

Rosa by Jonathan Rabb.
Halban Publishers Ltd 2007

This is the third of Jonathan Rabb's novels to have been published by Halban and it is as different from its predecessor as book two was from book 1. The hallmarks of Jonathan Rabb's writing are impeccable research, extraordinary attention to detail, superb style and a deep respect for his readers.

The focus of this story, set in Germany in the aftermath of the socialist revolution that followed the ending of the First World War, is the failed revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, whose body is hauled out of the Landwehr Canal in Berlin. Her body is one of several belonging to women believed to have been murdered by a serial killer stalking the streets of the Prussian capital. A redoubtable police inspector, Nikolai Hoffner, sets out to investigate the cases and find the murderer: his search takes him into very murky places, and puts him on a collision course with his immediate superiors, rivals in the political police force, sections of the military and his own son.

Hoffner's journey is a tense and painful one, but his dogged determination ultimately reveals the killer: this, however, is not the end of the story, and, beset by several severe personal losses, he negotiates his way through a series of hazards which put both his career and his life on the line.

Jonathan Rabb perfectly evokes pre-Weimar Germany, and especially the secret bubbling cauldron of anti-Communist and anti-Jewish paranoia and hatred that was to explode into the nightmare of Nazism less than ten years later. This is the perfect novel for those who enjoy intelligent fiction, as well as those with an interest in German society between the two world wars, and shows that Rabb is a writer who can maintain the highest standard in successive works. Roll on book number 4!

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh