

The Second Son – by Jonathan Rabb.
Halban Publishers Ltd., 2011

The Second Son concludes the trilogy whose predecessors were Rosa and Shadow and Light, Jonathan Rabb's dark and foreboding thrillers set in the troubled first three decades of the twentieth century in Germany. Rabb is a rare writer, for he has a scientist's eye for detail, combined with a poet's insights and a born storyteller's originality.

The Second Son features once more the main protagonist of the previous two tales, Nikolai Hoffner, the veteran and once highly regarded Berlin policeman with a Jewish mother, who is now persona non grata with the Nazified police force due to his ancestry. Hoffner decides to journey to Spain on the trail of his son Georg who has disappeared in that country at the start of the civil war.

Hoffner suffers the rare pain of having one son, Sascha, who is a convinced Nazi and from whom he is completely estranged, and Georg who has embraced his Jewish heritage and married into a Jewish family. On his travels through Spain Hoffner's courage, strength and ingenuity are tested to the limit and his journey is full of unexpected twists and turns, as well as enormous emotional upheaval.

Rabb demonstrated in Rosa and Shadow and Light an extraordinary ability to conjure the mood of Weimar Berlin, and here he proves that his skills as a storyteller are not restricted to that city for he brings civil war Spain alive in vibrant colour and a wide variety of characters both predictable and unpredictable.

Jonathan Rabb is clearly at the height of his powers as a storyteller and his next novel will be eagerly awaited.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh