

The Silver Branch Study Guide

The Silver Branch by Rosemary Sutcliff

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Plot Summary

The Silver Branch is the story of two cousins, Justin and Flavius, who are part of the Roman army in Britain in the third century. Justin is a surgeon and Flavius is trained as a soldier and they serve under Carasusius, the emperor of Britain and Gaul. Carasusius had rebelled against the Roman ruler Maximian who ultimately approves of Carasusius' role in Britain. Justin meets Flavius when appointed to the same military unit and they quickly discover that they are cousins. When the cousins accidentally learn of a plot to murder Carasusius by his finance minister, Allectus, they try to warn him but the emperor assigns them to duty on the Northern wall.

Thinking they have been disgraced by this assignment, Justin and Flavius soon learn from a local man named Evicoatos of the Spear, that the murder plot against Carasusius is real because he hears things among his people. Justin and Flavius realize that they must get to Gaul to alert the ruler Constantius about the plot to kill Carasusius but they meet a man named Paulinus who is organizing an effort against Allectus so Justin and Flavius decide to stay in Britain and help him. Justin and Flavius flee when Paulinus is murdered by Allectus' soldiers and they hide at their Aunt Honoria's home. While at her house they uncover a Roman eagle standard lost in an earlier campaign. Justin and Flavius use the eagle standard as a rallying icon to gather recruits and build a ragtag legion to fight against Allectus.

When Constantius finally arrives, Justin and Flavius and their legion join him in battle and defeat Allectus and his forces. Constantius pardons Justin and Flavius for abandoning their places on the North Wall and releases them from military service. Justin and Flavius, however, feel that Constantius is an emperor they could follow and decide to join his forces as they move northward into Britain.



I The Saxon Shore, II A Whisper Down the Wind, III The House on the Cliffs

Summary

A young Roman man named Justin stands on the galley of a ship as it approaches the Roman fortress of Rutupiae on the southeast British coast in the third century. Justin has come from Rome, having been assigned to the fortress as a surgeon. Before he left for Britain, Justin learned that the emperor Carasusius had been a favorite leader of emperor Maximian but fell out of favor when Carasusius stopped some looting Sea Wolves from leaving Gaul with stolen goods but did not send any of the goods back to Rome. Maximian had ordered Carasusius to be executed but he got away to Britain and took the whole Roman fleet with him. Carasusius proclaimed himself emperor in Britain with Gaul and Lower Germany backing his claim. Eventually Maximian accepts Carasusius as emperor in Roman Britain.

Justin meets with the Commandant and Senior Surgeon at Rutupiae and then settles into his quarters. While on his way to find a bathhouse, Justin meets another young soldier named Flavius and they soon learn that they are cousins. Flavius points out the pharo (lighthouse) which had once been a monument to Rome but is now crumbling. Flavius shows Justin his signet ring which bears the image of a dolphin and Justin has seen the same image on his grandmother's cosmetic box, confirming that they are of the same family.

Flavius takes Justin to the bathhouse and then on to the mess hall where Justin is spotted by Carasusius for being a new face. Carasusius questions Justin about where he has served before and makes a comment about whether Justin is a spy or not. A man named Allectus intervenes and smiles at Justin who is happy for the kind gesture. Flavius tells Justin that Allectus is Carasusius' Finance Minister and general right-hand man and the second most powerful man in Britain.

In "A Whisper Down the Wind," Justin's surgical skills are put to the test as the Romans fight back the invading Saxons. Justin and Flavius' friendship grows as they hunt and fish together. One day Flavius and Justin visit the shop of a half-British, half-Egyptian man named Serapion who sells herbs, oils and perfumes. Allectus is shopping for perfume for a lady friend. Flavius buys some muscle oil and the two leave the shop.

Flavius and Justin go to Flavius' family farm on their leave and Justin is happy to finally discover the real Britain as they explore the woods, the valley and the farmhands. The house is especially interesting, knowing that it had been built by an ancestor named Marcus Flavius Aquila many years ago. Flavius' parents died from pestilence when Flavius was a boy but he is still close to his Aunt Honoria who is away at the time of Flavius and Justin's visit. Flavius wonders what really happened that his family got such a nice farm. His ancestor, Marcus, had been only a Junior Centurion when he was



injured, released from service and granted this nice plot of land. Flavius wonders if it had anything to do with the Ninth Legion which had been ordered into battle in Valentia and never heard from again.

In "The House on the Cliffs," Flavius and Justin travel through snowy winter weather on their return trip to Rutupiae. On the second day of their trip they encounter Emperor Carasusius whose horse has thrown a shoe. As his groom tends to his horse, Carasusius sends his escorts on to Rutupiae and takes Flavius and Justin to his house not far from where they are stalled. Flavius and Justin wine and dine with the emperor in his sumptuous surroundings but are especially intrigued by a tiny man named Cullen who acts as the emperor's dog, even with a tail hanging from his belt at the back of his tunic. Cullen prances about the emperor's feet and even lies like a dog before the fire. Justin watches as Cullen moves to take from his belt a silver object adorned with apple shapes that make lovely ringing sounds. Throughout the evening Cullen would tap this Silver Branch and it would emit lovely sounds.

Analysis

The author establishes the time period and setting as the 3rd century in Roman Britain. Rome has fought for control of Britain for several years and the fort at Rutupiae on the coast shows the wear of battle with crumbling stone walls. The Saxons, people of Germanic descent, also want to inhabit Britain and the Romans continue to battle them for the territory. The Saxons are also called The Sea Wolves in the story. The Roman empire is fractured with emperors in Rome and Constantinople and now Carasusius had declared himself to be emperor in Britain. Some of the characters in the story such as Carasusius, Allectus and Constantius were real people who lived during this time and the author weaves the other characters in to tell this historical fiction piece.

The Silver Branch is the second book in a series written by Rosemary Sutcliff. In the first book, *The Eagle of the North*, Marcus Flavius Aquila is a Cohort in the Roman army in A.D. 133. Flavius mentions this ancestor and the Ninth Legion which disappeared in the North during battle. Marcus had been wounded and discharged from service and later attempts to find the eagle standard belonging to the Ninth Legion. This is what Flavius alludes to when he tells Justin that he thinks the family farm has more secrets than he knows and that he wonders if it is related to the missing Ninth Legion. The author provides some foreshadowing here as the significance of the farm and the Ninth Legion will be explained later in the book.

The author introduces the Silver Branch as an item that Cullen, a small man who behaves like a dog, plays to make musical sounds. It is a simple piece of silver to which is attached silver pieces in the shape of apples. When tapped, the apples make delightful ringing sounds.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of the pharo (lighthouse) at Rutupiae?



Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the dolphin image on the signet ring?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how the author uses the theme of nature in this book.

Vocabulary

curlew, fortress, jackals, ire, jetties, galley, myriad, anvils, prow, ramparts, immensity, fortress, cornices, decay, stark, clatter, pharos, acquaintance, fledgling, awe, turf, kinsman, tunic, heaving, scrutiny, garrison, boar, herring, maimed, precise, irascible, bastion, concoctions, phial, alabaster, sly, byres, vague, accoutrements, vantage point, exasperation, dismounted, roan, mutton, samian, eyrie, squall, scudding



IV The Sea Wolf, V Nightshade!, VI Evicatos of the Spear

Summary

Winter is turning into Spring and Flavius and Justin are out hunting on the marsh early one morning when they come upon two men talking quietly in the shadows. Flavius recognizes one of the men as Allectus and the other as a Saxon warrior. Flavius and Justin hide in the reeds and strain to hear the conversation between the two men but it is not clear. Just as quickly as they had come, the two men left in separate directions. Thinking that the Saxon is up to no good, Flavius and Justin decide to follow him. The Saxon soon spies them close behind and he puts up a good chase but Flavius and Justin eventually overcome the man and pin him to the ground. Flavius and Justin demand to know what the Saxon was doing with Allectus but he refuses to talk about it so they take him back to Rutupiae where he is locked in a cell. Flavius and Justin tell the Commandant that something suspicious had taken place and they wish to talk to Carausius when he returns.

