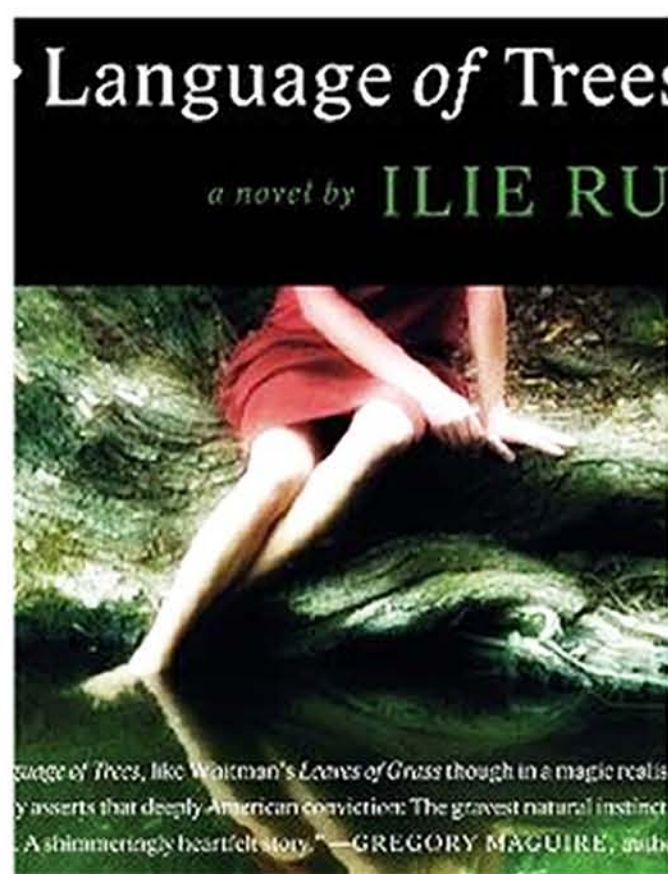


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# Haunting 'Language of Trees' takes root in folklore, mystery

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...age of Trees, like Waltman's *Leaves of Grass* though in a magic realist...  
 ... asserts that deeply American conviction: The gravest natural instinct...  
 ... A shimmeringly heart-felt story." —GREGORY MAGUIRE, author

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In *The Language of Trees*, author Ilie Ruby examines the effect of a boy's mysterious drowning on a small lakeside town in upstate New York.


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Author Ilie Ruby

 By [Bob Minzesheimer](#), USA TODAY

Ghost stories, at least in Hollywood, are often either comedies or horrors, but Ilie Ruby's haunting debut novel, *The Language of Trees*, borrows its spirits from the Seneca Indians.

The result is a literary, emotionally intense ghost story about family secrets and regrets.

Most of it is set in 2000. Most of its characters are not Senecas, but their folklore and spiritual powers propel the plot.

It's endowed with a strong sense of place: the real-life lakeside town of Canandaigua in upstate New York. In the novel, the spirits of the Senecas can still be heard if you know how to listen.

The plot revolves around the mysterious drowning of a boy in 1988, and how the guilt is borne, a dozen years later, by his family and other characters.

The novel is filled with stories like the one about how wolf packs were once as commonplace in Canandaigua as Indian burial grounds: "The wolves acted as protectors of the graves. When the graves began to be robbed and the artifacts disappeared, so did the wolves."

Ruby, who spent her childhood summers in Canandaigua, packs a lot into the plot: the dissolution of a marriage, the beginnings of another relationship, a kidnapping and shooting.

The plot lags a bit midway through, but never suffers from lack of lyrical images as the one of trees: "the most trusting of all creatures because they put their roots down in one place, knowing they'd be there for life."

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