

...with Frank Tallis

Clinical psychologist and novelist

One moment that changed the course of your career

Sitting in the pre-Raphaelite room of Tate Britain during my lunch hour after a pretty ordinary morning at a sexual health clinic in Pimlico. I decided that what I really wanted to do was write novels. Not so much to escape psychology but to use my knowledge of psychology in a different way.

One way being a writer helped my practice

Writing fiction helped me to recognise that human beings naturally organise their experiences according to narrative principles. A patient's chaotic self-narrative can be 'edited' into a more coherent form, and the basic plots found in literature can act as ready and useful templates (e.g. slaying the monster, rags to riches, voyage and return). Effective clinical psychologists, of all persuasions, are necessarily good story-tellers and editors.

One favourite psychological novel

The Glamour by Christopher Priest. Dark, elegantly written, profoundly psychological and full of surprises.



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One treasured possession

Vier Psychoanalytische Krankengeschichten, Freud's copy of his own case studies. The book was given to me by Paul Samet, the son of Freud's cardiologist Benno Samet.

I cannot express how touched and honoured I was to be presented with such a gift. The book travelled with Freud to London in 1938 when he escaped Nazi persecution.

When I hold it in my hands I can feel the weight of history. The pages still retain a fragrant trace of Freud's cigar smoke. At least that's what I choose to believe.

One cultural recommendation

Eyes Wide Shut by Stanley Kubrick. A marital crisis viewed through the distorting lens of the unconscious. Film critics never gave this masterpiece the reviews it deserved because they didn't have enough psychology.

One hero

Pierre Janet. If he had been a better self-publicist he might now be more famous than Freud. He was an early pioneer of psychotherapy; he wrote on diverse subjects such as the evolution of moral conduct, social behaviour, graphology, the paranormal, criminology; he predicted Esperanto, pharmacotherapy, and speculated about time

travel. The historian Henri Ellenberger has described his writings as a vast city buried beneath ashes awaiting excavation.

One book that you think all psychologists should read
Man's Search for Meaning. Viktor E. Frankl. A book that might not offer *the* answer – but it certainly offers *an* answer to the vexed question of how to live.

One challenge you think psychology faces
I've been reading books and papers that purport to explain consciousness for over 30 years now. The terminology and frameworks change, but I don't feel we're any closer to understanding the true nature of consciousness. Yet it's so fundamental to psychology.

One nugget of advice for aspiring psychologists
Read George Orwell's essay 'Politics and the English Language'. It'll take you about ten minutes and change the way you write for ever.

One proud moment
The first OCD Action conference and AGM. OCD Action is a charity I was very much involved with in its infancy and it felt good to be part of something unquestionably worthwhile.

One hope for psychology
That it becomes a more integrative discipline: willing to recognise that different theoretical frameworks and approaches can be viewed as complementary rather than competitive.

More answers online at
www.thepsychologist.org.uk

resource

'I'm particularly pleased with *The Sleep Room*, my latest novel (written as F.R.Tallis) – a ghost story set in a Suffolk 'lunatic asylum' during the 1950s. The "treatments" I describe, such as narcosis (months of induced sleep) and excitatory abreaction (an ether-based cure for PTSD) were fascinating to research. Bizarrely, a sleep room was still operating in London as late as 1972.'

coming soon

A 'super' issue!

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