

Julia in the Netherlands

I am French, and I've moved to the Netherlands 3 years ago. When I first arrived in this country, I started taking Dutch lessons, and reading some Dutch novels. I started with thrillers, because, being far from fluent, I wanted gripping stories that would force me to finish a book and not give up because of the difficulty of reading in another language.

That's how I've discovered **Simone van der Vlugt**, **Saskia Noort** and **Esther Verhoef**. Some of their novels are translated into French, and what I've really liked about them is how the dread slowly builds up among typical Dutch landscapes. I've also learned thanks to **Simone van der Vlugt**'s novel ***Blauw Water*** that you should always keep a hammer in your car to break your windshield, in case your car falls from a dam into the water. Good to know, but not very reassuring !

My favorite discovery is **Kader Abdolah**. I've come to have a lot of respect for this Persian author who had to flee his country in the 80's and since then has lived in the Netherlands. He learned to speak Dutch on his own using poetry and children books like ***Jip and Janneke*** by **Annie M.G. Schmidt**, a classic of Dutch children literature. I find it very impressive after having tried to learn Dutch myself, and having the distinct advantage of using the same alphabet in my own language.

I would recommend in particular his novel ***The House of the Mosque***, published in French in 2008 by Gallimard. It was voted second best Dutch novel of all time in 2007, during a survey organised by the newspaper NRC.

It takes place in the fictitious historical city of Senedjan in Iran, where three cousins represent the multifaceted Iranian society: Aga Djan sells carpets and is the head of the city's bazaar, Alsaberi is the imam of the Senedjan Mosque and Aga Shodja is the muezzin. They live in harmony in the family house next to the mosque, until the influence of the United States, communist ideas and religious fundamentalism start tearing Iran, and the family, apart.

With its strong ideas, poetic style and unforgettable characters, this book has had a deep impact on me.

I hope one day to be able to read some of the great Dutch classics (like ***The Discovery of Heaven*** by **Harry Mulisch**).

As for writers from other European countries, I don't read so much of them, except British authors. The main reason for that is that I read a lot of science-fiction and fantasy, and a majority of writers in these genres are British or American. I also like to read as much as possible in the original language, and the only two languages I can read fluently are French and English.

Among my favorite authors, I would highly recommend **Neil Gaiman**'s novel ***Neverwhere*** and its wonderful city of London Below. If you enjoy this book and cities that are not what they seem, you should try **China Miéville** and his mind-boggling « double city » of ***The City and the City***.

If you like great British writers like **Jane Austen** or **Charles Dickens**, and if you're not afraid of British humour and whimsy, you should definitely read the ***Tuesday Next*** novels by **Jasper Fforde**. I was personally sold the moment Pickwick, our heroin's pet dodo, first begged for a marshmallow... If that was not enough, the idea of a « literary police » was certainly irresistible for a librarian.

One of my favorite books is German, not British : ***The Carpet Makers*** by **Andreas Eschbach**. I still think that this planet where the carpet-makers spend their whole life weaving carpets made of women's hair to honor the Emperor is a striking creation.