

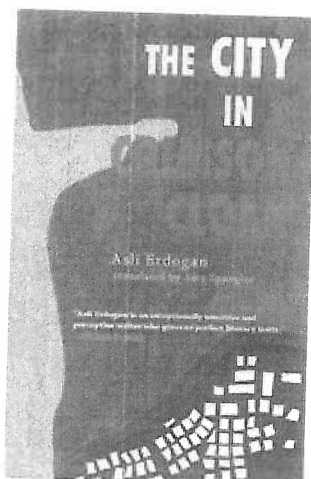
adventurous travel writing.

The L Magazine Review:

The Book Page

The City In Crimson Cloak

By Miles Newbold Clark



**Asli Erdogan [Trans. Amy Spangler
Soft Skull Pres
Available Oct. 28**

Contemporary politics may have transformed popular conceptions of the Arabian tale into a fundamentalist nightmare: we're less likely to find virgin-filled harems awaiting us on the other side of a beaded awning than a suicide bomber on the other side of life. Though "luscious" prose and noir epistemology might appear unlikely bedfellows, Erdogan, a Turkish physicist-turned-writer, has attempted to compose such a novel. In order to do it she has skipped across an ocean to Rio de Janeiro. Her protagonist, Özgür (herself an older university scholar-turned-novelist), suffers through poverty, stifling heat, cultural alienation and the humanistic horrors of a city consumed by Carnival's dark wheel. Elephantiasis-stricken vagrants lie in pools of urine, street urchins are "disposed of" for a few hundred dollars, and the difference between police and gangsters is merely that the gangsters conceal their weapons.

Innate failings of compassion — in which we, as Erdogan writes, "naturally have more pity for a sick dog than a sick man" — don't help lighten the mood here. Erdogan's Rio is not a city for the timid. And Özgür, neither outright prude nor shameless Parnassian, is clearly at sea as to how to live and work in such environs. The fact that she's writing a novel abets her plunge into further social and emotional isolation. As the boundaries between reality and Özgür's story-within-a-story blur, her descent toward death is not tragic or terrifying, but inevitable.

While this novel is oftentimes needlessly preoccupied with recycling images of poverty and brutality, the intrigue of *The City in Crimson Cloak* lies less in what it exploits than what it denies; namely, any intimate familiarity with its setting. Twice removed from her environment — first by foreignness, second by the isolation brought on by the act of writing — Özgür is only able to unpack the surface characteristics of Rio. For author Erdogan, this approach is a risky one, but it's also honest, as anyone who's taught English in unfamiliar environs will attest. And therein lies the greatest surprise the novel has to offer: the reader is able to empathize with Özgür despite an emotional and narrative distance from her. If this is a form of highbrow noir from another shore, it looks very, very good.

the complete review - fiction

The City in Crimson Cloak

Here is my blurb.

The description in Asli Erdogan's novel is breathtaking. The work is so much like its setting. Deep. Complicated. Raw. Difficult. Musical. I never wanted to leave a scene and yet I couldn't wait for the next. This is a truly fine book.

Percival Everett

Erdogan, Asli. *The City in Crimson Cloak*. Soft Skull. Oct. 2007. c.176p. tr. from Turkish by Amy Spangler. ISBN 978-1-933368-74-0. pap. \$14.95. F

Physicist-turned-novelist Erdogan debuts in English with a meandering yet heartfelt work set among the favelas ("shantytowns") of Rio de Janeiro. Drawing from her experiences during a two-year stay in Rio in the mid-1990s, Erdogan reinvents herself as the protagonist, Özgür, a young Turkish woman teaching English and writing a half-fictional novel called *The City in Crimson Cloak*, featuring a main character named Ö. The multilayered disguises employed by the author effectively mirror the nature of Rio, "the city that never removes its mask, not even after carnival." As Özgür wanders aimlessly through the chaotic streets one fateful Sunday, musing on the downward arc of her life and scratching out the final passages of her novel, her melancholy becomes as oppressive as the humidity. Erdogan supplies earthy, seductive description that accentuates the dark side of the tropics, painting Rio as a hellish labyrinth that lures its residents, native and foreigner alike, to their doom. There is a strong sense of social justice present in the finely observed street scenes, but ultimately this is less about the city and more about one woman's failed quest. Recommended for large fiction collections, this work may also appeal to fans of adventurous travel writing.—

