

Frederick Forsyth

The author and his work



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The British novelist Frederick Forsyth was born on August 25th, 1938, at Ashford in Kent, in the southeast of England. He was a student at Tonbridge School, also in Kent. As a boy, Frederick was very interested in aircraft. He started learning to fly when he was only sixteen, and he got his pilot's licence a few days after his seventeenth birthday. After he left school, Frederick studied for a time at the University of Granada, in Spain, then he joined the Royal Air Force (RAF). He became the youngest pilot in the RAF, at nineteen years old.

After his time in the RAF, Frederick became a journalist. He worked for a daily newspaper in England for three years, then for Reuters, the famous news agency. Later, when he started writing novels, Frederick mostly wrote political thrillers which are well known for their realism – their plots and their characters are very believable. His books are very well researched – the author obviously knows a lot about the kinds of people and the politics of the countries he writes about. It was Frederick's experiences as a Reuters journalist, and later as a BBC reporter and a freelance journalist, which gave him this knowledge.

Frederick first worked for Reuters at their Paris office. This was during the early 1960s, when the French government was trying to end the long civil war in Algeria. This north African country had been ruled by France for a long time, but many Algerians now wanted their country to be independent. Others did not want this and there was much fighting between the two sides. The leader of France, President Charles de Gaulle, was talking to the Algerians who wanted independence. He wanted French people who lived in Algeria to be safe and to have the same rights as the African people who lived there. But he also wanted to end the war and to give Algeria independence. A group of people called the OAS – the Secret Army Organization – fought against this idea. The OAS was a terrorist group and they tried to stop the peace talks with acts of terrible violence. Frederick reported on all of this, and it later gave him the idea for his first novel, *The Day of the Jackal*, published in 1971. This novel is about an OAS plot to kill General de Gaulle. It is a very realistic novel, and it quickly made Frederick famous.

After his time in Paris, Frederick worked for Reuters in Berlin. While there, he became interested in finding out about people who had been Nazis during World War II and who still held important positions in West Germany. He also investigated the way in which other Nazis escaped from Europe to South American countries where they avoided prosecution for war crimes. These investigations gave Frederick the idea for his next novel, *The Odessa File*, published in 1972. Although the novel was a best-seller when it was published, most people thought that its plot was simply fiction. Recent work by historians of Europe and South America, however, has shown that much of what people at that time thought was fiction was really true.

Frederick Forsyth also reported on the war in Biafra, in west Africa. Biafra used to be the eastern part of Nigeria, but in 1967 it broke away. Its people wanted an independent country. But Biafra broke away against the wishes of the Nigerian government, and a three-year war was the result. In 1970, Biafra was defeated and after that it no longer existed as a separate country. It was while Frederick was reporting on this war that he met many mercenaries – foreign soldiers who fought for

one side or the other because they were paid to. These meetings gave Frederick the idea for his novel, *The Dogs of War*, published in 1974. This novel was about a revolution in a fictional African country. He also wrote a non-fiction book about the Biafra war – *The Biafra Story*.

After his first literary successes, Frederick gave up working as a full-time journalist and became a full-time writer. Since then, he has written many thrillers as well as short stories. He still does a little journalistic work, and he has recently become interested in on-line publishing for his fiction. Many of his novels and stories have been made into films, both for TV and for the cinema.

A selection of works by Frederick Forsyth

1971	<i>The Day of the Jackal</i>
1972	<i>The Odessa File</i>
1974	<i>The Dogs of War</i>
1976	<i>The Shepherd</i>
1979	<i>The Devil's Alternative</i>
1972	<i>No Comebacks (short stories)</i>
1984	<i>The Fourth Protocol</i>
1989	<i>The Negotiator</i>
1994	<i>The Fist of God</i>
1996	<i>Icon</i>

(For a list of Frederick Forsyth's stories that have been simplified for the Macmillan Guided Readers Series, see a copy of the current Readers catalogue.)