Idle Worship: Kenneth Grahame's Literary Paganism

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the works of Kenneth Grahame in light of what some critics have deemed “literary paganism”. I argue that Grahame employs certain “pagan” tropes in order to launch a critique of modern culture. Grahame upholds a classical vision of leisure that rejects the ideology inherent to urbanization. His challenge to modernity relies on a literary persona indicative of an alternative attitude to that of the middle class fin de siècle urban culture. His short stories add to this critique in their presentation of childhood as a pre-converted pagan existence which en-kindles a sense of disappointment with routinized adult life in the modern city. *The Wind in the Willows* embodies Grahame’s vision of true leisure as it is depicted in both the River Bank animals and their wetland ecosystem itself. By paying close attention to the pagan themes in Grahame’s writing, we gain a comprehensive view of his often misunderstood body of work.

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Introduction

> *"You must please remember that a theme, a thesis, a subject, is in most cases little more than a sort of clothes-line, on which one pegs a string of ideas, questions, allusions, and so on, one's mental undergarments, of all shapes and sizes, some possibly fairly new, but most rather old and patched; and they dance and sway in the breeze, and flap and flutter, or hang limp and lifeless; and some are ordinary enough, and some are of a rather private and intimate shape, and rather give the owner away, and show up his or her peculiarities. And owing to the invisible clothes-line they seem to have some connexion and continuity"* - Kenneth Grahame (quoted in Green 239)

1859, the year of Kenneth Grahame's birth, was a year of wonder on the land, from the sea, and in the heavens[1]. Big Ben chimed for the first time (The Canadian Press 2009); the sea-horse was put on display at the London Fish House (Holdsworth 25), and the world witnessed the biggest solar storm in recorded history (Guhathakurta 165). During his lifetime, technological innovation promised to make modern life more convenient, more comfortable, and more efficient than ever before: the telephone, electric lamp, typewriter, vacuum cleaner, Caterpillar tractor, refrigerator, and of course, the motor car were all produced between 1859 and 1932 (Hudson 115-6). In an age of such technological progress, Grahame's work, which is often associated with a kind of wonder and whimsy, expresses deep disillusionment with the emerging modernized world.

In "The Romance of the Rail", for instance, he writes that "the crowning wrong" of industrialism is its "annihilation of the steadfast mystery of the horizon, so that the imagination no longer begins to work at the point where vision ceases" (22). Grahame suggests that the train itself poses a threat to the imagination: once we can overtake the horizon we may inevitably desensitize ourselves to wonder.

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[1] This year was also a productive one for English literature. Along with Grahame, that *annus mirabilis* saw

Advancements in transportation are not the only stifling aspect of modernity. Grahame writes contemptuously on the intrusive nature of certain social institutions which seem to affect aesthetic appreciation in negative ways. In “Cheap Knowledge”, for example, he complains that public libraries have begun to produce in their patron a “cloyed and congested mind”, which is due in part to the atmosphere. Grahame writes that the “the stillness and the heavy air, the feeling of restriction and surveillance, the mute presence of these other readers” in the Library “combine to set up a nervous irritation fatal to quiet study (331). For Grahame, then, the “progress” is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the subject is dazzled by modern inventions, such as the railroad. Such technological innovations can make wonder obsolete, dulling the imagination. On the other, standardized tastes, which are promoted and upheld by seemingly innocuous institutions such as public libraries coerce the individual into a willful complacency with industrialist utilitarianism. Under such conditions, Grahame worried that the human spirit was becoming a servant of what I will call the urban industrial complex.[2]

In this thesis project, I will examine four of Grahame five major publications: *Pagan Papers*, *The Golden Age* and its sequel *Dream Days*, and, of course, his most famous work, *The Wind in the Willows*. My central interest is in the rhetorical style and ‘pagan’ content of Grahame’s work. These aspects of his writing have received some very insightful scholarly attention by Lois Kuznets, Peter Green, Patricia Merivale, and more recently William Greenslade. A more detailed consideration of these defining features of Grahame’s writing will serve to increase scholarly understanding of his

[2] Grahame never refers to such a threat explicitly, but as I will demonstrate later in this project, by careful study of his prose essays, we can uncover the source of his anxiety.

literary endeavors, as well as to shed some light on his earlier works which have received scant critical attention. In this introductory chapter, I will outline some of the main trends in relevant scholarship, present the defining attributes of Grahame's literary paganism, and briefly summarize each chapter of my thesis.

Kenneth Grahame's Critical Legacy[3]

Jackie C. Horne and Donna R. Wright's *Kenneth Grahame's The Wind in the Willows: A Children's Classic at 100* (2010) is the most recent full length study of Grahame's work, and as the title suggests, the essays in the collection deal solely with Grahame's enduring animal tale as a staple of "children's literature"[4]. Along with the several fascinating engagements with Grahame's work in light of certain contemporary scholarly issues, the collection is notable for a thorough introduction which covers trends among critics who have explored Grahame's writing. First and foremost is the "biocritical" interest inherited from Grahame's most influential biographer, Peter Green (XVII). Critics who adopt this approach "analy[se] the novel in terms of Grahame's unhappy life", for they see reflected in Grahame's depiction of the River Bank world, the ideal place to which he could "escape [from] his deeply disappointing personal troubles" (XVIII). Another focal point of criticism lies in the attempt to determine more precisely the nature of Grahame's narrative strategies with regard to his child-audience (Horne

[3] Three biographies have been published since Grahame's death, the first by Patrick Chalmers in 1933, the second, and by far most influential, by Peter Green (1959), and Alison Prince's *An Innocent in the Wild Wood* in 1994. There have also been two broad studies of Grahame's work, the first by Eleanor Graham in 1963, and another by Lois Kuznets in 1987.

[4] There is a dearth of scholarly material directly concerned with his pre-*Willows* publications. I have tried to incorporate what has been written on these works, where it is relevant. For the most part, I have applied interpretive arguments made about *Willows* to Grahame's other works, when it is appropriate.

and Wright XVII).[5] This critical revaluation stems from the fact that *The Wind in the Willows* grew out of a series of bedtime stories Grahame told to his son. Also, the novel has long been marketed exclusively as a "children's book", (and continues to be, despite its declining appeal to children, which is indicated by the number of abridged, misrepresented, or even rewritten editions available to the general public[6]). Horne and Wright specify a related trend, which seeks to place Grahame's fiction in a more general category by "linking it to literature for adults", such as the works of Shakespeare, Homer, or The Romantics (XVIII).

A recurring note sounded in Grahame scholarship is that he is either essentially an 'escapist' author; this point-of-view is most ardently advocated by Peter Hunt, Robert Hemmings, and Robert Dingley.[7] For example, Peter Hunt writes that "Grahame is relentlessly repressive, turning to fantasy to preserve the idyllic, male-centered escapist society," a notion which he supports by pointing out that "the biographies of Grahame paint a picture of a man attempting to escape from an increasingly unstable world - a world of radical sexual, political and social change" (177-8). Likewise, U.C. Knoepflmacher argues in "Oscar Wilde at Toad Hall: Kenneth Grahame's Drainings and Draggings," that *Willows* can be read as Grahame's "attempt to distance himself from the Aesthetic Movement with which he had once been identified," (1) and that by lampooning the then recently demonized figure of Oscar Wilde in the guise of the

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[5] Aspects of this line of argument still have influence. See Robert Hemmings "A Taste of Nostalgia: Children's Books from the Golden Age-Carroll, Grahame, and Milne, and Lawrence Buell "Environmental Writing for Children: A selected Reconnaissance of Heritages, Emphases, Horizons"

[6] Such as the Candlewick Illustrated Classics edition of 2009 which is both heavily abridged and rewritten to appeal to younger readers, or The Cider Mill Press edition, also heavily abridged.

[7] See Peter Hunt "An Adult's' Book, a Children's Book, a Palimpsest: The Wind in the Willows and Three Men in a Boat" and Robert Dingley Meaning Everything: The Image of Pan at the Turn of the Century." *Twentieth Century Fantasies: Essays on Culture Society and Belief in Twentieth Century Mythopoetic Literature*

extravagant Mr. Toad, Grahame found a way to protect his “spotless reputation as an English squire” (14). For Knoepflmacher, the escape Grahame makes is from his own past in order to preserve his notoriety as a gentleman author. R.L. Platzner argues that through his fiction Grahame explores child experiences as a form of “evasion for the grown-up who cannot bear to relinquish the child inside him” (85). Taking this point further, John David Moore reduces Grahame’s aesthetic project in *Willows* to a fantasy where “(o)ne can be a childlike old boy animal lost in a series of equally valuable moments - writing mediocre verse, messing about in boats, strolling the country lanes” (59).

What each of these criticisms has in common is an ultimately reductive dismissal of Grahame’s works. Seth Lerer makes a welcome intervention in the criticism when he identifies an important gap in Grahame scholarship. He writes that, in spite of wide critical interest “*The Wind in the Willows* has not been the object of close textual study […] his work has not been subject to the explications of more modern scholars, seeking to find history and philology, knowledge and insight in his writings” (2). Lerer’s point seems to have been taken in more recent times. In the last six years critics such as, R.B. Gill, Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, Donna R. White, and Sarah Wadsworth have all found in Grahame’s novel both stylistic nuance and deep insight. For instance, Gill’s study focuses on the “worldview of romance” captured in *Willows* (168). He sees the novel as a manifesto-like experiment in genre which articulates a vision of the good life. Harris-McCoy and White track Grahame’s engagement with classical sources such as Virgil, Homer, and Marcus Aurelius. Sarah Wadsworth finds in *Willows* a source of literary engagement with the late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourse

around inebriation and addiction. While these are all welcome additions to scholarship, the critical task of showing how Grahame modulates narrative voice in order to articulate his distinctive aesthetic vision has yet to be completed. I propose to contribute modestly to this ongoing project by re-assessing Grahame's literary paganism.

Method and Approach

As Lois Kuznets notes, Grahame creates a "'persona[8]', a special voice for his narrator, whose true nature and intent are hard to capture and analyse" (42). Kuznets finds that our comprehension of Grahame's essays "depend very much on the reader's mood and willingness to accept the narrator's point of view, riding the tide of its rapid changes in terms not only of what is being contemplated, but also of the level of seriousness with which it is being contemplated" (42). James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz's rhetorical approach can help us to make sense of the labyrinthine style, not only of the essays, but also of his writing in general. Such an approach allows us to contextualize and assess his contribution to literary paganism and his critique of modernity.

I draw on Phelan and Rabinowitz notions of "the implied author". This figure is a literary construction, "who communicates through the myriad choices… that he or she makes in composing and revising a narrative" (31). As Phelan and Rabinowitz recommend, this rhetorical approach is used "not to determine the conscious intentions of the actual author […] but rather to discern the system of intentionality that explains why the text has [its] particular shape rather than some other one" (32). A narratological

[8] Kuznets finds this persona to be a key aspect of Grahame's essays, but I believe her insights can be applied to his prose fictions as well.

investigation of Grahame's literary paganism can help unveil the "system of intentionality"[9] which establishes coherency in and among Grahame's works. This approach draws our attention to rhetorical flourishes which can obscure the latent content of his writing by relating his stylistic choices with 'pagan' themes and tropes employed in response to the intellectual climate in which it was created.

It should be pointed out from the outset that when I use the name of the author-figure "Grahame" throughout my analysis of his prose writings and his fiction, I am referring to a literary persona operating within these texts, and not the actual or historical Kenneth Grahame. I am not, in other words, adopting an autobiographical approach in examining this body of work. I will make most overt use of the narratological approach in chapters two and three, where I pay close attention to the implied author or narrative persona at work behind the text. However, my overall approach, while influenced by the rhetorical strategy of Phelan and Rabinowitz, is also fairly eclectic. Because Grahame rarely is direct, I have drawn on several theorists from different eras who I believe have similar aesthetic interests as Grahame, and whose thought can be used to clarify what often is obscured by his style. I hope that by unraveling some of the allusions and hints in his writing, I can more fully present Grahame's literary paganism and how it develops through the texts I will consider. Although there are many problems inherent to Grahame's own positions and ideas, due to the scope of this project I mainly focus on offering a unified interpretation of his writings which seeks to shed more light on what exactly is "pagan" about his prose and fiction. I thereby address the often fragmented and reductive nature of several scholars who have perhaps taken for granted an autobiographical intention behind his work. Thus, this thesis is in part

[9] I repeat Phelan and Rabinowitz's phrase, but Grahame is far from 'systematic'.

recuperative. I hope to regenerate interest in Grahame's earlier work, and bring attention to the fascinating and often obscured perspective offered in all his writings.

Grahame's Literary Paganism

Grahame's particular brand of paganism contributes to a surprisingly vast (although relatively neglected) literary movement which took place between the 1880s and the 1930s.[10] Damon Franke defines the movement as a "syncretic" form of heresy which promoted "competing visions of the world and social relations" against those offered by Christian teaching (Franke XVI), and, as we shall see, more secular forms of orthodoxy. Though Grahame is not included in Franke's study, other scholars have made the connection. For instance, Jennifer Hallett lists Grahame among late Victorian authors who "were disenchanted by the modern situation", and saw "industrialization as a blight on civilization" (162). In response, such authors turned to the "ancient Mediterranean world" which "came to represent the antithesis of all of this: it was esteemed as a time of joy, liberation, simplicity, and nature" (Hallett 162).

Hallett distinguishes two kinds of literary paganism: one represented by Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, which intentionally associated itself with the "morally depraved side" of the ancient world, and another which presented a vision of "rustic Arcadian perfection" (Hallett 166). As Hallett suggests, Grahame's paganism fits the latter description. For instance, in his essay "The Rural Pan", the focus is on the goat-god's sublime music which attracts an elite few still able to hear it in spite of the noise

[10] The movement attracted prose and poetry writers such Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Saki, Thomas Hardy, Rupert Brooke, Edward Carpenter, and Algernon Blackwood to name a few.

pollution of the city[11]. Pan is thus an exclusively rustic deity who shuns humanity for the most part. Yet, Grahame writes, the god

> has been known to appear at times, in homely guise of hedger-and-ditcher or weather-beaten shepherd from the downs. Strange lore and quaint fancy he will then impart, in the musical Wessex or Mercian he has learned to speak so naturally; though it may not be till many a mile away that you begin to suspect that you have unwittingly talked with him who chased the flying Syrinx in Arcady and turned the tide of fight at Marathon (334).

Here British rural districts are linked with ancient Greek mythology, not only in the figure of Pan himself, but also with respect to Pan's realm - the "uncivilized" places beyond city limits and their inhabitants. This contrasting of the rural with the urban invites consideration of the etymological root of "pagan", which helps reveal the fuller character Grahame's interest in the movement.

Roland Hutton in his study of British paganism, *The Triumph of the Moon,* notes that until the mid-twentieth century "writers commonly asserted that the Latin word "paganus" […] signified 'rustic', as a result of the triumph of Christianity as the dominant, metropolitan, and urban faith, which left the old religions to make a last stand among the more backward populations of the countryside" (4). Grahame's work often features an inherently pastoral aesthetic. He contrasts the rustic past with the modern present, and suggests that the 'backwardness' of the pre-Christian world represents an aesthetic ideal which is preferable to that of the industrialized "new" world.

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[11] I will discuss Pan's place in Grahame's literary paganism in more detail in Chapter four.

Grahame's expressions of paganism are "heretical" in their praise of sensual indulgence, idleness, and an inversion of the traditional metaphysical Chain of Being. These three aspects of his pagan vision are connected. In fact, Grahame's style itself is indulgently allusive, often leading one around a point he is making, rather than opting for descriptive or representational clarity. For instance, in *The Wind in the Willows*, Grahame describes the seasonal change from Spring to Summer in a passage (which may generally be passed off as mere "purple" prose) ripe with suggestive imagery. Grahame writes

> The pageant of the river bank had marched steadily along, unfolding itself in scene-pictures that succeeded each other in stately procession. Purple loosestrife arrived early, shaking luxuriant tangled locks along the edge of the mirror whence its own face laughed back at it. Willow-herb, tender and wistful, like a pink sunset cloud, was not slow to follow. Comfrey, the purple hand-in-hand with the white, crept forth to take its place in the line; and at last one morning the diffident and delaying dog-rose stepped delicately on the stage, and one knew, as if string-music had announced it in stately chords that strayed into a gavotte, that June at last was here. One member of the company was still awaited; the shepherd-boy for the nymphs to woo, the knight for whom the ladies waited at the window, the prince that was to kiss the sleeping summer back to life and love (*Willows* 28).

The sensuousness of this "procession" covertly characterizes the regeneration of wetland flora in a deliberately erotic fashion, and the scene progresses as though it were a marriage ceremony. Yet, there is also an orgiastic quality to the whole affair. The

inclusion of the seduction of a shepherd-boy by nymphs is especially worth noting. Grahame intentionally employs a pagan image in order to highlight the submerged libidinal energies which he desires to make apparent in the pastoral world. In the broader context of his novel, these energies are revealed themselves in the animal characters.

Such literary indulgence of the sensual is reminiscent of Walter Pater's speculation that there exists a "pagan sentiment" inherent to sensation and aesthetic perception. Pater claims that this

> pagan sentiment measures the sadness with which the human mind is filled whenever its thoughts wander far from what is here, and now. It is beset by notions of irresistible natural powers, for the most part ranged against man, but the secret also of his luck, making the earth golden and the grape fiery for him (99).

This 'sentiment' is an inclination toward the immediacy of experience, and as such, is the basis for aesthetic reflection. The "universal pagan sentiment", according to Pater, has "existed before the Greek religion, and has lingered far onward into the Christian world, ineradicable, like some persistent vegetable growth, because its seed is an element of the very soil out of which it springs" (98).

The inevitable resurgence of the repressed pagan sentiment is a noticeable feature of Grahame's writing, though it is scaled down to the level of the individual personality of his characters. Therefore, as Damon Franke suggests in regard to other authors who employ its tropes, literary paganism provides Grahame with a supplemental "structuring device" (Franke XVI). For example, in "The Reluctant

Dragon", the titular creature is an idle beast that prefers "to get [his] meals regular and then to prop [his] back against a bit of rock and snooze a bit", rather than "rampaging, and skirmishing, and scouring the desert sands, and pacing the margin of the sea, and chasing knights all over the place, and devouring damsels, and going on generally" in the manner of his reptilian brothers (267). The Dragon's nonchalant attitude conflicts with the general ethos of his community. On Grahame's account, desire is suppressed, not because it is violent or immoral in the eyes of the society, but because it leads to nonconformity. As we can see in "The Reluctant Dragon", the 'sin' of the maligned beast among his own kind is that he is idle, and does not do what is expected of him by the other dragons.

Idleness is perhaps the single most defining characteristic of Grahame's literary paganism. For Grahame, being idle is heretical to the orthodox industrial ideology which was prevalent in the late nineteenth century (and which is arguably still dominant today). Benjamin Kohlmann writes, "[i]n the nineteenth century, [...] [i]dleness tended to be seen as pernicious if it impaired the industrial instinct" (*Idleness, Indolence, and Leisure in English Literature* 9). In response to this "industrial instinct", Grahame and other late Victorian authors who "celebrated forms of redundancy, eccentricity, and sheer uselessness" (Greenslade 145).[12] For Grahame, idleness is not simply a respite from work, nor is it mere inactivity. He ironically appraises idle activity such as smoking, book

[12] Grahame follows in the footsteps of R.L. Stevenson and Jerome K. Jerome in their provocative praise of idleness. Stevenson writes that "Idleness, so called, which does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognized in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class, has a good right to state its position as industry itself" (59). Jerome, likewise, claims that idleness "is a gift", and that thought "there are plenty of lazy people and plenty of slowcoaches, a genuine idler is a rarity. He is not a man who slouches about with his hands in his pockets. On the contrary, his most startling characteristic is that he is always intensely busy" (54).

collecting, and “loafing” (or strolling). The idler is engaged in activity, just not the sort of activity approved of by the utilitarian morality which the state encourages, and the masses adopt.

For instance in his essay “Loafing”, the idle figure compares with the dog. Each is the very image of summer languor, which for Grahame is a condition to be savoured:

> first, as a true Loafer should, let him respectfully greet each several village dog. *Arcades ambo* [arcadians also]— loafers likewise — they lie there in the warm dust, each outside his own door, ready to return the smallest courtesy. [...] The dog is generally the better gentleman, and he is aware of it; and he duly appreciates the loafer, who is not too proud to pause a moment, change the news, and pass the time of day (329).

The admiration of animal disposition is a key feature of Grahame’s work. He contrasts the animal's apparent sense of contentment with the restlessness and discontent of the dog’s masters who rush off after recreational pastimes. The loafer, like the dog, is in no hurry, but paces himself, allowing each pleasurable sensation to be felt. For Grahame these differing approaches toward leisure reveal the folly of anthropocentric thinking which has resulted in the conversion of natural energies to serve industrial capitalism which actually limits freedom. Another instance of such a rejection of mere busyness comes in the opening chapter of *The Wind in the Willows*. Mole gives up his domestic chores and emerges from the earth to join in the play of nature. Grahame points out Mole’s greatest pleasure comes not only in rejecting busyness, but also the pleasure of bearing witness to the busy workers as an idle spectator:

> 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. And instead of having an uneasy conscience pricking him and whispering 'whitewash!' he somehow could only feel how jolly it was to be the only idle dog among all these busy citizens. After all, the best part of a holiday is perhaps not so much to be resting yourself, as to see all the other fellows busy working (5).

Grahame can be understood as attempting to collapse the traditional distinction between idleness and leisure, according to which idleness is seen as slothful time-wasting, and leisure is understood as a spiritually enriching activity which has inherent value. G.M. Hyde has attempted to make a connection between Grahame and leisure. Although his "Up Tails All": *Leisure, Pleasure, and Paranoia in Kenneth Grahame's the Wind in the Willows* presents a mostly compelling reading of Grahame's novel, which overall finds it to be "transparent and thoroughly English" in its views of nature and class, his essay leaves much to be said about the specifics of Grahame's interest in leisure (48). Hyde claims that the novel reminds us "that we live in a fallen, post-heroic world in which our chief gift seems to be the leisure to contemplate our inadequacies" (Hyde 42). As I will discuss in Chapter 2, there is an air of pessimism about some of Grahame's views. However, as I will demonstrate, this pessimism is mainly due to a classical posture which sees human fate as mostly hostile. Indeed, leisure, for Grahame, seems to be something of a saving grace which can be attained if the pleasures of sense experience are cultivated in aesthetic contemplation. Therefore, if adequate attention is paid to the relationship between what may otherwise be

overlooked as mere idleness in Grahame's works, we begin to see a more nuanced understanding of his view of leisure. Although at first glance, the loafer's country rambles, or Mole and Ratty's boating expeditions may seem to be shallow activities which would not offer the sort of cultivation that a classical understanding of leisure would endorse. However, Grahame's aesthetic valuation of such pursuits suggests that for him, they offer much more to the human spirit than getting away for awhile. Josef Pieper, in *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, notes that in the Christian theological tradition, leisure and idleness were contrary states of being, and in fact, idleness, according to this tradition, is inimical to leisure. Pieper notes that "idleness, according to traditional teaching, is the source of that deep-seated lack of calm which makes leisure impossible" (40). Idleness, on this account, is akin to "despair", and that "leisure is only possible when a man is at one with himself" (40). However, I believe Grahame is intentionally associating such "idle" activities as Mole's riverside rambling with leisure in its more refined sense. This can be best understood as a rhetorical challenge to the social pressures which influence how people make use of their time. Grahame ironically praises these activities because they offer one a pleasant state of mind which in turn fosters the appropriate mood for aesthetic appreciation. Pieper describes leisure as a spiritual state in which one adopts "a receptive" and "contemplative attitude" which affords one both "the occasion" and "also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of Creation" (41). Grahame can be thought of as understanding the importance of leisure in a similar way, but his rhetorical strategy suggests a conceptual merger between idleness and leisure. In fact, idleness is for Grahame what leisure is for Pieper: the cultivated attitude which allows one to tap into their deepest aesthetic sentiments,

and in doing so, “steeps” one in creation. For Pieper, to immerse oneself in creation is to behold God’s providential bounty as a gift to humankind. This in turns inspires deep reverence and worship, and an ultimately mystical experience that brings one closer to God. For Grahame, in the patrimony of Pater, bodily sensations connect the subject to the world in such a way as to engender a similar sort of reverence, but one which is directed at a different object. Whereas a religious thinker like Pieper argues that leisure is crucial for our relationship with God, as well as for our spiritual cultivation, literary paganism, from Pater to Grahame sets the aesthetic experience as the highest point of reverence. Leisure, ironically cast as idle pastimes, thus cultivates an attitude of mind which is most receptive to contemplating the aesthetic quality of sensual pleasure. As leisure for Pieper allows one to step oneself in creation, idleness, for Grahame can bring one to feel their interconnectivity with the emanant beauty of Nature. Denis Denisoff understands Pater’s notion of the human to be “classical” in that he sees “the human as part of an animist collective” (439), and part of “a larger, natural web” (440). Grahame, again, echoes Pater, in his challenge to the anthropocentric notion of upward advancement, whether it is the common notion of biological progress of the individual organism from “lower” child to complete adult form, or the pseudo-evolutionist idea that the human species has progressed out of crude primitive origins and is destined for continuous physical progression.

The inversion of the metaphysical Chain of Being can be seen in Grahame’s short stories which explore the aesthetically sensitive nature of child-subjectivity. In these stories, children seem to have a more immediate experience of the pagan sentiment. For instance, in “A Holiday”, the adult-narrator reflects back on his childhood

and attempts to translate the subjective experience. In the story, the boy is trying to break free of the squabbling of his siblings and take full advantage of his day away from lessons:

> Earth to earth! That was the frank note, the joyous summons of the day; and they could not but jar and seem artificial, these human discussions and pretenses, when boon Nature, reticent no more, was singing that full-throated song of hers that thrills and claims control of every fiber [...] I had no words then to describe it, that earth-effluence of which I was so conscious; nor, indeed, have I found words since (134).

The adult cannot successfully render the experience relatable through language. The pagan sentiment, for Grahame, is thus shown to be something essentially prior to cognition, and is perhaps indicative of the web-like interlacing of the subjective experience with the sensible phenomena.

If the child's experience reveals a purer embodied pagan sentiment because they are not yet been blunted by artificial human contrivances, it follows that the animal must have a more immediate sense of aesthetic perception of sensations gleaned from the sensible world. Just as the child is a greater figure than the adult, so too, the animal is greater than the child. Grahame contrasts the child and the animal in "The Lost Centaur":

> it is to these unaffected, careless companions that the sensible child is wont to devote himself [...] And yet these playmates, while cheerfully admitting him of their fellowship, make him feel his inferiority at every point. Vainly, his snub nose projected earthwards, he essays to sniff it with the terrier who (as becomes the

> nobler animal) is leading in the chase; and he is ready to weep as he realises his loss (362).

Although the advanced human creature holds itself as the apex of nature's creative endeavours, the child sees in the animal what is lacking in humanity.

In *Willows*, Grahame explores the animal's relationship to its habitat in such a way as to make more explicit Pater's idea that subjectivity is part of a "web of Nature". For instance, Ratty explains to Mole that the river "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" (8). This last sentence expresses the difference Grahame finds among animals and humans. Animals live in a seemingly content relationship with their surroundings. Human beings, on the other hand, do not. Grahame can perhaps be understood as suggesting that the very thing that fuels human "progress" is our inability to appreciate what we truly are, or achieve contentment with our idealized status as superior creatures.

Through the assertion of counter-productive values such as indulgence, idleness, and the inversion of the Chain of Being, Grahame produces a vision of life which has captivated readers for over a century. Grahame's writing in general is, as Hallett notes, deeply nostalgic. Perhaps his animal fantasy world has indeed captured intimations of the "universal pagan sentiment", which instills in his readers a sense of exile from a truer world than the one in which they have found themselves. In this, Grahame can be understood as reflecting Wordsworth's lament in "The World is Too Much With Us," where, in the face of social upheaval and persistent change, the poet "would rather/ be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn" (10-11). As I explore Grahame's expression of this

“creed outworn”, I hope to show that its power is in the idealization of the alternative which the poet would “rather” adopt than become complacent with the aesthetically degraded, ever advancing, modern world.

Overview of Thesis Chapters

Chapter one details Grahame’s critique of the inherently anthropocentric Victorian ideal of progress and of what I call the urban industrial complex. Grahame challenges two aspects of late nineteenth century culture, broadly speaking. In “The Lost Centaur” Grahame rejects the idea that the human creature has cleaved himself from the natural world. The other critique of “progress”, found in “Orion”, is centered around the notion that human society has evolved from a primitive, undeveloped stage, to a more ‘mature’ and perfected society. Once the core of his literary paganism is explained, the purpose of the writer’s rhetorical strategy and the alternative attitude which his essays present appear in a new light.

In the second chapter, I detail the connection between pastoralism, idleness, and escape in select essays of *Pagan Papers*, and analyze Grahame’s narrative persona. The rural realm becomes the ideal place for the aesthete who desires to cultivate sensual pleasure into a fuller aesthetic appreciation. I will ultimately aim to show how Grahame uses idleness and escape as a conscious effort to resist complacency with the ever-expanding modern world.

Chapter three studies select stories from *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* in which Grahame evokes child-subjectivity as embodying the pagan sentiment. I will examine how the child-subject embodies the pagan sentiment, as well as the nefarious ways the child characters are manipulated into a form of education which dampens their

pagan spirits. However, Grahame also offers a measure of hope in three adult figures who have resisted full conversion to “Olympian” adulthood (Grahame’s term for the typical adult, from the child’s perspective, who does not seem to have an animated spirit). “The Reluctant Dragon” is then presented as a metafictional commentary on how the pagan sentiment can be conserved within the maturing subject.

Chapter four presents a detailed exploration of Grahame’s character and plot development in *The Wind in the Willows*. I analyse his animal characters as expressions of the essential *anima* or animating energy which is inherent to all living creatures. In his animal fantasy, Grahame tells a tale of friendship and cooperative living which secures the pagan sentiment, and brings harmony to the competing impulses which threaten to divide the inner self and separate the individual from his community, and overall, establishes the conditions under which leisure in its proper sense can be attained. Ultimately, *The Wind in the Willows*, I argue, is a manifestation of the literary pagan ideal which I have been tracing throughout this thesis.

Chapter One

"No Such Lamentable Cleavage": Grahame's Pagan Critique of 'Human Progress'

Introduction:

The emergence of literary paganism during the late 19th century had not only taken the form of a heretical challenge to Christian doctrine, it also operated as a means of literary opposition to a more secular orthodoxy: the ever growing faith in technological progress and national efficiency. *Pagan Papers* puts forth an alternative to such a belief. Paganism is offered as a literary experiment which champions idleness over industriousness, the refinement of our aesthetic awareness over utilitarian value-judgements, and the challenging of anthropocentric notions of human progress which falsely elevate the human above the animal and our shared natural habitat.

William Greenslade in his study, "'Pan' and the Open Road: Critical Paganism in R.L. Stevenson, K. Grahame, E.Thomas and E.M. Forster", writes that various expressions of paganism

> celebrated forms of redundancy, eccentricity, and sheer uselessness. Such values were increasingly prized as inimical to the rapid modernization of Britain into a mass industrial society after 1870 and to the project of national regeneration, grounded in social utility, taking shape in the early years of the new century (145).

However, Greenslade finds Grahame's contribution to such literature to be indicative of an escapist desire to take refuge from modernity in romanticised rural spaces. Consequently, Greenslade asks, "did the urge to escape from the turbulence of

modernity denote pure evasion, or did it, in any meaningful sense, constitute a critique?" (148). The charge of escapism is important to address in a study of Grahame's writing, both because there is a near critical consensus as to this aspect of his work, and because the nature of this escapism has yet to be addressed in detail. As I will demonstrate, Grahame's essays do indeed constitute a rich and interesting diagnosis of the relationship between aesthetics, technological progress, and the cultural implications of urban sprawl.

I believe that by re-examining some of Grahame's essays, a fuller appreciation of his criticism of modernity can be gained, as well as a more nuanced understanding of his significant contribution to the literary discourse concerning paganism, modernization, and leisure. This chapter is divided into two parts. In part one I will attempt to provide some historical context for Grahame's response to the rise of an urban consumerist society. This requires a brief reflection on the broad ideological assumptions concerning industry, efficiency, and progress of his time. In part two, I will discuss two key essays which best reveal how Grahame challenges anthropocentric assumptions about individual and historical development, because they deny the inherent value of other modes of aesthetic experience. By examining how Grahame responds to ideological pressures in fin de siècle England, we can also consider some of the reasons why his critique of modern society remains relevant today.

Part One: "Flat and Virtuous Lives"

Throughout *Pagan Papers*, Grahame laments the rise of commercialism, the loss of natural habitat, and the effects of urban culture upon the aesthetically sensitive individual. In his essays these problems are associated with the changing conceptions

of social organization, which is predicated on the idea of ‘progress’. The “Victorian ideal of progress” is “the assumption that a pattern of change exists in the history of mankind… that it consists of irreversible changes in one direction only, and that this direction is towards improvement” (Pollard quoted in Wright 3). Ideas of progress are intricately bound up with the rise of an industrial, technologically dependent urban modernity, which is expanding due to machine assisted labour. Historian G.R. Searle observes that “[i]n few periods has technology so dramatically altered people’s lives as between 1886 and 1914” (615). In fact, the transformation of society as the result of technological advancement during this period was so great that historians have recognised the emergence of a “second industrial revolution” (Evans 240), beginning between 1850 and 1860.

Another consequence of the discourse of efficiency is the reorganization of labour. The enormous impact of the second industrial revolution gave rise to a new way of structuring society around production, which led not only to a marked increase in urban population, but also fostered the extraordinary growth of “the service sector” (Evans 240). The service industry “tend[ed] to grow alongside the increasing wealth, diversity and complexity of a given society” (240-1), and as industrial economy thrived, demand for labour increased; more and more people began to seek employment, entertainment, and provisions. As this occurred, an agricultural crisis swept the nation and confidence in the economic viability of farming started to dwindle. The service sector, on the other hand, continued to grow, and was understood to be “considerably more efficient than either the agricultural or the manufacturing sectors” (Evans 241).

Migration from country to city was not only understood as a spatial relocation, but it also entailed a radical change from a deeply rooted way of life. While *Pagan Papers* is not concerned with the specifics of rural culture, and as a result looks past the actual ways of life of people living outside the city, Grahame harbours deep suspicions towards the routinization of human life under the influence of urban organization. In "The Eternal Whither", for example, he depicts a class of city clerks with flattened spirits:

> "Tis a sad but sober fact, that the most of men lead flat and virtuous lives, departing annually with their family to some flat and virtuous place, there to disport themselves in a manner that is decent, orderly, wholly uninteresting, vacant of every buxom stimulus" (Grahame 338).

The workers of the service sector, according to Grahame, have become mere one-dimensional drones who are deadened to the thrills of life, and conditioned to desire a mundane retreat to a designated, safe space which does not disrupt the sense of contentment fostered by middle-class urban living. Yet, Grahame humorously suggests, some may rebel and take to crime for sport, rejecting the false "virtues" which have enslaved them by delighting in flagrant disobedience because such disruptive activities "would furnish just that gentle stimulant, that peaceful sense of change so necessary to the tired worker" (338).

Grahame's suspicions of the effects of the culture of efficiency are seemingly more due to where and how people were being encouraged to spend their time. Despite the growth of the service industry, a so-called "culture of self- improvement" was directed at the population (Evans 360), because "between 1876 and 1900" only "14.2 percent of all significant inventions throughout the world were of British origin" (Searle

625). Such performance was deemed “[not] good enough for a country that aspired to global predominance” (Searle 625). Because of this “relative backwardness” in industry and research (Searle 623), this “culture of self-improvement” was directed mainly at the “better-paid, better-educated workmen, anxious to associate themselves with the onward march of ‘progress’” (Searle 539).

In “Abroad the Galley”, registers Grahame’s reservations about the ability for people to improve themselves through such social projects. He compares the ‘ship of state’ to a pirate ship governed by slave drivers. The crew- “pirates, parsons, stockbrokers, whatever our calling — are but galley-slaves of the basest sort, fettered to the oar each for his little spell.” Although they are all linked by “[a] common misery”, an overthrow cannot occur because “We never can look ahead. And they know this well, the gods our masters, pliers of the whip. And mayhap we like them none the worse for it” (359). The galley slaves are not able to see past the present because the structured existence they have come to know offers no alternative, and in this they have grown complacent. He also suggests that most people simply prefer such complacency. In Grahame’s sarcastic depiction of the ship of state, “the gods our masters” come up with ways to make their crew work the ship in some servile capacity, while cultivating in the slaves a sense of duty. Though Grahame suggests that this complacency is preferred by most people, it is the very thing he will reject throughout *Pagan Papers*.

Although, as Eric J. Evans notes, “[as] fewer people worked from home, and the organization of work became more regularised and disciplined, previously blurred distinctions between work and leisure became sharper and sharper” (304), Grahame seems to believe quality leisure time which could promote true self-cultivation is not

being encouraged, but instead, a materialistic and utilitarian approach to time management has caused people to treat leisure as a commodity. In “The Rural Pan” and “Loafing” Grahame complains about the manner in which the urban middle-class vacationers tear up the rural landscape, litter, crowd the waterways, and cause general ruckus. He claims that they have been conditioned to serve “Commercialism whose God is Jerry” (“The Rural Pan” 334). For Grahame, ‘progress’, efficiency, and self-improvement are all at the expense of the aesthetic contemplation fostered in true leisure.

Part 2: “Fitting out a Lord of Creation”

Grahame is critical of the notion of human progress in two related ways: in “The Lost Centaur”, he first challenges the conventional idea of human biological progression from animal origins. The second challenge is presented in “Orion” where he rejects the notion of historical progression out of a primitive, unadvanced culture, into a modern, more advanced one. In this essay, he equates such a notion with the transcendental and spiritual aspirations inherent in western philosophy and religion. Grahame mocks the idea of the human growing from “animal infancy”, while “the threads” that connect us to “the Brute [...] snap one by one at each gallant wing-stroke of a soul poising for flight into Empyrean” (361). Even though humans believe they are a biologically and spiritually advanced species, as Grahame points out, we remain unhappy creatures in this ‘ascent’: “we are yet conscious of a loss for every gain, we have some forlorn sense of a vanished heritage” (361). Even the child is made to “feel his inferiority at every point. Vainly, his snub nose projected earthwards, he essays to sniff it with the terrier who (as becomes the nobler animal) is leading in the chase; and he is ready to weep as

he realises his loss" (Grahame 362). On this account, biological 'progress' out of some ancient animal heritage is illusory since we have lost physical capacities which are enviable, and which the so called "lower" creation retains.

He writes further that children who spend more time with animals cannot but compare themselves with their four-legged friends:

> the rest of the Free Company, — the pony, the cows, the great cart-horses, — are ever shaming [the child] by their unboastful exercise of some enviable and unattainable attribute. Even the friendly pig, who (did but parents permit) should eat of his bread and drink of his cup, and be unto him as a brother, — which among all these unhappy bifurcations, so cheery, so unambitious, so purely contented, so apt to be the guide, philosopher, and friend of boyhood as he? What wonder that at times, when the neophyte in life begins to realise that all these desirable accomplishments have had to be surrendered one by one in the *process of developing a Mind, the course of fitting out a Lord of Creation*, he is wont — not knowing the extent of the kingdom to which he is heir — to feel a little discontented? (362, italics added).

Grahame does not directly state the object of his criticism, but the thrust of his main argument is unmistakable. The notion of evolution from some lower form of animal existence to a 'higher' human form, as well as the idea commonly asserted in child education that the use of reason separates human beings from beasts, are for Grahame, problematic ideas introduced in a dubious program of indoctrination. Becoming an 'adult',[13] on this account, is not simply a process of physical maturation. Formal education involves, ironically, a conversion from clarity to confusion: this

[13] Or "Olympian" as he later classifies the adult in *The Golden Age*, and *Dream Days*.

process of obfuscation forces young students to accept certain conventional views about human nature that leads them to believe they are “Lord[s] of Creation” (362). Just as children are thought not to have a developed ‘Mind’ like a human adult, so too the animal is thought to be an even lower being on the chain of evolution.

Grahame compares the idea of man’s evolution from a ‘lower’ animal existence to a ‘higher’ rational being with the idea of the child progressing from youth to adulthood. Such a way of idealizing the human condition necessarily leads to discontentment because we can see that the rewards of the developed ‘Mind’ as with adulthood, come at a cost and the gains do not always make up for the losses. Grahame claims that our discontentment in modern life is made apparent when we witness the contentment of animals. Grahame’s meditation on the nature of the human adult creature includes an explicit criticism of the notion of human progress in its most basic sense, namely, the idea that as organisms we necessarily *progress* from one stage of life to another, as if we are advancing toward a more perfected state of being.

The child, encouraged to understand itself as having surpassed the animal, is acutely aware of the less constricted life an animal leads. Simple observations, which according to Grahame, strike the child more immediately than most adults, demonstrate the comparative sense of satisfaction we cannot in good faith claim to possess. What is perhaps motivating the discussion in “The Lost Centaur” is that modern culture has accepted and propagated the notion that humankind is superior. This belief, for Grahame, is not only troublesome because it is false, but because it also restricts the sense of pleasure which the child, like the animal, supposedly possesses by nature.

The conclusion of “The Lost Centaur” implies that upholding the illusory ideal of human perfectibility at the expense of renouncing our basic animality has greatly impoverished the true sense of human identity:

> The mute and stunted human embryo that gazes appealingly from out the depths of [the animal’s] eyes must ever remind him of a kinship once (possibly) closer. Nay, at times, it must even seem to whelm him in reproach. As thus [the animal asks]: "Was it really necessary, after all, that we two should part company so early? May you not have taken a wrong turning somewhere, in your long race after your so-called progress, after the perfection of this be-lauded species of yours? A turning whose [sic] due avoidance might perhaps have resulted in no such lamentable cleavage as is here, but in some perfect embodiment of the dual nature: as who should say a being with the nobilities of both of us, the baseness of neither?” (362).

Here Grahame suggests that humankind has perpetuated a false conception of itself as a creature. Ironically, the mythical centaur is a more accurate image of a perfect creature: it has the nobility of human reason, without the baseness of human hubris. Yet, we have convinced ourselves that we are superior beings who, through a mistaken view of natural history, have emerged as a perfected animal. As a result, we only see a “mute and stunted” (362) thing reflected in the eye of the animal. This reflection, Grahame suggests, exposes our all-too-human imperfections. The animal reproach to human vanity lies in its silent refusal to consider itself as an incomplete creature, but also the shocking realization that we are not the perfected, completely evolved, ascendant creatures we consider ourselves to be. According to Grahame, “the threads

are utterly shorn asunder never: nor is man, the complete, the self-contained, permitted to cut himself wholly adrift from these his poor relations" (362). The conceptual divide between the human and the animal is one which exists to our detriment, for when we set ourselves so high above nature, we tend to lose our sense of belonging to the same world, and when we realize we do not meet the ideal which is thrust upon us, we are left with an anxiety about what we truly are. "The Lost Centaur" implies the reconceiving the human creature in more chthonic and animalistic terms, and asks that its readers resist the perfectionist and 'progressive' ideology which seeks to reduce the individual to a functionary worker tasked with sustaining the well-being of a societal body, whose desires take precedence over our own.

Thus, Grahame prioritizes the elegance of ancient myth over the cruder modern myth of human progress from primordial animal origins. He suggests that if we could consider our kinship with animals, we may gain a more rewarding means of understanding our own nature. This re-qualified sense of what it means to be a creature can be aesthetically freeing since the representation of human identity would include, rather than exclude, the basic animal pleasures which are a crucial part of our nature.

In "Orion", Grahame explores this broader sense of self, which he understands as having been lost when we accepted the notion that humans represent the pinnacle of evolutionary progress. He associates a so-called primitive mode of living with ancient paganism, as well as the idea of secular social progress with the biblical notion of human dominion over the earth as is given to Adam in Genesis, suggesting that Christian doctrine has been used to subdue the natural world:

> Many a century has passed since the plough first sped [sic] a conqueror east and west, clearing forest and draining fen; policing the valleys with barbed-wires and Sunday schools, with the chains that are forged of peace, the irking fetters of plenty: driving also the whole lot of us, these to sweat at its tail, those to plod with the patient team, but all to march in a great chain-gang, the convicts of peace and order and law: while the happy nomad, with his woodlands, his wild cattle, his pleasing nuptialities [sic], has long since disappeared (363).

Here, Grahame challenges the common idea that humans as a species have advanced out of a primitive and chaotic mode of living into an organized and progressive civilization. In “The Lost Centaur” he wonders how human beings would regard themselves if they acknowledged the nobilities of the animal and the human-animal, without viewing the former as an inferior species. In “Orion”, the answer is perhaps that these pagan peoples living closer to the earth, not disconnected from their land, livestock, or natural pleasures, would perhaps afford humankind a more liberating view of itself. Grahame implies here that Christianity has bestowed upon humankind an ideal which permits an imperialist tyranny over the land and its natural subjects - the “nomads” who forage from the earth, and enjoy their “pleasing nuptualities [sic]” (362).

Grahame’s sharp criticism is typical of late nineteenth century critiques of Christianity which links the faith with imperialism and industrialism. What is perhaps unique, however, is the association of secular notions of social progress with religious notions of spiritual perfection. Here Grahame compares the conquering (gospel) ‘Plough’ of Christianity with “peace and order and law” (363). Such notions of “peace” derive from an ideological assumption that the human creature is perfectible in

conformity with an abstract ideal. This ideal posits progress as a movement from lower modes of being to superior ones. For Grahame, such notions of the human creature are actually more restrictive because they bind us to a false ideal which subjugates our 'natural' inclinations to the tyranny of Custom. Our capacity to take pleasure in 'natural' sensual experiences is thus atrophied and hinders the full development of human identity.

The image of Orion, the great hunter from Greek mythology, who is immortalized as a constellation in the sky, is used by Grahame to contrast the notion of God in Heaven who, like a prison warden, monitors our movements:

> Truly, we Children of the Plough,[14] but for yon tremendous Monitor in the sky, were in right case to forget that the Hunter is still a quantity to reckon withal. Where, then, does he hide, the Shaker of the Spear? *Why, here, my brother, and here; deep in the breasts of each and all of us!* (364, italics added).

"Orion" serves as a reminder that true human nature is captured symbolically in the Orion constellation. Grahame implies that before the rise of modern civilization, the primitive life of early humankind was in some sense truer to their nature than that lived by their counterparts in later centuries. The constellation reflects down to us an aspect of our 'true nature' which should inspire humans to free themselves from restrictive notions of perfectibility. Orion can remind us of the "primal quicksilver" (364), which still circulates within us, that inborn urge to *sense* the primal force that animates our being.

In "The Lost Centaur" and "Orion", then, the major themes in *Pagan Papers* culminate. Grahame's challenge to the notion of human progress, both biologically and

[14] The big dipper, which has also been referred to as The Plough, is perhaps used by Grahame to evoke Christ's demand in the Gospel of Luke, that his followers, once they take up his "plough" are not to give thought to what they have left behind.

socially, can perhaps be seen as an early rejection of anthropocentrism. Denis Denisoff associates Grahame with Decadent authors such as Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, who likewise used paganism to put forward “counter-humanist deindividuation and species intersubjectivity” with regard to how the human creature stands in relation to its environment (432). Denisoff draws a line which connects such authors with “the more politically explicit eco-paganism being articulated today” (432). Although Grahame’s critique of modernity is limited by his range of interests and stylistic choices, as we have seen, there is more to his engagement with modernity than Greenslade suggests. However, even with an elaboration of Grahame’s position on modernity, the criticisms of Grahame as an escapist levelled by Greenslade and others may still be a valid fault to find in his writing.

It may be the case that Grahame’s ideological interests align to some degree with what Denisoff calls “the eco-critical vein of pagan decadence” (432), but Grahame’s particular expression of this paganism is not without its drawback with regard to the general notion of ecocriticism today. For instance, Grahame seems to reject the notion of human biological evolution as being a rewarding means of understanding the human creature. Such a conclusion poses a problem to the modern eco-critic: since anthropocentrism has given birth to the scientific discourse which lends crucial support to the defense of environmentalism, is it possible to think of social progress and responsibility in a way that is not beholden to an ultimately anthropocentric viewpoint? This, of course, is not a question that Grahame addresses. What he does seem to ask implicitly in *Pagan Papers*, is the following question: *what kind of approach to pleasure,*

beauty and the natural world can console the human spirit in an age of rapid fragmentation and complexity?

To answer the above question, we need to consider Grahame's essays as experiments in literary paganism with more focus on the narrative persona at work in the essays. Grahame indulges in certain literary tropes, the most common of which is pastoralism. In the next chapter I will look at how pastoralism gives Grahame a basic structure with which to inform his literary pagan critique of the modern industrial complex, and offer a fuller exploration of the implied author operating behind his essays.

Chapter 2

"Thank the Gods that Such Things Are": Idleness, Aesthesis, and Escape in *Pagan Papers*

Introduction:

Last chapter, I attempted to show how Grahame's literary paganism can be understood in part as a critique of the Victorian ideal of human 'progress'. As I noted, William Greenslade finds Grahame's critique to be ultimately escapist, and unable to provide a serious engagement with the issues raised in his writing. My reading of "The Lost Centaur" and "Orion", however, suggests reasons for reconsidering Grahame's broad treatment of paganism. Yet, the charge of mere escapism may still be levelled against *Pagan Papers*, given that it relies heavily on the pastoral genre which, as Terry Gifford notes, is itself often ripe with escapist themes (Gifford 2). In this chapter, I will demonstrate how escapism, properly understood, is part of Grahame's literary pagan ideal, and explain how the desire to escape fosters discontentment with the human complacency upon which modernization depends. My overall purpose is to show how Grahame's pagan ideal provides an alternative to the consumerist cosmopolitanism of late 19th century urban culture.

I divide this chapter into three sections. In part one, I will present Grahame's aesthetic alternative to the consumerist ideal prevalent in fin de siècle England. By considering the pagan persona operating behind the essays, I will show how Grahame's rhetorical strategy presents a spirit of idleness to his readers. In part two, I qualify Grahame's escapism by putting *Pagan Papers* in conversation with a recent work which promotes a similar aesthetic attitude, Frederic Gros' *A Philosophy of Walking*. In doing

so, I will demonstrate how escape itself can work as an important element of a critique of modern industrialism. Finally, I will conclude with some reflections on the overall nature of Grahame's literary paganism as it is represented in *Pagan Papers*.

Part One: Idleness and the Pagan Aesthetic

The majority of essays in *Pagan Papers* reflect, to varying degrees, a commitment to pastoralism. As Jennifer Hallett and William Greenslade note, much of late nineteenth century literary paganism is pastoral in that it privileges the rural over the urban. Terry Gifford, moreover, claims that "pastoral" "refers to any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban" (2), and, according to this definition, many of Grahame's essays are clearly pastoral. The relationship between paganism and rusticity is heavily implied throughout the collection, and notably in "A Bohemian in Exile":

> When old Pan was dead and Apollo's bow broken, there were many faithful pagans who would worship at no new shrines, but went out to the hills and caves truer to the old gods in their discrowned desolation than in their pomp and power (349).

Within the narrative voice of *Pagan Papers*, we can find the explicit association between paganism and pastoralism. With the onset of urban sprawl ("when old Pan was dead") the "faithful pagans" flee to the countryside to avoid conversion, and the rough terrain beyond city limits is more fitting to paganism than urban temples.

Considering the allusions to Greco-Roman gods, and the overt privileging of Pan against the more civic deities in the classical pantheon, we are invited to think of Grahame's persona as a descendant of some pagan cult. In what follows, I will

therefore treat the essayist's narrative voice as though it belongs to the ancestral member of what is known in classical studies as the "pagus". The Pagus were "dispersed settlements" of "one or more villages" which "had political autonomy" in ancient Rome (Cornell quoted in Stek 66). Modern historians refer to this phenomena as "the pagus-victus system", which was a "persistent 'tribal' survival which pre-existed the Roman Republic" (Stek 66). Grahame evokes a very ancient form of pre-Christian, and even pre-Roman, paganism, but filters this attitude through the highly stylized language of a late nineteenth century aesthete. Indeed, the connotations of 'pagan' today are often more suggestive of ritualistic nature-worship, rather than specifically signifying the worship of the Greco-Roman pantheon. This approach, I believe, will help clarify the nuance of Grahame's literary paganism and counter the assessments of Greenslade and others who would dismiss his critique of modernity as mere escapism.

According to O'Donnell, "paganism" was in fact non-existent until the dogmatic formulation of the Nicene creed (154), which arose from a concern by Christian theologians to distinguish Christianity from other religions (O'Donnell 158). Even to the Roman, the word 'paganus' meant "something like 'peasant'" (159). The 'paganus' was also used as a derisive term which signified one who would not serve as a soldier, and could even refer to someone who was not "serious or strong, or a fighter or rich" (160). What would later be considered by Christians as "paganism" was in fact the civic religion of the Roman empire, adhered to by those who were "the real Romans, the full participants in the work and responsibility of the Roman state" (O'Donnell 47). Christians may have called all Greco-Roman expressions of myth and ritual "pagan", but to the Romans themselves, pagans were backward country folk (O'Donnell 47).

Once Christianity itself became the cosmopolitan religion of the state, Greco-Roman "paganism" was relegated to the rustic and non-progressive past. Grahame's association with paganism, as well, has as much to do with an opposition to civic allegiances, and the industrial aesthetic, as it does with ritual nature worship. By viewing the speaker in Grahame's essays as a native of the city but in truth a descendant of the pagus, we can understand the underlying unity behind his rhetorical style and the pastoral content of the collection as a whole.

Grahame privileges the rural sphere, not only because for him urban or industrialized spaces are uglier, but also because the open pasture encourages what Pater claimed was crucial to the pagan sentiment - intellectual "play" (11). However, the rural landscape of Grahame's day was being misused for recreational purposes. Increasingly towards the end of the Victorian era, the middle class would take refuge in the countryside in order to enjoy their free time away from the daily routine of city-life. Peter Green and Robert Dingley associate Grahame himself with this so-called "holiday cult" (119), (Dingley 50). But, as Lois Kuznets notes in her reading of "The Rural Pan", Grahame bemoans the rise of the holiday-makers whom he represents as the "Mercuries" (the yuppies of his day), and the "Apollos", or "dandies" (Kuznets 27). Grahame is indignantly critical of such characters:

> "For a holiday, Mercury loveth the Pullman Express, and a short hour with a society paper; anon, brown boots on the pier, and the pleasant combination of Métropole and Monopole. Apollo for his part will urge the horses of the Sun: and, if he leaveth the society weekly to Mercury, yet he loveth well the Magazine.

> From which *omphalos* or hub of the universe he will direct his shining team even to the far Hesperides of Richmond or of Windsor" (333).

The merchant classes (represented as "Mercury") travel in luxury by train, and then stay in a luxury hotel. The dandies ("Apollo"), on the other hand, are always armed with the magazine, and remain fashionable no matter where they find themselves. Grahame uses these stereotypes to illustrate the prevalence of a consumerist mentality which had permeated all facets of urban culture, including leisure. These "Mercuries" and "Apollos" regard the countryside as a source of instant gratification and as something to be consumed.

The pagan sentiment Grahame attempts to characterize is antithetical to such a consumerist approach to the aesthetic rewards of the countryside. For instance, in "Loafing", he discusses the titular 'activity' as a method of refined aesthetic enjoyment. The loafer, unlike the urbanite reveler, has not tried to squeeze in as much R and R as possible, but, since he is aware that "action… is only the means to an end of reflection" (328), he has taken the opportunity to cultivate his sensual enjoyment of his time away from work. This attitude has been refined in contrast to the merry-makers whom the loafer observes. Grahame writes

> it is chiefly by keeping ever in view the struggles and the clamorous jostlings of the unenlightened making holiday that [the loafer] is able to realise the bliss of his own condition and maintain his self-satisfaction at boiling-point (328, and fn 556)

The 'freedom' of the urban recreation seekers is a freedom *to do* whatever they want, and however they want; freedom for the loafer, on the other hand, is a freedom from the passions which reduce leisure to yet another goal-oriented activity. The loafer's idle

approach allows him to appreciate the subtleties of experience from which pleasure is derived. Leisure for those corrupted by the urban sphere is pursued in toilsome lust: "[t]heir voices are clamant of feats to be accomplished: they will row, they will punt, they will paddle, till they weary out the sun" (329), whereas for the loafer, it is a calm and grateful presence of mind.

Grahame's 'loafer' can be clarified through reflection upon the classical distinction between work and leisure. In *Idleness, Leisure, and Indolence in English Literature*, Monika Fludernik and Miriam Nandi write that "[l]eisure offers a framework, a bounded segment of time, in which individuals [...] can engage in activities that are both relaxing and intellectually challenging, meditative, reflective and philosophical" (3). Grahame is suggesting a very similar approach to his "idle" pleasures. Whereas the revellers use their leisure time to chase fleeting satisfaction, the loafer has approached pleasure in a more aesthetically rewarding manner:

> By-and-by the boaters will pass him homeward-bound. All are blistered and sore: his withers[15] are unwrung. Most are too tired and hungry to see the sunset glories; no corporeal pangs clog his æsthesis -- his perceptive faculty. Some have quarrelled in the day and are no longer on speaking terms; he is at peace with himself and with the whole world (330).

A crucial aspect of Grahame's aesthetic vision is revealed in his use of the term *aesthesis*. According to John Ruskin, aesthesis is "the mere animal consciousness of the pleasantness" of sensual experience (Ruskin 16). Grahame seems to allude to

[15] "Withers: the ridge between the shoulder bones of a horse", or "a part corresponding to the withers in a quadruped... other than a horse" ("Withers"). It is interesting that Grahame characterizes the loafer's body as if it were a quadrupedal animal. In light of his comments in "The Lost Centaur", perhaps he is suggesting that the loafer is better able to appreciate the animal qualities of his body.

Ruskin's understanding of aesthesis as a faculty of perception which constitutes the first stage in a process of cultivation leading to a greater apprehension of beauty. Ruskin calls the second step *theoria*:

> the exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of [the aesthetic experience] I call theoria. For this, and this only, is the full comprehension and contemplation of the beautiful as a gift of God, a gift not necessary to our being, but added to, and elevating it […] And that this joyfulness and reverence are a necessary part of theoretic pleasure is very evident when we consider that, by the presence of these feelings, even the lower and more sensual pleasures may be rendered theoretic (Ruskin 16).

For Grahame, rendering theoretic the immediate pleasures captured by aesthesis, means meditating on those pleasures in an idle disposition. As I have suggested in the introduction, idleness as suggested by Grahame's essays is perhaps better understood as conceptually related to leisure, rather than its antithesis. The ancient Greeks linked leisure "with the 'cultivation of the self'", and regarded "work [as] a means to provide for life's needs; recreation [as] rest from work", and "leisure was the noblest pursuit in life" (Heintzman 7). Grahame's contrast between the loafer's and the urban reveler's approach to leisure is reflective of this classical understanding. For Grahame, the degraded approach of the reveler is more akin to "recreation" because he seems to treat a leisure pursuit such as boating as a resource to be consumed rather than a means for aesthetic appreciation. The idle approach prevents the aesthesis from being 'clogged', and thus promotes theoretic cultivation of basic sensations into a reverential contemplation of Beauty.

Fludernik and Nandi elaborate on what they refer to as “otium”, which is linked etymologically to leisure, and thereby offers further insight into Grahame’s notions of leisure and idleness:

> Originally opposed to negotium, ‘business’, but perhaps also ‘busyness’, like its Greek model, σχολή [schol¯e] or θεωρία [theoría], it privileges aristocratic relaxation from civic duties or war over the peasant’s, artisan’s or slave’s rest from toil (3).

For Grahame, theoria can only be achieved in a spirit of ‘otium’ or idleness, which those who share the pagan sentiment are compelled to cultivate, whereas the consumerist holiday makers, as they chase satisfaction, really only achieve what amounts to a break from toil.

Idleness, in Grahame’s view, is opposed not only to business and busyness, but also to the wider cultural structures which encourage such approaches to time management. As Fludernik and Nandi point out, “[t]hroughout the history of idleness, [...] leisure activities have tended to draw on them the anger and moral indignation of various apostles of thrift, industry and the work ethic” (5). Grahame offers idleness as an alternative to the cultural injunction of efficiency. In “The Eternal Whither”, for instance, he satirises the public hostility not only towards idleness, but also towards the business of the rustic vendor who deals at the border of the rural and urban spaces. Grahame writes “[t]here was once an old cashier in some ancient City establishment, whose practice was to spend his yearly holiday in relieving some turnpike-man at his post, and performing all the duties appertaining thereunto” (Grahame 337). The cashier flees from his life as a servantile clerk to witness the more dignified business which

takes place at the borders of the industrial urban center. The cashier, seeking reprieve from his toilsome position in the city,

> had discovered for himself an unique method of seeing Life at its best, the flowing, hurrying, travelling, marketing Life of the Highway; the life of bagman and cart, of tinker, and pig-dealer, and all cheery creatures that drink and chaffer together in the sun. He belonged, above all, to the scanty class of clear-seeing persons who know both what they are good for and what they really want (Grahame 337).