The City in Crimson Cloak

Asli Erdogan, trans. from the Turkish by Amy Spangler. Soft Skull, \$14.95 paper (176p)
ISBN 9781933368740

Turkish author Erdogan vividly captures the life and sin of underclass Rio de Janeiro in this darkly atmospheric novel, published in Turkey in 1998. A native of Istanbul, Özgür has spent the past two years barely surviving in Rio, a city overflowing with debauchery and violence. Lonely, penurious and hungry, Özgür's only solace is writing, and she has committed herself to staying in Rio until she does the city justice in her own book, *The City in Crimson Cloak*, which here becomes a novel within a novel. On the city's Fireworks Day, she makes her way through the favelas, or slums, gathering impressions of the chaos and carnality while recalling pieces of her autobiographical novel and journal entries. Özgür's battle to hold on to her own reality makes for a stark, nightmarish journey.

Betreff: press

Von: amy <amy@anatolialit.com>

Datum: Tue, 05 Feb 2008 21:41:35 +0200

An: 'asli erdogan' <aslifeld@yahoo.com>

Publisher's Weekly review:

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Barnes & Noble review:

From Barnes & Noble

The City in Crimson Cloak is at once the title of an unfinished autobiographical novel following a protagonist named O and the title of Asli Erdogan's novel about the (fictional) author, a Turkish woman named Ozgur. Ozgur, on the cusp of 30, has spent two years in Rio de Janeiro, trying to write the city around her into a shape that might be understood by her imagined reader: "a sophisticated, educated someone who had never experienced hunger, and who would be sitting down in a comfortable chair and doing the least risky occupation in the world -- reading..." As it happens, the novel begins on what will be the day of Ozgur's death, though she, of course, does not know that. Two years on, Ozgur, in her ragged jeans and worn-down shoes, looks like a woman without a dime to her name, subsisting on warm tea and cheap cigarettes, yet still appears to her neighbors as a gringa, voluntarily shrugging off privilege that they were never offered. In alternating sections, we are introduced to a former painter who once lived in London and is now considered the village madman, quoting passages of Keats and *Macbeth*; Ozgur's onetime friend, Eli a gay actor; and scenes describing harrowing conditions of violence and poverty. The novel might have been richer had Erdogan taken advantage of the structure to interrogate Ozgur's motives and perceptions more fully than Ozgur herself can. But it does succeed as a sort of reverse postcard -- the hazards of the tropics seen in the eyes of a woman from winter climes. --Amy Benfer

Library Journal reivew:

Forest Turner - Library Journal

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by
Aslı Erdoğan

[general information](#) | [review summaries](#) | [our review](#) | [links](#) | [about the author](#)



Title: *The City in Crimson Cloak*
Author: Aslı Erdoğan
Genre: Novel
Written: 1998 (Eng. 2007)
Length: 168 pages
Original in: Turkish
Availability: [The City in Crimson Cloak](#) - US
[The City in Crimson Cloak](#) - UK
[The City in Crimson Cloak](#) - Canada
[La Ville dont la cape est rouge](#) - France
[Die Stadt mit der roten Pelerine](#) - Deutschland

- Turkish title: *Kırmızı Pelerinli Kent*
- Translated by Amy Spangler

Our Assessment:

B : often effective city-portrait

Review Summaries

Source	Rating	Date	Reviewer
Le Monde diplomatique	.	7/2003	Timour Muhidine

From the Reviews:

- "La langue à la fois limpide et lyrique d'Aslı Erdoğan exprime parfaitement la distance de moins en moins grande qui sépare Özgür de la cité étrangère." - Timour Muhidine, Le Monde diplomatique

The complete review's Review:

The City in Crimson Cloak is a story of being down and out in Rio de Janeiro. The young Turkish protagonist, Özgür, always has the option of leaving the abyss and returning to her homeland, but Rio has a good hold on her. It's summer vacation time at the language school where she teaches, and she barely earns any money giving private lessons, so she's reduced to near-destitution -- but in this city of extremes, with its relentless heat, her hunger, thirst, and general discomfort are almost a given anyway.

