

## Kader Abdolah

### *This Beautiful Country*

Original title: *Dit mooie land*

COLUMNS

from *de Volkskrant* 2003-2008

From the author of  
*My Father's Notebook (Cuneiform),*  
*The House of the Mosque* and  
*The Messenger / The Koran*

Collected columns on topics such as the changes taking place in the 'tolerant' Netherlands, the position of Islam in the West, developments in Iran, language, refugees, integration and the trivialities that preoccupy us in our everyday lives

A chronicler of our time and a sharp-witted analyst

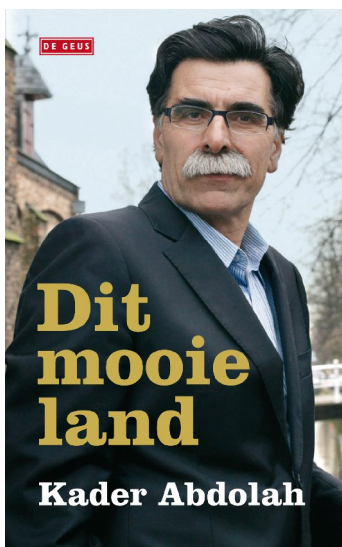
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## About the author

Kader Abdolah's (Iran, 1954) first collection of stories appeared in 1993 under the title *The Eagles*, and was followed in 1995 by *The Girls and the Partisans*. His first novel, *The Journey of the Empty Bottles*, appeared in 1997, and was followed by *My Father's Notebook (Cuneiform)* (2000), *Portraits and an Old Dream* (2003) and *The House of the Mosque* (2005). His dual publication *The Messenger* and *The Koran* appeared in 2008 and was nominated for the NS Prize (awarded by the general public).

Abdolah has already published three collections of his columns in *de Volkskrant*, namely *Mirza*, *A Garden in the Sea* and *Caravan*.



## About the book

Kader Abdolah has been an established feature of the Monday edition of *de Volkskrant* since 1996. His columns fall under the title *Mirza* (chronicler), and offer his own unique take on current events. Always personal, always from the perspective of the surprised, occasionally irritated and often gentle outside observer, Abdolah pokes and prods at the anthill of contemporary Holland, although developments on the international scene rarely escape his attention.

Kader Abdolah has the ability to place the issues of the day in a broader context, to put them into perspective. Elements taken from the treasure chest of Persian literature or daily life in his fatherland are frequently combined in his columns.

*This Beautiful Country* is a collection of the columns published between September 1<sup>st</sup> 2003 and September 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, the years in which he wrote and published *The House of the Mosque* and *The Messenger / The Koran* and thus an important period in Abdolah's career.

Kader Abdolah, *Dit mooie land*  
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Paperback, 384 pages

## Bibliography

*De adelaars* ('The Eagles') (1993, stories)  
*De meisjes en de partizanen* ('The Girls and the Partisans') (1995, stories)  
*De reis van de lege flessen* ('Journey of the Empty Bottles') (1997, novel)  
*Mirza* ('Mirza') (1998, columns)  
*Spijkerschrift* ('Cuneiform') (2000, novel)  
*Een tuin in de zee* ('A Garden in the Sea') (2001, columns)  
*Portretten en een oude droom* ('Portraits and an Old Dream') (2003, novel)  
*Karavaan* ('Caravan') (2003, columns)  
*Het huis van de moskee* ('The House of the Mosque') (2005, novel)  
*De koe* ('The Cow – Kalila and Dimna') (2007, stories)  
*De boodschapper* ('The Messenger') and *De Koran* ('The Koran') (2008, a story and a translation)  
*Dit mooie land* ('This Beautiful Country') (2009, columns)

## Prizes and awards

1993 – Gouden Ezelsoor Award for *De adelaars*  
1995 – Charlotte Köhler Stipend for *De meisjes en de partizanen*  
1997 – ASN-ADO Media Prize for *Mirza*, his column in *de Volkskrant*  
1998 – Mundial Award  
2000 – Dutch Royal decoration  
2001 – E. du Perron Prize for his complete works  
2004 – French Cultural Knighthood  
2006 – *Het huis van de moskee*, nominated for the NS Publieksprijs 2006 (runner-up)  
2007 – *Het huis van de moskee*, nominated for the All-time Favourite Dutch Book of Fiction (runner-up)  
2008 – French decoration Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres  
2008 – *The Messenger & The Koran*, nominated for the NS Publieksprijs 2008  
2009 – Il Premio Grinzane Cavour 2009 for *La casa della moschea*

## Rights

Rights for Kader Abdolah's novels have been sold to more than 25 countries.  
Sales lists are available for each title.

## The press on Abdolah's columns

'Abdolah looks at the Dutch society with a different, fresh eye, and that results in often original and enjoyable texts. He hits where he has to and talks when other writers should keep silent.' – *Metro*

'If the ever unruffled Abdolah let's go for once and uses his corner of the paper for a "minute of loud screaming", then the urgency of his testimony becomes almost tangible.' – *de Volkskrant*

'The column might be a volatile genre, but not when it's in the hands of Kader Abdolah.' – *De Morgen*

'His astute observations and poetic scribblings are a haven of rest in the midst of the day to day clamour of news.' – *Algemeen Dagblad*

## Excerpt: Two Columns

### Ignorance

The locations in which 135.000 American soldiers are now stationed have always been witness to enormous tragedy and a multitude of wars. A thousand years ago, the great poet Ferdosi gathered all those wars in 350.000 strophes. This is a short summary of one of his stories about the riddle of life.

