



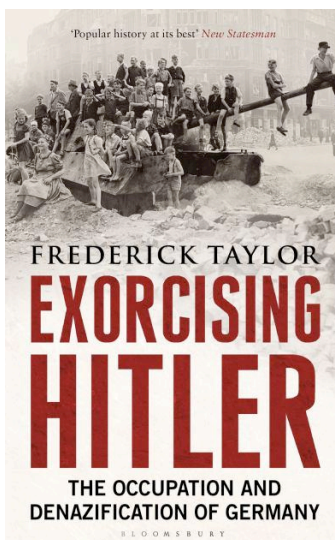
Good Afternoon! It's Wednesday on February 01, 2012.

Literature for everyone in the South West

Home
Community
Grassroots
literature
Book of
the month
SW Writer profile
About us
Read SW
Our patron
Interview
Publishers
Fundraising
Links



Frederick Taylor



Frederick Taylor was educated at Aylesbury Grammar School, read History and Modern Languages at Oxford and did postgraduate work at Sussex University, travelling widely in East and West Germany during the Cold War. He is the author of the acclaimed bestsellers *Dresden* and *The Berlin Wall*, both of which have appeared in many languages, and also edited and translated the *Goebbels Diaries 1938-1941*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and lives with his partner, the poet Alice Kavounas, on the Lizard Peninsula in Cornwall.

Can you say a bit about why Germany in the early Twentieth Century fascinates you so much?

I started learning German at school at the age of 13, quickly decided I enjoyed the language and literature and was interested in the country's history. I had a German pen friend, went on exchanges and so on as a teenager. I suppose the main fascination with the country came from the realization that at the beginning of the 20th century you had this booming, highly civilized, prosperous, recently united country -- not a full democracy but with a thriving party system and a free press -- which seemed to have a brilliant future. Instead, the century brought war, hyper-inflation, repression, horrific slaughter and in 1945 ruin -- from which, amazingly Germany recovered with a speed that no one would have thought possible, consequently defying all our stereotypes about it by also recreating as a flourishing democracy. How interesting a country is that!

Could you describe your approach to research? Does it take longer to research than to write the books? Do you complete the research first and then write, or is it an ongoing process?

A book usually takes 2-3 years to research and write. Research 18 months to 2 years, writing up to a year including revisions and preparing text for the printers. I tend to only start writing once I have everything I think I need. After all, it's pretty pointless to knock out some chapter only to find later you discover a piece of research that nullifies everything you've written.

I hear you're working on a book on hyperinflation in Weimar Germany. Can you tell us a bit about it? When can we expect it to be released?

Working title is *The Downfall of Money*. I've got a contract with Bloomsbury UK and US, and

“

Flint, flaked quartz, a cache of axes. These crinkled eggs shaped us. They glint and roll in the flooding gravel.

”

From 'Axes, Devon Sequence'
Checkpoint,
Exeter Poetry Festival
Ronald Tamplin

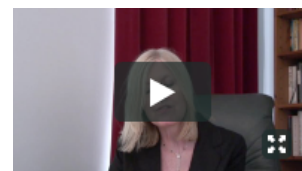
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(no less importantly) with the well-known German publisher, Siedler, who also published my books on Dresden and the Berlin Wall. This means a bit more seed money to finance the research/writing and also a specialized German involvement right from the outset. In my experience this hones the ideas and helps keep a more objective tone. The hyperinflation book will not be an economist's work, of course, more a politico-social portrait of Germany just after the First World War, a very particular time and place. All I can really say at the moment is that it's a more nuanced picture than most people would usually envisage. Less Versailles Treaty (though that's very important), more a traumatized country struggling to establish a socially just democratic state under near-impossible circumstances and paying the price (and yes, Hitler does come in there). The book should be out in the first half of 2013.

You've also had several novels published. How different are the experiences of writing fact and fiction?

Yes, well, the main difference in writing fact is that you're not allowed to make stuff up, whereas in the case of fiction it's actually compulsory. So you can't just sit down and write a work of history off the top of your head. You've got that research-and-then-writing process I described. Sometimes you do research for a novel too, of course, but it's kind of an extra that can be done concomitantly with the writing. What you learn from writing fiction (thrillers in my case) is how to tell a story. That skill transfers pretty much wholesale to factual writing. I mean, suspense, character, and arresting description are just as much part of a popular historical narrative as of a popular novel.

Can you describe your writing environment and practice - do you have a particular place where you write, or time of day, number of words, for example?

I have a good-sized converted bedroom as a study. Lots of books to hand so I can refer easily, because living in South Cornwall I'm a long way from a comprehensive library. In eleven or twelve years of writing exclusively non-fiction I have accumulated a pretty large collection on German and world history. I'm not a "morning" person, so I tend to use the mornings for reading and walking around the neighborhood. We sadly lost our dog recently, but usually there's a canine companion involved. Generally I'll write from lunch till six-thirty, hoping for a thousand words or so, fifteen hundred on a really good day (which have to be referenced and footnoted where necessary).

Do you have any advice for our readers who may wish to see their non-fiction work published?

It's tough at the moment. The market for factual books is in a slump. Publishers are really not sure if the growth of free information online (especially Google and the rise of Wikipedia), combined with the apparent decline of reading as a leisure pursuit even among the highly educated young, will kill off serious non-fiction. They are very reluctant to take any chances. All the same, the usual rules apply. Find a subject you're passionately interested in and let that passion show when you're talking to agents and publishers. Be determined. And be prepared to work very hard indeed.

At Cyprus Well, we are keeping an eye on developments in the digitising of books, Ipads, Kindles, etc. As an author, how do you view these developments?

There's clearly no going back to the time when paper ruled. So far as the craft of non-fiction goes, the digitalization process is good news and bad news. Turning a work of history into an e-book is, for instance, more complicated than doing the same for a novel -- you've got footnotes, an index, illustrations and so on. More expensive, too. And non-fiction readers haven't quite got used to the format the way they have with novels. Another reason why publishers are being cautious. On the positive side, you have the huge -- in fact almost limitless -- potential for instant cross-referencing and online interactivity with other media, which I think will eventually pull non-fiction out of the slump I described above. Maybe the non-fiction "book" will become more like an authored multimedia documentary. I'm reasonably digitally savvy, and I hope to be around during that period, when we can really play with the possibilities created by these developments. So the current time is undoubtedly anxious, but the future could be very exciting.

Thank you Frederick!

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