Coming to Terms with
the Criminal Past

One of the major realizations resulting from Europe's troubled past is that mature democratic cultures require citizens to confront the injustices committed in the name of the nation. Whether genocide, war crimes, colonialism, slavery, ethnic cleansing, political oppression or something else, few if any European nations, even those that have also been the victims of aggression, have an unblemished past, and owning up to this past - that is, instituting a culture of remembrance - is a core attribute of modern democracies.

This transformation of the past from a source of national pride to a driver of democratization is often associated with Germany and its post-war attempts to address the magnitude of the crimes committed under the Nazi regime. In German, this process of reflecting openly and honestly on the past is often referred to as Vergangenheitsverarbeitung, an ongoing process of analysing and critically appraising the past. As defined by Theodor W. Adorno, it refers to a process of enlightenment that works against 'a forgetfulness that all too easily turns up together with the justification of what has been forgotten' and that can only be brought to an end when 'the causes of what happened have been eliminated' - that is, when a democratic culture has been firmly established.

As we argue m this section, European crime fiction has contributed to exactly this sort of critical analysis of the past in the interest of ensuring the moral foundations of post-totalitarian democracy. This focus on a still traumatic past takes two major forms: 'period' and 'transhistorical' crime fiction. In the first, authors place their detectives in periods of dictatorship or war, from Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, Occupied France and Francoist Spain to Communist Russia and other Eastern Bloc countries. In the 'transhistorical' crime novels, the narrative action is set in the present, but the investigations into current transgressions result in the uncovering of historical crimes that point to the unresolved trauma of Europe's totalitarian legacy.

Regardless of the approach taken, European crime fiction engages with the historical legacy of dictatorship and war by depicting the past for a contemporary readership that is perhaps uninterested in reading more serious historical studies. Crime fiction's contribution to representing the past, however, goes beyond merely popularizing the past for a broader audience. Indeed, the genre's narrative conventions actively shape readers' understanding of the past by presenting them with 'an interpretative frame ... that opens up the past to interrogation and ... to the ethical imperative to confront the past and take collective responsibility'.

Totalitarian-themed crime fiction, then, has a twin aim to understand the past and to criminalize past deeds, thus symbolically attributing guilt to individuals for their actions. In this way, the novels link memory to justice. They not only bring readers face to face with an uncomfortable past; they are also interventions in the present and - in line with Velazquez Montalbano's project for the democratic city - the future, the aim being to position the provision of justice at the centre of modern democratic culture via a rejection of a criminal past.

Given this aim of buttressing democratic principles, it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of significant crime stories should be set during the politically and culturally tumultuous period between the world wars, particularly as it played out in Germany with the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism. A seminal work of this type is British author Philip Kerr's fourteen-volume (1989-2019) series about the Berlin-based private investigator Bernhard 'Bernie' Gunther, the first three instalments of which, now packaged as the Berlin Noir trilogy, cover the period from 1936 to 1947. In Germany itself, Volker Kutscher has produced the Gereon Rath series (eight vols., 2008-20), also set in interwar Berlin, which has been turned into an internationally acclaimed, German-language television series by Sky Deutschland, Babylon Berlin (three series, 201 7-20), while Polish author Marek Krajewski's Eberhard Mock series (eleven vols., 1999-2020) is set in Breslau in the same period. **Hungarian author Vilmos Kondor's Budapest Noir series (five vols., 2008-12) takes place in the Hungarian capital rather than in Germany, but the series title,**

which is also the title of the first volume, is an unmistakable nod to Kerr's trilogy, and the novels featuring journalist Zsigmond Gordon closely adhere to the model. All these series offer historical fiction in the Walter Scott tradition in that they focus on fictional characters who come into contact, however tangentially, with key historical figures and events.
They adapt the American noir format of the 1920s and 1930s to Europe, which had no noir tradition at this time, but also transform it to support the agenda of democratization: where the American models represented a society descended into lawlessness and corruption, the contemporary European adaptations use this format to show a similar unravelling of society into fascism, war and genocide. Their shared interest is to use the crime narrative to explore a threshold moment in European history, often obliquely, and with the added aim of recreating a lost world before the fall.
While Kerr is perhaps the most accomplished of these authors, Krajewski's series is unique in its choice of setting: the Silesian city of Breslau, at a time when this city was still German. The series features an almost entirely German cast led by the protagonist, Inspector Eberhard Mock of the Breslau Police {and, later in the series, the German military intelligence service). Following the territorial changes after World War II, Breslau became part of Poland under the name Wroclaw, and its original German population was replaced by Poles.
This creates a unique situation where a Polish author of Wroclaw writes about a German police officer of Breslau, charting over the course of the series the historical events that led to the repopulation and re-acculturation of this place as a Polish city; the fourth novel in the series, Fortress Breslau (2006), represents this transformation literally and figuratively via the siege and destruction of the city in early 1945. Accordingly, the series is devoted in part to uncovering the German past buried palimpsestically beneath the Polish present. As Dirk Kretschmar has shown, Krajewski achieves this effect ofre-presentification by carefully integrating the topography of the lost city into the narrative, for example by drawing attention to its prominent streets, squares and buildings, and by offering elaborate descriptions of contemporary material culture related to everything from work and entertainment to the food and drink consumed by the characters. Krajewski's interest in the past is historicist in that the novels try to conjure the past and evoke what Breslau was like in the interwar period, without passing judgement and without