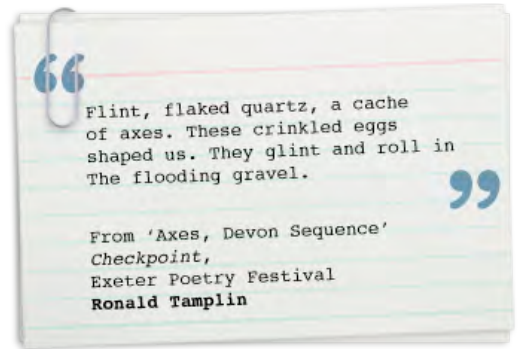




Good Morning! It's Monday on July 04, 2011.

Literature for everyone in the South West



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Saul David is the author of several critically acclaimed history books, including *The Indian Mutiny: 1857* (shortlisted for the Westminster Medal for Military Literature), *Zulu: The Heroism and Tragedy of the Zulu War of 1879* (a Waterstone's Military History Book of the Year) and, most recently, *Victoria's Wars: The Rise of Empire*. He has also written two bestselling historical novels set in the wars of the late 19th Century, *Zulu Hart* and *Hart of Empire*.

An experienced broadcaster, he has presented and appeared in history programmes for all the major TV channels and is a regular contributor to Radio 4.

He is Professor of War Studies at the University of Buckingham.

Cyprus Well caught up with Saul this month to ask a few questions about the new book, and writing in general.

The evocation of the setting in time is wonderfully done in the George Hart series, and the actions spring to life from the page. Could you describe your approach to researching an era and then incorporating period features into a story?

I'm lucky in that the George Hart series is set during the wars of the late 19th Century, a period I'd already researched for several non-fiction books like *Zulu* and *Victoria's Wars*. So I had much of the factual information of the wars to hand: what happened where, and to whom. But with fiction you need a lot more period detail than you would include in a history, such as the interior of a cabin on a Southampton-Cape Town steamer, the type of clothes people would have worn, or the size, shape and feel of a Colt pistol. And yet you must never forget that plot and characterization are paramount, and that the history should remain a light dusting in the background to give authenticity.

Can you say a bit about your reasons for choosing the particular era for George?

Part of the reason I chose the Zulu War of 1879 as the series opener was because I'd already written a history of it. But the main reason was because I've always been fascinated in the late Victorian period of Empire, and the dramatic opportunities that provides for mavericks like George.

Where did the inspiration for the Hart series come from?



Literature Clips

Our patron, Helen Dunmore (courtesy [Bloodaxe Books](#))



Helen Dunmore from Neil Astley



Lee Weeks



The idea to do a series set in the late 19th Century was actually suggested to me by my brilliant editor, Nick Sayers at Hodder, rather than the other way round. But I created the character, George Hart, and his part-African, part-British heritage is similar to my own. My great-grandfather was an Armenian, born in Persia (now Iran), educated in England (Cheltenham and Cambridge), and married to an English girl. Like George, he was also bullied at school on account of his dark skin.

What are the long term plans for George? Do you have a mapped out sense of how you'd like the series to develop?

At the moment I'm taking it one book at a time, though I'd ultimately like to take him as far as the outbreak of the First World War. But for now (book 3) he's returning to Africa and will become embroiled in diamond-mining, gun-running and the first war between the Boers and the British (which the latter lost, the only defeat in the whole of the 19th Century). Will he win back Lucy from the dastardly diamond magnate Barney Barnato? You'll have to read it to find out.

Can you describe your writing environment and practice – do you have a particular place where you write, or time of day, number of words, for example?

I write in an office in the garden that was built for me by my father-in-law. Actually it's more of a shed, but has a lovely view down a field to our pond. I tend to write office hours, so I can spend time with my three girls (13, 10 and 5), and am lucky to produce more than 1,500 words a day for fiction, and 2,000 for non-fiction. Novels are harder!

When you have a germ of an idea for a novel, how do you begin to plan for the writing stage. Do you map events in advance, for example, or do you simply begin?

I tried the latter with book one and got into a real mess. So now I plot every detail and move in advance. The outline for book 3, for example, is 15,000 words long and took two months to write! But it saves a lot of time in the end.

Do you have any advice for our readers who may wish to see their work published?

Don't give up. If you're determined to become a writer you'll get there. My first book was turned down by 8 publishers. But I didn't have a literary agent and was lucky to find a small press. Now, I think, you need an agent or the publisher won't even read the submission.

At Cyprus Well, we are keeping an eye on developments in the digitising of books, Ipads, Kindles, etc. As an author, how do you view these developments?

Not with any trepidation. It's happening and we have to accept it. I prefer to read 'real' books but you can't deny the usefulness of a Kindle or an Ipad. I've got the latter, but use it mainly for the internet and to read newspapers. And digitization might even give us a greater share of the publishing pie (now that publishers' costs are reducing). The real issue, as it is for the music business, is pirating and how to stop it. I'm not sure you can.

Thank you, Saul!



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