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## New novel combines satire, humor and a touch of sci-fi

By John T. Miller



Local author Sally Tubach Photo provided

Longtime Orinda resident Sally Tubach has published a novel, "The Grande Dame and Hitler's Twin: A Comedy of Errors," to many positive reviews.

While it's difficult to imagine Hitler and Comedy in the same title, Tubach makes it work in this fantastical mixed-genre novel, with elements of magical realism, satire, humor, and a touch of science fiction.

One of the elements that make the story work is the wealth of eccentric characters that drive the plot. They are drawn with a Dickensian flair, their faults and foibles colorfully sketched along with their believability.

What starts out with an absurd premise—Hitler had a twin brother who was cryogenically frozen—turns into a comic tale which asks the question: What might have happened had Hitler not been rejected by the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and went on to become a successful artist? Tubach plays with this idea in contemporary San Francisco.

Two of the main characters are based on real-life personages Tubach knew. The elderly old lady, Myrtle

Halstead, formidable, erudite, and overbearing, was modeled on a teacher her husband had at San Francisco City College, and Bruno de Carlo is based on an actual Italian aristocrat who was a notable celebrity in the San Francisco social scene and gossip columns. The town in France where the fictional twin was raised is modeled on an actual village where the Tubachs owned a vacation home.

The book began as an attempt by Tubach to write a short story about the literary snob (Halstead) who attempts to educate the classless aristocrat (de Carlo). She began work on it in the '90s while living in Bordeaux, France, but when they returned to California, other projects took over.

Her husband, Fritz Tubach, a child in Germany during WWII, and his friend Bernie Rosner, a Holocaust survivor, decided to write a double biography about their experiences: "An Uncommon Friendship" (see Aug. 8, 2018 issue in the Lamorinda Weekly archives for story). Sally Tubach got involved with that project, and after its publication went on speaking tours and promotional events, putting her novel on hold.

In 2012, Tubach said that the continued focus on the Holocaust was becoming depressing. "I wanted to write something lighthearted and fun," she says, "and I added the idea of Hitler's twin. The novel then took off again."

Tubach, who has a PhD in German Literature from UC Berkeley, wondered how a cultural hotbed like Germany, which produced forward-thinking writers such as Goethe and Frederic Schiller, and musicians such as Bach, Mozart, and Brahms, could give rise to such a despot as Hitler.

"I started imagining things; it was fun to play with all my characters' relationships," she says, adding, more seriously, "One of the messages I'm trying to deliver in the novel is the function and importance of literature."

Tubach had a widely varied career before her studies at Berkeley. When she married Fritz, she inherited two stepchildren whose mother had died, so she chose a career in freelance writing in order to be home and help raise the kids.

She has previously published "Memoirs of a Terrorist;" coauthored "Michael Mann: Fragmente eines Lebens;" "An Uncommon Friendship: From Opposite sides of the Holocaust;" and "German Voices: Memories of Life During Hitler's Third Reich."

Most of her work to this point was published by university presses, but when it came time to peddle this novel Tubach had difficulty finding anyone interested and became discouraged. Finally, in April of 2020, a small press out of Eugene, Oregon - Wipf and Stock Publishers - decided to pick it up. When it was published, Tubach had many personal matters to attend to and is disappointed she hasn't been able to publicize the book much. She is now getting into readings and other ways of promoting the book, including

a possible tour from Budapest to Amsterdam next December.

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