David Walsh, "Entry on: Outcast by Richard Kennedy, Rosemary Sutcliff", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1264. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Richard Kennedy , Rosemary Sutcliff

Outcast

United Kingdom (1955)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Pan Roman Britain Roman Empire





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Outcast
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Germany, United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1955
First Edition Details	Rosemary Sutcliff, *Outcast*. London: Oxford University Press, 1955, 229 pp.
ISBN	0809830108
Official Website	rosemarysutcliff.net (accessed: February 2, 2022).
Available Onllne	amazon.co.uk (accessed: February 2, 2022), kobo.com (accessed: February 2, 2022).
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	David Walsh, University of Kent, djw43@kent.ac.uk
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Richard Kennedy , 1910 - 1989
(Illustrator)

Richard Kennedy was an English illustrator from Cambridge. After leaving college at 16, Kennedy was hired by the Hogarth Press in 1928. Hogarth was run by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, the latter of whom was friends with Kennedy's uncle. Kennedy was employed to undertake various duties, among which included designing book covers. He left Hogarth after making a number of errors in his work, and he later recounted his experiences at Hogarth in his memoir *A Boy at the Hogarth Press* (1972). Subsequently, Kennedy went on to have a successful career as a book illustrator, most notably supplying images for some of Rosemary Sutcliff's novels.

Source:

Richard Kennedy, *A Boy at the Hogarth Press*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

modernistarchives.com (accessed: July 12, 2021).

Bio prepared by David Walsh, University of Kent, djw43@kent.ac.uk



Rosemary Sutcliff , 1920 - 1992
(Author)

Award winning and internationally well-known children’s writer Rosemary Sutcliff was born in Surrey, UK on December 14th, 1920. Her father was a naval officer and she spent her childhood in Malta and other naval bases. She suffered from Still's Disease, a form of

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Courtesy of Anthony Lawton.

juvenile arthritis, and was confined to a wheelchair for most of her life. She did not attend school or learn to read until she was nine years old, but her mother introduced her to the Saxon and Celtic legends, Icelandic sagas, the works of Rudyard Kipling, and fairy tales that became the basis for her historical fiction and other stories. After attending Art School and learning to paint miniatures, she turned to writing. She published her first book, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, in 1950, followed soon after by her best-known novel, *The Eagle of the Ninth* (1954), about the Romans in Britain. It is still in print today and been adapted into a film, TV, and radio series.

She wrote over 60 books, predominantly historical fiction for children. Her stories span settings from the Bronze Age, the Dark and Middle Ages, Elizabethan and Tudor times, the English civil war to the 1800s. In 1959 she won the Carnegie Medal for The Lantern Bearers, and was a runner up for other books. She was a runner up for the Hans Christian Andersen medal in 1974. In the same year she was made an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for her services to children's literature, and was promoted to a CBE (Commander of the British Empire) in 1992, the year she died. Two works based on Homer's epics, *Black Ships Before Troy* (1993) and *The Wanderings of Odysseus* (1995), were published posthumously. Sutcliff spent much of her later life in Walberton, Sussex, in the company of her father, house-keeper, gardener and various dogs. In her memoirs, *Blue Remembered Hills* (1983) she recounted her life up to the publication of *The Eagle of the Ninth*.

Source:

Official website (accessed: October 20, 2020).

Bio prepared by Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com and David Walsh, University of Kent, D.J.Walsh-43@kent.ac.uk

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Additional information

Adaptations

Rosemary Sutcliff, *Outcast*, adapted by David Scott Daniel, Story Time, BBC Home Service, 1966.

Rosemary Sutcliff, *Outcast*, adapted by David Fickling, Textbook for foreign speakers. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Translation

German: *Beric, der Augestossene*, trans. Ute Yusuf-Dorsch, Gütelsloh: Bertelsmann, 1959.

German: *Der Augestossene*, trans. Birgitta Kicherer, Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1986.

Japanese: *Keruto to roma no musuko*, trans. Kari Hajima, □□□□□, 2002.

Spanish: *Desterrado*, trans. Juan M. Valcárcel, Barcelona: Plataforma, 2010.

Swedish: *Den ensamme romaren*, trans. Per Kellberg, Stockholm: Bonnier, 1958.

Summary

Outcast is a young adult novel that tells the story of a teenager named Beric, a Roman by birth who is adopted, but subsequently cast out, by a British tribe. Sometime in the mid-second century CE, on the south coast of modern Devon, Cunori of the Dumnonii tribe finds a baby boy washed ashore following a shipwreck. The boy's deceased parents are Romans, but despite the warnings of the local Druid Merddyn, Cunori adopts the boy and convinces his clan, with the help of the blind harpist Rhiada, to let the boy stay with them. Cunori names the boy Beric, and for sixteen years Beric is raised as one of the tribe, but a harsh winter generates worry among his adopted clansmen that the boy has brought them an ill fortune, just as Merddyn had claimed. As a result, the decision is taken to banish Beric, who then heads to Isca Dumnoniorum to join the Roman army. However, before he can find his way to the fort, Beric is kidnapped by slavers, taken to Rome and sold to a magistrate named Piso. Although he befriends Piso's daughter, Piso's son Glaucus is arrogant and spiteful, and after Beric accidentally spills wine on Glaucus during a dinner party he is

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threatened with banishment to the salt mines. Escaping, Beric goes on the run but is captured and press-ganged into serving as galley rower in the Rhenus Fleet, although after an altercation with his overseer he is flogged and thrown into the sea. Beric then finds himself swept up on the British coast, and is nursed back to health under the care of the Romano-British centurion and engineer Titus Drusus Justinius, whose dead son Beric resembles. Justinius is able to gain Beric his freedom while they work together to rebuild the coastal wall along the Romney Marshes, and the story concludes with Beric considering joining the Roman army.

