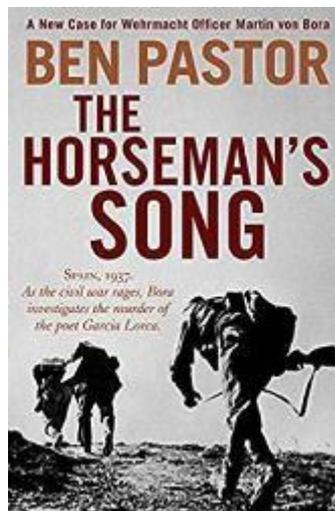




Mike Ripley's
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Do Mention the War

It is inevitable that the ‘Martin Bora’ novels of Ben Pastor will be compared to the ‘Bernie Gunther’ thrillers of the late Philip Kerr. Both feature German protagonists caught up in the maelstrom of World War II, and although there are clear differences – Gunther is a socialist-leaning cynical detective who is a reluctant soldier; Bora is an aristocrat, devout Catholic and professional soldier who finds himself a reluctant detective – both series of books share the same DNA of excellent storytelling.



Coincidentally, Ben Pastor’s sixth Bora thriller, *The Horseman’s Song*, to appear here is now published by Bitter Lemon just as the last Philip Kerr novel, *Metropolis* is published posthumously next month by Quercus.

Both series place their protagonists in different settings and time periods, something guaranteed to upset the obsessive-compulsive reader who wants to read a series ‘in chronological order’. *Metropolis* is set in the Weimar Germany of 1928, whereas *The Horseman’s Song* has Martin

Bora earning his spurs as an army officer fighting for the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War in 1937.

There are, I think, thirteen Bora novels so far published in Italy (although written in English by the bilingual Verbena Pastor), but only six have made it to the UK, covering Bora's wartime career, as a Wehrmacht officer, in Poland, Rome, Verona, Crete and the Russian front. In *The Horseman's Song*, we find a younger Bora on the front line of a vicious civil war in the hot, dusty sierras outside Aragon, struggling with his conscience and academic training as a philosopher, at the random and senseless violence around him. His story is counterpointed by that of an American fighting for the other side as a volunteer in the International Brigade, and the two collide when the body of the famous poet Garcia Lorca is found in no-man's land.

Initially suspected of murdering the poet himself, Bora is drawn into playing detective, blissfully unaware (initially) of the hornets' nest he is kicking. At one chilling point, a suspicious German *Abwehrofficer* tells him: 'You're not nearly as clever as you think, but it's fun watching you try.'

The Horseman's Song (a reference to a Lorca poem) is a long, detailed study of a thinking, professional soldier who has, on a daily basis, to balance the danger, boredom, waste and pain of a military life with his privileged upbringing, his cultural and religious beliefs and his sense of duty. Nobody does that better than Ben Pastor.