



by Dorothee Elmiger

March 2014 / 141pp

Fiction

prohelvetia

Pro Helvetia supported the English language translation of this book.

Sleepwalkers *Schlafgänger*

review

Young Swiss writer Dorothee Elmiger is a shining star of the international literary scene. Her first novel won multiple awards and is already available in English translation.

Sleepwalkers is unusual in its approach, reading more as a collage of voices; narratives interweaving, interrupting and overlapping one another. Quite what is being discussed is at times oblique, but seems to have an underlying political urgency and circles around themes of borders and frontiers: stories of immigrants and of those trying to cross borders illegally, human rights and the market value of human beings.

Sleep and sleeplessness are leitmotifs. Two words important to the narrative are ambiguous: *Schlafgänger* means 'sleepwalker,' but also refers to the large numbers swarming to urban centres in search of work and an escape from poverty in the nineteenth century; and *Grenzgänger* indicates both ghostly figures who 'reside' close to borders, hoping to find a way across, and those who legally cross to their home or workplace.

Disturbing, bewildering, and with a soundscape that has a poetic beat that buzzes in the head, this highly unusual short work is a courageous contribution to the immigration debate and a striking work of literary fiction.

about the author

Dorothee Elmiger was born in 1985 in Wetzikon, Switzerland, grew

up in Appenzell, and lives today in Lucerne. She received a grant from the Literaturkurs Klagenfurt in 2009, and her debut novel *Einladung an die Waghalsigen* (DuMont 2010) was awarded the Kelag Prize at the Ingeborg Bachmann Festival 2010, the Aspekte Literature Prize 2010, and the Rauriser Literaturpreis 2011. For *Schlafgänger* she was awarded the promotional prize of the Hermann- Hesse-Prize 2014.

Previous works include:

Einladung an die Waghalsigen (2010)

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Seagull Books (English World); Editions d'en bas (French)

Translation rights available from:

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