In pursuit of idleness, this clerk, like the loafer, is able to break loose from the monotony of urban life, and pursue instead a more rewarding experience of living, which, like the loafer's, is contemplative and idle.

Grahame's satire highlights a consistent theme in *Pagan Papers*, related to the human desire to transgress conventions which hinder our enjoyment of life. He writes that "[i]n these tame and tedious days of the policeman rampant, our melancholy selves are debarred from many a sport, joyous and debonair, whereof our happier fathers were free" (337). To those bored with the kinds of recreation they are encouraged to enjoy, he suggests:

> why not try crime? [...] The freshness and novelty of secrecy, the artistic satisfaction in doing the act of self-expression as well as it can possibly be done; the experience of being not the hunter, but the hunted, not the sportsman, but the game; the delight of comparing and discussing crimes with your mates over a quiet pipe on your return to town; these new pleasures — these and their like —

> would furnish just that gentle stimulant, that peaceful sense of change so necessary to the tired worker (337-8).

Grahame suggests rejecting customary restraints which dictate how we spend our time and which indulgences are acceptable. And the highest delight of such a flagrant rebellion is that it will be an "artistic satisfaction in doing the act of self-expression as well as it can possibly be done", as though by doing what you want to do but are not supposed to do, you foster the truest form of self-expression. Of course, as a satirical piece, Grahame is hyperbolic to make a point: the "tired worker" who, bored by the ceaseless monotony of busyness and business in the city, is at last driven to lawlessness in order to stimulate aesthesis. Grahame makes a similar point here as that made in "Orion": although the outbreak of suppressed energies is quelled by societal conventions, the pagan revenant will resist those boundaries which limit his aesthetic needs. Such boundaries have been established within us, and they are reflective of those boundaries which separate the free rural spaces from the restricted spaces of the city.

Grahame expounds his critique of the modern insistence on boundaries and industriousness in "Deus Terminus". He suggests that state control allocates where one can ramble: "so much country is explored, marked out, allotted, and done with; that such and such ramblings and excursions are practicable and permissible, and all else is exploded, illegal, or absurd" (340). Woodland habitats, which are being marked off as private property, pose a threat to urban ideology because they are more than merely free-spaces where one can stroll. These spaces also mark "the margin of the material", where "no such petty limitations fett[er] the mind" as they do within the urban sphere

(340). The seasonal flux that is visible along the countryside is conducive to intellectual fluidity. For Grahame, there is a mimetic connection between outer and inner spaces: the British have erected their version of Terminus “as much in the less tangible realms of thought as in our solid acres” (340). Nonetheless, Grahame suggests, to transgress the “margin of the material” is to reconnect with a sphere that invites fluidity of body and mind.

In “Romance of the Road”, Grahame explores the connection between the wandering mind and the lay of the land. By traversing the most ancient roads and paths on the English countryside, the loafer has not only escaped the urban industrial complex, but he has also reestablished a connection to the Earth, and the character of place. For example, Grahame claims that an old pathway or road moves one “away from the habitable world in a splendid, purposeful manner,” as it “run[s] along the highest ridge of the downs” showing “but a shade of difference from the neighboring grass, yet distinct for all that” (319). The “shade of difference” Grahame refers to is the subtle distinction between the “habitable world” and the space which is not tampered with by industry. The road ascends to the “highest ridge of the downs” - as if it is intentionally climbing away from the suburbs and towns, a sort of peaked partition, which leads you up and over. Though this track wanders through the sacred space beyond human habitation, it nonetheless invites the idler to follow its course: “out on that almost trackless expanse of billowy Downs such a track is in some sort humanly companionable: it really seems to lead you by the hand” (319).

Grahame writes further that “the pleasant personality in roads is not entirely fanciful”, but that “[i]t exists as a characteristic of the old country road, evolved out of the

primitive prehistoric track developing according to the needs of the land it passes through and serves" (319). The road has a 'Romance', a story to tell, and it desires an attentive audience. This story is not one which speaks to the human Romance- the story of human civilization and historical progress. Rather, the road reveals the communal labour of all creatures in relation to the land itself. The loafer follows these paths "past farmsteads where man and beast live in frank fellowship" and "learn pleasant and serviceable lessons" from each other (320). These roads also reveal the "bending corn" which "chant[s] the mystical wonderful song of the reaper when the harvest is white to the sickle" (320). The 'Romance' of such roads, then, is the story of mortality - of all life - as it passes through the 'pastoral' place where life's bounties are enjoyed, and where life is in kinship with all of its creaturely manifestations; but it also tells of life's final stage, and thus speaks to a fuller understanding of human existence. The road shows how fundamentally interwoven our needs are with the needs of the land. Its cycles and rhythms are the patterns of our narrative, and this truth reveals our hubris in thinking that we direct the course of the Earth's Romance. Idleness, as it facilitates this sort of activity, is also the very attitude of the land, and the character which nature produces in the process of life. To be idle is to be free to follow where such roads lead, to be free to listen to this Romance, rather than to be bound by the notions of human progress and industry which set mankind apart as authors of a self-centered story.

The loafer is brought to reflect not only upon natural processes and the interdependence of life and land, but is also granted a fuller appreciation of the spaces which exist beyond the urban sphere, and how they can reconstitute the human psyche.

Grahame suggests idle loafing ought to imitate the course of the sun: “the journey should march with the day, beginning and ending with its sun, to be the complete thing, the golden round” (320). The loafer’s engagement with the freedom offered beyond the borders of civilization thus imitates the natural cycle. In “Loafing”, we saw that the revelers treated their leisure time in an immoderate way, in so far as they attempted to consume as much pleasure as possible, and thus were returned to their lives discontented and burned out. Instead, aesthetic sensibilities are guided by the natural cycle, which, according to Grahame, “makes the mind and body fare together, hand in hand, sharing the hope, the action, the fruition; finding equal sweetness in the language of aching limbs at eve and in the first god-like intoxication of motion with braced muscle in the sun” (“Romance of the Road” 320). Thus, the loafer has *felt* the day move through his body. The processing of aesthesis into theoria is achieved most effectively outside of the city, where our inner sense of enchantment with the Earth and with life itself is expanded.

Part Two: Retreat and Renunciation

Despite Grahame’s thought provoking meditations upon the inherent aesthetic and psychological value of strolling old pathways, Peter Green understands such praise of the rural as “a refuge from actuality” which pits “rural fulfilment and seasonal rhythms against the machine’s inhuman sterility” (118). Jennifer Hallett, moreover, notes a similar temptation existing in the mode of literary paganism in general:

> paganism was primarily experienced as a Saturday night of intellectual dreaming or a bank holiday of restful delight… Literary paganism functioned more as a ‘quick fix’- a pessimistic drug to release the individual from reality in the short

term rather than an optimistic endeavour to change modern reality wholesale (178-9).

For Hallett, an escapist author refuses to prescribe any constructive means of positive change, and opts instead to avoid the complexities of their society. Terry Gifford claims that in "the best of Pastoral literature, the writer will have taken the reader on a journey to be changed upon return for a more informed action in the present" (80). Grahame's literary paganism, as I have suggested in Chapter one, serves as a critique of how the human creature is conceptualized. However, such a critique in itself may not seem to offer much by way of "informed action" (Gifford 27). Grahame's approach is after all more inward-looking than overtly social. His intention is not mere evasion of the complexities of modern life, but rather he offers a means of coping with them.

Peter Green associates Grahame with a so-called "walking-cult" which had "collected a surprising number of literary devotees" in the late nineteenth century, and who understood walking as being "a philosophy of life" (118). A notion of idle loafing similar to Grahame's can be found in Frederic Gros' recent *A Philosophy of Walking.*[16] Gros, like Grahame, sees walking in rural spaces as providing a sort of freedom from civic structures. Gros associates the rural loafer[17] with Baudelaire's urban "flaneur". Both figures move through "open spaces" and in doing so counter the problematic ideology of "civilization with the burst of a clean break" (177).[18] Gros sees that the

[16] Gros's work is not exclusive to rural walking, but is a broad study of the aesthetics of walking and slow pace as it poses a challenge to urban and courtly culture throughout history.

[17] Gros does not use the term, but to make the connection clearer, I will refer to the 'walker of open spaces' which Gros discusses as a 'loafer' because Grahame and Gros have a very similar figure in mind.

[18] Baudelaire's 'urban flaneur', who for Walter Benjamin is a "passionate spectator" rather than a mere evasive presence, makes for an interesting comparison to Grahame's rural loafer. Each are engaged in valuable mediation upon the nature of the space they move through, and each offer insight into the implications of their respective activities and the culture within which they operate.

method of escape from the urban sphere is not merely an evasion of the difficulties of modern life. Rather, the loafer's resistance to modernity lies in his desire to escape. Gros refers to the "suspensive freedom" of walking in open spaces beyond the reach of industry (3). This freedom is "a brief out-of-system experience", for there the loafer "transgresses" the comfort and contentment he is afforded by modern living (5).

Pagan Papers and *A Philosophy of Walking* present similar pastoral retreats, but it is not clear that loafing as such is a means of overt subversion which Terry Gifford finds in the best of the genre. Gifford classifies some experiments in the pastoral as a "retreat" from the court to the country (23), and claims that such "a retreat can […] offer a temptation to disconnection, an escapism from complexity and contradiction". 'Good' pastoral, according to Gifford, will inform action which can subvert "the hegemony of the urban establishment" in some fashion (23). Both Grahame and Gros present a challenge to Gifford's demand for such specific prescriptive guidance from literature. The reflections Grahame and Gros are addressed to the individual reader, drawing attention to the private power of what Gros call "renunciation" (7).

Gros' notion of renunciation is useful for understanding escapism, and reading Grahame in this light urges us to reconsider how we comprehend Grahame's critique of industrialism and consumerism, and to reevaluate his style, keeping in mind the immediacy of his sense of discontentment with modern industrial society in fin de siécle England. Gros holds that the pleasure of walking affords us "the rediscovery of the simple joys and the reconquest of the primitive animal" within us (6). Grahame likewise employs pastoralism and the wandering into open spaces as a means of bringing back to human subjectivity a deep sense of our 'animal pleasures'. Acute appreciation of our

sensual connection with the land, and the intermingled forms of life which depend upon it, are the objects of the pagan sentiment.

As we can see, Greenslade's judgement of Grahame's critical value, then, has perhaps overlooked the nuance which can be brought forth from Grahame's literary paganism. Moreover, Gifford's three-step definition of 'good' pastoral literature can be successfully applied to Grahame's pastoral sentiments. Quality pastoral should, according to Gifford, employ a cycle which expresses "retreat", "renewal", and "return" (Gifford 27). If we consider Grahame's renunciation of modernity as offering a critique in and of itself, we can see that there is value in escapism in *Pagan Papers*, and in other literature that fosters a desire in readers to become re-enchanted with nature. Grahame's escapism, seen through the lens of Gros's concept of 'renunciation', can thus be understood along similar lines to what J.R.R. Tolkien classifies as one of the positive qualities of a fairy tale.

Tolkien writes that the fairy story offers a cycle of escape, renewal, and recovery. Recovery for Tolkien means the "regaining of a clear view," not primarily "'seeing things as they are'", which would involve a philosophical disquisition, but rather seeing things clearly in the sense of their being "freed from the drab blur of triteness and familiarity" (296). The pastoral retreat, like the fairy story, provides the mind with a similar space for 'renunciation'. Although traversing the actual landscape is for Grahame, as it is for Gros, a necessarily reinvigorating experience, it is also an aesthetically fulfilling one. Grahame's pastoralism involves an idler's inner reflection upon the beauties found in open space, as well as the corresponding psychological effects these spaces have on him. The retreat to rural space is not only an escape into the countryside; it is more

importantly an escape from the city and its oppressive structures. Grahame speaks clearly to us today when he expresses a melancholy acceptance of the loss of natural habitat due to urban sprawl, the negative consequences for the land itself, and the harmful psychological effects of habitat assimilation. He concludes “The Rural Pan”, by highlighting the endangered nature of these spaces for the purpose of renunciation and recovery:

> to-day the iron horse has searched the country through — east and west, north and south — bringing with it Commercialism, whose god is Jerry, and who studs the hills with stucco and garrotes the streams with the girder [...] Happily a great part is still spared — how great these others fortunately do not know — in which the rural Pan and his following may hide their heads for yet a little longer, until the growing tyranny has invaded the last common, spinney, and sheep-down, and driven the kindly god, the well-wisher to man — whither? (334).

