

Ralph Freedman

Author of historical fiction and literary criticism

<http://ralphfreedman.net/about-ralph-freedman/>

About Ralph Freedman



(L to R) Brother Bert, their mother, and Ralph Freedman

RALPH FREEDMAN was born on February 24, 1920 in Hamburg, Germany, where he spent his childhood and adolescence. A Jewish refugee, he emigrated to England in early 1939, where he first worked on a farm in Derbyshire, later as an interpreter for the Committee for the Care of Children from Germany in London.

In 1940, he left for the United States aboard a small ship which, for eleven days made its way across the ocean, keeping a vigilant lookout for U-Boats and icebergs. He lived and worked first in New York, joining his father who had emigrated previously. After his mother and brother escaped from Germany through Russia and Japan, the family settled in Seattle, Washington.



Freedman getting in taxi to go to ship headed for England

From the start Ralph Freedman envisioned himself as a writer (he wrote his first novel, *Paul Grotte*, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen), even as he struggled with a change of language in Derbyshire and London, hoping to be eventually accepted by English-speaking readers.



Staff Sgt Freedman in Brazil on his way to Africa

While a student at the University of Washington, he worked hard to perfect his fluency in English, reading tirelessly—classics like William Faulkner and Hemingway (whom he, like every other aspiring young author, tried to imitate)—and maintained this commitment during his Army service, first at the Military Intelligence Training Center in Camp Ritchie, Maryland, then in combat in Tunisia and at the invasion of Sicily and, finally, in the forward unit of 5th Army Headquarters in Italy.

Upon his discharge from the service in 1945, Ralph began to put his dream of becoming a writer into practice, especially after returning to the University. While there, he wrote a novel based on recollections of his brief post-war service in counter-intelligence in Austria, entitled *Divided*, which earned him the Lewis & Clark Northwest Award offered by E.P. Dutton in 1947 and published by them in 1948 (unlike his very first novel which he had flung into the Thames River in London).



Ralph Freedman while at Princeton

Ralph Freedman's academic career took over at that point. He went on to graduate work in philosophy at Brown where he received an M.A. in 1950, and to Yale for a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature in 1953. A later version of his doctoral dissertation—*The Lyrical Novel*—was published by the Princeton University Press in 1963. He later went on to publish biographies of Hermann Hesse and Rainer Maria Rilke, both of whom had been major literary influences during his young years. These biographies established Ralph Freedman's legacy by furthering the influence of the two literary giants on succeeding generations. In Germany alone, he undertook two hugely successful book tours following the publication of Rilke's biography, and his biography of Hesse became so popular that it was recognized by the color of its cover and known simply as "the green book." His work has been translated into German, Italian, French, Korean, Spanish and Chinese.



Ralph Freedman in his study

Late in life he returned to fiction. His first full-length work of narrative fiction since *Divided* was a novel about McCarthy-type investigations in the early 50s, which he witnessed at the University of Washington after his return from the Army. *Rue The Day* won the Indie Award for best historical fiction in 2010.

Ralph lives in Decatur, Georgia. He is a frequent traveler both in the U.S. and abroad and is now busy with his