Özgür is writing a book -- yes, *The City in Crimson Cloak*. It's one way of trying to keep her sanity, of making sense of it all:

Writing meant first and foremost putting things into order, and Rio, if it were to be defined in just one word, was CHAOS.

She hopes: "to capture Rio like a butterfly in her hand, and to gently imprison it in her words, without killing it", but the delicate imagery stands in stark contrast to the brutal urban agglomeration that is that city. There's violence everywhere, and all the manifestations of the worst poverty: disease, hunger, filth. The bodies of both the living and the dead are literally lying in the streets, and when there are fireworks it's not as some part of a carefree celebration but rather a signal that another drug shipment has arrived.

The City in Crimson Cloak isn't a wallow in self-pity, or a love (or hate) letter to Rio. Özgür isn't exactly reveling in the experience, but the city has her by the scruff of the neck, and it continues to exert a powerful fascination. The heat makes it impossible to go much beyond a sort of torpor, yet there's an over-abundance of life and experience all around, every action fraught with potential -- including that of the most extreme violence.

Özgür doesn't dwell on it much, but Rio is a sort of anti-Turkey, and not just because at this time of year it's probably near freezing there, even as the summer heat in Brazil hovers constantly around forty degrees Celsius. She still has her Turkish lifeline -- and wishes her mother had more to say when she talks to her on the phone -- but is also freed from many constraints: she doesn't have to carry an ID, no one notices that she doesn't wear a bra. Still, given how she's living it doesn't sound like the trade-off speaks much in the favour of staying. But she does.

The City in Crimson Cloak describes Özgür's day, while sections from her writing are also interspersed in the text. What she writes about in her 'The City in Crimson Cloak' resembles what she lives, making for two close variations on the theme. Erdoğan captures the city well: it's not a pretty picture, but it's a vibrant one. The stifling heat, the violence, the sheer arbitrariness of so much comes across very well -- this sense of: "Everything decayed so quickly in the tropics, and revived just as swiftly".

There's no one Özgür is really close to, no one she can have a real conversation with. The few conversations she does have, such as with her mother on the telephone, are only a very limited interaction. She's frequently wanting to avoid people (often for good reason), and the sense of isolation, of being at sea in a flood of humanity, is prevalent throughout the book. Conditions in Rio -- its apparent lawlessness, as well as a certain carefreeness (that spills into indifference) -- accentuate the feeling.

The City in Crimson Cloak is an evocative novel, a city-portrait that is particularly strong on the dark underbelly of Rio. The book-within-a-book idea works well enough most of the time, a different reflection of her state of mind and situation, and the descriptions are striking enough that the attempts at more poetic passages usually work well enough. The ending is perhaps an appropriate conclusion, though it feels a bit like a very literary 'way out'.

An interesting novel of a city, with some fine writing.

Weblog

Final Long-list for Best Translations of 2007 19 December 07

It's been a very interesting experience putting together this list of the "Best Translations of 2007." The number and enthusiasm of the responses and suggestions has been

overwhelming, and I'm really proud that we were able to put together such an interesting and diverse list. (See my [analysis](#) for a bit more info on how this all breaks down.) Thanks again to everyone who e-mailed me, posted comments, or helped spread the word about this project.

This list of 50 books below includes works of fiction, collections of poetry, and even a few books of essays. Next year we might break these all out, but for now, I thought it would be worthwhile to keep everything together in one long list. And on Friday (or Monday at the latest), we'll post the top 10 titles of the year. (Or the top 10 fiction works, and top 3 collections of poetry. We want to make sure poetry gets its due, and it may be that the best way is to highlight it separately rather than include one title in the top 10 list.)

