

 THE 
WIND IN THE
WILLOWS

Kenneth Grahame

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES
BY GARDNER MCFALL

ILLUSTRATIONS BY NANCY BARNHART

GEORGE STADE
CONSULTING EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



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FROM THE PAGES OF THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

‘Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing simply messing about in boats.’ (p. 10)

Packing the basket was not quite such pleasant work as unpacking the basket. It never is. (p. 15)

This day was only the first of many similar ones for the emancipated Mole, each of them longer and fuller of interest as the ripening summer moved onward. He learnt to swim and to row, and entered into the joy of running water; and with his ear to the reed-stems he caught, at intervals, something of what the wind went whispering so constantly among them. (p. 18)

‘The poetry of motion! The real way to travel! The *only* way to travel! Here today—in next week tomorrow! Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped—always somebody else’s horizon!’ (p. 28)

‘Who ever heard of a door-mat telling any one anything? They simply don’t do it. They are not that sort at all. Door-mats know their place.’ (p. 40)

‘It was the talk of the burrows.’ (p. 49)

Villagers all, this frosty tide,
Let your doors swing open wide,
Though wind may follow, and snow beside,
Yet draw us in by your fire to bide;
Joy shall be yours in the morning! (p. 64)

‘It’s for your own good, Toady, you know.’ (p. 74)

‘Rouse thee, old loon, and take over from us this vile Toad, a criminal of deepest guilt and matchless artfulness and resource. Watch and ward him with all thy skill; and mark thee well, grey-beard, shouldst thou be caught untoward befall, thy old head shall answer for his—and a murrain on both of them!’ (p. 81)

‘I feel just as you do, Mole; simply dead tired, though not body-tired.

It’s lucky we’ve got the stream with us, to take us home. Isn’t it jolly to feel the sun again, soaking into one’s bones! And hark to the wind playing in the reeds!’ (p. 91)

The clever men at Oxford

Know all that there is to be knowed.

But they none of them know one half as much

As intelligent Mr. Toad! (p. 130)

Toad, with no one to check his statements or to criticize in an unfriendly spirit, rather let himself go. Indeed, much that he related belonged more properly to the category of what-might-have-happened-had-I-only-thought-of-it-in-time-instead-of-ten-minutes-afterwards. Those are always the best and raciest adventures; and why should they not be truly ours, as much as the somewhat inadequate things that really come off? (p. 151)

Bang! go the drums!

The trumpeters are tooting and the soldiers are saluting,

And the cannon they are shooting and the motor-cars are hooting,

As the—Hero—comes!

Shout—Hoo-ray!

And let each one of the crowd try and shout it very loud,

In honour of an animal of whom you're justly proud,

For it's Toad's—great—day! (p. 162)

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KENNETH GRAHAME

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on March 8, 1859, Kenneth Grahame was five years old when his mother died of scarlet fever following the birth of her fourth child. Kenneth's despondent father put his children in the care of their maternal grandmother and, except for a brief interlude, did not see or communicate with them again. A relatively isolated child, Kenneth developed a passion for the landscape around his grandmother's home in Cookham Dene, Berkshire. That lush area along the Thames stayed in his imagination and was later to play a large part in his writings; in time he would live there with his wife and son.

Grahame attended boarding school at St. Edward's in Oxford, where he excelled at sports and his studies. These accomplishments were muted by the death of his brother William and by his family's refusal to allow him to study at Oxford University. Instead Grahame was urged to move to London where in 1879 he took a position as a gentleman clerk at the Bank of London. Rather than mourn his lost opportunities, he worked diligently and spent his considerable free time playing sports and cultivating literary interests. Friendship with acclaimed academic F. J. Furnivall widened his circle of friends, and Furnivall advised the young man as he began writing short essays and poems.

After publishing his first works under a pseudonym in the *National Observer*, Grahame combined some of his light prose pieces and published them under his own name as *Pagan Papers* in 1891. Modest success followed, along with more publications: *The Golden Age* (1895), *The Headswoman* (1898), and *Dream Days* (1898). Relatively conservative politically, Grahame nevertheless published in the same journal as Oscar Wilde and formed friendships with writers of different opinions and backgrounds. His double life as bank worker and writer continued through the end of the century. In 1899 Grahame married Elspeth Thomson; they had a child, a partially blind son named Alastair, a year later.

Royalties from the sale of his books allowed Grahame to resign from the bank, and the family settled in Cookham Dene, where Grahame had spent his childhood. Although he wrote little in this period, Grahame told his son stories that gave him the idea for his great novel *The Wind in the Willows*. The book was published in 1908, and, after a slow beginning, proved immensely popular; it has remained so down to the present day. Grahame wrote little after the book's release, withdrawing further into solitude in the countryside. His quiet way of life was shattered in 1920 by his son's death. To cope with the loss, Grahame and Elspeth spent years traveling through Europe before returning to England in 1924. Kenneth Grahame died in Pangbourne, Berkshire, on July 6, 1932, and is buried in Holywell Churchyard in Oxford.

THE WORLD OF KENNETH GRAHAME AND THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

1859 Kenneth Grahame is born on March 8 to Bessie Ingles Grahame and James Cunningham Grahame; the upper-middleclass family lives in Edinburgh, Scotland. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* are published.

1860 James moves his wife and three young children to Argyllshire, where he has taken the position of sheriff. The family first lives in the port town of Loch Fyne, then moves to another port town, Inveraray.

1864 Bessie contracts scarlet fever after giving birth to her fourth child; Kenneth also comes down with the illness. When Bessie dies, James sends the children to live with their wealthy maternal grandmother in England, at her home in Cookham Dene, along the Thames in Berkshire; later Kenneth will use the setting in *The Wind and the Willows*.

1865 Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is published.

1866 Financial concerns cause Kenneth's grandmother to move to a smaller house in Cranbourne. The children live with James in Inveraray for a little less than a year, the last time they will live with their father.

1868 Kenneth and his brother William are sent to the private school St. Edward's, in Oxford, where Kenneth will spend the next seven years; he is an excellent student and gifted at sports.

1871- George Eliot's *Middlemarch* is published.

1872

1876 Although Grahame would prefer to go on to college at Oxford University, his family decides he should work for his uncle while trying to secure a position at the Bank of England in London. Grahame is not happy about the move but pursues his work with dedication.

1879 Grahame receives a post at the Bank of England as a "gentleman clerk," which gives him a great deal of freedom and minimal

work hours. During this period he meets scholar Frederick James Furnivall, with whom he cultivates a literary relationship.

1880 The New Shakespeare Society, founded by Furnivall, makes Grahame its honorary secretary. He begins publishing short pieces, including poems, under a pseudonym.

1883 Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is published.

- 1886** ~~Grahame makes his first voyage to Italy.~~
-
- 1887** Although he has not had a relationship with his father since early youth, Grahame attends his funeral in Le Havre, France. Queen Victoria celebrates her jubilee.
- 1890** Grahame visits Venice.
- 1891** Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* appear.
- 1893** *Pagan Papers* is published; the book comprises short essays that previously appeared under a pseudonym in W E. Henley's respected *National Observer*. Despite his newfound success, Grahame keeps his Bank of England position.
- 1895** *The Golden Age*, a series of fictionalized childhood remembrances, is published. The author makes another trip to Italy. H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* is published.
- 1897** Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is published.
- 1898** Grahame is made secretary of the Bank of England. *The Headswoman* and *Dream Days*, the sequel to *The Golden Age*, are published; the latter includes Grahame's best-known short story, "The Reluctant Dragon."
- 1899** Perhaps weakened by his childhood scarlet fever, Grahame is susceptible to illness and comes down with a severe chest ailment. A friend, Elspeth Thomson, nurses Grahame, and the two develop a romantic relationship. They marry on July 22.
- 1900** A son, Alastair, is born. He suffers from blindness in one eye and will be unable to take part in many sports and activities while growing up.
- 1901** Queen Victoria dies.
- 1902** Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is published.
- 1903** A man enters the Bank of England and randomly threatens Grahame with a gun; he is unharmed but shaken. Henry James publishes *The Ambassadors*.
- 1904** Grahame begins telling Alastair stories that will become *The Wind in the Willows*. In December J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* is first performed on stage in London.
- 1906** Grahame moves his family to Cookham Dene, where he grew up.
- 1907** Grahame begins the manuscript for *The Wind in the Willows*. He retires from the Bank of England because of poor health.
- 1908** *The Wind in the Willows* is published. The narrative marks a significant change in Grahame's style and perspective; readers embrace it after a slow debut on the market. The

novel represents Grahame's last major literary effort.

- 1910** E. M. Forster's *Howards End* is published.
- 1914** James Joyce's *Dubliners* is published. World War I begins.
- 1915** Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* is published.
- 1916** *The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children* is published; it is compiled by Grahame and contains a preface by him.
- 1917** T. S. Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* is published.
- 1920** After suffering emotional stress at school because of his partial blindness, Alastair is found dead after being run over by a train; his parents view the death as accidental, although signs point to a suicide. By this point, Grahame and his wife have grown emotionally distant from one another and isolated from their friends. They will spend several years abroad, mainly in Italy, to distract them from their grief over their son's death. Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* is published.
- 1922** Eliot's *The Waste Land* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* are published.
- 1924** The Grahames return to England and settle in Pangbourne, Berkshire.
- 1926** Grahame's last work appears—the introduction to *Seventy Years a Showman*, by George Sanger.
- 1927** Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* is published.
- 1929** A. A. Milne adapts *The Wind in the Willows* for the stage, as *Toad of Toad Hall*.
- 1932** Grahame dies in Pangbourne on July 6.

INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Grahame's life was marked by duality, personal disappointment, and loss, all of which, through temperament and imagination, he transformed in his work, the best known being the children's classic *The Wind in the Willows*. The charming, memorable characters of Rat, Mole, and Toad find their origin in the author's own experience; the book's themes—the lure of travel, the affection for home, the virtues of friendship, the benevolence of nature—all spring from Grahame's deepest human and artistic preoccupations.

