

Book Review: The Wind in the Willows

Author: Kenneth Grahame

A sentimental British favourite, *The Wind in the Willows* is a far more interesting book than its popular and often very young audience might suggest.

In 1899, Grahame married and had one child, a boy named Alastair who was troubled with health problems and a difficult personality, culminating in the boy's eventual suicide, the cause of much parental anguish. In 1908, Grahame retired from his job at a Bank so he could concentrate on the stories he had been telling his son, the stories of the Thames riverbank on which Grahame himself had grown up. So *The Wind in the Willows* is a tale steeped in nostalgia, and inspired by a father's obsessive love for his only son.

Within the text, the reader discovers two tales, interwoven. There are, famously, the adventures of Mole, Ratty, Badger and Toad with the canary-coloured caravan, the succession of motor cars, and the climactic battle for Toad Hall. At the same time, there are Grahame's lyrical explorations of home life, river life and childhood itself.

Above all, *The Wind in the Willows* powerfully evokes the turning seasons of the English countryside, from the riverbank in summer to the rolling open road, but also through its hints of an imminent class struggle from the inhabitants (stoats and weasels) of the Wild Wood. It does so with rich characterisation, stunning set-pieces and wonderful humour from the very first page.

The Wind in the Willows deserves recognition as a novel in which all readers (children and adults) will find wisdom, humour, entertainment and meaning, as well as many passages of great literary power, together with characters who live on as legendary figures in English literacy.

Reviewed by: Mr. Newell