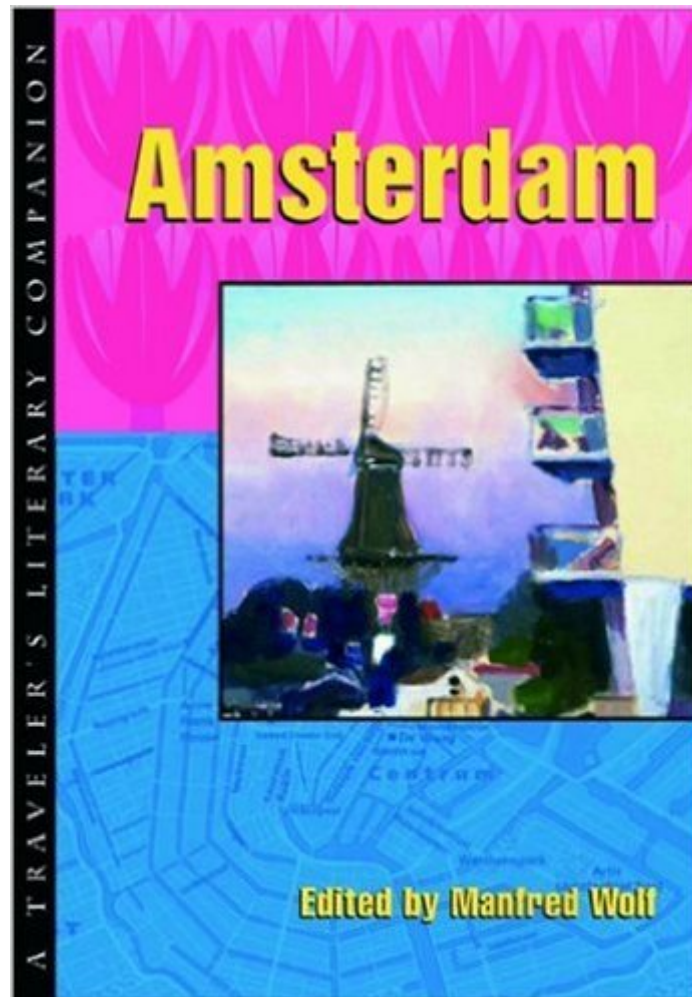


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# Amsterdam: A Traveler's Literary Companion



## Synopsis

Travel to one of the most dynamic cities in the world in the company of its finest writers. The stories in this volume will take you on a personal odyssey through the city's rich past to its dynamic present. Arranged by the areas of Amsterdam they illuminate, these stories offer up a rich literary banquet to the traveler who wishes to experience the character and soul of this great city. Join better-known Dutch writers such as Harry Mulisch and Cees Nooteboom, along with those whose writing appears in English here for the first time, as they lead you along the canals, through the neighborhoods, and from the past to the present in this rare collection of twentieth-century Dutch literature. Contributors include Cees Nooteboom, J.J. Voskuil, Simon Carmiggelt, J. Bernlef, Martin Bril, Remco Campert, Marion Bloem, Maarten 't Hart, Geert Mak, Hermine Landvreugd, Gerrit Komrij, Bas Heijne, Lizzy Sara May, Gerard Reve, Marga Minco, Harry Mulisch, and Hafid Bouazza.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone who has ever visited Amsterdam knows the curious magic of that city, its canal-lined streets, polyglot population, and unconventional mores. But few are aware of Amsterdam's rich literary life. Manfred Wolf brilliantly redresses that cultural gap in Amsterdam, A Traveler's Literary Companion. In what may be the best in an excellent series, Wolf, Professor of English at San Francisco State University and leading expert on Dutch literature, introduces the reader to an Amsterdam of gaiety and sadness, beauty and squalor, hope and despair. The selections are

arranged thematically and geographically and include "City and People," "Canals," "Red-Light District," "Gay Amsterdam," and "Jewish Amsterdam." Among the provocative essays and stories are Remco Campert's "Soft Landings," Hermine Landvreugd's "Staring out the Window," and Margo Minco's "The Return." To read this fine collection is to come a step closer to overcoming what Cees Nottebom observes in the opening selection, "Amsterdam": "This is my city, a token for the uninitiated. She will never reveal herself to the outsider who does not know her language and history, because it is precisely language and names that are the keepers of secret moods, secret places, secret memories."

A delightful book! Makes me wish I was headed again for Amsterdam tomorrow. Fortunately, I do have friends headed that way this year and it's going to make a great going away present. This "traveler's literary companion" gives the English-speaking reader a glimpse they usually never get of a complex city. It's like being given the keys to the hidden treasures that most tourists don't see. While the typical guide gives a quick sketch of the main outlines, this book presents an in-depth portrait worthy of an old Dutch master. Enjoy! I sure did.

I don't have a whole lot to add to these great reviews other than stating that this book deserves its current five-star rating. The excerpts are well-chosen and they really help the reader see into the lives of the Dutch from multiple angles. The fact that the excerpts are bite-size makes this an especially desirable book to take with you to read on the plane or in your hotel/apartment each night. I am leading a group to the Netherlands next year and this will likely be required reading.

"Amsterdam" has a nice feel to it. It's a handy volume, just the size to pack on one's literary or actual travels. It has a useful Preface by its Dutch-American editor, Manfred Wolf, a map to locate you in the city, and section divisions to lead you in to short fictions about The City and its People, the Canals, the Red-Light District, Gay Amsterdam, Jewish Amsterdam, and so on. But this is not a travel brochure book full of clichés to impress tourists. It is, for one thing, about a city with a painful history (see e.g. Gerard Reve's "The Decline and Fall of the Boslowits Family", about a Jewish family in Second World War Amsterdam), and about a city with more than its fair share of alcoholics, drug addicts, would-be artists and failed poets (see e.g. the fine story "Soft Landings" by Remco Campert). For a lighter-hearted treatment of the city, however, see Maarten't Hart's "Living in the Red-Lighted District", which gives a behind-the-scenes picture of one of the best-known aspects of liberal Amsterdam life. If, like me, you are in total ignorance of Dutch writing and have

only a superficial knowledge of the city, then "Amsterdam" is a fine introduction - not only to seventeen new authors but also to a unique place.

When I first learned of this collection of Dutch fiction, I was enthusiastic about the concept (a literary anthology for the traveler to Amsterdam) but at the same time a bit apprehensive about whether selections could be found which would give a taste of this historic and many-sided city without compromising either readability or literary merit. I needn't have worried. For the most part the translations are first-rate, and the short stories and excerpts from longer works are well chosen, both for quality and the information they convey about various aspects of the city. It is refreshing to see the work of eminent, but little-known (in the English-speaking world, at least) Dutch writers like Gerard Reve and Maarten 't Hart in English. The beauty of a book like this is that it can mentally prepare you for a visit to Amsterdam (or possibly even inspire you to plan one) in a much more subtle and ultimately more enjoyable way than any standard guidebook can do.

Divided into sections including "City and People," "Canals," "Red-Light District," "Gay Amsterdam" and "Jewish Amsterdam," Manfred Wolf's wonderful new volume, "Amsterdam," is both travel guide to this quirky, classy, multi-cultural city, and an introduction to the writings of a number of Dutch literary greats. Through these samplings one is exposed to Dutch traditions of tolerance, freedom of expression, hatred of fanaticism, love of compromise and at the same time the occasional and peculiar manifestations of Dutch small-mindedness. It is the perfect book to accompany a visit to Amsterdam as well as the perfect volume for gaining insights into this imminently civilized city, if one lacks the opportunity to travel there. Don't miss it.

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