Sometimes readers assume that a children's book must owe its existence to a particular child the author knows, as in the instance of Lewis Carroll writing *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for Alice Liddell or J. M. Barrie finding his inspiration for *Peter Pan* through his friendship with the David boys. While it is now probably more the exception than the rule, in Grahame's case the assumption holds true; the first adventures of Toad grew from stories he told his son, Alastair, affectionately known as "Mouse." The small, ordinary event of his son's request for a bedtime story tapped deep into Grahame's psychic and imaginative life, enabling him to explore his deepest conflicts and longings in the extraordinary book he produced. It is perhaps because of this marriage of outer pressure with inner need that *The Wind in the Willows*, published in 1908, has survived. Its honesty and truth resonate with children and adults alike. Its sensual, poetic prose, so pleasurable to read, is informed by Grahame's grasp and love of past literature, which is felt even when it is not visible.

Born in Edinburgh, Scotland, on March 8, 1859, Grahame was five when his mother, Bessie Grahame, died of scarlet fever, leaving her husband to care for their four children. James Cunningham Grahame, who suffered from depression and alcoholism, was ill-equipped for this role. He promptly sent Kenneth and his siblings, Helen, William, and Roland, to live with their maternal grandmother, an emotionally aloof but capable woman. Her home, called the Mount at Cookham Dene, was situated in Berkshire on the Thames River. There, as only a child thrown back on his resources can do, Grahame found compensatory joy in the countryside (as an adult he likewise would find joy in the recuperative power of words). Nature became his companion; it offset his feelings of dislocation and abandonment, and fueled a rich, imaginative inner world. In Berkshire, he experienced, like Mole in the book's opening chapter, "the joy of living and the delight of spring" (p. 7) and came face to face with the river, the book's central symbol of earthly paradise and, arguably, something even greater than the imagination:

It all seemed too good to be true. Hither and thither through the meadows he rambled busily, along the hedgerows, across the copses, finding everywhere birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting—everything happy, and progressive, and occupied.... He thought his happiness was complete when, as he meandered aimlessly along, suddenly he stood by the edge of a full-fed river. Never in his life had he seen a river before.... All was a-shake and a-shiver—glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated. By the side of the river he trotted as one trots, when very small, by the side of a man who holds one spellbound by exciting stories (p. 8).

Unfortunately, Grahame's stay at the Mount lasted only two years, for his grandmother moved to a new house in 1866, and soon after, his father summoned them home. That arrangement lasted less than a year; his father left them permanently and moved to France, where he died twenty years later.

penniless in a boarding house. Grahame never saw his father again except to reclaim his body and plan his funeral.

In 1868, at the age of nine, Grahame and his older brother, William, entered St. Edward's School in Oxford. After adjusting to the rigors of English public school life, Grahame distinguished himself as a scholar and athlete. He did this despite the emotional blow of William's death from a respiratory ailment in 1875. Grahame had every expectation of continuing his studies at Oxford after St. Edward's, but his grandmother and uncle had different ideas. His uncle arranged for him to work in London in his own firm of parliamentary agents in Westminster and later, in January 1879, as a gentleman clerk at the Bank of England.

Grahame made the best of a situation he did not choose or desire—he used his spare time afforded by banker's hours to explore London and become part of a coterie of writers surrounding the scholar Frederick James Furnivall. Furnivall founded the Early English Text Society and the New Shakespeare Society, both of which Grahame joined; in 1880 he became the honorary secretary of the New Shakespeare Society and began writing poems and prose, ostensibly in a long-lost bank ledger. Furnivall, one of Grahame's first critics, was as encouraging about his prose as he was discouraging about his verse.

Grahame now had access to an intellectual milieu he had craved and an outlet for his creativity, even as he dutifully reported to the bank, rising in its ranks over the next two decades to the impressive position of secretary of the Bank of England. By the time he received this appointment in 1898, he had buried his father, who died in 1887, traveled extensively in Europe, and published the three volumes that established his reputation, first as an essayist in *Pagan Papers* (1893), and then as an authority on childhood in *The Golden Age* (1895) and its sequel, *Dream Days* (1898).

The duality of Grahame's life as a banker and writer and the degree to which these two worlds were separate is arresting, although duality was a condition he'd been familiar with as a Scot living in England and as a young outsider in his grandmother's home. (It is said that when *The Golden Age* appeared, the governor of the bank thought Grahame was writing about bullion rather than the irretrievable days of childhood.) However much Grahame initially deplored working at the bank, he came to embrace it; it gave him a secure paycheck and freed him from any pressure of having to become a professional writer, which Grahame acknowledged would have been "torture." When he came to writing, he was, by his own admission, "a spring not a pump" (Green, Kenneth Grahame [1859-1932], p. 113; see "For Further Reading"). Writing for neither money nor fame (he was an intensely private man), Grahame's work grew out of personal need, which lent his enterprise a purity of motivation.

