

The Informer.
By Craig Nova.

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(9780307236937).

Nova, known for challenging literary fiction, turns here to a thriller set in Berlin in 1930, as the Weimar Republic slouches toward its own particular Armageddon. Like Philip Kerr, Jonathan Rabb, and others, Nova finds in Berlin before the war the perfect breeding ground for noir—a decadent society slipping deeper into the muck while a repressive alternative prepares to take control. Nova focuses his story on two women, one a detective searching for a serial killer, the other a special kind of Weimar-era prostitute, a *Gravelstone* (a woman with a deformity that possesses erotic appeal). The prostitute, Gaelle, is also an informer, selling tidbits of information to all who ask—Communists, Nazis, the police. The cop, Armina, feels personally violated by the killings, all of prostitutes, and is determined to solve the case, despite the encouragement of her boss to leave it alone. Nova's main concern is the complex interplay among his characters, but he develops the suspense nicely, too, flashing forward to Berlin in 1945 for a peculiar but effective finale, the city's post-Armageddon rubble providing the inevitable flip side to Weimar's forced gaiety. An entrancing mood piece. —*Bill Ott*