Greenslade’s and Robert Dingley’s suspicion of Grahame’s attitude is perhaps warranted because it is not clear that Grahame is sincere here in his criticism of modernity. Dingley notes that through Grahame’s prose, the “new ugliness” is easily “aestheticized” by phrases such as “iron-horse” instead of train (50). However, I think there is a subtlety in Grahame’s position that is being overlooked. In the passage quoted above, Grahame’s depiction of the steam-powered locomotive as the “iron horse” which brings with it “Commercialism, whose god is Jerry”, is worth fuller consideration. It is relevant to note that the word “Jerry” once referred to the chamber pot.[19] Grahame disdains “the new ugliness” not only because it shrouds beauty in the world and “clogs the aesthesis”, but also because it reduces humanity to a great

[19] See “Jerry”, Online Etymological Dictionary.

collective digestive system whose suppliants worship human waste. The retreat from such a world constitutes an outright rejection of such dehumanizing idolatry. Escape can therefore be a necessary and positive response to modernity: the only remaining option which can revive the aesthetic impulse, or 'pagan sentiment' latent within the human spirit.

Part 3: A Pause in Sorrow

As I have shown throughout this chapter, literary paganism presents a constructive response to the rise of urban culture, consumerism, and industrialism. Paradoxically, despite the efforts to capture a pagan sentiment which is earthy and joyful, Grahame also often expresses despair. For example, in "The White Poppy", he conveys an ironic gratitude for the things that offer us pleasure: "Let us thank the gods that such things are: that to some of us they give not poverty, nor riches but a few good books in whole bindings" (347). However, Grahame also writes:

> "who, indeed, can say that the record of his life is not crowded with failure and mistake, stained with petty cruelties of youth, its meanness and follies of later years, all which storm and clamour incessantly at the gates of memory, refusing to be shut out? Leave us alone, O gods, to remember our felicities, our successes: only aid us, ye who recall not gifts aptly and discretely to forget" (347).[20]

Such despair, I believe, can be found in Grahame's pagan vision of the cosmos, and it seems to have been inherited from classical sources. Hesiod expresses a telling view of

[20] I will return to the importance of 'forgetfulness' and discontent to Grahame's aesthetic vision in chapter four.

what literature, namely poetry, offers poor mortals, and I believe Grahame has preserved it in his brand of paganism. Hesiod says that the Muses

> …were born on Pieria after our Father Kronion
> Mingled with Memory, who rules Eleutharae's hills.
> She bore them to be a forgetting of troubles,
> A pause in sorrow (53-6).

However, in light of the view that Grahame adopts from classical paganism, where life is mostly pitiful, with beauty and pleasure providing a fleeting respite from sorrow, we may wonder why we are supposed to feel gratitude towards the gods for the few gifts they offer?

G.K. Chesterton perhaps provides one possible answer to this unsettling question. In *Orthodoxy*, he claims that: "When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos, he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates who are deadly" (Chesterton 114). Chesterton sees paganism as an ultimately pessimistic outlook because it lacks the sense of hope that is central to Christian teaching. Although there is some merit in responding to modern progress by embracing the ideal of idleness in the way Grahame's persona does, his pagan philosophy fails to compensate for the loss of social optimism, and especially for the loss of spiritual hope which Chesterton affirms. Consequently, Grahame's literary paganism, in its hard distrust of moral strictness, cannot provide either secular or spiritual direction for societal change because the pagan cosmology is entrenched in the belief that, as Thomas Hardy writes in "Hap," the gods "had as readily strown/ Blisses about my pilgrimage as pain" (Hardy

13-14) - that try as we might, our lives are dictated by the whims of the gods - or perhaps worse- by mere happenstance!

One may find in Grahame's praise of the "poppy['s] [...] magic juice of Oblivion" as the "happiest gift of the gods" (347), a validating example of the critical consensus that *Pagan Papers* is ultimately escapist in the purely negative sense. However, the thirst for juice of the "White Poppy", like the drive to wander the country-side, reveals the desire for the transgression of boundaries and enclosures. Grahame claims that it is "a tactful forgetfulness that makes for happiness" (347), by which I take him to mean that the human spirit, or what Gerard Manley Hopkins called "inscape", like the land which the loafer wanders, is not defined by the boundaries which have come to define the landscape of the psyche. Human identity is not reducible to the memories which contribute to it. Painful or unwanted memories can, like false boundaries, be renounced. The nature of Grahame's escapism, as I have argued thus far, should not be understood as mere avoidance of the complexities of modernity; in the renouncement of the terms of modernity, escape becomes for Grahame the best path to human fulfilment.

The immediacy of the threat to expressed in at least one essay in *Pagan Papers*. In "The Rural Pan", Grahame expresses the inevitability of ecological desolation: "Pan and his following may hide their heads for yet a little longer", but nevertheless "the growing tyranny" will eventually claim "last common, spinney, and sheep-down" and drive "the kindly god" away (334). Grahame depicts the grim reality of a situation in which there is virtually no end to the greed and ignorance caused by the rise of modern industrialism. However, his all too real view of ecological decline does not imply mere

hopelessness. In fact, given the high value bestowed upon the woodlands, wetlands, and open spaces of the countryside we can see how he implicitly associates aesthetics, psychology, and environment. These three aspects of human experience are inextricably bound because they have the most power over human development. For Grahame, the aesthetic quality of our environment determines our character, and under such conditions as are dominant in urban modernity, one must flee the city, in order to counter its corrupting influence by reconnecting with the rhythms of nature.

Pagan Papers, though it is mostly concerned with the exaltation of life's pleasures in the face of degradation, is also a testament to a truth about human experience: though there is great beauty to be cultivated and understood, it arises in a transitory interior subjectivity that is fringed with disappointment and suffering. The grim reality of ecological desolation attunes the adult lover of nature to hearing the sound of what Wordsworth called "the still, sad music of humanity" ("Tintern Abbey" 91). In my next chapter, I will look at how Grahame explores the 'pagan sentiment' in yet another unique narrative construct, which, rather than praying for a "tactful forgetfulness", opts instead for reminiscence. Grahame employs a new narrative technique: the double perspective of the adult who reminisces about his childhood, and recaptures the interior idle aesthetic sensibility inherent to child subjectivity.

Chapter Three

"One Must Stoop": Stature and Play in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*

Introduction:

Following *Pagan Papers*, Grahame published two collections of stories about the childhood exploits of five mid-Victorian era orphaned siblings. *The Golden Age* (1895) and *Dream Days* (1898) revisit many of the themes established in his essays, such as the suppression of creative energies by societal conventions, the aesthetic appreciation of rural spaces, and the cultivation of sensual pleasures. Both works also recount the complex mode of experience unique to children before they are fully integrated into society. According to Lois Kuznets, Grahame employs a "double point of view" through the unnamed adult who recounts childhood experiences (61). The narrator is an adult of an undisclosed age, who revisits the experiences and reflections of his child-self, albeit mediated through a stylized adult voice.[21] In these stories, childhood represents the same pre-industrial and rustic sentiment which was praised in *Pagan Papers*. Grahame's sibling-stories looks back upon his childhood as an Arcadian time now lost to the progress of civilization as he indicates in "The Prologue":

> Somehow the sun does not seem to shine so brightly as it used; the trackless meadows of old time have shrunk and dwindled away to a few poor acres. A saddening doubt, a dull suspicion, creeps over me. Et in Arcadia ego,--I certainly did once inhabit Arcady (131).

[21] Laura Krugman-Ray also offers a very insightful analysis of Grahame's narrative voice in "Kenneth Grahame and the Literature of Childhood".

This passage captures the general theme of these stories. Grahame indicates the relationship between the loss of the rural landscape due to urban sprawl and the stultifying effects of modernity upon the imagination. He also compares the aesthetically rich child-subjectivity to an adult perspective, which is compromised as children are initiated into society. The progression from childhood to adulthood is implicitly likened to the 'progress' of modern society out of a primitive age. For Grahame, both processes of 'maturation' represent a fall from the Golden Age into the Iron Age.

Grahame's interest in child-subjectivity, along with his seemingly unshakable status as a children's author, has led some critics to be suspicious of his treatment of childhood. Robert Hemmings, for example, associates him with other authors of "the golden age of children's literature" who evoke childhood as "an impossibly sanitized and edenic time and space" (55). Hemmings concludes that such a "myth of innocence figures children as functionally securing the needs of the adult writer and reader for whom childhood signifies escape from the pressures of modern, industrialized, polluted, and exploitative adult world" (56-7).[22] However, as both Lois Kuznets and Mariah Gubar note, Grahame's depiction of children is by no means innocent. Kuznets maintains that Grahame has an "unsentimental view of childhood" (71), and he reveres child for their aesthetic sensitivities, while not depicting them as 'pure' or morally innocent. Mariah Gubar adds that "Grahame's representation of child characters […] blurs the line between child and adult, innocence and experience" (26). Nonetheless, if no nuanced engagement with what it is that makes the child perspective appealing be found in Grahame's stories, they can still be construed as uncritically escapist, regardless of the

[22] Hemmings's consideration of Grahame is based on his study of *The Wind in the Willows*. His assumption is that the animal characters are meant to appeal to children because they embody child-like qualities.

nuances of Grahame's representation of childhood. Therefore, I will attempt to provide an account of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* which underscores the positive aspects of his nostalgic reminiscence.

I divide this chapter into three parts. In part one, Grahame's characterization of child-subjectivity and how it relates to his aesthetic vision is considered. Then I discuss Grahame's suspicions about how formal education attempts to mold children into functional citizens able to navigate, contribute to, and stabilize the 'progressive' urban industrial culture.[23] An account of this process of conversion will help us reflect upon the more nuanced nature of Grahame's critique of modernity that has yet to be firmly established in the scholarship concerning his work. In part two, I will present two idle-minded adults who have seemingly retained a degree of the pagan sentiment despite the process of maturation. These figures offer an alternative ideal to the one which is imposed upon the children by the adult "Olympians", and offer hope to the narrator who is anxious about the effectiveness of "Olympian" conversion. In part three, after a discussion of a third idle-minded adult, I turn to "The Reluctant Dragon", a metafictional story which most clearly provides a commentary on the collections as a whole, offering a vision of how the pagan sentiment can be conserved during the child's transition to adulthood. Ultimately, in this chapter I hope to provide clear reasons for rejecting critical assertions such as Hemmings's with regard to Grahame's work, and to establish *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* as rich literary sites of fin de siècle discontentment with urban industrial culture.

[23] Grahame is not often direct about this fear, but I am bringing forward what I have established in my study of *Pagan Papers.*

Part One: "You have played enough"

Grahame imbues children's subjectivity with a greater capacity for aesthetic experience than adults. This is clearly indicated in his comparison between the child "Illuminati" and the adult "Olympian" (130). Adults are called "Olympians" in an ironic sense, because they lord over and constrain the children. However, these supposedly god-like beings are seemingly uninterested in getting any enjoyment out of life. For instance Grahame writes:

> These elders, our betters by a trick of chance, commanded no respect, but only a certain blend of envy-- of their good luck--and pity--for their inability to make use of it. Indeed, it was one of the most hopeless features in their character [...] that, having absolute licence to indulge in the pleasures of life, they could get no good of it (129).

The elders may exercise a kind of petty control over the child's present circumstances, but ultimately they are depicted as submissive to their false ideals. From the child's perspective, adults are unable or unwilling to make anything more of their lives than a procession of routine obligations and a servile submission to custom.

Grahame's child characters, on the other hand, capture the pagan sentiment in their ability to creatively manipulate the affective impact which the sensible universe has on the intellect and the imagination. Lois Kuznets notes that Grahame "distinguished himself from many of his contemporaries who wrote about children […] from an adult point of view" (59), in that he "honored children not so much for their supposed innocence, but for their animal spirits and their imaginative vigor" (61). For instance, in

"The Argonauts", Grahame demonstrates the child's ability to engage both his surroundings in play:

> Harold... was squatting in an old pig-trough that had been brought in to be tinkered; and as he rhapsodised, anon he waved a shovel over his head, anon dug it into the ground with the action of those who would urge Canadian canoes… "I'm Jason," he replied, defiantly; "and this is the Argo. The other fellows are here too, only you can't see them; and we're just going through the Hellespont, so don't you come bothering." And once more he plied the wine-dark sea (175).

