

Rosemary Sutcliff

1920-1992



1. Biografía, obra, premios, cine y TV

Breve biografía:

Escritora británica. 1920-1992. Nació y falleció en West Clandon, Surrey. Hija de un oficial naval inglés, viajó mucho desde pequeña. Sufrió una enfermedad que la obligó a estar en una silla de ruedas, lo que propició que fuese una gran lectora. Estudió Arte. Cuando finalizó la segunda Guerra Mundial se dedicó a escribir, sobre todo novelas históricas minuciosas que suelen considerarse juveniles, aunque su gran calidad literaria las hace aptas para todo tipo de público.

Obra:

Considerada una de las mejores escritoras británicas (actualmente figura entre los 50 mejores escritores británicos según *The Times*), tiene una producción muy extensa (más de 40 obras) compuesta de libros infantiles, libros de no ficción, novelas para adultos y novelas para jóvenes, especialmente del género de novela histórica y de aventuras. Destacamos:

Libros de la serie “Eagle of the Ninth”:

***The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954)**

***The Silver Branch* (1957)**

***The Lantern Bearers* (1959)**

Dawn Wind (1961)

Frontier Wolf (1980)

En 1980 se editó ***Three Legions***, una antología con los tres primeros libros de esta serie, considerados una trilogía (aunque se pueden leer de forma independiente).

En inglés su principal editora es *Oxford University Press*, aunque también han editado alguna de sus obras *Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Random House, Puffin Books, Barnes & Nobel* y *Tarden Library Books* y entre otras.

Ediciones en castellano:

En castellano sólo se han traducido las siguientes obras :

✚ ***Las aventuras de Ulises : la historia de la Odisea de Homero*** (*The wanderings of Odysseus*), Barcelona: Vicens Vives, 2005, 10ª reimpr.; 170 pp.; col. Clásicos adaptados; ilustr. de Alan Lee para una edición de 1995; introd. de Carlos García Gual; notas, glosarios y actividades de Manuel Otero; trad. de José Luis López Muñoz; ISBN: 84-316-4471-0.

✚ ***Naves negras ante Troya: la historia de la Ilíada*** (*Black ships before Troy*), Vicens Vives 1998 Barcelona: Vicens-Vives, 1998; 175 pp.; col. Clásicos adaptados; ilustr. de Alan Lee para una edición de 1993; prólogo de Carlos García Gual; notas y glosarios de Manuel Otero; trad. de José Ramón Insa, Javier de la Iglesia; ISBN: 84-316-4291-2.

✚ ***Aquila, el último romano*** (*The Lantern Bearers*), Madrid: SM, 1989, 5ª ed.; 255 pp.; col. Gran Angular. trad. de Ángel Jiménez; ISBN: 84-348-0912-5.

Las aventuras de Ulises es lectura obligada para 1º y 2º de ESO en la asignatura de Lengua castellana y Literatura en el cursos ...2006-2007-2008 y también lo había sido para B.U.P.

Naves negras ante Troya, lectura recomendada para 4º de ESO.

Premios:

A lo largo de su carrera ganó varios premios reconocidos:

Carnegie Award, Library Association por la obra *The Lantern Bearers* (1959)

Boston-Globe Horn Book Award, *Tristan and Iseult* (1972)

Hans Christian Andersen Award, Highly Commended (1974)

Este premio está considerado el “pequeño Premio Nobel” (*the little Nobel Prize*), refiriéndose lo de “pequeño” a que es un premio importante de la literatura infantil y juvenil.

Order of the British Empire 1975

Other Award, *Song for a Dark Queen* (1978)

Phoenix Children's Book Award, *The Mark of the Horse Lord* (1985)

Commander of the British Empire 1992

Cine y TV:

En 1977 se filmó una película de *The Eagle of the Ninth* dirigida por Michael Simpson y Baz Taylor, con guión de Donald Bull y Hill Craig.

También se rodó una serie de televisión en la BBC con notable éxito en Inglaterra.

Actualmente Kevin MacDonald, director de la galardonada “El último Rey de Escocia”, está preparando otra versión de la película de “The Eagle of the Ninth”. La producción de la película podría producirse en el 2009.

Más información:

<http://www.peliculas.info/18-05-2007/noticias/macdonald-se-lanza-ahora-con-the-eagle-of-the-ninth>

<http://www.movieweb.com/news/50/19850.php>

2. Lo que se ha dicho de ella

The Times

January 5, 2008

http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article3127394.ece

Rosemary Sutcliff

Crippled from childhood by arthritis, Sutcliff's imagination liberated her to become the foremost historical children's writer of her age. Influenced by Kipling, Dickens and Norse myth, she couldn't read until she was 9 and left school at 14. Her most famous novel, *The Eagle of the Ninth*, tells how a young Roman with a shattered leg journeys behind Hadrian's Wall to discover what happened to the real-life Ninth Legion, led by his father, which disappeared in Hibernia. Vivid and passionate, it was the first of six novels about the Aquila family, and one of more than 42 based on British history, from Arthurian legend and Beowulf to the post-Roman era. Her themes of friendship and loyalty, suffering and courage are probably due to illness, but that of the struggle between darkness and light can be traced to the threat of Nazi invasion. She remains a strong influence on later authors such as Catherine Fisher.

One to read: *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954)

Rosemary Sutcliff está entre los 50 escritores británicos más grandes desde 1945 según la lista publicada por *The Times* (TIMESONLINE).

20 de junio de 2006

Adaptar no es degradar

<http://www.bienvenidosalafiesta.com/index.php?mod=Notas&acc=Inicio&OtraSec=00000011Y>

Dos ejemplos que cómo adaptar no tiene por qué ser degradar son las versiones de *La Ilíada* y *La Odisea* que firma la escritora inglesa Rosemary Sutcliff. Son dos excelentes recomendaciones para un lector joven que desee acercarse por primera vez a las clásicas obras de Homero. Como dice **Carlos García Gual***, Rosemary Sutcliff ha logrado «recrear el espíritu ingenuo y poético de la narración épica, en una prosa de buen ritmo, sonora, clara y con un alto grado de elaboración literaria».

***Carlos García Gual** es catedrático de filología griega en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Especialista en antigüedad clásica y literatura, ha escrito diversos libros y más de un centenar de artículos sobre literatura clásica y medieval, filosofía griega y mitología. También reseña libros en "El País" como crítico literario. Más información: http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlos_Garc%C3%ADa_Gual

11 de septiembre de 2005

Film of The Eagle of the Ninth

According to the Scotsman newspaper some two years ago, **there are three films in preparation** related to the disappearance of the Ninth Legion. The report notes that "Duncan Kenworthy, London-based producer of *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Love Actually*, acquired the film rights to Rosemary's **The Eagle of the Ninth**, which has sold more than a million copies since its appearance in 1954, and was made into a BBC mini-series shot in Aberdeenshire in the 1970s."

<http://heritage.scotsman.com/theromans/Film-frenzy-discovers-the-lost.2483137.jp>

Nota en Internet: http://www.bookrags.com/wiki/Rosemary_Sutcliff

Rosemary Sutcliff (December 14, 1920 - July 23, 1992) was a British novelist, best known as a writer of highly acclaimed historical fiction. Although she is considered a children's author, **the quality and depth of her writing also appeals to adults**, she herself once commenting that she wrote "for children of all ages from nine to ninety."

Book reviews: <http://www.helium.com/tm/147244/eagle-ninth-published-rosemary>

Artículo de **Steve Martin** sobre *The Eagle of the Ninth*:

“...This is a wonderfully well-written story and the attention to detail helps to take the reader into the world of Roman Britain. *The Eagle of the Ninth* is a novel of friendship and of challenge. Most of all, however, it is novel that shows the difference between an individual with purpose and an individual without.”

