

Shadow and Light by Jonathan Rabb.  
Halban Publishers Ltd 2009.

In my highly subjective opinion, Jonathan Rabb is the best writer of intelligent and highly authentic thrillers in print today. He creates stories of immense intricacy that always reach a satisfactory conclusion, and his sense of atmosphere, character and event is astonishing.

Shadow and Light is the second Rabb novel to feature Chief Inspector Nikolai Hoffner, the widowed Kripo detective estranged from his sons, who possesses an uncanny eye for detail and an amazing breadth of perspective, and yet who finds it hard to combat his own inner demons and self-destructiveness.

The story is set in Berlin in the late twenties; the city is at its decadent height but all around the signs of danger from incipient fascism are evident, signs that bode ill for the city, for Germany as a whole, and, because of his Jewish mother, for Hoffner in particular. That the reader has this knowledge adds a power and poignancy to the story overall.

In Shadow and Light a murder at a film studio leads Hoffner on a trail that takes in the film director Fritz Lang, the newspaper magnate Alfred Hugenberg and the shadowy Joseph Goebbels. He is hindered from time to time by family worries - his younger son has bunked off school to work at the film studios and his older son is mixed up with the Brownshirts.

Hoffner pursues the case with help from the gloriously sinister Alby Pimm, and although he solves his case he ends up no better than he was before it began.

Jonathan Rabb continues to delight with this second novel from Germany between the two World Wars, and it is to be hoped that there is at least one more Hoffner tale before he is engulfed by the tide of history.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh