

CRIME SCENE: SWITZERLAND

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Continuing the major Crime Time series of overviews: the very best of the international crime writing scene, country by country, the key trends. This issue features information written and compiled by Paul Ott, novelist and short story writer (as Paul Lascaux), critic, bibliographer, and founder of Mordstage, Switzerland's major crime fiction festival.



Switzerland is a country with four official languages: German (approximately 4 million speakers), French (2.5 million), Italian (300,000) and Rotoromanian (60,000). Their literary traditions have little in common.

A SHORT HISTORY OF SWISS CRIME FICTION

Following François Gayot de Pitaval in France, early forms of Swiss crime writing include the journalistic coverage of criminal proceedings. Dating from about 1810, volumes of such reports can be found in the Swiss National Library. Later the more interesting cases moved into the public domain with literary adaptations, most famously by Jodocus Temme, a former judge who wrote *Der Studentermord in Zürich* (*The Murder of a Student in Zürich*, 1872, reprinted 2006). A second key influence was the Gothic novel, the history of which started on the shores of Lake Geneva with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819).

Swiss fictional crime writing in German starts around 1920 under the influence of the Dada cultural movement originating in Zurich's Cabaret Voltaire, e.g. Walter Serner with *Die Tigerin* (*The Tigress*, 1921). In 1926 Paul

Altheer arrives with *Die 13 Katastrophen* (*Thirteen Disasters*, re-printed 2009) and his early anti-hero, detective Bob Stoll. The first proper crime novel however is Carl Albert Loosli's *Die Schattmattbauern* (*The Farmers of the Shadowy Meadow*, written in 1926 and published in 1932), the story of an impoverished farmer, suspected of murder, who is finally crushed by the justice system. And for the first time the ancient landscape of the Emmental in the Canton of Berne features in a crime story, a consistent feature of Swiss crime fiction ever since.

Friedrich Glauser, the first great writer of Swiss crime fiction and with Simenon, a key figure in the development of European crime fiction, appears in the 1930s. He wrote five Sergeant Studer novels; all of them are suffused by Glauser's experiences as a marginalised human being, forever between suicide attempts and psychiatric care. He might also be regarded as the 'father' of the 'Regionalkrimi' (see Key Trends).

Two more important writers of the 1930s are

Stefan Brockhoff and Wolf Schwertenbach. Brockhoff was the pseudonym of a trio of exiled German students, who later became famous as German professors in the USA. Brockhoff's novels, best represented by *Musik im Totengässlein* (*Music in the Alley of the Dead*, 1936, re-printed 2007) are still splendid reading today.

In the French speaking part of Switzerland, it all began (as early as 1904) with Benjamin Vallotton and his Commissaire Potterat, a Don Quixote-like policeman who stumbles over his cases rather than solving them. But it was in the period 1930-45 that French writing finally began to get off the ground. Notable was Berthe Vuillemin, the first known Swiss female writer. Her novel *Le drame de la Belle Escale* (*The Drama of La Belle Escale*, 1932) is in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes. In 1933 Charles Ferdinand Ramuz published *Farinet ou La fausse monnaie* (*Farinet, or The Forged Money*), with Farinet another early anti-hero. In 1943, three more French writers appeared: Georges Hoffmann, whose later *La maison des sortilèges* (*The House of Spells*, 1945) would further develop the Gothic novel, François Fosca who wrote stories set in the world of art and artists; and Marcel de Carlini, most famous for his radio plays.

The first female writers in German emerge in the early 1940's with Gertrud Lendorff, but a deeper impact was made by Kaethe Baumann, who wrote *Achtung Überfall* (*Look Out, Robbery*, 1945), which depicts life under the Nazi regime and deals with a gang of forgers.

The publication of crime novels in Switzerland peaks in the 1940s when book publishing ceased in Nazi-occupied France, causing French writers affected to seek publication in either Switzerland or Belgium. Similarly Swiss editors who previously published for the German market also started series of

mainly translated English and American works of crime fiction. Most of these series are no longer in print.

The 1950s are notable most for the contribution to European crime fiction of Friedrich Dürrenmatt. World-renowned as a playwright, he also wrote three distinguished crime novels. *Der Richter und sein Henker* (*The Judge and his Hangman*, 1952), *Der Verdacht* (*The Suspicion*, aka *The Quarry*, 1953) and *Das Versprechen* (*The Pledge*, 1958). All three engage with key moral issues, and in Inspector Bärlach, the police investigator in the first two novels, Dürrenmatt has created a complex figure who combines aspects of both Glauser's Sergeant Studer and Goethe's Faust, to fascinating effect. In 1985 Dürrenmatt wrote one more crime novel, *Justiz* (*Justice*), a bitter attack on the political and justice system.

The French contribution continued to grow throughout 1960s and 1970s with Paul Alexandre, André Berger who together wrote *Voir Londres et mourir* (*See London and Die*, 1956), a psychological thriller which won the Grand Prix du roman d'aventures in France, Robert Junod who wrote early noir fiction, and espionage writer Fernand Berset whose *On descend à Lausanne* (*Get Off At Lausanne*, 2002) is a beautiful requiem for the genre. Perhaps the most celebrated internationally is Delacorta (the pseudonym of Daniel Odier) with his series featuring a career criminal and Alba his teenage sidekick. *Diva* (1979) was later adapted by Jean-Jacques Beineix for his cult film.

By the 1980s, Swiss crime fiction was well established with writers such as Peter Zeindler, Alexander Heimann, Sam Jaun, Roger Graf, Werner Schmidli, Hansjörg Schneider, Paul Lascaux, Verena Wyss, Milena Moser, Peter Höner and Ulrich Knellwolf. Most are still writing.

THE KEY REFERENCE BOOKS

- **Mord im Alpenglühen** (*Murder in the Alpine Dusk*, NordPark 2005) by Paul Ott.
The Swiss crime novel - then and now. A critical history covering all the major Swiss (and Swiss-domiciled) writers. Includes a full bibliography, both chronologically and by author.
- **Im Fadenkreuz. Der neuere Schweizer Kriminalroman** (*In the Crosshairs*, Chronos 2007) Ed. Edgar Marsch.
An anthology of essays on recent Swiss crime fiction.
- **TatortSchweiz 2. 23 kriminelle Geschichten aus der viersprachigen Schweiz** (*Crime Scene: Switzerland 2*, Limmat 2007) Ed. Paul Ott.
The second anthology published in connection with the Mordstage festival (see Festivals), featuring 23 short stories from Swiss crime writers.
- **Im Morgenrot. Die besten Kriminalgeschichten aus der Schweiz** (*From Dawn*, Scherz 2001) Ed. Paul Ott.
The best Swiss crime stories.*
- **Banken, Blut und Berge. Kriminalgeschichten aus der Schweiz** (*Banks, Blood and Mountains*, Rowohlt 1995) Ed. Peter Zeindler.
An earlier anthology.*

* Out of print

RECENT TRENDS IN CRIME PUBLISHING

The German-speaking market has one of the highest proportion of translations from other cultures. Interested readers are given a comprehensive view of world-wide production, including African, Latin American or Asian authors. In crime too, translations dominate the market, primarily of works by English, US and Scandinavian authors.

Nevertheless, an increasing share of the market goes to Swiss writers, many of them women, and some who are not regarded (or who do not regard themselves) as primarily crime writers. Some of the most interesting younger writers are (writing in German) **Stephan Pörtner**, **Martin Suter**, **Jutta Motz**, **Susy Schmid**, **Ernst Solèr**, **Sabina Altermatt**, **Mitra Devi**, (writing in Italian) **Liaty Pisani**, and (writing in French) **Jean-Jacques Fiechter**, **Michel Bory**, **Corinne Jaquet**, **Daniel Zufferey**, **Jean-Jacques Busino**, **Jean-Hugues Opperl**, **Jacques Neiryneck** and **Anne Cuneo**.

NUMBER OF TITLES

Sharing publishers with the greater German market, it is hard to isolate the number of crime titles specifically published in Switzerland. But we can give some approximate figures for titles published by Swiss crime writers. There have been no titles published in Retoromanian since 2003.

N.B. up to 25% of sales in the overall German market are accounted for by crime titles.

YEAR	TOTAL	GERMAN	FRENCH	ITALIAN
2004	41	33	6	2
2005	42	34	7	1
2006	47	43	2	2
2007	47	43	3	1
2008	51	51	N/A	-

BEST SELLERS

As in most European countries best-selling authors include mainly English and American writers like **Dan Brown**, **Simon Beckett**, **Elizabeth George** and **Donna Leon**, but also authors from Scandinavia like **Henning Mankell**, **Åke Edwardson**, **Håkan Nesser**, the Italian **Andrea Camilleri** and the French **Fred Vargas**.

Best-selling Swiss writers include **Martin Suter**, **Hansjörg Schneider**, **Milena Moser**, **Petra Ivanov** as well as **Friedrich Glauser** and **Friedrich Dürrenmatt** who still regularly show up on the list of best-selling books.

OTHER KEY TRENDS

- Inspired by **Friedrich Glauser**, the so-called 'Regionalkrimi' (crime fiction situated in and emphasising the characteristics of a specific region), is predominant. Most Swiss crime writers belong in this category. Bern and its surroundings, the long-time 'capital' of Swiss crime fiction, is represented by the likes of **Glauser** and **Dürrenmatt**, as well as by **Alexander Heimann**, **Werner Schmidli** (all of them deceased) and (more recently) **Sam Jaun**, **Paul Lascaux** and **Stefan Hänni**. Zürich is notable for crime novels by **Roger Graf**, **Stephan Pörtner**, **Sabina Altermatt**, **Mitra Devi**, **Stefan Naglis** or **Gerlinde Michel**, who won the first Zurich-based crime fiction prize (see Prizes). Basel is represented by **Hansjörg Schneider**.

- Crime fiction with a specific theme is also important. Such themes include stories set in the mountains (authors include **Emil Zopfi**, **Urs Augstburger**, **Sabina Altermatt**, and **Martin Suter**), food (**Paul Lascaux**), a specific problem like the exploitation of women (**Petra Ivanov**) or lately, the success of novels with a hospital setting, sometimes written by professionals with a medical background (**Paul Wittwer**, **Nicole Bachmann**, **Gerlinde Michel**).

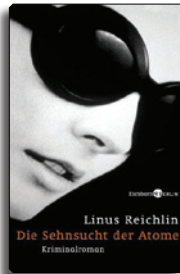
- Whereas in Germany, historical crime fiction is a big success, this is only true in Switzerland to a limited extent. **Monika Dettwiler** is the major exception.

- Re-issues of some early crime fiction writing (**Jodokus Temme**, **Stefan Brockhoff**, **Paul Altheer**) have also achieved some success.

NOTABLE WRITERS BY CATEGORY

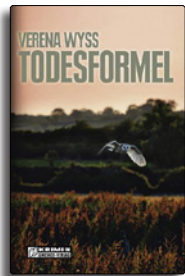
POLICE DETECTIVES

Glauser's Sergeant Studer and **Dürrenmatt's** Inspector Bärlach continue to influence younger writers. **Hansjörg Schneider's** Peter Hunkeler follows this tradition.



Most popular because of his successful Sunday morning radio series, **Ernst Solèr** (died 2008) features both Fred Staub of the Zurich police as well as the federal Swiss investigators. **Michel Bory's** Inspecteur Perrin, **Michael Theurillat** with his Inspector Eschenbach and **Roger Graf** in his latest novels are three more examples, as is the prize-winning first novel by **Linus Reichlin**, with Inspector Hannes Jensen solving the case.

OTHER PROFESSIONALS AS DETECTIVES



Key writers in this category include **Corinne Jaquet** (from Geneva) with her hero Alix-Désirée Beauchamps, a court reporter, and **Petra Ivanov's** Regina Flint, a district attorney, (though her characters are working together with the police). **Verena Wyss** has just started a new series with Jennifer Bach, a young lawyer.

PRIVATE EYES

A strong category for Swiss writers, thus avoiding dull police routine and giving their protagonists greater freedom to act. Examples include **Roger Graf's** detective Philip Maloney

(a parody of the hard-boiled investigator), **Sam Jaun's** Peter Keller, **Peter Höner's** Jürg Mettler (who operates in Kenya), **Paul Lascaux** with his new team of Heinrich Müller and Nicole Himmel (along with alter egos Henry Miller and Lucy), **Stephan Pörtner's** Köbi, hero of 'alternative' Zurich, **Mitra Devi** with her private eye Nora Tabani, **Susy Schmid's** Evi Gygax, **Anne Cuneo's** Marie Machiavelli, **Jutta Motz's** art historian Lisa Wolf, as well as her series featuring a unit of three female investigators of financial crime. **Jon Durschei's** Pater Ambrosius is a kind of Alpine Father Brown.



THRILLERS/ESPIONAGE

Best known for espionage-writing is **Peter Zeindler** with his agent Konrad Sembritzki, still going strong after more than 20 years. So are the novels by **James Douglas** (pseudonym of **Ulrich Kihli**) in the fields of terrorism, conspiracy and financial crime. The novels of **Liaty Pisani** with her agent Ogden often feature political conspiracy, sometimes resulting in non-publication in her native Italy.



NOIR/HARD-BOILED

Generally speaking, a speciality of those Swiss French writing authors who are influenced by the 'roman noir'. They include: **Jean-Jacques Busino**,



Jean-Jacques Fiechter and **Jean-Hugues Opperl**, the latter living in Paris.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH



Some crime fiction writers don't fit in any category, or they write on the borderline between straight fiction and crime. The psychological thrillers of **Martin Suter** embrace rituals both ancient and modern, whilst those of **Milena Moser** take on

current issues important to women. **Ulrich Knellwolf** starts with murder in the Bible and

ends in the Vatican, which is sometimes the case also with the theologically based thrillers of **Jacques Neiryck**.

SHORT STORIES

A number of Swiss crime fiction writers are skilled in this area e.g. **Milena Moser**, **Ulrich Knellwolf**, **Stephan Pörtner**, **Paul Lascaux** and **Mitra Devi**, resulting in a number of recent anthologies. (See Key Reference Books, Festivals)



KEY PUBLISHERS (imprints in brackets)

a) BASED IN SWITZERLAND

Most of the following publishers remain independent.

- Diogenes Verlag: diogenes.ch
- Limmat Verlag (TatortSchweiz): limmatverlag.ch
- orte Verlag (orte-krimi): orteverlag.ch
- Cosmos Verlag: cosmosverlag.ch
- Kein & Aber: keinundaber.ch
- bilgerverlag: bilgerverlag.ch
- Edition 8: edition8.ch
- Salis Verlag (sel noir): salisverlag.com
- Arche Verlag: arche-verlag.com
- Ammann Verlag: ammann.ch
- Chronos Verlag (reprints): chronos-verlag.ch
- Bernard Campiche: campiche.ch
- RomPol: rompol.ch
- Editions de l'Aire: editions-aire.ch

NB Also based in Switzerland was Scherz with its Agatha Christie catalogue. It has now been sold to S. Fischer, Frankfurt.

b) BASED IN GERMANY OR FRANCE

- Gmeiner-Verlag: gmeiner-verlag.de
- Pendragon Verlag: pendragon.de
- Grafit Verlag: grafit.de
- Nagel & Kimche: nagel-kimche.de
- Karl Blessing Verlag: randomhouse.de/blessing
- Fleuve noir: fleuve noir.fr
- Editions Payot & Rivage: payot-rivages.fr
- Editions Baleine - Le Seuil: editionsduseuil.fr
- Edition Luce Wilquin: wilquin.com

CRIME FICTION: WHERE TO FIND IT

Switzerland's only specialist crime fiction bookshop is in Zürich:

Buchhandlung am Rand,

Röschibachstrasse 3, 8037 Zürich,

+41 44 271 21 51

amrand.ch

Also note the crime fiction library in Zurich:

krimiTHEK, Im Gemeinschaftszentrum

Schindlergut, Kronenstrasse 12, 8006 Zürich

(open to the public on Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings)

krimithek.ch

There are good bookshops in every city and will normally feature a special section of crime fiction in German or French, often with a good selection of local or Swiss work. In major cities you'll also find sections of English and French books. The big chains are:

- Thalia (in Bern also operates as Stauffacher): thalia.ch
- Orell Füssli: books.ch
- Payot (French): payot-libraire.ch

NEWS AND REVIEWS

Switzerland has no specialised crime fiction magazine.

NEWSPAPERS

Most newspapers in Switzerland are either language-based or relate to a particular region. German-based newspapers include Tages-Anz and Neue Zürcher Zeitung. Le Temps is the major French-speaking paper, El Corriere del Ticino for the Italian-speaking. Almost all newspapers cover the Swiss crime scene, particularly if a well-known writer publishes a new book, or if a novel is of regional or local interest. But there is no regular coverage of crime fiction.

SHORT STORIES

There are no short story magazines in Switzerland and other publications do not feature them. Writers rely entirely on the occasional published anthology.

ON THE WEB (in German, unless otherwise stated)

Paul Ott's own website features updates of Mord im Alpenglühen (see Reference Books) with all the newly published books by Swiss crime writers, along with information on Mordstage (see Festivals).

- literatur.li

Groups of enthusiasts are starting to build Facebook groups e.g. Kriminalroman, Schweizer Krimiclub

- facebook.com

FESTIVALS

- **MORDSTAGE:** Literally 'Days of Murder' (the extension 'mords-' also means 'great, fantastic'). Founded by Paul Ott in 2001 and since staged on an odd year basis, this festival is organised by crime writers for crime writers, usually coupled with the publication of an anthology of Swiss crime stories (see Key Reference Books).

In 2009 (6-10 May) Mordstage was staged in partnership with CRIMINALE, the annual event organised by Das Syndikat, Germany's crime writers' association. Events were based in Singen, Schaffhausen, near the Swiss-German border and Lake Constance, and were open to the public, many of them free. Over 260 German-speaking crime fiction writers participated. Check out websites die-criminale.de and literatur.li for details.