Anyway, here it is:

- *How I Became a Nun* by Cesar Aira, translated from the Spanish by Chris Andrews (New Directions)
- *Vibrator* by Mari Akasaka, translated from the Japanese by Michael Emmerich (Soft Skull)
- *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* by Yousef Al-Mohaimed, translated from the Arabic by Anthony Calderbank (Penguin)
- *The Theory of Clouds* by Stephane Audeguy, translated from the French by Timothy Bent (Harcourt)
- *Field-Russia* by Gennady Aygi, translated from the Russian by Peter France (New Directions)
- *A Voice from Elsewhere* by Maurice Blanchot, translated from the French by Charlotte Mandell (SUNY)
- *The Drug of Art: Selected Poems* by Ivan Blatny, translated from the Czech by Justin Quinn, Matthew Sweney, Alex Zucker, Veronika Tuckerova, and Anna Moschovakis (Ugly Duckling)
- *Amulet* by Roberto Bolano, translated from the Spanish by Chris Andrews (New Directions)
- *The Savage Detectives* by Roberto Bolano, translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer (FSG)
- *Christ versus Arizona* by Camilo Jose Cela, translated from the Spanish by Martin Sokolinsky (Dalkey Archive)
- *Mountains Painted with Turmeric* by Lil Bahadur Chettri, translated from the Nepali by Michael J. Hutt (Columbia)
- *The Dream of the Poem: Hebrew Poetry from Muslim and Christian Spain, 950-1492* edited and translated from the Hebrew by Peter Cole (Princeton)
- *Autonauts of the Cosmoroute* by Julio Cortazar, translated from the Spanish by Anne McLean (Archipelago)
- *Guantanamo* by Dorothea Dieckmann, translated from the German by Tim Mohr (Soft Skull)

- *Missing Soluch* by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, translated from the Persian by Kamran Rastegar (Melville House)
- *The Little Girl and the Cigarette* by Benoit Duteurtre, translated from the French by Charlotte Mandell (Melville House)
- *Ravel* by Jean Echenoz, translated from the French by Linda Coverdale (New Press)
- *The City in Crimson Cloak* by Asli Erdogan, translated from the Turkish by Amy Spangler (Soft Skull)
- *The Book of Words* by Jenny Erpenbeck, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky (New Directions)
- *Novels in Three Lines* by Felix Feneon, translated from the French by Luc Sante (NYRB)
- *The Collected Poems: 1956-1998* by Zbigniew Herbert, translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz, Peter Dale Scott, and Alissa Valles (Ecco)
- *The Exception* by Christian Jungersen, translated from the Danish by Anna Paterson (Nan A. Talese)
- *Rivalry: A Geisha's Tale* by Nagai Kafu, translated from the Japanese by Stephen Snyder (Columbia)
- *Today I Wrote Nothing* by Daniil Kharms, translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelevich (Overlook)
- *Sunflower* by Gyula Krudy, translated from the Hungarian by John Batki (NYRB)
- *The Curtain: An Essay in Seven Parts* by Milan Kundera, translated from the French by Linda Asher (HarperCollins)
- *Dark Paradise* by Rosa Liksom, translated from the Finnish by David McDuff (Dalkey Archive)
- *The Dedalus Book of Russian Decadence: Perversity, Despair and Collapse* edited by Kirsten Lodge, translated from the Russian by Grigory Dashevsky and Margo Shohl Rosen (Dedalus)
- *African Psycho* by Alain Mabanckou, translated from the French by Christine Schwartz Hartley (Soft Skull)
- *The Flying Camel and the Golden Hump* by Aharon Megged, translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden (Toby Press)
- *Shame in the Blood* by Tetsuo Miura, translated from the Japanese by Andrew Driver (Shoemaker & Hoard)
- *In Her Absence* by Antonio Munoz Molina, translated from the Spanish by Esther Allen (Other Press)
- *Day In Day Out* by Terezia Mora, translated from the German by Michael Henry Heim (HarperCollins)

