

MID&PLUS - INTERVIEW OF KATHERINE SCHOLES

How did you come to write novels ?

I was born in Tanzania and lived there until I was ten, when my family moved to England. I found it hard to adjust to life in such a different country and was very homesick for Africa. My teacher suggested that I write about my feelings in the form of free verse. This began my journey as a writer. I kept diaries and wrote stories and poems all through my childhood. In my twenties I married a filmmaker and I found myself surrounded by people who were working on screenplays. That was when I decided to try writing fiction myself. I began with children's stories and moved on to longer novels for adult readers. I think all along I really wanted to write about Africa – to explore the lost home of my childhood. Eventually I wrote 'The Rain Queen' which set me on the path to being a full-time novelist.

Where do your stories come from ?

I often start with something that's connected to my life. It might be a place or an event in history, or a personal story I've heard. I begin researching everything that connects with that starting point. The internet has made this part of my work much easier, but I like to do first hand research as well - interviewing people, and traveling to locations. I keep following ideas that spark my interest, until I have a huge amount of material to work with. I spend about a year researching and developing stories, then a year writing and editing. Often I discover the seed of the next novel hiding somewhere in the one before. For example, I read about George Adamson, the 'lion man' when I was working on 'The Hunter's Wife'. When I'd finished that book I developed my interest in lions further and wrote 'Lioness'.

You are living in Tasmania, but have been living in various countries. Does the place from which you write has an influence on the novel ?

It's strange that for many years now I've been writing about the dusty plains of central Tanzania, while sitting at my desk overlooking the Derwent River in southern Tasmania. The contrast between what I'm imagining and where I am physically could not be greater ! But somehow it works. I think it's because both settings are very powerful in terms of landscape (and the landscape is like a character in my novels). I've never tried to write in an urban setting, but I think I'd find it difficult.

The Rain Queen, Congo Dawn, The Stone angel, all of them have a strong woman as the main character. Have you ever left the first place to a man in one of your novels ?

I like to have one main point of view in my novels, so that the reader really 'becomes' that character. Until recently, this person was always a woman, and I followed her journey as she discovered her true, strong self. In my latest book 'Congo Dawn' the story goes back and forth between two main characters, and for the first time, one of them is a man. I never intended for Dan Miller to be such a big part of the novel. His character emerged from my research, as though of his own accord. I became fascinated by him. At first I was daunted by having a male character (who is also a soldier) but I sent some chapters to my editor and she encouraged me to keep going. My other main character was a young woman, so I think her présence helped me – and my readers – connect with Dan. It was a difficult but wonderful journey and I think it changed me as a writer.

Have all of your novels been already translated into French ?

Yes, I have a wonderful publisher at Belfond who has supported each of my novels. She is a gréât source of encouragment to me.

What gives you the energy to write every morning?

Sometimes it's very hard to get started. Everything from walking the dog to doing the laundry seems more interesting ! But once I have entered the story and reconnected with my characters, the real world drops away and the hours fly past. It takes a long time to write a novel, though, and it can get lonely and exhausting. One thing that really inspires me is when I hear from readers who have been touched in some way by my novels.

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