A commemorative anthology featuring both Swiss and German writers is available.

- **Gefährliche Nachbarn** (Dangerous Neighbours, 2009) edited by Paul Ott, Barbara Grieshaber and Siegmund Kopitzki.

- **BURGDORFER KRIMITAGE:**

Founded in 1994, this is the locally organised festival staged in Burgdorf (see Prizes) in November each even numbered year. Open to the public, the festival features readings, theatre, and films.

krimitage.ch

- **FRAUENFELDER KRIMITAGE:**

Since 2006 and again in 2008, the Burgdorf festival has put special emphasis on female writers.

frauenfelderkrimitage.ch

OTHER KEY WEBSITES

SCHWEIZERISCHE NATIONALBIBLIOTHEK (the Swiss National Library). Its online catalogue collects all that is written about Switzerland and by Swiss writers, including almost all of the crime fiction that has ever been written in Switzerland.

- helveticat.ch

AUTORINNEN UND AUTOREN DER SCHWEIZ, the Swiss national writer's organisation (including a dictionary of authors)

- a-d-s.ch

NB There is no national Swiss crime writer's organisation. Swiss writers are however welcome to join DAS SYNDIKAT, the German crime writers organisation.

- das-syndikat.com

SISTERS IN CRIME. There is a Swiss chapter, contactable via Jutta Motz

(juttamotz@hotmail.com) There is no website.

AIEP-IACW: International Association of Crime Writers. Swiss representatives are Paul Ott and Jutta Motz.

- jmc.ou.edu/AIEP/

MAJOR PRIZES FOR CRIME FICTION (and recent Swiss winners)

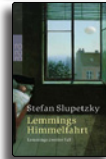
There is no official Swiss crime fiction prize. There is still little or no support for the genre from arts bodies in general, though Pro Helvetia, the national cultural commission, will sometimes fund translations. Recognition therefore comes from two regional sources, and from neighbouring Germany.

• BURGENDORFER KRIMI-PREIS

Burgdorf is a small town north-east of Bern, appropriately within the landscape where so much Swiss crime fiction has been set. The prize, for an outstanding work of crime fiction written in German, is awarded during the bi-annual Burgdorf crime festival (see Festivals).

2008: Jan Seghers (Germany)

2006: Stefan Slupetzky (Austria)



• ZÜRCHER KRIMI-PREIS

A new prize for crime fiction. Only writers from the Zurich area are eligible. Awarded by a jury appointed by the neighbourhood association of Wipkingen, a suburb of Zurich.

2009 winner: Gerlinde Michel: **Alarm in Zürichs Stadtpital** (Alert in the Town Hospital)

• FRIEDRICH GLAUSER PREIS

Winners are chosen in a number of categories by a jury from Das Syndikat, the German crime writer's organisation. Swiss winners include:-

For Lifetime Achievement:

- Prof. Dr. Edgar Marsch (2006), Professor of Modern German Literature at Fribourg University, in particular for his work on crime fiction in German over many years, resulting in the reference book **Die Kriminalerzählung** (The Crime Writers, 1972), and later **Im Fadenkreuz** (In the Crosshairs, 2007). (See Key Reference Books)

- author Peter Zeindler (1996)

For Best Novel:

- Martin Suter: **Der Teufel von Mailand** (2006, UK title: A Deal with the Devil)

- Hansjörg Schneider: **Hunkeler macht Sachen** (Hunkeler Goes His Own Way, 2005)

For Best Debut novel:

- Linus Reichlin: **Die Sehnsucht der Atome** (The Yearning of the Atoms, 2009)

• DEUTSCHER KRIMI-PREIS

Jury award under the auspices of the German BKA (Bochumer Krimi Archiv, based in Bochum, Germany), open to all German-writing authors. There are two categories: for best novel in German and for best novel in translation.

Novel of the year (Swiss winners):

- Linus Reichlin: **Die Sehnsucht der Atome** ((The Yearning of the Atoms, 2009))

- Alexander Heimann: **Muttertag** (Mother's Day, 2002)

- Alexander Heimann: **Dezemberföhn** (December Wind, 1997)

- Peter Zeindler: **Der Schattenagent** (The Agent in the Shadow, 1997)



FINAL NOTE: AWARD-WINNING COVERS

The book cover designs for the books by Linus Reichlin and Paul Lascaux were both selected by German website Bloody Cover as amongst 2008's 12 best-looking crime fiction covers from across the German-language publishing world:

• bloody-cover.de

(This link will take you to the 2009 award-winning page: www.bloody-cover.de/2009/2009.html)