- *Listening* by Jean-Luc Nancy, translated from the French by Charlotte Mandell (Fordham)
- *Lost Paradise* by Cees Nooteboom, translated from the Dutch by Susan Massotty (Grove)
- *The Unforeseen* by Christian Oster, translated from the French by Adriana Hunter (Other Press)
- *Out Stealing Horses* by Per Petterson, translated from the Norwegian by Anne Born (Graywolf Press)
- *I Am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation* by Francis Picabia, translated from the French by Marc Lowenthal (MIT)
- *The Worst Intentions* by Alessandro Piperno, translated from the Italian by Ann Goldstein (Europa)
- *Spring Tides* by Jacques Poulin, translated from the French by Sheila Fischman (Archipelago)
- *Delirium* by Laura Restrepo, translated from the Spanish by Natasha Wimmer (Nan A. Talese)
- *The Night* by Jaime Saenz, translated from the Spanish by Forrest Gander and Kent Johnson (Princeton)
- *The Lodging House* by Khairy Shalaby, translated from the Arabic by Farouk Abdel Wahab (American University in Cairo)
- *Ice* by Vladimir Sorokin, translated from the Russian by Jamey Gambrell (NYRB)
- *Vain Art of the Fugue* by Dumitru Tsepeneag, translated from the Romanian by Patrick Camiller (Dalkey Archive)
- *The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* by Cesar Vallejo, translated from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman (California)
- *Omega Minor* by Paul Verhaeghen, translated from the Flemish by the author (Dalkey Archive)
- *Montano's Malady* by Enrique Vila-Matas, translated from the Spanish by Jonathan Dunne (New Directions)
- *The Assistant* by Robert Walser, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky (New Directions)
- *I Have the Right to Destroy Myself* by Young-ha Kim, translated from the Korean by Chi-Young Kim (Harcourt)

Danforth:

TDR The Danforth Review

canadian ~ twenty-first century literature since 1999

Brooklyn and New York City Lit Scene Fall 2007 Highlights

Compiled by Janine Armin and Nathaniel G. Moore

Bought out by Winton, Shoemaker & Co., which also owns Counterpoint, Soft Skull was able to go ahead with a new scourge of fall titles. This year has already heralded great literary moves in NYC, though more of the renovative bent than the innovative. Small presses, and the fairs that celebrate them, are getting a hand from new investors, ensuring the longevity of the products and the quality of drinks at the launches.

The press' political edge continues, with titles like **Freedom From Want: American Liberalism and the Global Economy** by Edward Gresser, recounting the anti-globalization cause of those wily American democrats who see free trade as a bad thing, and who don't think working for nothing is a good idea. Because that's obvious and Soft Skull isn't, the book also concerns the turn-around wherein these ideas are actually hurting the poor they seek to protect, as democracy becomes likened to a 'conservative tradition reaching back to Sparta.'

The City In Crimson Cloak by Asli Erdogan, follows Özgür, a young woman who has declared war against Rio de Janeiro by writing it down in her novel within the novel, *The City in Crimson Cloak*. The narrator describes one day in Özgür's life, populated by 'shanty towns, Condomble rituals, and the violence and sexuality of the streets.' The two novels intertwine presenting diametric metaphors for Rio: life and death. Another cool book from Soft Skull is **Awake! A Reader for the Sleepless** edited by Steven Beeber, which looks at somnambulistic texts that help satiate the sleepless.

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Anatolialit Agency
Caferaga Mah.
Haci Sukru Sok.
Ay Apt. 13/2
34710 Kadikoy
Istanbul
TURKEY

Tel/Fax: +90 216 338 70 93

www.anatolialit.com

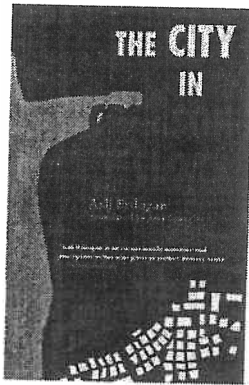
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Von "amy" <amy@anatolialit.com>
An: "asli erdogan" <aslifeld@yahoo.com>
Datum: 10/4/2007 9:51:44 pm
Betreff: FW: Publishers Weekly

From: Richard Nash [mailto:richard@softskull.com]
Sent: Thursday, October 04, 2007 9:48 PM
To: Amy Spangler
Subject: Publishers Weekly

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Brooklyn press, Akashic, is shelling out a hefty swell, with *Like Son* by Felicia Luna Lemus, 'the not-so-simple story of a father, a son, and the love-blindness shared between them,' featuring a post-punk man who must solve his family saga involving a 'Mexican avant-garde who once brought tragedy upon the Cruz family.' Alex Rose's *The Musical Illusionist* sounds mind-blowing: 'an interwoven collection of post-modern folk tales -- disappearing manuscripts, neurological anomalies, teleporting bacteria, and an unforgettable composer who manipulates sound to bend perception -- that masterfully blends scientific curiosity with magical-realist caprice.' This collection is organized by something called 'The Library of Tangents' into which the reader travels and views exhibitions and experiences 'parallel understandings of space, time, language, and all of the senses.'