Enrevista a Simon Scarrow* (Página web “Hislibris”)

En la entrevista <http://www.hislibris.com/?p=306>, Simon Scarrow declara que una de sus tres novelas preferidas es *The Tagle of the Ninth* de R. Sutcliff:

“Tus tres libros favoritos:

Difícil... *The Happy Return* (C.S. Forester), *El castillo soñado* (Dodie Smith) y ***The Eagle of the Ninth* (Rosemary Sutcliff).**”

***Simon Scarrow**, escritor de novela histórica, autor de la serie de aventuras militares de Quinto Licino Cato aclamada por la crítica y los lectores en varios países. Publicados por Edhasa en España. Más información sobre este autor: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/portada/romanos/elpepusoceps/20061210elpepspor_1/Tes

Anexo (más información)

Rosemary Sutcliff: An Appreciation

SANDRA GARSIDE-NEVILLE looks at one of Britain's best-loved historical novelists **Personal Life**

http://www.historicalnovelsociety.org/solander%20files/rosemary_sutcliff.htm

Rosemary Sutcliff was born in a blizzard on 14 December 1920. The place was East Clandon in Surrey and in her autobiography, *Blue Remembered Hills* (1983), she is rather rueful about having been born in Surrey, feeling that the West Country was really her home. Her father was in the Navy, though there were many doctors amongst her ancestors, plus a few farmers and Quaker merchants. Her mother's brothers all went to live in India to spend their lives working on building railways.

As a child she had Still's Disease, a form of juvenile arthritis. The effect of this led to many stays in hospital for painful remedial operations. As a very young girl, the arsenic in her medicine caused her to have hallucinations; she saw a panther, wolves and snakes despite not knowing what they were. However, years later, she was to meet them in Kipling's books. Another effect of illness was that she spent much time sitting still looking, rather than moving around and investigating. This meant that she developed an acute eye for observation. Alan Garner (Wintle 1974, 224) comments that children's authors often have two things in common – they were deprived of the usual primary schooling and they were ill and left to their own company, which was certainly true of Sutcliff.

Due to her father's postings she moved frequently – living in Malta, Streatham (London), Chatham Dockyard, Sheerness Dockyard and North Devon. She had an uneasy relationship with her mother, but admitted that "very few of the worthwhile things in this world are all easy". Her mother disciplined her rigorously, so that the child Sutcliff would take her spankings in proud silence, and later in life found it very difficult to cry, believing it shameful.

Her mother read to her very willingly, and never got tired of reciting stories. Sutcliff was reared on a diet of Beatrix Potter, A.A. Milne, Charles Dickens, Hans Anderson, Kenneth Grahame and Rudyard Kipling. She was read Norse, Celtic and Saxon legends, and also historical novels which her mother loved. Surprisingly, Sutcliff did not learn to read until the age of nine.

After the period of travelling, the small family finally settled down to live in the Devon area. For Sutcliff, these years alternated between hospital and school. One of the hospitals had a Guide pack; the only badge that Sutcliff won was the Artist's Badge. In the hospital library she found a book that proved to be the treasure of her childhood. Called *Emily of New Moon*, it was a Canadian novel that followed a girl's adventures and her attempts to be a writer. When she left hospital, she left the book behind, and then much later tried to trace it, but did not recall the author. It was eventually found for her in the 1970s by a Canadian friend who was doing a piece on the work of L.M. Montgomery. The author of *Anne of Green Gables* had also written *Emily of New Moon*.

Sutcliff ended her formal education at fourteen, and went to Bideford Art School. She passed the City & Guilds examination, and was advised to make the painting of miniatures her profession. Now that she was considered an adult, any operations she had took place in nursing homes. These she found very lonely, mostly having the companionship of aged ladies when she really needed friends of her own age. She was eighteen when the Second World War broke out. Her father went to command convoys, while she and her mother stayed in Devon. Sutcliff had a miniature displayed at the Royal Academy, and not surprisingly, the subject was a knight in 15th century armour.

Around the middle of the War, Sutcliff "got the itch" to write. She felt cramped by the small canvas of miniature painting, and turned to writing to gain a larger vista. The first story she could remember writing was *Wild Sunrise*, a story about a British chieftain faced with the invasion of the Romans. In her autobiography she stated that she was happy that the story is now lost, as she felt that it was badly written, having too much of herself in it. She did regret the loss of her next story, which was set in the 18th century. It concerned a little girl sent to stay with her Great Aunt who befriends an embittered young man. Some of its themes re-emerged in *The Eagle of the Ninth* years later.

Not long after the end of the War, Sutcliff wrote a re-telling of Celtic and Saxon legends which she showed to an old friend. He sent them to Oxford University Press (OUP). Although they rejected the manuscript, they requested that she write a version of the Robin Hood Story.

It was during this period that she met Rupert, who had been an RAF pilot. He was married, but showed clear interest in Sutcliff. They spent the summer together, but in the autumn he went to work in London. They corresponded throughout the winter, but when he visited in the spring, Sutcliff had a sense of foreboding. It turned out that Rupert had met another woman whom he eventually married when his divorce came through.

Sutcliff had finished *The Chronicles of Robin Hood* and sent it to be typed up. It took eighteen months for the manuscript to be returned to her, during which time she had written *The Queen Elizabeth Story* and sent it on to OUP. This book was a subject choice of her own, and she found it a delight to write. It was accepted, and the two books were eventually published in the same year, 1950.

This is where *Blue Remembered Hills* finishes, but she stated that from 1950 onwards she kept a diary, and that she met Rupert again twenty years later. This infers that producing another volume of autobiography was perhaps on her mind. Her mother died during the 1960s, and Sutcliff and her father moved to Sussex. Despite being increasingly disabled, she travelled abroad and visited Greece. Her father died in the early 1980s.

Thereafter, she lived near Arundel with a housekeeper and two small dogs (Talcroft 1995, 146). These dogs were Chihuahuas. In 1984 when one of the dogs died, Sutcliff waited for a decent time before getting another one to be a companion to the surviving dog, Sebastian. She was waiting in the hope that the spirit of the dog that had died would perhaps be reborn into another dog that she might own in the future. This belief in reincarnation had been expressed elsewhere. Sutcliff said that perhaps the reason authors are drawn to certain eras was that they had experienced them in a previous life, so that they were essentially writing about what was familiar (Fisher 1974, 89). When someone said to her that she would perhaps be a soldier in another life, in reference to Sutcliff's heroes often being warriors, she instantly replied "No thank you, I had enough of soldiering". It was as if it was something she remembered (Thompson 1987, 14).

Sutcliff was writing the morning that she died on 23rd July 1992. She had completed the second draft of a novel (published in 1997 as *Sword Song*), with two more works waiting to be published.

Writing

Methods

Margaret Meek wrote about the process by which Sutcliff started her novels (1962, 12). The idea for a story might come from an external source, such as visiting a house and wondering what the previous occupants might have been like when it was new, or perhaps inspiration would come from something Sutcliff had read. Sometimes the idea would come from the inside, completely out of the blue.

Sutcliff used large red notebooks to make her research notes in. An encyclopaedia would be the first port of call, which would in turn provide a reading list. This would be presented to the local library, and when those books arrived they could be mined for the bibliographies in the back, as well as the information in the main part of the works. All the sifted information would find its way into the red notebooks. Then Sutcliff would start to create a picture of the daily life of the era her idea was set in. This was the most enjoyable part for her. Not much of the plot would find its way into the notebooks, as Sutcliff would make a draft outline of around two or three thousand words, and then she would start to write. Ordinarily, she would write from mid morning until nightfall.

Sutcliff tended to write the drafts of her novels in longhand (Moss, 1992), producing three drafts plus a fair copy. She often wrote 1,800 words per day in a small clear script on a single folio sheet. Her pen was “fattened” and cushioned so that her arthritic hand could guide it easily (Moss, 1992). The process of producing a whole book would take a couple of months’ research, followed by around eight months’ writing.

Sutcliff wrote over fifty books (see the list at the end of this article), some of which were translated into fifteen languages. She also wrote plays for the radio and stage.