Pagan Papers, which is hardly known today, is a collection of essays that originally appeared anonymously in the *National Observer*, home to significant writers of the time such as Yeats, Conrad, James, and Shaw. Poet and playwright William Ernest Henley, perhaps best remembered for his poem "Invictus," was the editor. At Henley's suggestion, Grahame submitted a collection of his essays to John Lane at the Bodley Head Press, and it was published with a frontispiece by Aubrey Beardsley depicting the nature god Pan. The book received mixed reviews, some of which compared Grahame mostly unfavorably, to Robert Louis Stevenson. The essays contained some of Grahame's lifelong concerns, which would also be expressed in *The Wind in the Willows*: the romance of the road, the glory of nature, and the virtue of loafing. One of the essays, "The Rural Pan," even captures the spirit of the nature god Pan as he later appears in the book's seventh chapter, "The Piper at the Gates of Hell."

Dawn” : “In the hushed recesses of Hurley back water, where the canoe may be paddled almost under the tumbling comb of the weir, he is to be looked for; there the god pipes with freest abandonment. Here, for comparison, is the dramatic moment in *The Wind in the Willows* when Rat and Mole approach Pan:

In silence Mole rowed steadily, and soon they came to a point where the river divided, a long backwater branching off to one side. With a slight movement of his head Rat, who had long dropped the rudder-lines, directed the rower to take the backwater... Breathless and transfixed the Mole stopped rowing as the liquid run of that glad piping broke on him like a wave, caught him up, and possessed him utterly (pp. 85-86).

The Wind in the Willows proved to be the outgrowth and culmination of much of Grahame’s prior thought and work.

Grahame’s second book, *The Golden Age*, which Swinburne described as “too praiseworthy for praise” (Kuznets, Kenneth Grahame, p. 59) and *Dream Days*, which soon followed, marked a shift in technique and subject from those of *Pagan Papers*. Eschewing the essay form, Grahame adopted short fictional stories to address a single topic: childhood. The stories concern a Victorian family of five children, one of whom is the unnamed narrator reflecting on his youth. They highlight the disparity between the sensitive child in touch with the natural world and the dull, materialistic, adult Olympian estranged from nature and youth’s innocent pleasures. *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* are landmarks in the development of children’s literature for changing the status of the child. Where earlier the child was represented as being an ignorant, though trainable proto-adult, in Grahame’s books the child was a unique, indeed superior being, with ideas and needs distinct from those of grown-ups. Though not written for children, *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* portrayed childhood in a new way, and influenced the manner in which subsequent writers for children depicted them in fiction.

As an immediate literary descendant of the British Romantic poets, with their emphasis on childhood, subjective feeling, nature, and the imagination, Grahame was especially sympathetic to the poems of Wordsworth, whose *Prelude* recounts the poet’s growth from childhood to maturity and privileges childhood as the site of supreme sensibilities and union with the natural world. In his memoir, Elspeth Grahame claims that all of Grahame’s work is founded on the first stanza of Wordsworth’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood” (First Whispers of “*The Wind in the Willows*,” p. 26), wherein the poet laments his loss of the child’s glorious view of the earth. Wordsworth’s sentiments would have struck a chord in Grahame, who concludes “*The Olympians*,” an essay in *The Golden Age*, with the narrator’s Wordsworthian observation: “I certainly did once inhabit Arcady. Can it be that I too have become an Olympian?” Grahame’s response to this inevitable dilemma was to create his own Arcadia, which he later depicted brilliantly in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Besides the stories of the five children (Harold, Edward, Charlotte, Selina, and the narrator), *Dream Days* contains as the last entry a story within a story, now known in its own right as the children’s book *The Reluctant Dragon*. Grahame’s first biographer, Patrick Chalmers, calls it “the top note of a Kenneth Grahame’s articles and short stories” (Kenneth Grahame, p. 91). Published separately in 1931 after Grahame’s death and still in print today, the book depicts a resourceful, fearless child who reconciles Saint George with a peace-loving dragon by enlisting them in a mock battle, thus allaying the townspeople’s fears of the beast. The dragon, a “happy Bohemian,” who likes to laze in front of his

cave, enjoying sunsets and polishing his poems, stands as a tantalizing portent of the riverbank characters in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Grahame's evolution as a writer was steady, clear, and, in 1898, nearly complete, the arc of his development taking him from personal essays to short fiction about childhood to an actual children's story in "The Reluctant Dragon." Peter Green describes it as a rising and falling curve, the falling curve being that of self-conscious explicitness, "the openly stated theme, the deliberate literary quotation or allusion, the carefully ornate style" and the rising curve that of "unconscious, implicit symbolism and allegory which is practically non-existent in the early essays" (p. 265) but which becomes apparent in *The Wind in the Willows*. After *Dream Days*, the stage was set for Grahame's major work; his life's events, namely his marriage and the birth of his son, squared with his temperament to propel him.

Sometime in 1897 Grahame met Elspeth Thomson, who, at thirty-six, saw Grahame as an excellent catch. Though they shared some personal circumstances (both were from Edinburgh; both had three siblings; both lost a parent at an early age), they were ill-matched. Despite her artistic leanings, Elspeth was domineering, and the forty-year-old Grahame had been a bachelor for too long. If Elspeth had not set about securing him, he might have led a completely agreeable life on his own, like Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll. Instead, after an illness, perhaps when he was feeling particularly vulnerable, Grahame embarked on a precipitous, ultimately unhappy marriage to Elspeth. The date of the wedding was July 22, 1899; the following May, their son Alastair was born.

Alastair became the focus of his mother's life as Grahame retreated into his work at the bank, his love of boating, and his uncomplicated male friendships, particularly with Arthur Quiller-Couch, Edward Atkinson, and Graham Robertson. Alastair was born blind in one eye with a noticeable squint in the other. His mother compensated for this defect by celebrating her son's precocity and overlooking or repressing the disability that made him painfully different from his peers. Her overprotection and idealization of Alastair made it difficult for him to fit in at either public school or Christ Church, Oxford, which he later attended. In 1920, two years into his university education suffering emotional problems, Alastair was killed by a train; evidence suggests that his death was suicide. Grahame and Elspeth were devastated. Grahame lived the rest of his life in relative seclusion and never wrote anything of great significance again.

In the spring of 1906, however, Alastair's tragic end was distant and unimaginable. Grahame and his family had moved from London to Cookham Dene, the place of Grahame's happiest childhood memories.

Alastair was about the same age Grahame had been when he arrived at his grandmother's home. The memories flooded back. As he later told Constance Smedley, who encouraged him to write down the stories of Toad: "I feel I should never be surprised to meet myself as I was when a little chap of five suddenly coming round a corner.... I can remember everything I felt then, the part of my brain I use from four till about seven can never have altered" (Green, p. 17). Grahame's distinctive power as a writer for children stems from the immediate, vivid access he had to his past, the sensations and joy concretely expressed in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Smedley was the European representative of the American magazine *Everybody's*, which, she told Grahame, would want to publish the stories of Toad and Mole. If not for her coaxing, Grahame might never have conceived of them as a book. The manuscript he offered *Everybody's*, first called "Mr. Toad," then "The Wind in the Reeds," was rejected. After John Lane at Bodley Head also turned

down, Methuen reluctantly decided to publish it. In the United States, President Theodore Roosevelt, fan of Grahame's previous books and a convert to his new one thanks to his wife and children, was instrumental in getting Scribner's to do the same.

Chalmers fixes the origin of *The Wind in the Willows* to "one May evening in 1904," when Mrs. Grahame, after inquiring of her husband's whereabouts, was told by a member of the household staff he was upstairs with Alastair, "telling him some ditty or other about a toad" (p. 121). Elspeth Grahame reinforces this in her memoir, writing "but for Alastair ... there never would have been either Toad, Mole, Badger, Otter, or Ratty ... for the story would never have been told in the absence of such a listener" (p. 10).

Grahame recounted Toad's adventures to Alastair at bedtime as well as through letters during the months of May to September 1907, when they were separated. These letters, fifteen in all, which still exist and have been published in *My Dearest Mouse: "The Wind in the Willows" Letters*, contain a fragment of chapter 6 and most of chapters 8, 10, 11, and 12. The book appears to have been written in three discreet sections: the stories of Toad, followed by the stories of Rat and Mole, with the two chapters some critics single out as standing apart from the book in subject and tone, "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" and "Wayfarers All," coming last.

Elspeth's claim notwithstanding, what began as a bedtime story for Grahame's son soon became a story for the child in himself and a compensatory site of reclaimed joy. Grahame turned from his life's disappointments—his mother's death, his abandonment by his father, his uncle's refusal to send him to Oxford, his passionless marriage—and created an alternate reality, an animal fantasy set in a pastoral landscape, reminiscent of the one he'd loved as a child and marked by the strong bonds of male companionship. In this world, the animal characters who behave like people are sensitive to nature and each other; though danger lurks both in the Wild Wood and the Wide World, it is mastered or avoided altogether; and, significantly, death never intrudes.

For all the personal reasons Grahame had for creating *The Wind in the Willows*, the historic moment also exerted its force on him. A "mid-Victorian" (Green, p. 2), Grahame increasingly felt, as did many writers and artists of the day, the impact of the industrial revolution, with its loss of a rural agrarian economy and the ascendancy of a middle class dedicated to accumulating wealth. He felt that materialism and the accelerated pace of life had robbed man of a soul, had domesticated life's miracles, and forced man to neglect the animal side of his nature, all themes he had previously explored in his essays. Ambivalent about social change, a reflection of which is perhaps found in Grahame's pitting the Wild-wooders against the River-bankers, Grahame took refuge in his writing. Like other authors of the "golden age of children's literature," roughly the years from 1860 to 1910, he outwardly conformed to society's standards. Though these were standards he criticized openly in *Pagan Papers* and indirectly in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, in *The Wind in the Willows* he subsumed his critique in a fantasy whose rejection of everyday reality in favor of an alternate one can be read as a fundamental rebellion against the norms.

Like Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, and J. M. Barrie, Grahame found solace in the world of fantasy he created out of recollected childhood memories, many of which were bound up with nature. Indeed he preferred the world of nature to that of people. Like Walt Whitman, who praised the virtues of animals in *Leaves of Grass*, a work Grahame knew and admired, he favored animals for what they could teach people about how to live in the world.

In *The Wind in the Willows*, the animal characters appear inherently superior to the human ones.