Akashic's poetry imprint Black Boat releases *Eel on Reef* by Uche Nduka, who has been compared to John Ashbery and Kamau Brathwaite.

Readings defiantly abound in the city, with Chinatown's *Happy Ending Music And Reading Series* features some big time writers like Ellen Litman, Chris Adrian, Jonathan Baumbach and Irini Spanidou. KGB follows suit with David Lehman, Andrew Seguin and the contributors to *Open City*. As usual, glamour also touches NY's literary world, with the Accompanied Library hosting a mid-September gala looking to revitalize the elite literary club.

Also don't forget the New York Art Book Fair September 27-30, 2007. The annual fair of contemporary art books, art catalogues, artists' books, art periodicals, and 'zines offered for sale by over 120 international publishers, booksellers, and antiquarian dealers.

The complete review's Review:

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She hopes: "to capture Rio like a butterfly in her hand, and to gently imprison it in her words, without killing it", but the delicate imagery stands in stark contrast to the brutal urban agglomeration that is that city. There's violence everywhere, and all the manifestations of the worst poverty: disease, hunger, filth. The bodies of both the living and the dead are literally lying in the streets, and when there are fireworks it's not as some part of a carefree celebration but rather a signal that another drug shipment has arrived.

The City in Crimson Cloak isn't a wallow in self-pity, or a love (or hate) letter to Rio. Özgür isn't exactly reveling in the experience, but the city has her by the scruff of the neck, and it continues to exert a powerful fascination. The heat makes it impossible to go much beyond a sort of torpor, yet there's an over-abundance of life and experience all around, every action fraught with potential -- including that of the most extreme violence.

Özgür doesn't dwell on it much, but Rio is a sort of anti-Turkey, and not just because at this time of year it's probably near freezing there, even as the summer heat in Brazil hovers constantly around forty degrees Celsius. She still has her Turkish lifeline -- and wishes her mother had more to say when she talks to her on the phone -- but is also freed from many constraints: she doesn't have to carry an ID, no one notices that she doesn't wear a bra. Still, given how she's living it doesn't sound like the trade-off speaks much in the favour of staying. But she does.

The City in Crimson Cloak describes Özgür's day, while sections from her writing are also interspersed in the text. What she writes about in her 'The City in Crimson Cloak' resembles what she lives, making for two close variations on the theme. Erdoğan captures the city well: it's not a pretty picture, but it's a vibrant one. The stifling heat, the violence, the sheer arbitrariness of so much comes across very well -- this sense of: "Everything decayed so quickly in the tropics, and revived just as swiftly".

There's no one Özgür is really close to, no one she can have a real conversation with. The few conversations she does have, such as with her mother on the telephone, are only a very limited interaction. She's frequently wanting to avoid people (often for good reason), and the sense of isolation, of being at sea in a flood of humanity, is prevalent throughout the book. Conditions in Rio -- its apparent lawlessness, as well as a certain carefreeness (that spills into indifference) -- accentuate the feeling.

The City in Crimson Cloak is an evocative novel, a city-portrait that is particularly strong on the dark underbelly of Rio. The book-within-a-book idea works well enough most of the time, a different reflection of her state of mind and situation, and the descriptions are striking enough that the attempts at more poetic passages usually work well enough. The ending is perhaps an appropriate conclusion, though it feels a bit like a very literary 'way out'.

An interesting novel of a city, with some fine writing.

Asli der US-Ausgabe

Asli Erdogan and the Crimson Cloak

There are these rare literary works who grab you and conquer your mind because they tell you about an existence totally deprived security nets, on the boarder to death. Asli Erdogan has managed to create a novel about a young woman lost in her desperate will to experience her limits, and at the same time about the writer who lives her novel.

In this Brazilian mirror game Asli Erdogan occures not only as a true master and a magic narrator but as an unique female voice in a male dominated genre.

Eugene Schoulgin