Rostam was the hero of heroes in the old kingdom of Persia, a bit like Hercules.

One day, when he was hunting near the border, he lost his horse and he crossed the border into neighbouring Toran in search of it. Fate would have it that his horse had found its way to the stables of the king of Toran where they recognised and welcomed Rostam.

In the middle of the night he heard soft footsteps. Tahmine, the princess of Toran, appeared with a candle in her hand. She told him that she had heard a great deal about him, that she had dreamt about him and that she loved him.

Rostam received her in his bed. The following morning, when he was ready to leave, he gave her a jewel: 'if you have a child and it is a girl, braid this jewel in her hair – if it is a boy, bind it to his arm.'

Tahmine gave birth to a son, Sohrab, but Rostam did not know that Tahmine had borne him a child.

When Sohrab was ten years old he asked about his father. Later he followed in his father's footsteps and became a great hero.

War broke out between the Persians and the people of Toran and Sohrab invaded the kingdom of Persia with an army. Deep in his heart he was still searching for his father. According the tradition, the heroes of each country had to fight first. The warlords of Toran realised that Sohrab would have to fight Rostam and that the experienced Rostam would kill the young Sohrab. They were secretly happy at Sohrab's impending death. After all, he had Persian

blood in his veins and might later represent a serious danger to Toran. The tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab is the tragedy of ignorance. They drew their swords and fought one another. Everyone and everything, even fate, prevented father and son from recognising each other. The Persians knew about Sohrab, but they kept silent. Sohrab recognised something of himself in Rostam's face and sensed that this was his father. During a pause in the fighting, he talked with his warlords about his doubts, but they lied and told him that Rostam was not his father. But in his heart Sohrab felt differently and when the fight resumed he asked Rostam to reveal his name, but he refused. Sohrab knocked his father to the ground and held his sword to his throat ready to kill him. For the first time in his life old Rostam asked for forgiveness and Sohrab let him go. But suddenly Rostam stabbed Sohrab in the side. Only then did he see the jewel bound to Sohrab's arm, but it was already too late. Rostam begged the king to use the magic lotion that could save his son, but the riddle of life determined that it arrived too late. In western mythology the son kills his father, in the east it is the other way round. Bush should have known this when he invaded the region with his army. I have an old version of the book at home. I'll send it to the White House.

## **Auschwitz**

With the whistle of a locomotive in the distance, we all looked back to 1945. I have always been looking for an opportunity to write about Auschwitz, but have never been able to find one. I didn't know what to write about, because the information I had didn't come from me and I had an image in my mind that was fictitious, from the movies. Auschwitz was far away, and because we were not involved we had nothing to say about it. Now I see things differently. Reza Khan was the father of the Shah of Persia. He was an ambitious man with great dreams for his country: national railway lines reaching from the Persian Gulf to the borders of the Soviet Union, a national radio station, a university for Teheran, the liberation of women from the chador, fighting with the ayatollahs to keep mosque and state separate. And Hitler saw it all and in secret he sent Goebbels to Iran with a confidential message for Reza Khan: 'We are Arian, the Germans are Arian, but the Iranians even more so. Reza Khan and Hitler are brothers.' The Iranian politicians were proud to be brothers with Hitler and Goebbels, but they knew nothing of Hitler's diabolical plan for the Iranian railways, which would bring him to back to back with Russia. The covert relationship between Reza Khan and the Nazis had become so fraternal that when his crown prince arrived to open Iran's first radio station, the tiny space was filled with Nazis in civilian clothes who welcomed the young man with cheers. Reza Khan had gone too far. The allies saw it all and invaded Iran. The British occupied the southern provinces and the Soviet Union conquered the northern provinces. Reza Khan was exiled to Egypt where he died. The crown prince became the Shah of Persia. There was no more talk of the Germans or Hitler or Auschwitz. The silence continued for decades, but in 1976 a film was broadcast on television about the Second World War. It was about a Jewish family in Amsterdam: *Anne Frank*.

It was a remarkable film, even though it came across as fictional. Besides: where was Amsterdam? Where was The Netherlands?

A year later, when the revolution started in the fatherland and the Shah was forced to leave the country, hundreds of books suddenly appeared about the crimes of the Nazis, all of them banned under the Shah. A series of films about the Holocaust was also screened in the cinemas.

All this took place during the short power vacuum that followed the departure of the Shah and ayatollahs' rise to power.

But one thing remains true: Iranian intellectuals, writers, artists and filmmakers have always kept silent about the Holocaust. In reality there is a sort of unspoken agreement between the artists of the Middle East to stay as far away from the topic as possible, and this is due to Israel's role in the region.

The silence has to be broken. The Holocaust was one of history's greatest tragedies, and it was caused by the animal in every one of us, the animal that is still capable of committing crimes.

My thoughts are with those who died in Auschwitz and those who still suffer because of it.

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Translated by Brian Doyle

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