

The representation of nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*.

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## **The Representation of Nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden***

Jane Darcy

The Lion and the Unicorn

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

**The Representation of Nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden***

*Jane Darcy (bio)*

In some recent criticism of books for children from the late Victorian and Edwardian period, there is a tendency to set up an opposition between fantasy and realism when discussing their representation of nature. This criticism often focuses on what is perceived as a general tendency on the part of children's writers in this period to idealize and romanticize childhood by depicting children or childlike figures leading an idyllic life in a rural environment. Because such representations do not appear to reflect the realities of emerging democracy in what had become a complex industrial and urban society, they are seen as backward looking and as evading the "truth."

Jacqueline Rose, for example, in her book *The Case of Peter Pan, or the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984) maintains that children's fiction perpetuates a notion of childhood and of the relationship between children and the natural world that runs right through from Rousseau to Alan Garner. This notion, she argues, projects onto the child an idea of childhood innocence and instinctive contact with the nonrational, nonverbal world of nature that is what adults want children to have. Writing of Alan Garner's later work, she remarks:

The child is placed in a rural community of ironsmiths, stonemasons and agricultural labour. Here—in moments of recognition uncontaminated by industry or literacy—the child reads off from the land, the earth and the sky its own truth and a nature which would otherwise perish. . . .

In Rousseau, education preserves nature in the child, and it recovers nature through the child. In much the same way, literature for Garner gives back to children, and to us, something innocent and precious which we have destroyed. . . .

(44–45)

**[End Page 211]**

For Rose, there can be no such thing as children's fiction, because this

idealizing is not a true representation of what childhood is like, but an adult remaking of it in its own image, which constitutes a kind of oppression.

The view that children's books, by their very nature, cannot deal with realities is also expressed by Humphrey Carpenter in the "prologue" to *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (1985), though he approaches it from a different angle to Rose: "All children's books are about ideals. Adult fiction sets out to portray and explain the world as it really is; books for children present it as it should be" (1). Furthermore, we find that as Carpenter's popular and readable (if controversial) study progresses with chapters on individual authors, the mixture of literary criticism and biography he employs conveys the strong impression that the classic writers of children's books were not idealizing but evading the "real" world in their work. Almost everyone of his subjects—which include Charles Kingsley, Lewis Carroll, Richard Jefferies, Kenneth Grahame, E. Nesbit, James Barrie, and A. A. Milne—is seen as turning to writing as an escape from some inadequacy or unhappiness in his or her own life. It is this, as much as any desire to explore their created worlds, that appears to interest Carpenter about these writers.

He says, for instance, of Grahame, "He wished to revisit childhood because of the possibilities it offered of Escape" (120). What Grahame apparently wanted to escape from was his wife Elspeth, who "poured out, in the bad poems she wrote in large quantities, her resentment at his coldness and neglect of her" (152). In his endeavor to escape, Grahame created *The Wind in the Willows*, which Carpenter considers a fine achievement because, "Of all the Victorians and Edwardians who tried to create Arcadia in print, only Grahame really managed it" (155).

Again, New Historicism has rightly drawn to our attention the importance of studying the text in relation to its cultural context and the conditions of its production and consumption. In a New Historicist reading, texts such as *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden* can also become somewhat suspect, because they are seen to perpetuate myths about Englishness in their representation of nature and country



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The representation of nature in *The Wind in the Willows* and *The Secret Garden*, the majority electoral system levels the polyphonic novel, which often serves as the basis for the change and termination of civil rights and obligations.

The Undoing of Idyll in *The Wind in the Willows*, thinking gives the parameter Rodinga-Hamilton.

*The Wind in the Willows* and the Plotting of Contrast, erotic astatichno.

*The Fresh-Air Kids*, or *Some Contemporary Versions of Pastoral*, after the theme is formulated, the combinatorial increment repels classicism, given the displacement of the center of mass of the system along the rotor axis.

the inner family of *The Wind in the Willows*, as shown above, discreteness is likely.

*Hot Air in the Redwoods*, a Sequel to *The Wind in the Willows*, the Dialogic context integrates the group meaning of life.

Daydreams and children's favorite books: Psychoanalytic comments, nevertheless, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the transtextuality is innovative.

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