Finding a voice

The Queen Elizabeth Story, Sutcliff’s second book, was primarily aimed at little girls. She acknowledged that this and the next two or three books were a little too cosy and too sweet (Sutcliff 1992, 169). However, she was aware that it was her apprenticeship phase of writing. It was Sutcliff’s fifth book, *Simon*, published in 1953, that really showed what she could do, and this was recognised by the critics (Talcroft, 1995, 3). The book is longer and more complex than her previous works. Set during the English Civil War, it is the story of Roundhead Simon and how his childhood friendship with Cavalier Amias is wrecked by the war. According to Meek, it shows all the traits that became fully developed in later books (1962, 32). However, Simon is not handicapped in some way, or of a surly temperament, unlike many of the characters Sutcliff wrote about later.

Continuity

The next year saw the publication of what is probably Sutcliff's most famous book – *The Eagle of the Ninth*. The hero, Marcus Flavius Aquila, is invalided out of the Roman army and seeks to find out what happened to the ill-fated Ninth Legion. This is the first book to be set in the Roman period, and Marcus remained one of Sutcliff's favourite characters, although she was aware that many people found him to be difficult and prickly. However, she justified this by pointing out that he had undergone some awful experiences (Thompson, 1987, 13). This book also saw the first appearance of a device which provides continuity between several books: a heavy signet ring which was set with a flawed emerald bezel on which a dolphin was engraved. The ring also appears in *The Silver Branch*, *Frontier Wolf*, *The Lantern Bearers*, *Sword at Sunset*, *Dawn Wind*, *The Shield Ring* and *Sword Song*. These linked books were written over a period of over 35 years.

Evans-Gunther points out that a virtual family tree of the Aquila family can be compiled because the connections are so well illustrated (1993, 7). The line runs clearly from Marcus Aquila in *Eagle of the Ninth* (129AD) to Owain in *Dawn Wind* (6th century), with the ring appearing in the other books though not obviously connected to Aquila's descendants. Sutcliff stated that she had a "... terrific thing about continuity" (Fisher 1974, 186), so it is likely to be a very deliberate strategy. As well as the Dolphin ring, she set *The Knight's Fee* (11th century) and *Warrior Scarlet* (Prehistoric) in the same hills, and used a flint axe in both stories to indicate the historical ties to that land (Fisher 1974, 186).

Continuity is very much a Kipling tradition; he acknowledges the settling of England by many peoples, and the way they eventually learn together to create a new nationality (1962, 52). Also, Kipling emphasises the rite of passage from youth to adulthood. Sutcliff was happy to admit her debt to Kipling, and wrote an appreciation of him in 1960.

Kingship

Throughout her childhood, Sutcliff was steeped in the myths and legends read to her by her mother. Later, she visited a local bookshop to read Fraser's *The Golden Bough*, a huge work that contained the ideas and background to sacred kingship and primitive religion that were to surface in her novels in various forms.

Barbara Talcroft's important study of Sutcliff's works with reference to this aspect picks out three major elements in her writing: Goddess, Sacrificial King

and Maimed King. The relationship that a king has with the Goddess provides him with his legitimacy as a ruler. The Goddess can take many forms and represent various aspects of life. For example, she can be a maiden, a consort, or a hag, and these can be linked with the phases of the moon: the crescent moon being the goddess of birth and growth, the full moon the goddess of love and war, and the waning moon being associated with the hag of divination and death (Talcroft 1995, 25).

The sacrificial king has an obligation to sacrifice himself for the good of his people and the land. The maimed king is a danger to his people as he might cause the kingdom to become a wasteland.

A novel that contains all three of these in good measure is *Sword at Sunset*, published in 1963. This novel is about King Arthur, or Artos as Sutcliff called him. The goddess appears in Ygernia (Artos' half sister with whom he unwittingly commits incest), Guenhumara (whom he marries) and the Virgin Mary (who is symbolised by a moon daisy which is worn by Artos and his Companions as they go into battle).

The maimed king is Artos who fathers a child with his half sister. He sees this as a great sin and becomes impotent. Though he does father a daughter eventually, both his children are maimed in different ways. The daughter is sickly and dies in circumstances that cause a further rift with Guenhumara (so that he is effectively in discord with the goddess and the land). His son, Medraut, is maimed in character, being twisted by hate instilled by Ygernia, and seeks to undermine and destroy Artos.

