

The Wind in the Willows

Class 1

Important points

Extra Information

Kenneth Grahame, Rat, and Mole

When Kenneth Grahame wrote The Wind in the Willows, he fashioned two of the characters after himself: the Water-Rat and the Mole. The Rat was a picture of what Grahame wished his life was like while the Mole symbolizes Grahame's actual life. The Rat spent his days living by the River, sailing on it and writing poems about it. As he himself says:

"[The River is] 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. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing" (pg. 10-11).



Kenneth Grahame

Grahame wanted to live his whole life by the river, like Rat, but unfortunately for him, he did not. So the Rat is an image of how Grahame wanted to live. The Mole, on the other hand, first comes out into the light at the beginning of the book. He had lived underground most of his life, very secluded, with few acquaintances. Not really a bad life, but definitely not living life completely. When he meets the River, and the life around the River, he is completely entranced:

"Never in his life had he seen a river before - this sleek, sinuous, full-bodied animal, chasing and chuckling, gripping things with a gurgle and leaving them with a laugh, to fling itself on fresh playmates that shook themselves free, and were caught and held again. All was a-shake and a-shiver - glints and gleams and sparkles, rustle and swirl, chatter and bubble. The Mole was bewitched, entranced, fascinated" (pg. 7).

This is how Grahame actually lived: separated from the River for most of his life, but finally returning to it in the end.

The Badger and his Home

"'Very Long ago,' [said the Badger,] 'on the spot where the Wild Wood waves now, before ever it had planted itself and grown up to what it now is, there was

a city – a city of people, you know. Here, where we are standing, they lived, and walked, and talked, and slept, and carried on their business. Here they stabled their horses and feasted, from here they rode out to fight or drove out to trade. They were a powerful people, and rich, and great builders. They built to last, for they thought their city would last forever.’

‘But what has become of them all?’ asked the Mole.

‘Who can tell?’ said the Badger. ‘People come – they stay for awhile, they flourish, they build – and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There badgers here, I’ve been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be.’”

– Chapter 4 Mr. Badger, pg. 65-66



The home of Badger is unique among the homes of his friends, because it is symbolic of civilization. Badger lived in a home built over the ruins of an ancient city. You see, every once in a while, there are people who come together and form a society that becomes a vast civilization. They build massive cities they think will last forever. And when they become an empire, they begin to believe that they can control those things that don’t change, such as truth and justice. After all the work they did to build their civilization, they assume that they can now rebuild truth; they think they can redefine what is right and what is wrong. So, according to them, they could say that murder is no longer wrong or that stealing is ok if certain people do it. However, they can never really change what is true. Time eventually wins out and they will sink into obscurity.

Centuries ago, long before the Romans, the Celts were the strongest group in Europe, with cities from the British Isles to the shores of the Mediterranean. Today the Celts are little more than a legend. The Mayans in South America built an Empire that was more technologically advanced than the Romans but now all that is left of them are ruins. In the east, there once was a great Mongol Horde, a vast army of men and horses that conquered most of Asia, from Siberia, to Turkey. Now the only things of the Horde that exist are stories. The one thing that still exists after all this time, however, is truth. People are constantly trying to change it, but thousands of years after they are gone it still exists. In this part of the



story, Badger is a symbol of this truth and his house represents all those civilizations and peoples who tried to change it.

Mr. Toad and Motorcars

When Mr. Toad becomes addicted to motorcars, he falls from the common sense and honor that is maintained by his friends. Badger, in his attempt to cure him, tells him:

“You’re disregarding all the warnings we’ve given you, you’ve gone on squandering the money your father left you, and you’re getting us animals a bad name in the district by your furious driving and your smashes and your rows with the police. Independence is all very well but we animals never allow our friends to make fools of themselves beyond a certain limit; and that limit you’ve reached.” (pg 91-92)

Similar to what occurred during the decline of Victorian England, Toad’s convictions have been eroded and it is up to his friends to help him. In this aspect, Toad is like England, during the decline of the Victorian Era: he falls from the honor and sense that formerly he had more or less followed. But unlike England which never recovered from this decline, Toad is eventually saved. So once again, we see Grahame writing about England has he wanted it to be, but never was.