When Flavius and Justin are called to Carausius' quarters, they see that Allectus is also there. Flavius and Justin tell Carausius about the Saxon speaking to Allectus on the marsh this morning but they could not make out the exact words that were spoken. Allectus is outraged but Flavius and Justin stand firm in their conviction that Allectus had secrets with the enemy. Allectus again protests but Flavius tells Carausius that the Saxon is locked in a cell and will tell the truth. Carausius summons a Tribune to bring the Saxon to his quarters. Before long, the Tribune returns to report that the Saxon is dead in his cell.

In "Nightshade!" Carausius wants to see the dead Saxon for himself so he, Allectus, Flavius and Justin proceed to the cell where the prisoner is lying dead on the ground. Justin determines that the Saxon had been poisoned with nightshade in his supper broth. Flavius states that obviously the man was poisoned because he would have told the truth about meeting with Allectus in the marsh that morning. Allectus tries to divert the attention to Justin whom Carausius thought might be a spy when he first saw him but Justin protests vehemently. Carausius dismisses Flavius and Justin telling them that they will receive new orders because he does not want them near him because he cannot tolerate mistakes even if they might be honest ones.

Justin and Flavius head to Flavius' quarters in shock because they thought Carausius would have believed them. The Commandant's messengers soon arrive with orders for Flavius and Justin to report to Magnis on the Wall; Flavius will be in command of the Eighth Cohort and Justin will work as a surgeon. The orders are a natural promotion but Flavius and Justin feel as if they have been ostracized.



In "Evicatos of the Spear," Flavius and Justin arrive at Magnis on the Wall which the others there call the end of the world for its remote location. Flavius finds the fort to be dirty and unkempt, cooks are stealing food and selling it on the outside and the equipment is all in disrepair. Flavius sets out to have repairs made and improve the look of the soldiers and the fort. One morning Justin saw some of the men returning a repaired catapult to its position on the wall when it slipped and came crashing down seriously injuring the leg of a soldier named Manlius. Justin guides some of the soldiers as they carry Manlius to the hospital where he is treated.

Several weeks later as Justin is finishing his work for the day, one of the attendants tells him that a native hunter with a wolf bite wants to see him but he will not come inside the hospital. Justin goes outside to see the man wearing only a wolfskin at his waist and carrying a big spear. Justin takes the man into the hospital and tends to his wound telling the man that he must return every day for treatment.

One day Flavius sees the man with the wolf bite and he tells Flavius that his people are from the West Coast beyond the North Wall but he is a man without a tribe or a country now. The man had been outcast because as a boy he had killed a man for insulting his ancestors. Because of the man's daily visits to the hospital, he, Flavius and Justin grow to be friends.

Analysis

There are three important themes that begin to surface in this section of the book: comradeship, loyalty and coming of age. Flavius and Justin are not just cousins, they are comrades and united in their loyalty to the emperor. Flavius and Justin spend a lot of time together as friends just enjoying each other's company and they grow close. Their shared lineage unites them but they also share the bond of loyalty to Carausius as evidenced by the risk they take in exposing Allectus as a possible traitor. They are putting their lives on the line by going against Carausius' right hand man but their support of the emperor supersedes any fear they may have for their personal safety. This is one of the marks of maturity and shows that Flavius and Justin are coming of age as soldiers and as men.

Flavius and Justin think that the emperor is angry at them and has ostracized them to Magnis on the Wall but Evicatos of the Spear is very insightful when he states that men cannot always see the ways of great men. The emperor's orders for Flavius and Justin are more than disappointing at this point but Evicatos of the Spear foreshadows that all is not what it seems for the pair. Flavius and Justin also become friends with Evicatos of the Spear, forging a bond that will see them through some difficult times to come.

Discussion Question 1

What risk do Flavius and Justin take in telling Carausius about Allectus and the Saxon?



Discussion Question 2

Why do Flavius and Justin feel like they have been ostracized instead of promoted when they receive orders to report to Magnis on the Wall?

Discussion Question 3

Why was the Saxon prisoner poisoned in his cell?

Vocabulary

hovering, forsaken, fowl, sheeny, stealth, quarry, furze, tawny, bestowed, meddling, consequences, centurion, hobnailed, amiss, clasp, resolve, vivid, preposterous, oppressive, distinct, beacon, insistent, legionary, barred, gingerly, melancholy, suffice, contrive, whirlwind, crimson, enquiry, mob, rations, lurch, gale, catapult, locust, wary, mane, mauled, outlawry, salves, furbished, yonder, inclination



VII To the Fates, That They May Be Kind, VIII The Feast of Samhain, IX The Sign of the Dolphin

Summary

One day when Flavius, Justin and Evicatos of the Sword are out hunting, Evicatos shows them an altar built into a rough stony ledge. Justin clears away some lichen on the stone and reads the words carved there: "To the Fates, Sylvanus Varus, standard-bearer of the fifth Tungrian Cohort with the Second Augustan Legion, raised this altar, that they may be kind." Flavius and Justin realize that the words must have been carved when the Romans were last in the area about 150 years ago. Evicatos wanted them to see this altar but also wanted to talk to them where he is sure that no one will overhear him.

Evicatos tells them that there are emissaries of Allectus in the area befriending native people called the Picts. Allectus has offered to help the Picts against the Dalriads which are Evicatos' people if the Picts first help Allectus overthrow Emperor Carausius. Evicatos knows that this will mean death for his people because the Picts do not like the Dalriads because they are growing more powerful and will most certainly help Allectus. Evicatos begs Flavius and Justin to alert Carausius but he is afraid that they will be killed for treason. Evicatos offers to carry a note written by them to Carausius. Justin agrees to meet Evicatos at the cock fight in Vallum ditch tonight to transfer a note to him and the transfer goes off with no one seeing what had occurred.

In "The Feast of Samhain," Justin is in the hospital one evening when Manlius comes for help with a hand wound. Justin senses that Manlius wants to talk to him in private, so as soon as they are alone, Manlius tells Justin to get Flavius and take all the money they have and go to Manlius' house without delay. Manlius has wounded his own hand in order to deliver this urgent message to Justin so he and Flavius gather up their belongings and head to Manlius' as quickly as possible. Manlius' wife lets them into the house where Evicatos is waiting for them. Evicatos had been caught with Justin's letter but was able to break free from the Romans and flee to Manlius' home to alert Flavius and Justin.

Flavius and Justin know that they must go into hiding and Manlius' wife gives them some different clothes to wear and some food for their trip. Evicatos makes plans to meet them a little later and leaves. While Flavius and Justin wait for Evicatos, they contemplate the gravity of their circumstances and know that they are saying farewell to the life they have known. Soon Evicatos arrives with horses for all of them and they ride away to find safety.



A few days into their journey, the trio notices men driving cattle toward a big farm and Evicatos tells Flavius and Justin that it is the Feast of Samhain when the animals are brought in and penned for the winter. Flavius, Justin and Evicatos are welcomed at the farm and given food and shelter. At supper, the men learn that there is now a new emperor called Allectus. Both Flavius and Justin realize that this means that Carausius has been killed. They learn that it was the Saxons who had committed the crime six days ago, meaning that it had already occurred by the time that Evicatos had been caught with Justin's note. Evicatos is now safe to return north to his people but Flavius and Justin know that they have only one option: to sail to Gaul to hasten Caesar Constantius to Britain to overthrow Allectus.

In "The Sign of the Dolphin," Flavius and Justin arrive in Calleva where they can get more money from Flavius' Aunt Honoria so they can make the trip to Gaul. When they reach Aunt Honoria's farm, they hide near some outbuildings so the slaves will not see them. When Flavius sees Aunt Honoria's servant, Volumnia, exit the house he gets her attention and she is glad to see Flavius. Aunt Honoria sends Flavius and Justin to the arbor and she will send Aunt Honoria down there to see them.

In the arbor, Flavius introduces Justin to Aunt Honoria and tells her their story. Aunt Honoria gives them the money she had in the house in addition to two bracelets with opal stones that they can sell later. Flavius and Justin travel two days to reach Portus Adurni from where they hope to sail to Gaul. While walking through the streets of the town, Flavius and Justin see a shop that has a sign with their family dolphin on it and enter to find a warm place to get food and wine. As they eat they are approached by a short man, a tax collector, who soon sees the dolphin signet ring on Flavius' finger and engages them in conversation about the old and new emperors. The man reveals that he is a tax collector and befriends Flavius and Justin. When the conversation in the room gets heated, the man suggests that they leave because they have been spied on all evening and trouble is soon to arrive.

Analysis

The Romans were very interested in symbols and icons and they believed that destiny and outcomes rested in the realm of the gods. That's why it is important when they read the words carved into the stone altar: "To the Fates, Sylvanus Varus, standard-bearer of the fifth Tungrian Cohort with the Second Augustan Legion, raised this altar, that they may be kind." The soldiers would pay homage to their gods in hopes of favorable outcomes in battles and for their causes in general.

The author also shows the theme of nature extensively throughout the book. For example, when Evicatos, Flavius and Justin head out for a morning of hunting she writes, "It was a raw morning with the mist lying low and heavy like smoke among the brown heather, and the rooty tang of bog and the bitter-sweetness of sodden bracken hanging in the air." The author wants to paint a picture for the reader of what the characters were experiencing, not only in what they saw but in the smells that accompany the landscape. Life for soldiers in the third century was spent mostly in the



open so they would have been very aware of the changing landscape as they moved across Britain in both pleasurable and military pursuits.

Loyalty remains an important theme in the story as Flavius and Justin risk their lives in an attempt to save Carausius. By writing the note for Evicatos to carry, the possibility of discovery was very real and could have meant death for treasonous activity but the two young men believe the risk of warning the emperor supersedes any possibility of personal danger. Other people show loyalty too such as Manlius and his wife. Manlius intentionally injures his hand in order to have a reason to speak to Justin and tell him that he and Flavius are in danger. Manlius' wife also runs a risk by having Flavius and Justin in her home and giving them food and new clothing to wear. Even the disposal of Flavius and Justin's military tunics and cloaks could be a source of discovery and retribution if Manlius and his wife are to be found out by the Romans.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Evicatos of the Sword take Flavius and Justin far into the country near the altar in the rock?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Evicatos offer to carry a note from Justin to Carausius?

Discussion Question 3

Why was it irrelevant that Justin wrote a note for Evicatos to carry?

Vocabulary

shaggy, tang, foreboding, sodden, bracken, turf, carcass, sidling, lichen, bannock, emissaries, peregrine, wrath, heather, slackened, thicket, hovels, makeshift, midst, throng, daubed, redoubled, conscience, betray, rival, triumphant, distress, burnished, gashed, papyrus, granaries, gleam, tallow, haggard, brooch, solitude, moors, shards, loomed, prosperous, uproarious, deny, clench, slew, lopsided, weary, mantle, contrive, privet, stibium, gesture, pretext, signet, intaglio, cur



X The Berenice Sails for Gaul, XI The Shadow, XII A Sprig of Broom

Summary

The tax collector leads Flavius and Justin down some dark passageways to his home where he tells Flavius and Justin that a friend of his had seen the two entering the Dolphin establishment earlier and notified the tax collector. Flavius and Justin stood out because of their erect military bearing inside their rough clothing. This led the tax collector's friend to think that they might be in hiding. When the tax collector saw Flavius' dolphin ring, he knew that the pair may need some help. Flavius tells the tax collector that they need to get to Gaul to reach Constantius and the tax collector says that he can help them.

The tax collector offers to shelter Flavius and Justin while the appropriate travel arrangements are made but they cannot stay in his house. The tax collector takes them to a narrow passageway that leads to a small dark space that had been part of a theatre. The next morning the tax collector brings breakfast and a few things to read before departing for the day. Justin is especially bothered by the dark, cramped quarters and tries to read but is too distracted by the discomfort of the situation. That evening the tax collector returns and releases Flavius and Justin from their hiding place so that they could have dinner in his house. The pair become friendly with the tax collector whose name they learn is Paulinus.

After five nights of seclusion Paulinus tells Flavius and Justin that the moon and tides are good for their voyage and all the arrangements for their passage on a ship called the Berenice have been made for them to leave tonight. Paulinus then surprises Flavius and Justin by asking if they would consider staying behind and working with him to save other Romans hunted by Allectus as well as acting as spies for Constantius when the time comes. Paulinus needs someone who can take command if anything should happen to him. Flavius and Justin decline Paulinus' offer because they do not feel that they have the courage needed for the job. However, when it comes time to board the ship, Flavius and Justin cannot do it, deciding instead to stay and help Paulinus in his work against Allectus.

In "The Shadow," Flavius and Justin give Paulinus one of Aunt Honoria's opal bracelets to help with funding for their cause. Flavius also removes the dolphin signet ring from his finger and hangs it on a cord to wear around his neck inside his tunic. Justin writes a letter to his father to tell him that he may not be hearing from him for awhile due to his new mission. Flavius and Justin eventually meet some of the other people working with Paulinus and they take up residence with Cerdic the boat-builder. All through the winter, the group is able to send several men to safety from the reach of Allectus. Because the movement is secret, the only way the men needing shelter have of being identified is by



wearing a sprig of rye grass somewhere on their clothing and whispering, "One sent me."

The apple tree in Paulinus' courtyard blooms for spring and then brings forth apples to show that summer has arrived. Life under Allectus' rule was harsh with exorbitant taxes and he even brings in Saxon and Frankish mercenaries to help keep rule in Britain. Those needing shelter increases in number as Allectus' reign extends. One day, Allectus himself arrives in Portus Adurni and Flavius and Justin come within a few feet of him and takes note that Serapion the Egyptian is now part of Allectus' contingent.

Later that night, Allectus and Serapion talk in private and Serapion tries to give him advice but Allectus wants to know when it became all right for Serapion to give him advice. Serapion states that it happened when Serapion furnished Allectus with enough nightshade to kill a man. Allectus says that he has also learned that several men trying to escape from Allectus' rule have been able to elude the authorities and he wants to learn more about how that is possible.

Justin sits at the Dolphin with a sense of uneasiness wondering why Serapion would be one of Allectus' personal attendants and that there is a strong connection between poison and the products that Serapion sells. A young Centurion enters the Dolphin and catches Justin's attention when he sees the soldier holding a sprig of rye grass. Justin recognizes the Centurion as someone who was chastised by Allectus in the crowd yesterday and approaches him cautiously. The Centurion has come looking for help because he no longer wishes to serve Allectus. Eventually, Justin leads the Centurion back to Paulinus' house where the top branches of the apple tree shone silver in the moonlight.

In "A Sprig of Broom," Justin introduces the Centurion to Flavius and Paulinus who tell the Centurion that his passage to Gaul can be arranged but it will take a few days. The men are startled when Phaedrus the ship-master of the Berenice bolts in and tells them that Allectus' guards have surrounded Paulinus' house. As the soldiers beat against the doors, Flavius, Justin, Phaedrus and the Centurion escape through a narrow passage called the Sparrow's Way, leaving Paulinus who says he cannot fit but has another way out. As they wait for Paulinus in the dunes, they think they see Paulinus approaching but it is Myron, Paulinus' servant boy, to tell them that Paulinus has been murdered by the soldiers.

Flavius, Justin and the Centurion now know that there was no other way out of the house for Paulinus, that he knew he would be killed and wanted the others to escape to safety. They are in silent shock for awhile and then the Centurion says, "Greater love hath no man--" and Justin thinks he sounds as if he is quoting someone. Flavius rallies the others and tells them that Paulinus' work must go on and the Centurion asks if he may stay to help them. Flavius offers his family home for their new headquarters and draws a map in the sand so that everyone can find his way. They also decide to change their token from a sprig of rye grass to a sprig of broom.



The servants at Flavius' family farm are willing to do whatever they can to help the men even though Flavius cannot tell them why he and Justin are here and not in Gaul when that had been their intention. Flavius also tells them that there will be many people coming around the farm, some of whom will be wearing a sprig of broom. Flavius also tells them that secrecy is a matter of life and death on the farm now. When the others depart and it is just Flavius, Justin and Anthonius left in the room, Anthonius draws the shape of a fish in the dust. Anthonius had seen that symbol in Judea and it had something to do with a man named Christos who had been executed more than 200 years ago.

Analysis

In this section, Flavius and Justin decide that their loyalty to Emperor Constantius can be put to better use by staying in Britain instead of going to Gaul. They have been rescued by Paulinus and they can continue his work of saving those being hunted by Allectus. The work is very risky and Paulinus needs someone to take over if he should be killed so Flavius and Justin realize they can step in if need be which is exactly what happens when Paulinus is killed by Allectus' soldiers. Flavius and Justin can also act as spies for Constantius and can be of use to him when he finally arrives in Britain.

The author further establishes the apple motif in the story with the introduction of the apple tree in Paulinus' courtyard. Apples can symbolize redemption in literature and it is fitting that Paulinus has an apple tree at his home because he is saving--redeeming--those men who are hiding from the wrath of Allectus. Several times in the story the apple tree is referred to as "the best little apple tree in the Empire." Paulinus' home is an oasis for those needing help and the apple tree is that symbol. When the author wants to indicate that the rescue mission is still working, she writes, "Winter wore away and Paulinus' apple tree was in bud." Season by season, Paulinus and his crew work secretly to save men from Allectus' punishment. Apples can also symbolize temptation as written in the Bible in the story of Adam and Eve when Eve takes the apple offered by the serpent. Taking the apple means banishment from the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve are sent into darkness wearing sin, innocent no more. Similarly, when Paulinus' apple tree is destroyed by Allectus' men at the time that Paulinus is murdered, it means the end of innocence for Flavius and Justin. Earlier in the story, the Silver Branch which is played by Cullen also embodies the apple symbolism as the small apples which make the musical sounds when Cullen strikes them.

The author begins to establish a thread of the teachings of Christianity in this section too when Anthonius says "Greater love hath no man" which is excerpted from the Bible passage which states "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Anthonius validates Paulinus as a person who truly loves other people and is willing to help them achieve better lives even if it means the loss of his own. At one point, Anthonius draws the outline of a fish in the dust and Justin recognizes it as something he has seen in Judea about a man called Christos (Jesus Christ) who was executed more than 200 years ago. Justin marvels at the leadership of this man who still has followers so many years after his death.



Discussion Question 1

Why do Flavius and Justin decide to remain in Britain instead of sailing to Gaul as they had originally intended?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think led to the discovery of Paulinus' house and his ultimate murder by Allectus' men?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author let the reader know that it was Allectus behind the poisoning of the Saxon prisoner earlier in the story?

Vocabulary

bellow, rage, gash, brazier, niches, slouch, serene, gaze, veritable, azure, respite, hull, subdued, ebbing, signet, brooch, guise, sprig, tang, uncompromising, fortress, craggy, quelled, pockmarked, guttural, mercenaries, firebrands, murmur, desolate, burnishing, roused, atrium



XIII The Silver Branch, XIV An Ancient Ensign, XV Return to the Legions

Summary

Flavius and Justin carry on Paulinus' work and when three brothers join their group it appears that they will soon have enough men to be a Legion. Justin adds a gladiator whom he found at an amphitheatre. The gladiator is now free but has nowhere to go and no work to do so Justin includes him in their growing Legion. Flavius and Justin travel to Calleva where they buy weapons for the men, selling Aunt Honoria's second opal bracelet to pay for them. While in Calleva, they learn that Constantius' ships have been spotted coming into Britain. They also encounter Cullen being chased by a group of Saxons and Flavius and Justin rescue him by going to Aunt Honoria's house. She hides them in the hypocaust where fires are kept burning in the winter to heat the floors of the home. Justin's fear of tight, dark places overtakes him once again and he enters the hypocaust with dread.

Soon the Saxons arrive and demand to know if Aunt Honoria knows about the three men and they storm past her to search the house. Flavius, Justin and Cullen can hear the Saxons overhead and know they are breaking Aunt Honoria's household items just for spite. Before long, the Saxons are gone and Aunt Honoria opens the door to the hypocaust to let the men out. Cullen then tells them that before Carausius died he had given Cullen a letter to give to Flavius and Justin and it has taken almost two years to find them. Cullen produces the letter and it states that Carausius knew that Allectus was going to have him killed and that Carausius had sent Flavius and Justin to the North wall not as a punishment but in order to protect them from Allectus' wrath. Flavius and Justin are quietly gratified that Carausius had believed them about Allectus.

In "An Ancient Ensign," a sound is heard coming from the hypocaust and Cullen admits he had moved some stones in order to hear better when they had been hiding there. Flavius and Cullen enter the hypocaust again to see what has happened. Flavius and Cullen return with a bronze eagle wrapped in red wool and they soon determine that it must have belonged to the missing Ninth Legion because that had been the only eagle lost in Britain. They surmise that it had been in their family because Marcus had been part of the Legion and was discharged with wounds so he was not with the Legion when it was lost. Apparently Marcus had stored the eagle in the hypocaust for safekeeping all these years. Flavius thinks the eagle is a gift from the gods and a sign that they should form their little Legion of men.

Aunt Honoria gives the men some food and sends them on their way so they can elude the Saxons. Flavius, Justin and Cullen meet up with the rest of the group and Anthonius tells them that a big man with a spear is waiting for them at their headquarters and they are delighted to see that it is Evicatos who has come to join their group. Flavius and Justin mount the newly found eagle on a spear and it becomes the standard for this new



little Legion. Anthonius reports a fire near the coast and then the men see a chain of fires meant to be beacons. The next morning the men learn that Constantius' ships have arrived in Britain so Flavius urges his men to prepare to march.

In "Return to the Legions," Flavius, Justin and the Legion approach the Roman encampment and offer themselves as reinforcements. They learn that the camp is under the command of Asklepiodotus and that Constantius' camp is located further east. Eventually Flavius and Justin are allowed in to see Asklepiodotus and offer up their band of men which has now numbers more than 60 men. Asklepiodotus demands some proof that the men are who they say they are but they are stumped. Fortunately a Centurion named Licinius enters and recognizes Justin as having been the assistant surgeon at Rutupiae a few years ago. Asklepiodotus is satisfied with Licinius' recommendation of Justin and Flavius and invites their little Legion to join their cavalry unit. At a staff meeting later that day Flavius gives his recommendations on the march toward Allectus' troops and Flavius rides next to Asklepiodotus when the troops march out the next day.

Analysis

The themes of comradeship and loyalty remain important in this section. The little Legion being assembled by Flavius and Justin is growing and even though most of the men do not have military experience, they are united in their cause to defeat Allectus' troops as well as the invading Saxons. Most men, including this ragtag bunch, need to rally behind a cause they consider to be valuable and noble so even though most of these men have no real military training, they believe in what Flavius and Justin are doing to rescue others and that is what binds them together.

Loyalty is also important in this section. Not only are the men building relationships of trust and loyalty among the group, but their mission overall is loyal to Paulinus and the work he started. It is also good to note that the letter from Carausius that Cullen delivers indicates that Carausius knew that Flavius and Justin had been telling the truth about Allectus and that their loyalty to Carausius had been well placed. And, finally, the men are loyal overall to the Roman cause and finding the battered bronze eagle serves as inspiration for them to charge ahead, feeling just in their mission.

Discussion Question 1

What is a hypocaust and why is it such a good hiding place for the men when trying to evade the Saxons?

Discussion Question 2

What is the content of the letter from Carausius that Cullen delivers? Are you surprised by what it says?



Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the battered bronze eagle that is found in the hypocaust?

Vocabulary

refuge, dispossessed, gaunt, throng, despair, contemptuously, mournful, borne, hasty, flanks, colonnade, loathsome, unintelligible, babble, scathed, tattered, motley, reproachful, papyrus, gilded, gratuity, potent, stockade, groggy, sloth, reverie, desperado, ambush, disreputable



XVI "Carausius! Carausius!", XVII Eagle in the Flames, XVIII Triumphal Garlands

Summary

News reaches Asklepiodotus that Allectus plans to defeat his troops before turning his attention to Constantius' troops. Allectus has more than 12,000 troops consisting mostly of marines and mercenaries. Constantius' troops had yet to land in Britain so Asklepiodotus would have no reinforcements for tomorrow's battle. The men wait for Flavius to return to camp with tomorrow's watchword and battle cry which they learn is "Carausius."

Early the next morning, the men take their places in the Auxiliary Cavalry and prepare for battle. Before long, the thundering sound of the approaching enemy puts the men on alert. Flavius hears the trumpet sound and then leads his Legion into battle with the men crying out, "Carausius! Carausius!" The men see a stream of mercenaries headed toward Calleva and Flavius and Justin determine that they must go there to save the city. Flavius tells Anthonius to ride back to Asklepiodotus to ask for reinforcements and they ride out toward Calleva.

In "Eagle in the Flames," Flavius and Justin see that the gates of Calleva are open and the invaders are pouring in. When they reach the city, they see that it is on fire but they manage to get to some side streets which are deserted, the citizens most probably hiding in the basilica. Flavius leads his men back to the center of town where they see some citizens trying to defend themselves with what weapons they may have had available. Flavius' men hold back the Saxons as the citizens rush to the basilica for safety. Before long, Flavius' men turn and run for the basilica themselves when the fighting overwhelms them.

Flavius takes command of the basilica and orders men into position to guard the building. Justin estimates 1,800 people inside including women and children. Justin then tends to the wounded and he soon sees Aunt Honoria and Volumnia who volunteer to help him. At one point Justin is able to look out and sees the Saxons looting and setting fire to the buildings in the city. The Saxons relentlessly beat against the doors of the basilica which is now almost engulfed in flames. Then Justin and the others see the bronze eagle borne by Cullen and they are invigorated in their efforts against the Saxons who have now invaded the basilica. Cullen is felled by a spear and Evicatos rushes forward to protect him and is soon killed.

After the battle is over, the basilica empties and attempts are made to put out the fires. Justin sees a red rose fall down from the rafters and rushes upstairs to see Pandarus who had put the rose in his cloak before the battle. Pandarus is mortally wounded and Justin stays with him until he dies even as the flames move in closer. Justin then comes upon Flavius who is looking for men who might still be alive and soon Anthonius and the



others arrive to help them out of the inferno. They then learn that Allectus has been captured.

In "Triumphal Garlands," it is a month after the battle that defeated Allectus and people are awaiting the arrival of Constantius in the town of Londinium. Flavius, Justin, Anthonius and the remaining men of their Legion are among the crowd. The men feel as if Carausius has been avenged with the deaths of the traitors, Allectus and Serapion among them. Justin recalls all the events of the past year and he cries silently for Paulinus, Evicatos and Pandarus. Justin also recalls the first letter he has received from his father in years that tells him that he is glad he is alive and that Justin could never disappoint him.

Justin's musings are interrupted by the triumphant arrival of Constantius. Later that evening, Flavius and Justin are summoned to Constantius' quarters because he wants to thank them for their assistance in battle and for providing intelligence for the army over the past year and a half. Constantius tells Flavius and Justin that they are certainly due for some rest and that they are free to retire from service. However, Constantius hopes that Flavius and Justin will stay with the army and they agree to do so. Constantius also states that Flavius' men may join the army or leave as free men. Cullen is also able to go free but he decides to stay with Flavius and Justin as an aide and he trots behind them as they return to their men, his silver branch tinkling as he moves.

Analysis

The theme of nature continues to be an important one in this section. For example, on the night before the battle, Justin waits on a hilltop and observes all that goes on around him. "But the night itself was very still, behind the sounds of the camp. A wonderful night, up here above the mist; the bracken of the hillside frozen into silver stillness below the dark fleece of thorn-scrub that covered the higher slopes on either side, the moon still low in a glimmering sky that seemed brushed over with a kind of moth-wing dust of gold. Somewhere far down the widening valley a vixen called to her mate, and somehow the sound left the silence empty."

The theme of coming of age is important as the story closes as Flavius and Justin lead their little Legion into battle against Allectus, the man who had their beloved emperor, Carausius murdered. They take up the mantle of the bronze eagle with their ragtag bunch of warriors and more than rise to the occasion in fending off the Saxons in the town of Calleva. A lot has happened to them since the day they first met at Rutupiae and they have conducted themselves with honor and integrity as fine Roman centurions.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Flavius and Justin take it upon themselves to ride ahead and try to save the town of Calleva?



Discussion Question 2

Why do Flavius, Justin and the other men get a new burst of energy when Cullen raises the eagle standard in the basilica?

Discussion Question 3

Are you surprised that Flavius and Justin decide to stay with Constantius and fight in his Legion when they could have left military service?

Vocabulary

usurper, scarp, bivouac, vixen, fate, vividly, bracken, fronds, sidled, gleam, spate, demoralized, rabble, marauders, basilica, magistrate, valiant, loomed, pompous, barbarian, haggard, pathetic, savagery, grotesque, jest, glare, mockery, crouched, toppled, alight, writhing, gesture



Characters

Justin

Justin, whose full name is Tiberius Lucius Justinianus, serves as a surgeon in the Roman army. When he meets Flavius at Rutupiae they discover that they are distant cousins. Justin is not as outgoing as Flavius, letting Flavius speak first in most situations, possibly because Justin stutters and he is embarrassed by it. Justin also has a more reflective personality, observing nature more carefully and being more sentimental over the passing of time and the deaths of comrades. Justin is also afraid of small, dark enclosed spaces which he is forced to inhabit a couple of times in the story when the young men are in hiding. Justin appreciates symbols and stories, too, and is the one who is most interested when Anthonius talks about Christos from Judea. Justin is a very caring person, partly because of his profession, but he is always thinking of other people and how to ease their difficult situations. For most of the story Justin feels that his father is ashamed of him because he did not become a fighting soldier, choosing surgery instead, but by the end of the book Justin receives a letter from his father who states that there is nothing Justin could ever do that could make him ashamed and Justin feels a huge sense of relief about his relationship with his father.

Flavius

Flavius, whose real name is Marcellus Flavius Aquila, is a Centurion in the Roman army. He has reddish hair and a friendly, outgoing manner. Flavius feels at ease wherever he is and is more vocal than his cousin Justin. Flavius is also very charming as evidenced by the playful relationship he has with Volumnia and Aunt Honoria. Flavius has a strong sense of duty and loyalty to Rome and perhaps is too impulsive in his decision making at times as compared to the more thoughtful Justin. The two of them are extremely loyal to each other too and stick together regardless of the circumstances. Flavius is a born leader and takes command easily especially in battle related situations. He is able to keep a cool head and can think strategically while still rallying the men. Signs and symbols, especially the Roman eagle, are important to Flavius because they signify the past heroics of men who have come before and he has a strong ingrained respect for the past and the nobility of the Roman army.

Carausius

Marcus Aurelius Carausius was a real person in the Roman army in the third century. He was a military commander who took over control of the empire in Britain in the year 286. He was murdered by his finance minister, Allectus, in the year 293. In the story, Carausius is revered by his men, especially Flavius and Justin, and they avenge his death at the battle at Calleva at the end of the story.



Allectus

Allectus served as finance minister for Carausius and he assassinated him in the year 293, taking on the role of emperor. Allectus was defeated by Constantius in the battle of Calleva and later executed for treason. Flavius and Justin know that Allectus is evil when they see him meeting in secret with a Saxon and then having the Saxon killed so that his secret would be kept.

Evicatos of the Spear

Evicatos of the Spear is a native hunter who befriends Flavius and Justin early in the story. He is able to provide validation to rumors of war and betrayal because news travels quickly among the people in the wild. Evicatos had been exiled from his own people for killing a man who insulted his tribe. Evicatos remains loyal to Flavius and Justin, even joining their little ragtag Legion and dying during the battle at Calleva. The author's notes state that there was a stone found at Calleva with the name Evicatos carved in Irish script and the name means "spear man."

Cullen

Cullen is a tiny man who serves as a hound to the Emperor Carausius. He sleeps near the emperor's feet or in front of the fire and wears a tail which is tied around his waist. Cullen serves in a subservient role and he plays his silver branch which makes pleasant sounds. After the death of Carausius, Cullen searches for Flavius and Justin for a couple years and decides to remain in service to them.

Aunt Honoria

Aunt Honoria is a great aunt to Flavius and Justin. She still lives at the family farm with her servants. Aunt Honoria has lived a long life and is not shocked by much, so when Flavius and Justin come to her for help, she is able to respond quickly without much explanation from them. Aunt Honoria is very generous to Flavius and Justin too, giving them two opal bracelets to sell so that they can fund their trip to Gaul. Aunt Honoria is caught up in the basilica during the battle of Calleva and offers Justin her help of the wounded men.

Volumnia

Volumnia is Aunt Honoria's favorite servant and has been with her for many years. True to her name, Volumnia is a very large woman with a generous spirit. She particularly enjoys teasing Flavius but he knows that she can also be trusted with their secrets. Volumnia is present in the basilica during the battle of Calleva and helps Justin tend to the wounded men.



Anthonius

Anthonius is a young Centurion who finds disfavor with Allectus and is rescued by Justin at the Dolphin and taken to Paulinus' home for safety. Passage is arranged for Anthonius to go to Gaul but he decides to stay and help Flavius and Justin in their work of rescuing others trying to escape Allectus' wrath after the Roman soldiers kill Paulinus in his own home. Anthonius is inclined to help find refuge for those trying to escape, especially because he is familiar with Christ and his teachings to help other men who are in need.

Pandarus

Pandarus is an aging gladiator whom Justin befriends one day near the amphitheatre. Pandarus is free to leave but has no family and no skills other than fighting. Justin invites Pandarus to join the little legion he and Flavius are forming and he is happy to be of service. Pandarus dies with Justin at his side in the basilica during the battle at Calleva.



Symbols and Symbolism

Dolphin Signet Ring

Flavius wears a signet ring with the image of a dolphin on it which is the symbol for his family. Justin recognizes the same image as the one that appears on his grandmother's cosmetics box, validating that they belong to the same family.

Broken Eagle Standard

The broken eagle of the lost Ninth Legion had supposedly disappeared when the Legion had been lost in the North country. However, when Flavius finds it in Aunt Honoria's hypocaust, it becomes clear that their ancestor, Marcus, who had been discharged from service due to injuries, had hidden the eagle at the house. It has remained there for nearly 150 years and even though it is broken and tarnished, Flavius and Justin attach it to a spear and it becomes the icon for their little ragtag Legion.

Pharos

The pharos is a lighthouse at the wall at Rutupiae. The structure had once been a triumphant monument to Rome at the fort but through battles and defeats, the structure has crumbled and now serves as a lighthouse.

The Eagles

The Eagles are the soldiers fighting in Roman legions. Each legion carried a staff with either a silver or gold eagle to designate them as a fighting group from the Roman Empire, thus being called the Eagles for short.

Sprig of rye grass

When men needed the help of Paulinus and his group because they were in hiding from Allectus and the Romans, they needed a way to show that they were seeking help. The signal for this help was wearing a sprig of rye grass somewhere on their clothing so that they could be identified by someone in Paulinus' group and then brought to safety. After Paulinus is killed, Flavius and Justin change the group's icon to a sprig of broom.

Apple Tree

The author establishes the apple motif in the story with the introduction of the apple tree in Paulinus' courtyard. Apples can symbolize redemption in literature and it is fitting that



Paulinus has an apple tree at his home because he is saving--redeeming--those men who are hiding from the wrath of Allectus. Several times in the story the apple tree is referred to as "the best little apple tree in the Empire." Apples can also symbolize temptation as written in the Bible in the story of Adam and Eve when Eve takes the apple offered by the serpent. Taking the apple means banishment from the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve are sent into darkness wearing sin, innocent no more. Similarly, when Paulinus' apple tree is destroyed by Allectus' men at the time that Paulinus is murdered, it means the end of innocence for Flavius and Justin. Earlier in the story, the Silver Branch which is played by Cullen also embodies the apple symbolism as the small apples which make the musical sounds when Cullen strikes them.

Hypocaust

Flavius, Justin and Cullen hide in the hypocaust of Aunt Honoria's home to hide from the Saxons. It is there that they find the eagle from the missing Ninth Legion which gives them the courage to formalize their own little Legion and help Constantius defeat Allectus and the invading Saxons.

Roses

The gladiator Pandarus always went into the arena with a rose on his robe and he does the same thing when he goes into battle with the little Legion. It is as if the flowers mean hope and life to him and he wears them as a talisman against bad luck. Prior to the battle of Calleva, Pandarus put a red rose on his cloak and when it drops from the rafters of the basilica, Justin knows that Pandarus must be badly wounded. When he arrives upstairs, he sees that Pandarus is dying and he stays with him.

The Silver Branch

The Silver Branch is a melodic instrument of apple shaped pieces that plays pleasant sounds when tapped. The Silver Branch is an extension of the practice of showing an apple tree branch as a sort of password or icon of authority during the early centuries in Britain. So, Cullen's Silver Branch is not only pleasant to hear, but it symbolizes the ability of those who carry it with them the right and authority to move through British camps without question.

Nightshade

Nightshade is a family of plants, some of which are edible but some which are poisonous. Allectus employs Serapion for nightshade to kill the Saxon prisoner so he will not be able to say that he had been conspiring with Allectus against Carausius. Allectus' ongoing employment of Searpion is symbolic of the poisonous nightshade as Allectus plots and plans to murder Carausius and take over the role of Emperor.



Settings

Britain

The story takes place in third century Britain, approximately the years 286-296, during the rule of Emperors Carausius and Emperor Allectus.

Rutupiae

Rutupiae is the site of a major Roman fort on the Southeast coast of Britain and was an important entry site to the country. It is here that Justin is assigned as junior surgeon and where he first meets Flavius.

Portus Adurni

Portus Adurni is the port city from which Flavius and Justin hope to sail to Gaul. However, they encounter Paulinus there who provides shelter for them and they ultimately decide to stay to help Paulinus in his work to help others trying to escape the wrath of Allectus. When Paulinus is murdered, Flavius and Justin decide to move their home base to Flavius' family's farm.

The Dolphin

The Dolphin is a drinking establishment in the city of Portus Adurni where Flavius and Justin first meet Paulinus. They continue to use the Dolphin as a site where those who seek refuge can meet them and gain passage to Gaul.

Calleva

Calleva is a major town in Britain and the site of the battle where Emperor Constantius' troops defeat Allectus and his men. Evcatos of the Sword and Pandarus both die during this battle.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

The Coming of Age theme is an important one in literature because a character(s) passes a crucial test or reaches a certain point in life that separates them from childhood. This point can be different for every character due to age and circumstances. Some characters reach this point early due to a certain traumatic situation while others mature more gradually into adulthood.

In *The Silver Branch*, Flavius and Justin are relatively inexperienced young men who come of age due to difficult circumstances. Being at war propels these two into adult situations which force them to grow and mature quickly. Their values system is tried at first when they see Allectus meeting in secret with the Saxon man. Their attempts to warn Carausius are thwarted by Allectus and they feel as if Carausius has ostracized them. However, they continue to act nobly and loyally to the emperor and to Rome until Allectus murders Carausius. Their maturity shows when they decide to stay and help Paulinus in his rescue work instead of fleeing to Gaul which would have been easier work. And then when Paulinus is killed, they could have easily abandoned the work but they decide to stay true to his vision and carry on, even assembling a little Legion to help fight Allectus and help Constantius win the battle at Calleva.

Flavius and Justin come to more self realization during their time together too. Flavius knows that he is a born soldier and it is his destiny to be a military man. Until he is tried, though, he does not know how much of a natural leader he is. When he and Justin are together, he is the first one to speak with Justin being a bit more reticent. Flavius also can make decisions quicker and they incorporate the best plan for everyone involved, not just what he wants to do.

Justin also comes to learn more about himself throughout the course of the book. He knows that his family wanted him to be a soldier but that is not his true nature. Because of that, Justin feels that he is a disappointment to his father. By the end of the story, he receives a letter from his father telling him that he is proud of him. This is a great realization for Justin and he is able to lay down the burden of feeling like a disappointment. Justin is quieter than Flavius and more reflective. He stutters and does not push himself forward as much but he knows that he is good at what he does and that he has value too. Coming to this sort of self realization and comfort with who one is is a great sign of maturity and coming of age.

Comradeship

Comradeship is an important theme in *The Silver Branch*. Flavius and Justin are quick friends and the bond gets even stronger when they realize they are cousins. Their comradeship grows as they are tested by Allectus' actions. They are united in their code



of ethics and right vs. wrong so that decision making is a natural process for them. Even high ranking people such as the emperors know that the bond between Flavius and Justin is strong and that what is told to one is told to the other. They share everything, truly the definition of a pair in sync. They also create comrades in Evicatos of the Spear, Anthonius, Pandarus and others who see their integrity and want to serve with them. Evicatos is tentative upon first meeting Justin but soon Justin's authentic nature proves itself and Evicatos adopts Flavius as a comrade too just because of his association with Justin. They put on such a united front while leading their men that the men know that what is said by one will be backed up by the other. Their actions create feelings of loyalty not only to each other but with others as well.

The comradeship between Flavius and Justin is visible early on and they are trusted immediately by the emperor Carausius. When Carausius is stranded by the road when his horse needs a new shoe, he invites the pair to accompany him to his home and takes them into his confidence. To be entrusted with this level of communication and trust shows that their comradeship is authentic and they have made another comrade in the emperor himself.

It could be difficult to foster comradeship in the environment of the invading Roman army in Britain. They have already seen Carausius crush the former emperor and know that Allectus is up to no good so they don't have strong role models for building camaraderie. Perhaps it is because Flavius and Justin have the benefit of being related that makes their bond work because they are not just befriending the other, they are being loyal to the family.

Flavius and Justin make a good pair; Flavius is outgoing and bold while Justin is shy yet contemplative. Perhaps serving in the military, especially during wartime, creates comrades and bonds that might not have formed otherwise but these men recognize how volatile life can be during these times and they rely on each other for support and just to stay alive. It is remarkable that the friendship between Flavius and Justin is so strong that it is noticeable by other people. In the end, Constantius recognizes their bond and assigns them to the same Legion to serve under him.

Loyalty

Loyalty is an important theme in *The Silver Branch* on more than one level. First, Flavius and Justin are loyal and dedicated to their friendship and family ties. Where one goes, the other one goes. At times it seems as if they can almost read each other's minds. Even though they did not know that they were related until they meet at Rutupiae, they both have a strong sense of loyalty to the family. Both Flavius and Justin revere Aunt Honoria who is also loyal to them by funding their efforts to protect the emperor.

They are also completely united in their sense of loyalty to Emperor Carausis and even put their lives at risk by informing him of Allectus' traitorous behavior. Loyalty is part of their personal code and anything that could put the emperor at risk is abhorrent to them.



They are loyal to serving Carausius in any capacity, even when they feel he has ostracized them by sending them to a remote location.

Their loyalty takes the form of trying to defeat Allectus in any way also. This includes helping those men who are trying to hide from Allectus' reach through their work with Paulinus. After Paulinus is killed by Allectus' men, Flavius and Justin remain loyal to him, too, and make the decision to continue the work he had been doing at Flavius' family's farm. At the end of the story when Allectus has been defeated, Constantius commends Flavius and Justin for their loyalty to him and assigns them to the same Legion. Flavius and Justin are also loyal to the men who comprise their little Legion and they make sure that those men are taken care of with military positions too. The men had the option to leave but they remain loyal to the emperor and to Flavius and Justin by remaining in military service.

Nature

The theme of nature is prevalent in Rosemary Sutcliff's novels. She writes so descriptively and authentically about natural elements it is almost as if they are characters. For example, when Flavius and Justin are on leave at Flavius' family's farm, she writes, "They spent five days at the farm, and it was during those five days that Justin first really discovered Britain. The bare winter woods dappled like a partridge's breast, the slow, broad voices of the farmhands, the lapwings on the ploughland; the low, long house itself, built onto by succeeding generations but holding still at its heart the smoke-blackened atrium, used as a storeroom now, that had been the original houseplace, built by another Marcus Flavius Aquila making a home for himself and his British wife and the children that came after--these were all Britain to Justin.

The people in Britain during this time period very much lived off the land and relied on nature for almost everything related to food, clothing and shelter. Therefore, nature became critical and they needed it to be generous in order to survive.

The author also uses elements of nature as icons throughout the story. For example, the sign for people seeking shelter from Allectus and trying to locate Paulinus is to wear a sprig of rye grass. Evicatos of the Spear puts feathers on the neck of his long spear. And Pandarus puts a rose on his cloak when he heads into battle just like he did when he was a gladiator.

Perhaps because the characters live outside so much of the time because of being in the military, nature is always on display for them. Weather affects how well they will do in battle or if they can sail the seas based on the tide and the weather. Justin is especially sensitive to the natural elements and takes comfort in it, especially on the night before the battle at Calleva. He sits on a hilltop and surveys the men preparing for the conflict the next day, juxtaposed in the midst of so much lovely scenery with its natural foliage, animals and birds. He is so tuned in to nature that he can even hear a vixen calling to her mate in the night. It is encouraging to him that life and nature will go on long after he and the other men are gone.



Ancestry and Heritage

Ancestry and heritage is an important theme in *The Silver Branch*. The book is the second in a series written by the author that takes up over a hundred years after the end of the first one. The first book tells the story of Marcus Flavius Aquila who was with the lost Ninth Legion. Flavius is named after him and he and Justin are very aware of their lineage. When visiting the family farm Justin thinks about his heritage. "He had that other Marcus Flavius Aquila much in mind those days while, with Flavius, he poked happily about the byres and barns, or helped old Buic, the shepherd in the lambing-pens. It was as though, because he also was of Marcus' blood, the old house, the whole downland valley was a link between them."

Aunt Honoria helps to keep the family honor alive too. She can easily grasp the situation in which Flavius and Justin find themselves when they are running from Allectus. She then generously gives them two prized bracelets so that they can sell them in order to fund their journey and their work. Honoring the lineage runs in the blood of these people and she serves in her own way without question.

Flavius had always wondered about the family house and the connection to the lost Ninth Legion and why Marcus had been granted such a nice piece of land. When they find the broken eagle in the hypocaust at the house, it all makes sense that Marcus had brought it with him when he left the Legion after being injured. The eagle gives Flavius and Justin a sense of purpose and they use it for the standard for their little Legion.

Being in the military was expected of any young man descended from Marcus Flavius Aquila so when Justin wanted to be a surgeon instead of a soldier, he thought his father was unhappy with him. It must have been difficult for the sensitive Justin to go against his father and his family but he needed to be true to himself. Justin works diligently and conscientiously at his work but he always feels as if his father is not pleased with his choice. It is not until the end of the story that Justin receives a letter from his father telling him that he has always been proud of him. There is honor in how Justin chooses to serve and he continues the family heritage in that way.



Styles

Point of View

Like many novels, *The Silver Branch* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "He was thinking about that Marcus the last evening of all as he and Flavius leaned side by side on the wall that kept the Downs from sliding into the vine terraces on the warm southern slope. From where they were, they could see the whole farm lying clear down to the shores of the forest that closed the valley at last, all quenched and quieted in the first faint thickening of the winter twilight." In this passage, the author not only tells the reader what Justin is thinking but also describes what he and Flavius see in the scenery, making this third person omniscient point of view.

Language and Meaning

Because *The Silver Branch* is set in third century Britain, the language is appropriate for the time. The author also uses the ancient words and names for places that have been modernized. For example, Rutupiae is located in what is now called Richborough Castle near Sandwich, Kent. The dialogue is also appropriate for the times including words that are not used much anymore. For example, "... In the first place, you can rid your mind of any idea that Carausius is framed of the same stuff as most of the six-month sword-made Emperors we have had in the years before Diocletian and Maximian split the Purple between them. He is the son of a German father and a Hibernian mother and that is a mixture to set the sparks flying; born and bred in one of the trading-stations that the Manopeans of the German sea set up long since in Hibernia, and only came back to his father's people when he reached manhood. He was a Scaldis river-pilot when I knew him first. Afterward he broke into the Legions--the gods know how...."

The book was also written by a British author so the language is in British English instead of American English. For example, the American English spelling of the words "theater" and "amphitheater" are spelled "theatre" and "amphitheatre." And the words "color" and "colored" are spelled in British English in the book as "colour" and "coloured."

The author also writes for Justin's stuttering and she stays in that mode throughout the book.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. The Silver Branch takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.



Quotes

It was a triumphal monument as well--a triumphal monument to the might of Imperial Rome and her conquest of Britain. Now it is just a pharos, and we break up the fallen marble for rubble in the walls that we build to keep the Saxons out... There's a moral somewhere in that, if you like morals.

-- Flavius (I The Saxon Shore paragraph 1)

Importance: Flavius is angry that Rome has to keep defending its position in Britain. They had conquered it many years ago but now the Saxons are on attack and the mighty tower that stood as a symbol of Rome's power is now shattered and reduced to a mere lighthouse.

I saw him kill that moth, and he enjoyed doing it.

-- Justin (II A Whisper Down the Wind paragraph 1)

Importance: Justin tells Flavius of how Allectus delighted in killing a moth on the night that the Saxon prisoner was poisoned. It is clear to Justin that Allectus is cold-blooded and clearly enjoys killing, something that Justin cannot get out of his mind.

Caesar knows that for all the worth there is in us, we are Caesar's men for life or death, Justin and I.

-- Flavius (III The House on the Cliffs paragraph 1)

Importance: Flavius and Justin receive a rare invitation to dine with Carausius at his house where they declare their loyalty to him. It is this loyalty that will drive them in their efforts against Allectus and in support of the new Emperor Constantius.

Name of Thunder!" he whispered. It is Allectus!

-- Flavius (IV The Sea Wolf paragraph 1)

Importance: Flavius and Justin catch Allectus meeting secretly with a Saxon and although they are not sure what is transpiring, they know that it is traitorous behavior. When they report Allectus to Carausius, they flare Allectus' ire and Carausius has them sent away so they will not be killed.

What matter for the moment how the poison came into the man's bowl? The thing that matters is why, and the answer to that is plain. Alive, he could tell who it was that he met on the marshes this morning, and what passed between them. Therefore he has died. Caesar, does the proof suffice?

-- Flavius (V Nightshade! paragraph 2)

Importance: Flavius and Justin have caught Allectus in a traitorous act of meeting secretly with a Saxon who they took into custody as a prisoner. When the prisoner is poisoned, Flavius is outraged because now the man cannot tell the truth about meeting with Allectus and Flavius' and Justin's words are still in question.



I am of the people of the firths and islands of the west coast up yonder, beyond the old Northern Wall; the people that were from Erin in the old times.

-- Evicatos of the Spear (VI Evicatos of the Spear paragraph 1)

Importance: Evicatos has come to Justin for care for a wolf bite that will not heal. He explains his heritage to Justin and they, along with Flavius, begin a friendship that lasts until Evicatos dies in the battle of Calleva.

To the Fates, Sylvanus Varus, standard-bearer of the fifth Tungrian Cohort with the Second Augustan Legion, raised this altar, that they may be kind," Flavius read aloud.

-- Flavius (VII To the Fates, that They May Be Kind paragraph 2)

Importance: Flavius reads the words found on an altar hewn from stone on a hillside. Flavius wonders why this standard bearer was praying for kindness from the gods, for something specific or just in general. The gods played an important role in the lives of the Romans and it is meaningful that Evicatos has taken Flavius and Justin to see the altar and the words.

So. I think that is all that needs to be said; and now you must go. And in these ill and uncertain days, who shall say when you will come back--though indeed I believe with you that the Emperor Caesar Constantius will come one day. And so--the gods be with you, my nephew Flavius... and you--

-- Aunt Honoria (IX The Sign of the Dolphin paragraph 4)

Importance: Aunt Honoria has given money and two opal bracelets to Flavius and Justin to fund their trip to Gaul. Aunt Honoria is a no-nonsense type of person and can see through to the essential elements of a situation quickly. She has faith in Flavius and Justin and they are able to accomplish much based on her financial and emotional support.

Flavius," he said desperately, "I am not going." There was a little pause, and then Flavius said, "No, nor I, of course." Then, with a breath of a laugh, "Did not Paulinus say that we counted as one in this?"

-- Justin and Flavius (X The Berenice Sails for Gaul paragraph 2)

Importance: Paulinus has arranged passage to Gaul for Flavius and Justin but just as they are about to board the ship, they change their minds and decide to stay. They feel that working with Paulinus would be a noble cause and the best way that they can show loyalty to Carausis by working against Allectus, the man who executed him.

We did not leave him. He ordered us out, that we might carry on the work after him. It was for that that he took us in the first place. So now we carry on the work.

-- Flavius (XII A Sprig of Broom paragraph 2)

Importance: Paulinus has just been killed by Allectus' men and Justin feels guilty that they left him behind as they escaped to safety. Flavius counters that Paulinus told them to leave, that he had another way out, but he did not tell them that the way out was



death. Flavius is always able to quickly gauge a situation and determine what has to happen next just as he does in this case is stating that Paulinus' work must go on.

...the little emperor's name yelled above the tumult for a battle-cry, 'Carausius! Carausius!

-- Flavius (Carausius! Carausius! paragraph 1)

Importance: Flavius and Justin are charging into battle against Allectus to avenge the death of their beloved Emperor Carausius and his name is used as a battle cry to spur the other men forward.

It is in my mind that Rome owes you that, at all events," Constantius said, with that shadow of a smile again in his eyes.

-- Constantius (XVIII Triumphal Garlands paragraph 3)

Importance: Constantius is pleased with how Flavius and Justin have conducted themselves during the battle at Calleva as well as continuing the work begun by Paulinus. He offers them leave from the military but they decide to stay to serve him and they are assigned to the same Legion together.