They have more discriminating senses, as Mole shows in his keen ability to recognize his home through his sense of smell. Badger's home, built upon the remnants of a human dwelling, implies the triumph of the animal kingdom over human civilization; it attests to the futility of man's endeavors. As he tells Mole, "They were a powerful people, and rich, and great builders. They built to last, for they thought their city would last for ever... People come—they stay for a while, they flourish, they build—and they go. It is their way. But we remain" (p. 52). Grahame's view of human folly, expressed through Badger's conversation with Mole, is reminiscent of the Romantic poet Shelley's in his famous sonnet "Ozymandias," which Grahame would have known.

Explaining his preference for animals, Grahame once said, "As for animals, I wrote about the most familiar and domestic in *The Wind in the Willows* because I felt a duty to them as a friend. Every animal, by instinct, lives according to its nature. Thereby he lives wisely, and betters the tradition of mankind. No animal is ever tempted to belie its nature. No animal ... knows how to tell a lie" (Finch Whispers of "The Wind in the Willows," p. 28).

We sense Grahame's deep appreciation for his animal characters on every page of *The Wind in the Willows*. While Grahame borrowed certain characteristics from people he knew in creating them (Grahame himself has been identified with Mole and Alastair with Toad), much of Grahame's sympathy for these animals comes from having observed them in the wild, as both a child and an adult. On one occasion, he rescued a mole and brought it inside in a box to show Alastair, only to have it escape during the night and die under the maid's broom the following morning. In 1898, in his introduction to *A Hundred Fables of Aesop* (from the English version of Sir Roger L'Estrange with pictures by Percy J. Billingham), he objected to the use of animal characters for man's moral didactic purposes. Perhaps for this reason, though Grahame's characters behave in anthropomorphic ways—boating on the river, enjoying picnics, driving motor cars—they also retain their animal features. Mole, Toad, and Rat, for instance, have paws, not hands; and the barge-woman reacts to Toad as a woman might to an unwelcome "horrid, nasty, crawly" (pp. 124, 126) amphibian, tossing him by fore-leg and a hind-leg into the water.

One of the most felicitous examples of Grahame's fusion of animal and human comes in the fanciful concept of animal etiquette he advances throughout the book. While borrowing the concept of etiquette from the human realm, he infuses it with the imagined concerns of animals:

The Mole knew well that it is quite against animal-etiquette to dwell on possible trouble ahead, even to allude to it (p. 12).

Animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever (p. 15).

No animal, according to the rules of animal-etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous, heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter (p. 45).

This duality of Grahame's characters and the contradiction sometimes involved in their possession of both animal and human traits has troubled some readers. The obvious disparity in size when the animals interact with human characters (Toad and the barge-woman, for instance) has bewildered some illustrators. For others, like A. A. Milne, who adopted Grahame's book for the stage in 1929, these apparent inconsistencies pose no serious problem. As he writes in his introduction to the play, Toad of

Toad Hall: “In reading the book it is necessary to think of Mole ... sometimes as an actual mole ... sometimes as a mole in human clothes, sometimes as a mole grown to human size, sometimes walking on two legs, sometimes on four. He is a mole, he isn’t a mole. What is he? I don’t know. And, not being a matter-of-fact person, I don’t mind” (Chalmers, p. 137). Grahame himself, who retained access to the child’s perspective, wrote regarding this “problem” : “It is the special charm of the child’s point of view that the dual nature of these characters does not present the slightest difficulty to them.... To the child, it is entirely natural and as it should be” (Green, p. 258). By not pinning the characters down as either wholly one thing or another, he gives room for the reader’s free imaginative play, an appropriate feature given that the book is a fantasy.

In the final analysis, Grahame is pursuing truths more significant than whether or not a toad can credibly wear the clothes of a washerwoman, as he does so humorously in chapter 8. He is concerned with human nature and its dualities—in his own case, the love of home vying with the lure of adventure, depicted in “Wayfarers All”; the need for pleasure at odds with a sense of duty, reflected in Mole’s rejection of spring cleaning for a spring outing at the start of the book; and always the wish for freedom contrasted with the rule of self-control, expressed in Toad’s mostly futile struggle to reform himself.

Grahame is also interested in reflecting our common human-ness, and, in this respect, children as well as adults can relate to his characters. Who, like Mole, has not enjoyed the thrill of throwing off domestic chores for an adventure outside (p. 7) or experienced something similar to Mole’s terror in the Wild Wood (pp. 33-34)? Who has not acted impetuously like Mole when he grabs the sculls from the Rat, tumping over the boat (p. 16), and then experienced the relief and beneficence of a friend’s forgiveness (p. 17)? Who cannot enjoy Toad’s exuberant boastfulness, his incorrigibility, and his fleeting obsessions, even though, as every child and adult knows, Toad is a perfect example of how not to behave?

As easy as it is to identify with these characters—the poetic river Rat, the loyal, home-loving Mole, the asocial Badger, the impetuous Toad—Grahame’s twin themes of home and adventure are universal, too. The best sort of adventure, the book suggests, is the adventure that teaches us about ourselves. Toad, of course, has mindless adventures that land him in trouble. Though he has flashes of self-perception, he never really learns from experience. He abuses the trust and patience of his friends. However, Mole is a creature who does take something away from experience. After his desired, but terrifying trip into the Wild Wood, he knows he is “an animal of tilled field and hedgerow, linked to the ploughed furrow, the frequented pasture, the lane of evening lingerings, the cultivated garden plot” (p. 54). Similarly, after laying claim to the delightful world of the riverbank and returning to his underground home, he realizes how much home means to him (p. 68). Rat’s brush with the Wild World in “Wayfarers All” suggests that, as tempting as travel is, it is not ultimately worth the cost of one’s home.

In *The Wind in the Willows*, home is important to each character, and each character defines home differently. For Rat, home is the river: “It’s brother and sister to me, and aunts, and company, and food and drink, and (naturally) washing. It’s my world, and I don’t want any other” (p. 11). For Badger and Mole, home is underground. As Mole says, “Once well underground ... you know exactly where you are. Nothing can happen to you, and nothing can get at you. You’re entirely your own master” (p. 50). For Toad, whose attachments are more transient and superficial, home is Toad Hall, a “self-contained gentleman’s residence, very unique; dating in part from the fourteenth century, but replete with every modern convenience” (p. 94). Though he speaks like a realtor showing a fine property, Toad is as attached to his home as his friends are to theirs; we see this in his urgency to reclaim

from the stoats and weasels in the last chapter. Anyone who has been homesick will recognize and relish Mole's return home in "Dulce Domum," especially after his anguish at missing it, expressed in such poignant terms:

Now, with a rush of old memories, how clearly it stood up before him, in the darkness! Shabby indeed and small and poorly furnished, and yet his, the home he had made for himself, the home he had been so happy to get back to after his day's work. And the home had been happy with him, too, evidently, and was missing him, and wanted him back, and was telling him so, through his nose, sorrowfully and reproachfully, but with no bitterness or anger; only with plaintive reminder that it was there, and wanted him (p. 57).

In such a passage, we feel the weight of the author's own feeling and, bringing to it our own experience, recognize its fundamental truth and beauty. It is impossible not to be moved by Grahame's characters, who, though animals, are so like ourselves.

Woven throughout the plots involving home and adventure is the timeless theme of friendship, characterized by loyalty, mutual concern, bravery, and affection. It is illustrated early on in Rat's search for Mole in the Wild Wood and, later, in his insistence that they find Mole's home. It is exemplified in the way Rat and Mole help find Otter's son, Portly, in "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" and the persistent manner in which Mole urges Rat to remain by the river rather than follow the seafaring rat in "Wayfarers All." Perhaps there is no higher model for friendship than that exemplified by Rat, Mole, and Badger as they help the infuriating, ungrateful Toad reform and return home. One question that always arises in my children's literature class is why, after all, they put up with Toad's impossible schemes and bad behavior. As Rat says, "You don't deserve to have such true and loyal friends" (p. 143). Yet isn't that the point? If friendship doesn't strain itself, even to the breaking point, if it doesn't suffer all, is it friendship? The book's answer seems to be no.

When *The Wind in the Willows* was published in October 1908, with a jacket and frontispiece designed by Graham Robertson (the book was not illustrated until the 1913 edition), reviewers were put off. They did not understand the new tack Grahame had taken, and, frankly, they preferred his previous books about childhood written for adults rather than what seemed to be an animal story for children. One of the most perceptive comments about the book came from Richard Middleton in *Vanity Fair*: "The book ... is notable for its intimate sympathy with Nature and for its delicate expression of emotions which I, probably in common with most people, had previously believed to be my exclusive property. When all is said, the boastful, unstable Toad, the hospitable Water Rat, the shy, wise, childlike Badger, and the Mole with his pleasant habit of brave boyish impulse, are neither animals nor men, but are types of that deeper humanity which sways us all.... *The Wind in the Willows* is a wise book" (quoted in Green, p. 259).

This view, however, was a minority one. Most critics dismissed it, as did George Sampson, who patronizingly described it in *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* as a "series of imaginative nature sketches." The initial dislike of the book was joined with a general suspicion that it must hide a secondary meaning. Grahame disclaimed any thought that it was satire or allegorical writing that it was "a book for Youth, and those who still keep the spirit of youth alive in them" (p. 145). On October 10, 1908, in response to a fan letter from President Theodore Roosevelt, he wrote about *The Wind in the Willows*: "Its qualities, if any, are mostly negative—i.e., no problems, no sex, no second meaning—it is only an expression of the simplest joys of life as lived by the simplest being" (Green, p. 274).

Certainly the book is more complex than Grahame's letter admits, given its war between the entitled river-bankers (could that be a pun?) and the upstart weasels and stoats of the Wild Wood. Many have seen this as a projection of Grahame's own social fears, his apprehension that the whole order might be destroyed through social change. It is of note that in November 1903, a deranged man with socialist beliefs entered the bank and threatened Grahame with a gun, thereby solidifying the author's political conservatism.