Analysis

As with many of Sutcliff's novels, the book focuses on a young man whose expected path in life is radically altered, and he is forced to undergo a journey in order to find where he belongs. As Sutcliff described to Emma Fisher: "I think really I've only got one plot; a boy growing up and finding himself, and finding his soul in the process, and achieving what he sets out to achieve; or not achieving it, and finding his own soul in the process of not achieving it. And becoming part of society" (Fisher 1974, p. 190). In this case, Beric presumes he will become a warrior among the Dumnonii, but he is exiled and must endure a number of trials before finding a place in the home of Justinius, and possibly the Roman army. In relation to this, the question of identity is also a recurrent theme, with Beric unsure of where he belongs: he is raised by a British tribe who then reject him, but he is also ill-treated in Rome where his blood relatives are from. In the end, it is a man between the two worlds, the Romano-British Justinius, who adopts Beric. This is perhaps a nod to the benefits that the combination of British and Roman qualities will bring (which are also illustrated by the Romano-British heroes of Sutcliff's other novels), and will one day provide the foundation for Britain's own imperial status.

The story also draws on traditional narratives of the Roman core declining into corruption and greed, while Britain has not yet succumbed to such temptations. In this regard, Sutcliff was certainly influenced by the works of Kipling's historical narratives for children, including *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906) and *A School History of England* (1911), which forewarned how an Empire (Roman or British) risks decline if its inhabitants become too self-indulgent. In *Outcast*, aristocratic characters such as Glaucus and the Legate that Beric

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encounters while serving as a rower in the Rhenus fleet act as the antagonists of the story, coming in notable contrast to the Romano-British Justinius who saves Beric. Moreover, the moral decay of Rome is inferred its continuing reliance on slavery, while in contrast there is little reference to slavery in British contexts. Indeed, Beric essentially equates a return to Britain with gaining his freedom, even though he has no one to return to. Slaves rarely feature in Sutcliff's Roman Britain novels, with Marcus freeing Esca soon after purchasing him in The Eagle of the Ninth, and subsequent generations of Aquilii family do not own slaves in later novels. Additionally, Beric observes in Rome how the temple of Sylvan Pan, a deity symbolising nature, is rarely visited by anyone and has begun to decay. This perhaps represents the worsening nature of man's relationship with his environment, especially in large cities, and this is another common feature of post-war children's literature, as concerns increased regarding the damage that was resulting from pollution and urban expansion (Butler 2006, p. 125–136).

The relationship between men and dogs is also a prominent theme; Beric must leave behind his faithful dog Gelert who wants to go with him, and when Beric later decides to flee Justinius's home he meets Canog, who has been kicked by a pony and, like Beric, is an outcast that needs nursing back to health. The solace Beric finds in his relationship with Gelert and Canog is autobiographical, for Sutcliff kept dogs throughout her life and particularly in her childhood they gave her a sense of companionship that her disability and transient lifestyle prevented her developing with other children (Sutcliff 1983, pp. 22–24, 82–83). The theme of mutual affection between a dog and its owner can be traced back to antiquity, with perhaps the most famous example Odysseus and his dog Argos, as well as being a common trope in modern Children's Literature, such as Timmy from the *Famous Five*, Toto in *The Wizard of Oz*, and Fang in the *Harry Potter* series.

Kipling's poem *The Roman Centurion's Song*, in which a Roman soldier asks "Let me work here for Britain's sake – at any task you will – A marsh to drain", may have served as influence for the story, while Beric's adoption in the "wild" and subsequent return to "civilisation" draws comparisons with Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* (Wright 1981, pp. 91–94). The aforementioned decaying temple to the Sylvan Pan in Rome may also allude to Kipling's work, as the character of Puck (who originally appeared in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*) was based on Pan. Additionally, the character of Beric might have

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been inspired in part by the G.A. Henty novel *Beric the Briton* (1893), also written for teenage boys, in which a young British warrior is captured and taken to Rome, wins his freedom, and then returns to Britain as a governor.

Sutcliff's years living in North Devon clearly served as an inspiration for the story, with the Dumnonii having inhabited the area in the Late Iron Age to the Roman period, while the post-war reconstruction period had revealed much about Exeter's Roman predecessor Isca Dumnoniorum (Mattingly 2006, pp. 401–408; Wiseman 2020, pp. 31–49). A discussion of the sources Sutcliff used for each novel can be found in Talcroft's (1995) study.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Pan Roman Britain Roman Empire
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Adventure Adversity Animals Authority Boys Character traits Coming of age Conflict Death Emotions Family Gender, male Hierarchy Identity Initiation Integrity Masculinity Resilience Values Violence

Further Reading

Fisher, Emma, 'Rosemary Sutcliff', in Justin Wintle, ed., *The Pied Pipers: Interviews with the Influential Creators of Children's Literature*, London: Paddington Press, 1974, 182–191.

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Sutcliff, Rosemary, *Blue Remembered Hills*, London: Bodley Head, 1993.

Talcroft, Barbara, *Death of the Corn King: King and Goddess in Rosemary Sutcliff's Historical Novels for Young Adults*, London: The Scarecrow Press, 1995.

Thompson, Raymond H., "Interview with Rosemary Sutcliff", 1986, available at the Camelot Project website (accessed: July 12, 2021).

Wiseman, Peter, *Exeter and the Ancient World: People and Stories*, Exeter: The Mint Press, 2020.

Wright, Hilary, "Shadows on the Downs: Some Influences of Rudyard Kipling on Rosemary Sutcliff", *Children's Literature in Education* 12.2 (1981): 90–102.

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