



Amsterdam, edited by Heather Reyes and Victor Schiferli (City-pick/Oxygen, £8.99)

This latest addition to the excellent “city-pick” series of urban anthologies weaves together fiction and non-fiction, including more than 30 specially translated extracts, to give an intimate portrait of one of Europe’s most distinctive cities. In his introduction, translator Sam Garrett notes that Amsterdam is home to at least 170 different nationalities. In the 17th century its 400 bookshops were a magnet to freethinking bibliophiles across Europe, such as Leibniz and Locke, who whiled away the hours in coffee houses discussing the latest ideas and smoking Dutch tobacco. Of course, in this most easygoing of cities you can now fill your pipe with far stronger substances, as the extract from Geoff Dyer’s “Hotel Oblivion” shows. Geert Mak rightly notes that there is something wonderfully “unmonumental” about this urbane yet unassuming world city. As Deborah Moggach writes in *Tulip Fever* (1999): “The city sees itself in its own water like a woman gazing into a looking-glass. Can we not forgive vanity in one so beautiful?”

PD Smith