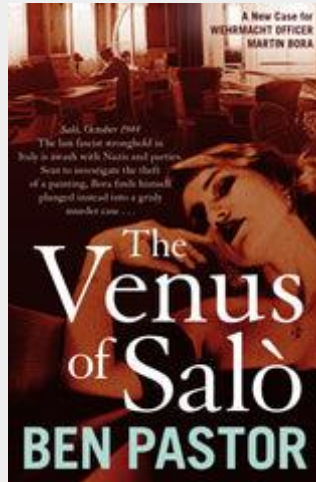


THE CRITIC



“My book of the month is Ben Pastor’s *The Venus of Salò*, the eighth in her Martin Bora series which, I must confess, is new to me. Pastor, the pseudonym of Maria Verbena Volpi, an Italian who taught in American universities, has also written on ancient Rome and pre 1914 Prague, and her Martin Bora series was launched with *Lumen* (2000). For those who, like me, enjoy the Furst and Kerr novels set in World War Two, this is a game-player up, both because Bora, a Wehrmacht colonel of ability, bravery, scruples and artistic interests, is depicted from within in a very skilful fashion by an accomplished novelist, who, in this novel, also writes well about sexual passion and romantic yearning, but also because the plot is at once almost breathtakingly complex and also highly satisfying. Set in Salò, Mussolini’s capital, in late 1944, the novel begins with the theft of a mesmerising Titian and develops to include murders, conflict with the Resistance, and violent rivalries within the latter and among the Germans, not least a feud within the SS, conspiracies within the Nazi élite, the Gestapo constructing a case against Bora, and rivalries within the Fascist élite. **A triumph as a novel and a murder story.”** *The Critic*