

A Visible Darkness by Michael Gregorio.  
faber and faber 2009.

A Visible Darkness is the third novel by Michael Gregorio to feature the investigating magistrate and disciple of Kant, Hanno Stiffeniis, and it is as powerful as its predecessors.

Gregorio shows an admirable ability to conjure up a strong sense of place and atmosphere for his readers, a talent much to the fore in the first two Stiffeniis books and even more potent here, but taken to an even higher level in A Visible Darkness, particularly in the opening three chapters whose stench is cloying and tangible. Once you've read it you will understand what I mean.

The main part of the novel takes place on the Baltic coast of a Prussia still under French occupation during the Napoleonic Wars. Stiffeniis is summoned from his home, and the side of his heavily pregnant wife, to investigate a murder among the amber collectors of the Baltic shore. The environment and the situation into which he journeys is hostile and dangerous, complicated by the challenge of dealing with unsympathetic French officers fixated on raising as much amber as possible to support their war effort, the tight knit nature of the local community and the help of a new assistant.

Stiffeniis pursues his case with the same dogged determination and forensic analysis as before, though not without huge danger to himself, and his family.

Michael Gregorio delights with A Visible Darkness as with its two predecessors, and has created a great new detective, worthy of being translated to celluloid.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh