

The Coronation is my fourth novel. My debut novel, *The Genes of Isis*, is an epic fantasy.

The fourth, *The Abdication*, is a novel. But *The Coronation*, like my second, *The Old Dragon's Head*, is a secret history thriller. That's history with a supernatural twist.

The main character of *The Coronation* is Marion, Countess von Adler. She is based on a real-life personage, Marion, Countess von Dönhoff who lived at her Junker family estate at Castle Friedrichstein near Löwenhagen, East



Prussia. For reasons of discretion, I changed the name of the estate in the novel to Castle Ludwigshain.

Much of the inner detail in the novel is derived from the real Countess' autobiography, *Before the Storm: Memories of My Youth in Old Prussia* (tr. by Jean Steinberg. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990). Although she lived during the 20th Century, because of her book, I was able to add that rare touch of authenticity and flavour the story with unusual, subtle details. It allowed me to enter not only her pre-Second World War world and then imagine what it might have been like to live there during the 18th Century when the novel is set.

A wonderful read, she paints a vivid picture of her upbringing, from the parlour games, the geese flying overhead, the smell of the forests, her dogs and horses, the names of the staff, the layout of the castle and the out-buildings, and beyond that, the rolling fields, the local villages, the lakes, and running through the valley, the River Pregel.

She describes the diet, the Christmas meal, the daily chores and the routines of Lutheran prayer and cleaning, right down to the colour and texture of the tunics worn by the housemaids.



Bordering the Baltic Sea, the land of East Prussia is special because of the presence of amber – a semi-precious yellow fossilized tree resin - along its Samland Peninsula. 95% of the world's amber is mined there. I

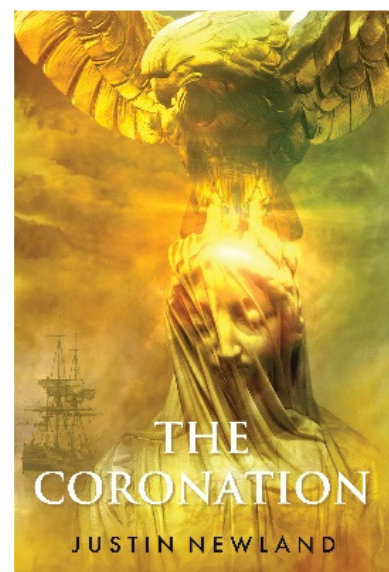
featured the famous Amber Room in the plot, which, at the time of the novel in the 1760s, was housed in The Catherine Palace near St. Petersburg, Russia.

Marion, Countess von Dönhoff, had much to say about life in Germany during the Second World War, and this extract is perhaps the summit of her humanity:

“I also do not believe that hating those who have taken over one's homeland ... necessarily demonstrates love for the homeland. When I remember the woods and lakes of East Prussia, its wide meadows and old shaded avenues, I am convinced that they are still as incomparably lovely as they were when they were my home. Perhaps the highest form of love is losing without possessing.”

With such a profound sentiment, added to her sparkling wit and compassion, she was the ideal inspiration for the novel's lead character, Marion, Countess von Adler. Adler means eagle, and in *The Coronation*, I wanted to explore an alternative, spiritual genesis for the Industrial Revolution.

Using the folklore and heraldry of the land of Prussia, rich in the motif of the double-headed eagle, I conceived the idea of a mysterious, supernatural entity, the Adler, and the part it would play in the development of the Industrial Revolution.



What, you may ask, is the title of the novel, *The Coronation*, to do with the Adler?

Well, to reveal that would be a spoiler. Enjoy the novel.

Justin Newland

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