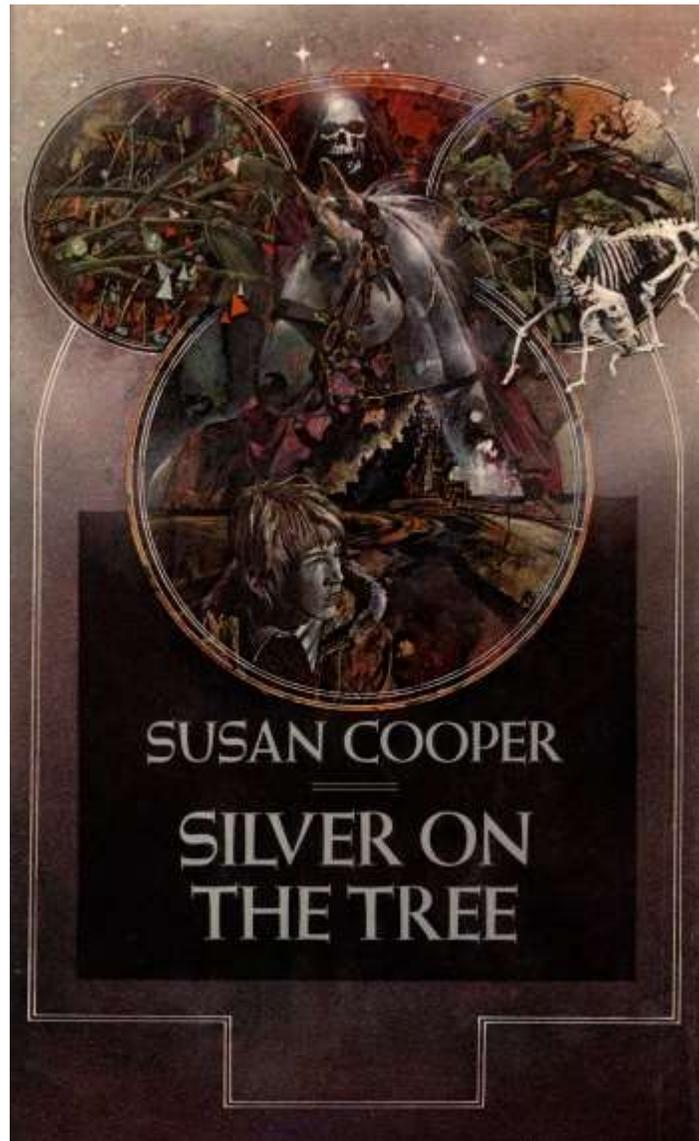


Susan Cooper (1935 - ): *Silver on the Tree* (1977)



*Silver on the Tree* is the final book in Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* sequence. I read the fourth book, *The Grey King*, for school in fifth or sixth grade (thanks, Ms. Heath!) and then went back and started with the first book. (We must have been doing a King Arthur theme that year because we also read T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone*.) When I went to college, I met someone who had grown up in Wales near where *The Grey King* is set, which I thought was incredibly cool.

All the books are strange, eerie, and intriguing, but a particular line from *Silver on the Tree* has stuck with me and popped up in my mind through the years. A man has been asked to judge whether a boy from the past (he was brought forward through time at birth as his mother wished to escape a difficult situation) should be sent back to the past or allowed to stay in the

twentieth century. This is a fantasy novel, so the stakes are high between Light and Dark. The boy's mother made a poor decision and the child had no choice, argues one side. She had a right to make a choice that she felt was best for her infant, says the other, and anyway, this time is the only time he's ever known (Part 4, Chapter 19; page 249 in the Atheneum paperback edition pictured):

John Rowlands said thoughtfully, "Send him back more than a thousand years? And what language were men speaking here then?"

"Latin," Will said.

"He has very little Latin," John Rowlands said, looking out at the dark mist beyond the river.

"You are frivolous," the voice out of the darkness said, curtly. "He may be taken out of Time merely, as he is now, so long as he plays no part in this present matter."

"Not frivolous," John Rowlands said, softly still. "I am simply wondering how a boy can be said to belong to a time whose language he does not even speak."

Reading this, I wondered, too. One of my childhood wishes was to learn all languages, so I could belong everywhere I went. Like many, I fantasized about living in other times as well. But this single line brought home to me how hard it would be to be myself, transported years into the future or the past, into a culture that would be inevitably foreign. For the boy in question in *Silver on the Tree* to go back one thousand years in time, though he stood on the very same rock, would mean not only losing everyone he'd ever known, and every thing he'd ever known (for even the land and weather would have changed), but also losing himself in exile for as long as he lived. The story goes on to delve into what it means to belong—especially since the boy has often been seen as an outsider or freak because he is an albino.

I have been thinking a lot about this scene as the news is filled with Congress and the White House haggling about the fate of DREAMers and DACA. People who were brought to the United States as children are being deported from the only home they remember, often to a country they've never been, where people may speak a language they do not know. The justification given is that's where they belong. I am not convinced. I wonder how they can be said to belong to a country they do not know or remember.