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Susan Cooper

Greenwitch (The Dark is Rising Sequence, 3)

United States (1974)

TAGS: Celtic Mythology Katabasis Poseidon Sibyl Tethys





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

General information	
Title of the work	Greenwitch (The Dark is Rising Sequence, 3)
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, United States, Worldwide.
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1974
First Edition Details	Susan Cooper, *Greenwitch*. New York: Atheneum, 1974, 147 pp.
ISBN	0689304269
Genre	Fantasy fiction
Target Audience	Children (ages 10–14)
Author of the Entry	Elena Louverdis, Victoria University of Wellington, louverelen@myvuw.ac.nz
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Babette Pütz, Victoria University of Wellington, Babette.Puetz@vuw.ac.nz Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



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Susan Cooper , b. 1935
(Author)

Susan Cooper is an English author, born in Burnham, Buckinghamshire, England. With a childhood spread across WWII Cooper delighted in reading when safety concerns disallowed herself and her younger brother to play outside. She earned a B.A. Degree in English Literature from the University of Oxford, at which she was the first woman to edit the undergraduate newspaper Cherwell. Whilst at university she was taught by both J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Post-graduation, Cooper worked as a reporter for The Sunday Times, with her boss here being Ian Fleming, and her writing then stemmed from journalism into children's literature as well as adult fiction. Emigration to the United States allowed for her novels to reach international recognition and here she accumulated many literary awards such as the Newbery Medal, The ALA Margaret A. Edwards Award, and the Tir na n-Og Award. Once in the United States Cooper ventured into writing screenplays for adults and has since received two Writers Guild Awards and two Emmy nominations. She was on the board of the National Children's Book and Literacy Alliance from 2006 to 2012, a non-profit organisation that goes toward advocating literacy, literature and libraries across the US. In April 2017, Cooper gave the fifth annual Tolkien Lecture at Pembroke College, Oxford, and spoke on the role of fantasy literature in a contemporary society.

Sources:

Official Publisher Page, (accessed: July 22, 2019).

Reading Rockets: A Video Interview With Susan Cooper (accessed: September 1, 2019).

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Bio prepared by Elena Louverdis, Victoria University of Wellington, louverelen@myvuw.ac.nz

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Additional information

Translation	Finnish: *Viheriä noita,* trans. Kristiina Rikman, WSOY, 1980. Swedish: *Lövhäxan,* trans. Jadwiga P. Westrup, Bonniers Juniorförlag, 1983. Danish: *Den Grønne Heks,* trans. Birgitte Brix, Gyldendal, 1985. Norwegian: *Løvheksa,* trans. Marit Berger, Gyldendal Norsk Folag, 1988. Italian: *Stregaverde,* trans. Gabriella Paulucci, Mondadori, 1997. Dutch: *Groenheks,* trans. Wiebe Buddingh, De Fontein, 2003. German: *Greenwitch,* trans. Annemarie Böll, Ravensburger Buchverlag, 2006. Czech: *Morana*, trans. Milena Poláčková, Albatros, 2007 Serbian: *Zelena Veštica,* trans. Olivera Ilić, Čarobna knjiga, 2007. Spanish: *Brujaverde,* Planeta, 2008. Portuguese: *A Feiticeira Verde,* Novo Século, 2010. Vietnamese: *Phù thủy xanh*, NXB Hội Nhà Văn, Nhã Nam, 2010.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Prequels: *Over Sea, Under Stone, Book 1 of The Dark Is Rising Sequence,* Jonathan Cape, 1965. *The Dark is Rising, Book 2 of The Dark Is Rising Sequence,* Macmillan, 1973. Sequels: *The Grey King, Book 4 of The Dark Is Rising Sequence*, Atheneum, 1975.

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Silver on the Tree, Book 5 of The Dark Is Rising Sequence, Atheneum, 1977.

Summary

Greenwitch is a fantasy novel for children about a humanoid image of leaves and branches that comes to life with the powers of the universe and becomes involved in a battle between good and evil. It makes use of many folktale elements and allusions to Classical mythology in order to bring myth and ancient societal practices to the attention of the modern child. As the third book in the series *The Dark is Rising Sequence,* the *Greenwitch* returns to the lives of Simon, Jane, and Barney Drew, in the coastal British town of Trewissick, Cornwall. In the initial two books in the series, *Over Sea Under Stone* and *The Dark is Rising,* Simon, Jane, and Barney as well as Will Stanton respectively discover the world of the Old Ones, who are constantly battling to defeat the dark. Here, their enigmatic great-uncle Merriman Lyon enlists their help to recover a priceless artefact of the Light, the Golden Grail, stolen by the evil forces of the Dark. The Grail contains an untranslatable inscription which, once deciphered, will dictate whether the Light or Dark prevails.