This, however, could not explain Toad's offensive class consciousness, revealed not only in how he dresses and lives, but in how he treats people, particularly the barge-woman, whom he considers himself inferior by virtue of her class and sex. Rat's assessment of Toad's behavior in the book's penultimate chapter indicates a sexism that arguably pervades the book in its near absence of female characters. "Now, Toady ... don't you see what an awful ass you've been making of yourself? On your own admission you have been handcuffed, imprisoned, starved, chased, terrified out of your life, insulted, jeered at, and ignominiously flung into the water—by a woman, too!" (p. 137). Some of this Grahame would not have even been conscious of. The book is not primarily a social parable. However, he did realize he was writing a fantasy of the kind of world he would have wished to inhabit, an Arcadia where the paternal squirearchy ruled, assuring the pastoral leisure life they (and Grahame) were accustomed to, but which seemed to be disappearing. The specificity of this imagined world, drawn from Grahame's experience and longing, give the book its singular, memorable vision.

That critics have disagreed about the book from 1908 to the present day is a tribute to its complexity and explains its lasting power. Its depth and texture has lent itself to multiple critical readings from the 1970s onward, when children's literature became an active field of study. Journals like *Children's Literature* and the *Horn Book Magazine* have published articles on Grahame's book from feminist, formalist, and historical perspectives, among others.

One observation commonly made is that the book's construction is fundamentally flawed, being split between two stories: one about Rat and Mole, the other about Toad, with extraneous chapters ("The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" and "Wayfarers All") tacked on. A close reading of the first chapter, however, shows that all the seeds of the book's later developments are planted there. Every significant character is either introduced or referred to. We glimpse Toad in his "brand-new wage-boat" (p. 14) and learn that he is predisposed to whims and excesses, the full development of which begins in the next chapter as Rat and Mole accompany him in his gipsy caravan. At the same time, the themes of home, adventure, and friendship are set in play through Mole's exploration of the river bank with Rat. The theme of nature's beauty and goodness, evident in chapter 1, finds its apotheosis in Pan's appearance to Rat and Mole in "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn." Similarly, the lure of adventure, measured against the ties of home, suggested in chapter 1 by Mole's departure for the river bank, is more fully explored in "Dulce Domum" and its antithesis, "Wayfarers All," in which Rat is tempted to travel south. Far from being extraneous or incompatible with the other chapters, "The Piper at the Gates of Dawn" and "Wayfarers All" manifest a deepening of subject and tone that are present elsewhere.

In this respect, *The Wind in the Willows* operates the way a long prose poem might, with elements introduced, then later developed and deepened—a fitting suggestion given that Rat is a poet and that one of the book's ongoing concerns is Mole's initiation into the world of the imagination and art through his experiences with Rat and the river. Though he admits early in the book that he is "no poet himself" (p. 20), Mole speaks in similes after his vision of Pan, comparing "the wind playing in the reeds" to "far-away music" (p. 91). He understands the compensatory, therapeutic role of poetry.

Rat's life, and offers him pencil, paper, and solitude in the wake of the seafaring rat's departure.

That Grahame connected poetry with landscape is evident in his preface to *The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children*, first published in 1916. There he describes "the whole range of English poetry" as a "wide domain, with its woodland glades, its pasture and arable, its walled and scented gardens here and there" (p. xiii). Grahame's knowledge of the Romantic poets, with their attention to landscape as the site of imaginative experience, squared with his own love of the countryside. He poured all of his affection for nature, his love and knowledge of literature, and his longing for an ideal world into *The Wind in the Willows*. We can still respond to the world he created, even in the twenty-first century—or especially now.

Grahame's contribution to children's literature is immense. The very element that critics did not understand when *The Wind in the Willows* was published has made it a classic. Grahame created the first novel-length animal fantasy, the roots of which reached back to Aesop's fables, gained energy from Beatrix Potter's contemporaneous tales about Peter Rabbit, and blossomed into a mature, new form, foreshadowing later permutations like Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Adams's *Watership Down*, and White's *Charlotte's Web*.

Milne, an unqualified admirer of Grahame's work, called *The Wind in the Willows* a "Household Book ... a book which everybody in the household loves." C. S. Lewis wrote in an essay first published in the October 1963 *Horn Book Magazine* that it was the brilliant kind of story that expressed things without explaining them; Lewis pointed to the description of Badger: "that extraordinary amalgam of high rank, coarse manners, gruffness, shyness, and goodness. The child who has once met Mr. Badger has ever afterwards, in his bones, a knowledge of humanity and of English social history which he could not get in any other way." When asked to write his reminiscences, Grahame characteristically replied: "Reminiscences? I have none." But, of course, they were already written down and transformed in his best-known book. Kenneth Grahame died on July 6, 1932; he fell asleep by his much-loved river, reading Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman*. This is a closure with symmetry, since the house he was born in at 32 Castle Street in 1859 was directly across from one Scott had inhabited two decades before. The proximity of his birthplace to Scott's could not have escaped Grahame's attention. Perhaps even in his youth the man who later claimed he wanted only to "build a noble sentence" knew he would become a writer. Early on, Kenneth Grahame found what he wanted to say, and, in *The Wind in the Willows*, he found the best way of saying it.

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