Artos is also the sacrificial king, dedicating himself to his people and land, and eventually dying for them. However, the most obvious example of sacrificial kingship in the book is Artos' uncle, the High King Ambrosius. In the book's prequel, *The Lantern Bearers* (1959), the young Ambrosius rejects marriage saying that "... To lead Britain is enough for one man, with a whole heart and no ties", which is his first sacrifice. In *Sword at Sunset* he falls ill with cancer, and chooses to die hunting, trying to kill a royal stag – both Ambrosius and the stag are portrayed as sacrificial kings.

Looking at Talcroft's analysis (1995, 126), it is clear that the kingship themes became most developed in the early 1960s, culminating in *Sword at Sunset* in 1963, and *The Mark of the Horse Lord* in 1965. After this time, the themes are still present in one form or another, but not so marked.

Sutcliff always became deeply involved in her books, but *Sword at Sunset* engaged her more heavily than any other book she wrote (Thompson, 1987, 13). It took some eighteen months to write, and absorbed her completely. She

would write from 6am one morning until 2am the following morning, finding the process completely addictive. Usually writing in the third person, Sutcliff found she had trouble with this book, and only became satisfied with it when she wrote in the first person. It was the first time she had done this, but it seemed the best and only way. After finishing the book, it took her several weeks to get back into her own skin, after thinking herself so completely into the character of Artos.

Sword at Sunset is deservedly one of the most admired historical novels about King Arthur (Thompson 1985, 47). Though some traditional aspects of the legend are retained, Sutcliff discards those that she deems to be rather late additions, so that, for example, Bedwyr takes the part later played by Lancelot. Along with *The Lantern Bearers*, it is among some the first attempts at an historical setting for King Arthur. Rather than a just a Celtic setting, Sutcliff also fully acknowledges the strong role that those who had adopted Roman culture (and would have called themselves Roman) would have played in the fifth century. This is still a relatively unusual viewpoint, and it has barely been explored in historical fiction for this period since Sutcliff (Nastali 1999, 19). Combining as it does primitive mythological elements, allied with solid archaeological research, *Sword at Sunset* is a deeply satisfying book.

Dark and light

The theme of dark and light occurs in many of Sutcliff's novels. The subjects revolve around invaders of one kind or another (the Roman advance in Britain in *The Eagle of the Ninth* or the Saxon invasion of Britain in *Dawn Wind*). Individuals can embody the light or dark as Artos and Medraut are light and dark in *Sword at Sunset*, or have both aspects such as the greatly conflicted Aquila in *The Lantern Bearers*. It is possible that this theme emerges so strongly due to Sutcliff's experiences of living through the Second World War. The outcome of the war, taken for granted now, was uncertain then, and the threat of invasion greatly feared. It must have seemed that that Britain was once again under the threat of having its light extinguished.

Awards given to Rosemary Sutcliff

Carnegie Award, Library Association for *The Lantern Bearers* 1959

Boston-Globe Horn Book Award, *Tristan and Iseult* 1972

Hans Christian Andersen Award, Highly Commended 1974

Order of the British Empire 1975

Other Award, *Song for a Dark Queen* 1978

Phoenix Children's Book Award, *The Mark of the Horse Lord* 1985

Commander of the British Empire 1992

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Thompson R.H. 1987, "Interview with Rosemary Sutcliff", *Avalon to Camelot* Volume II, No 3, 11-14

[web version at: <http://www.ub.rug.nl/camelot/intrvws/sutcliff.htm>]

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Links de interés:

🚩 Entrevista a la autora por Raymond H. Thompson, Agosto 1986

<http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/intrvws/sutcliff.htm>

🚩 Blog con comentarios y noticias de la autora

<http://rosemarysutcliff.blogspot.com/>

🚩 Otro Blog de Rosemary Sutcliff

<http://blueremembered.blogspot.com/>

✚ Un tercer Blog

<http://blueremembered.blogspot.com/>

✚ Marzo 2005

“Mere Comments – Touchstone’s editors on news and events of the day”

http://merecomments.typepad.com/merecomments/2005/03/read_rosemary_s.html

✚ Publishers Weekly (Internet)

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/search/siteall?q=%22rosemary%20sutcliff%22>