The Light and the Dark are the powers of good and evil constantly at war with one another, fighting to preserve or destroy the world. The forces of the Light are made up of the Old Ones, ancient immortals possessing special powers of warping time, protection and elemental manipulation, guided by the all-knowing Grey Lady. The Dark, on the other hand, is made up of the Dark Lords who share similar powers but advocate for chaos, confusion, and the subversion of agency, rather than freedom and freewill. Served by Dark underlings, the Dark Lords wreak havoc on humankind. As the mystery of the Grail begins to unfold, Merriman introduces a young boy named Will Stanton to aid in their search, who possesses his same mysterious powers of the Old Ones. The town moves into its century old festival period, in which the construction of the Greenwitch takes place. At midnight, as the women of the village construct this giant image of the Greenwitch out of hawthorn branches and leaves, the custom of asking a wish of the Greenwitch prompts Jane to form a connection with this idol, and she wishes for the Greenwitch to be happy. The powers that the Greenwitch possess allows this image to grant wishes if the maker touchers her and has pure intentions when wishing. The Greenwitch is sacrificed to sea for good luck in fishing and the harvest, though

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where she would usually stay in the depths at rest for eternity, the Greenwitch is unable to be released because the contention of the Dark and the Light for her secret hold her in limbo. This secret is unknown to the forces of the Light, though the intensity with which the Dark desires it warns Merriman and Will that they must retrieve it before it is too late.

The children are constantly tested by the forces of the Dark in the form of a crazed painter. Simon is forced to look on as this painter, or member of the Dark, not only reveals that the Dark is in possession of the Grail but imposes a prophetic spell on Barney causing him to unknowingly spout an oracle that helps the Dark influence the Greenwitch. This oracle confirms that the Greenwitch holds the papyrus and can be found in the realm of Tethys. The Greenwitch is said to be the child of Tethys and Poseidon, which explains why she takes refuge in this realm. It tells that the spells called Mana, Reck and Lir are the three that the Dark can use together to take possession of the Greenwitch's secret. Escaping with Barney, Simon relays all that was prophesised to both Will and Merriman, forcing both Old Ones to understand that the 'secret' is in fact a long-lost parchment that decodes the inscription on the grail. Will and Merriman, diving to the realm of Tethys to the depths at which the Greenwitch has sunk, attempt to persuade this magical effigy to give her secret to the Light. The two are unsuccessful, however, Jane's compassion for the Greenwitch poses as one final chance to obtain the secret for the Light. As Jane falls asleep, she enters a nightmare in which she must navigate the forces of the Dark, ghosts of the drowned, and a phantasm of the town ablaze. As the nightmare reaches a pinnacle, the Greenwitch appears to her, and remembering Jane's selfless wish, entrusts Jane with the protection and rightful use of the secret, and thus the parchment. Upon waking, Jane discovers that the powers of the Greenwitch have manifest the conclusion of her dream, and she now possesses the parchment. With the key to the inscription, the five questors with newfound optimism steal the grail back from the Dark and are able to decipher the prophecy that will eventually lead to the fall of the Dark.

Analysis

In *Greenwitch* Cooper allows the very conventional literary scaffolding of 'good against evil', or in this case 'Light against Dark' to frame the narrative, a concept that we find at the foundation of ancient

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narratives such as Homer's *Iliad,* Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and largely all Hellenic heroic myth. While the surface level very much manifests Arthurian and Celtic legend, the foundation lies dominantly in ancient Greek myth and societal practice. The explanation behind this is that Arthurian myth and legend was born directly from a post-Roman era Britain. A newly liberated kingdom of people were creating their own native myth based heavily on the idea of hero and adventure narrative that was known to them from texts such as the *Iliad,* the *Odyssey,* and the *Aeneid.* The particular idea of the Golden age of Britain can be directly correlated to the Golden Age of Rome, and the foundation of Britain lies in the knowledge of this period in antiquity. In this way, Cooper as she states in *But Myth Has No Prototype* that once the connection is made between antiquity and Arthurian legend, the author's imagination can take what it wants from here. In consideration of the cult practice at the sanctuary of Heraion of Samos, as accounted by Menodotus of Samos in *On the Dedications in the Temple of Samian Hera* 15.11–15, the act of binding a statue of Hera in branches that is then adorned with votive offerings and washed in the sea, is a clear correlation to the Greenwitch. The Greenwitch is decorated not in physical votives but in wishes and prayers serving the same function, and then is sacrificed to the sea with the intention of these invocations being implemented. In this light, the feminine aspect of the cult of Hera is also present in the cult like practice of the feminine Greenwitch. This dedication to the sea brings the gods of the sea to the fore, and the Greenwitch is referred to as the child of both Tethys and Poseidon, cementing the connection to this domain. The realm in which the Greenwitch is cast into is that of Tethys, and Will and Merriman must appeal to this Titan goddess in order to interact with the Greenwitch, an offering that the Titaness had protected for centuries. We know from *Iliad* 14.201–204 that during the Titanomachy Tethys protected Hera while Zeus deposed Cronos. Here, we see the extent of the security Tethys offers, and why the secret of the Greenwitch had been so safe. The Drew children encounter many classical concepts in their quest, in both standard and distorted forms. Simon and Barney are tangled in a contradiction of *xenia,* in that the boys are invited into the caravan of the depraved painter, though as a member of the Dark, the man's invitation does not provide a sense of security nor hospitality. Instead he imposes a spell on Barney and forces him to provide an oracle. Acting as an unwilling *Pythia,* Barney becomes the mouthpiece of a prophecy that, as in many ancient cases, when misused and misinterpreted brings about the implementers own demise. The most famous example of this

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is perhaps King Croesus of Lydia as told by Herodotus 1.53, who in 546 BC travelled to the oracle, anxious of the threat posed by Cyrus of Persia, and asked whether he should wage war against Persia.

While the foundation of the *Greenwitch* is the battle between 'Light and Dark', the obvious maturation present in Jane's narrative is the main connection between the young readers and the concepts. Jane's journey of development and self-awareness is accelerated by her *katabasis*. This descent into her own conscious is not done by choice, and Jane must live through the nightmares of a burning city and a drowned sea captain. Her eventual rise to a safe slumber occupied only by the spirit of the Greenwitch is rewarded with the gift of the Greenwitch's secret. In this way, Jane emerges from her *katabasis* at the conclusion of her development, at the culmination of her moral and psychological growth.

Greenwitch does not retell a myth, nor does it feature characters based on ancient heroes. Rather, we are presented with a narrative scattered with Classical allusions, and one that exposes the fundamental influence of this period on other later periods of myth and legend. The effect this creates for the young reader is a narrative and characters much more analogous to themselves as young people. The characters of Jane, Simon, Barney, and even Will portray few of the archetypal heroic traits such as strength, bravery and what has come to be expected from the extraordinary heroines or heroes of ancient narrative; Odysseus, Herakles, Achilles, or Atalanta. Though Will does possess powers of the Old Ones which make him more ethereal, himself, Simon, Jane, and Barney are merely young children who are coming of age. Simon as the eldest of the children has already experienced his explicit maturation through a *katabasis* in *Over Sea Under Stone*. Like many Classical heroes, Jane undergoes a *katabasis* and though she deals with fundamentally different afflictions on the journey downwards, her *katabasis* is no less difficult than an ancient hero's in a relative sense. In the same way ancient heroes suffered and fought mythical and evil foes, Simon, Jane, and Barney are facing equally destructive, terrifying, and threatening forces in the antagonists of the Dark. Simon and Barney, in directly facing one manifestation of the Dark in the form of the painter, are possessed by an unwanted oracle and forced into submission but are ultimately able to overcome the mental trauma of this and then supersede the forces of evil by finally stealing back the Grail. When Barney wakes from his trance and forgets the interaction with the Dark, he visibly matures over the course of the narrative by way of an *anabasis*. Initially

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refusing to believe Simon, that he had in fact lost a whole hour of his life to a Dark spell, over the time comes to a realisation that there is more to the world than simply what he knows or has seen and where Simon was right about the trance and his amnesia, the Dark forces pervade all parts of the world. This non-explicit realisation by Barney displays his maturation from a young child to someone who is alert and awake to the happenings of the world. Jane, whilst attempting to develop her sense of self, is forced into a nightmare influenced by the raging Dark and Light forces around her and comes out of this *katabasis* as a stronger and more focused young woman with a greater understanding of the effect of good actions. Classical associations provide the steps on which the Drew children build their characters and highlights the ability for children to overcome afflictions of evil and a personal *katabasis,* to a positive greater good end result.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Celtic Mythology Katabasis Poseidon Sibyl Tethys
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Childhood Coming of age Conflict Gender, female Good vs evil Magic powers Prediction/prophecy Water Witch Youth

Further Reading

Cooper, Susan, “But Myth Has No Prototype”, *The Horn Book Magazine* 91.3 (2015): 22–23.

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Addenda

Audiobook – *Greenwitch, Book 3 of The Dark Is Rising Sequence.*

Author: Susan Cooper.

Narrated By: Alex Jennings.

Length: 4 hours and 23 minutes.

Released: 12-04-2007.

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