

The Kingdom of Ashes by Robert Edric. Doubleday 2007.

I am ashamed to admit, in view of his prolific literary output, that this is the first of Robert Edric's novels that I have ever read. It will not be the last.

The Kingdom of Ashes, a title taken from a dark and prophetic German folk-tale, is set in Germany in the spring of 1946. Its main characters are a British interrogator, Alex Foster, his friend Doctor James Whittaker, and Eva Remer, a German girl working for the British with whom he falls in love. Surrounding them are a number of superbly portrayed supporting characters, not least the street-wise American hustler Jesus Hernandez.

Edric's skill is not just in telling a good story but in creating a mood that gradually pervades the reader: the mood here is heavy with tension -between the German prisoners waiting to be interrogated, the British officers who are fed up with the war and its aftermath and want to go home, and the Germans who have survived the war and who now have to come to terms with each other's actions during it and after it.

The Kingdom of Ashes presents the reader with a scarred world full of scarred people, and is a powerful reminder of the fact that the damage of war can be found on every level and in every aspect of the society that survives it, in both the victor and the vanquished.

This is a haunting story superbly told that I highly recommend.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh