



Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom | Bonnie Dundee

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Two lengthy and demanding novels where the young heroes become part of religiously/politically inspired insurrections which shape their lives and thoughts forever.

Wang Lee in the Paterson epic (**Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom**) is a Chinese peasant who rises to be a sergeant in the rebel Taiping forces, fighting to establish their own fanatical brand of christianity in Manchurian China during the 1850s. The impossibly high moral standards, preached but not necessarily practised by the religious leaders, and the blindingly vicious and violent face of the struggle to establish the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace comes across strongly and meaningfully but the very unfamiliar history and motivations will defeat all but the doughtiest reader.

Bonnie Dundee, a recent work by this author, is complicated history too, set in seventeenth-century Jacobite Scotland, where Hugh Herriott breaks away from his mordantly dissenting family to join Colonel Graham of Claverhouse. Despite divided loyalty at the onset Hugh progresses from stable boy to soldier and, when maimed by war, to painter. Throughout he is as dogged a follower as his own hound Caspar; one of those for whom their purpose in life is found in the service and shadow of great men -- such as 'Bloody Claver'se'.

Hugh's retrospective narrative bears all the hallmarks of Rosemary Sutcliff's rich and evocative style and the benefits of her extraordinary sensitivity to history, but regrettably I don't doubt that readership amongst the young will be sparse.

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