Harold's creative engagement with his surroundings demonstrates the child's malleable sense of how objects, and their own bodies, relate to the world. This ability is unique to the child because they seem to be 'naturally' inclined to at once see objects as they appear, but are also able to engage with them as though they have become what the child wishes them to be.

The child's capacity for creative engagement with his habitat is superior to the adult "Olympians" of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*. Grahame's depictions of the child's interaction with his surroundings differs markedly from the aesthetic meditations of *Pagan Papers*. The loafer can appreciate the beauty in things as they appear, but he lacks the ability to interact with the world in quite the same way as a child.[24] For

[24] In his depiction of child subjectivity, Grahame seems to be both expanding upon and challenging the view of children and childhood expressed by Robert Louis Stevenson in his essay "Child's Play" (1878). Stevenson writes that children belong to "a primitive time", and they view adults as beings who seem to "move upon a cloudy Olympus" (Stevenson 122). In this view, there is a disjunction between the child and the adult perspectives. The adult looks upon the child as a kind of undeveloped semblance of a full grown person, and the child looks up to the adult as though he were of a different class of beings all together. Though Grahame adopts Stevenson's idea that adults are to the children as the gods of Olympus are to mortals, the junior writer inverts the hierarchy. Whereas Stevenson claims that children "see and touch and hear as through a golden sort of mist" (123), and therefore if we are to reflect on our child

instance, in “A Holiday”, Grahame depicts the child’s aesthetic sense as invigorated in a manner that is not available to the adult aesthete. As the unnamed narrator bounds through the open fields during a day off school in early spring, he recounts the communion of the natural habitat with his senses:

> “The soft air thrilled with the germinating touch that seems to kindle something in my own small person as well as in the rash primrose already lurking in sheltered haunts. Out in the brimming sun-bathed world I sped, free of lessons, free of discipline and correction, for one day at least” (132).

Grahame relates the energies aroused in the child to the regenerative power of spring. The erotically charged language suggests a similar effect to that which the loafer feels in “The Romance of the Road”: the “god-like, intoxication” of having exerted his body all day in the sun. However, the child has a more immediately communicative relationship with the environment: “[t]he air was wine, the moist earth smell, the lark’s song, the wafts from the cow shed at the top of the field, the pant and smoke of a distant train - all were wine - or song was it? Or odour, this unity they all blent [sic] into” (134). The child is acutely perceptive of the intertwining of sensations in and around him. Denis Denisoff refers to a similar notion of Pater’s as “ritual de-individuation” (444). Such a phenomena occurs during the observance of the diverse experiences which can lead to the dispersal of our sense of a unified self - a kind of apperception which reveals the bundle of sensations which Pater believes constitutes our identity. Such an experience is perhaps ritualistic since it breaks from the mundane sequence of experiences which are typical of habitualized human perception. The narrator’s holiday “ritual” is to flee from

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experiences, we will realize that our “sensations” were “vague, and [...] blunt” (123). As his stories indicate, Grahame suggests the opposite: when the adult reflects upon his childhood experiences, he finds in them the enviable power of the child's keener senses.

the course of formal education for the day, and participate in “various outdoor joys of puddles and sun and hedge-breaking” (132). Splashing through puddles and dashing through the bushes are all activities which appeal to the child because they enable him to express his own desire to move about in a playful and carefree manner.

The nature of such a ritual can be clarified with reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s reflections on human play, as expressed in his essay “The Relevance of the Beautiful”. Gadamer writes that “human play is fundamentally an exercise of movement” (23). Such ideas concerning play can be found in the child characters of Grahame’s stories, which are receptive to the playful energies which permeate the world around them. The child’s idle approach to life is thus not in any way inactive. Children, for Grahame, attempt to expel their vital energies in a manner which seeks no other end but the act of play itself. Child’s play reflects the fundamental ‘play-impulse’ innate to all artistic and creative endeavours. Gadamer claims that “play appears as a self-movement that does not pursue any particular end or purpose so much as movement as movement” (23). In Grahame’s stories the child desires the freedom to express this playful energy in a way that is not held accountable to any purpose or end, since such a strict logic would be antithetical to the child’s inherently idle disposition.

For Grahame the ludic impulse in children taps the fundamental energy which pervades the environment and moves through all creatures. Gadamer claims that such playful energy is a “phenomenon of excess, of living self-representation”, because “self-movement is the most fundamental characteristic of living things” (23). In other words, there is a spilling over of energy which is visible in the playful movements of living things. Grahame also suggests such an excess is present in children at play. He

illustrates this point by presenting the vigorous action of the wind, by which the hedge-breaking youth becomes enthralled:

> All the time the hearty wind was calling to me companionably from where he swung and bellowed in the tree-tops. "Take me for guide to-day," he seemed to plead [...] “To-day why not I, the trickster, the hypocrite? I, who whip round corners and bluster, relapse and evade, then rally and pursue! I can lead you the best and rarest dance of any; for I am the strong capricious one, the lord of misrule, and I alone am irresponsible and unprincipled, and obey no law (134-5)

Grahame uses the wind to express that fundamental energy which moves all things[25], and the defining characteristic of this energy is its inherently playful nature. Play is “irresponsible and unprincipled” because it is not governed by purposive reasoning, but is a “lord of misrule” (135). Grahame depicts this “trickster” as appealing to the same vitality which prompts the child to act impulsively.

According to Gadamer, the principle of unimpeded movement is a “free impulse and not simply” a “freedom from particular ends” (22). Play, then, like leisure, is not merely a recreational pursuit or a recess from productive activity. It is an expression of the freedom of movement and creative energies for their own sake. By exploring the play principle which is unique to children, Grahame is able to highlight the aesthetic experiences which seem to degrade as one matures. The child is not yet burdened by ‘adult responsibilities’, and therefore is able to relate to time and place in a

[25] Grahame’s depiction of the wind in this story is perhaps an allusion to Pan’s piping, and the ecstasy which overcomes the boy is similar to “panolepsy” - the irresistible enthusiasm (in greek, literally, possession by a god) - which, in ancient Greek myth was said to inspirit those who encountered the rustic demi-god (Bourgaud 102). I will return to the connection between Pan and the wind next chapter in which I will discuss the central place of the Pan mythos in *The Wind in the Willows*, and in Grahame’s aesthetic vision in general.

fundamentally idle way. “Child’s play” for Grahame is akin to leisure in the classical sense which I have previously discussed, because children play not as a respite from work, or for mere amusement. Play is to the child, for Grahame, as what leisure is to the aesthete: the true end of existence, for, as Gadamer suggests, the play-impulse is a manifestation of the very energy which compels life, and by giving that force creative expression, one participates in the process of Nature. The child at play is “steep[ed] [...] in the whole of creation”, as Josef Pieper claims is the case for those engaged in true leisure (41). Since child-subjectivity is naturally idle, reflecting upon it can allow one to recall the merit of the play impulse which has been stifled by the forces of modern society.

The recollection of the child perspective allows the adult to reflect upon the creative energies which have been compromised in the name of ‘growing up’. I do not mean to suggest that Grahame literally thought that we should try to behave as children no matter our age, but that by putting the particular experiences and sensations of childhood into adult speech, he asks readers to consider what we are forced to give up in our internalization of the customs and behaviours that stabilize our culture. Paul March-Russell claims that “underlining the use of the child is a discontent on the part of the writers with the current organization of society” (25). Rather than using childhood as a “retreat into the reassuring world of arcadia” (March-Russell 25), the literary interest in childhood is indicative of an “emerging dialogue between, on the one hand, a rational, urban and commercial society, and on the other hand, magical and folkloric beliefs” (25). Grahame implicitly suggests that the so called ‘progress’ we believe we make, both as a culture and as individuals, is an ‘upward’ movement away from conditions

which are more conducive to our sense of fulfilment as creatures. To be 'lower', or of lesser stature is, for Grahame, to be close to the sources of beauty, pleasure, and the fulfilment which comes from creative engagement with ourselves and our habitat.

Though childhood is ostensibly arcadian, Grahame also envisages his child protagonists as suffering at the hands of a cruel destiny. Eventually deprived of their freedom, they are dragged off to school, and forced to learn the rituals of the Olympian world. The child characters of these collections are aware that the very boorish tyrants they despise are waiting to assimilate them. The threat of 'growing up' is one of growing distant from the impulse which runs through the natural world and the self. The children who appear in Grahame's stories fear the process of "growing up" because they feel threatened by the attempt of adults to constrain their vital energies. The title of the first collection of stories, "The Golden Age", evokes the classical myth of an imaginary time and place where people lived in arcadian bliss.[26] Yet, while children may have the capacity for true leisure, they are governed by "Olympian" tyrants who force them to conform, first to the petty dictates of the household and later to those of the schoolmaster. Taken at face-value, Grahame's allusion to the myth may seem genuine in that it appeals to the sense of nostalgia which is clearly deployed throughout his stories. However, there is also a kind of sad irony in the allusion to Ovid's myth. The

[26] The myth of the Golden Age projects a vision of life always in contrast to the 'modern' age. In *Metamorphosis*, Ovid writes: "The world untroubled lived in leisured ease/ Earth willingly, untouched, unwounded yet/ By hoe or plow, gave all her bounteous store" (100-102). Ovid's myth suggests that a "golden age" hosted men who were in a state of perpetual idleness. Yet these men did not worry about the system of reward and punishment associated with a legal authority:

> Golden was the first age which unconstrained,
> With heart and soul, obedient to no law,
> Gave honour to good faith and righteousness
> No punishment they knew, no fear; they read
> No penalties engraved on plates of bronze (Ovid 88-92)

early pagans, according to Ovid, did not know “punishment” or “law” (88-92), since they lived in harmony with the gods, while the children of Grahame’s stories are often subjected to the seemingly arbitrary whims of their elders:

> brute force was pitilessly applied. We were captured, washed, and forced into clean collars: silently submitting, as was our wont, with more contempt than anger. Anon, with unctuous hair and faces stiffened in a conventional grin, we sat and listened to the usual platitudes (130).

Thus, childhood is only a ‘golden age’ in its potential. Grahame, like Ovid, and Hesiod before him, does not use this mythic past age to give readers an anesthetizing sense of nostalgia, but to communicate a sense of deep disappointment with how things actually are.

Olympian tyranny is often met with resistance. A prime example of the ways in which the children rebels is found in “The Twenty First of October”. The narrator’s sister Selina is frustrated by the Olympian lack of enthusiasm towards a national holiday in honour of Nelson.[27] Selina prepares a bonfire in her neglected hero’s honor. This event is described as a kind of pagan rite: “She rose and moved slowly down towards the beckoning fire; something of the priestess in her stride, something of the devotee in the set purpose of her eye” (217). As the fire intensifies, she becomes possessed in a nympholeptic trance: “Selina, a maenad now, hatless and tossing disordered locks, all the dross of the young lady purged out of her, stalked around the pyre of her own purloining” (218). Her ritual activity, Grahame suggests, has less to do with the fact that the Olympians have forgotten about Nelson, and more to do with her need to construct

[27] Lord Horatio Nelson is a British naval officer who was killed during the battle of Trafalgar in the Napoleonic wars.

a final monument to the way of life she will be forced to give up. We learn that she has recently reached the age in which she will be paraded around in public, introduced into society as a budding woman, and expected to participate in the rituals which are "proper" to a girl of her age and station. Selina's bold display of resistance offers hope to the narrator:

> "That it should be Selina too, who should break out this way. Selina who had just become a regular subscriber to the Young Ladies Journal, and who allowed herself to be taken out to strange teas with an air of resignation palpably assured - there was a special joy; and it served to remind me that much of this dreaded convention that was creeping over us might be, after all only veneer" (214-5).

Although the narrator sees in Selina's ritual a ray of hope for the child's resistance to the coming change into adulthood, the bonfire results in the punishment of both her and her brother Harold, who assisted in her ritual rebellion. She is eventually cowed into passive submission to the upcoming change. Grahame reveals that Selina is henceforth broken down by the Olympian strategy to divide her from her fellow pagans, and she comes to accept her ritual act as a mistake:

> when the exaltation had fizzled away and the young-lady portion of her had crept timorously back to its wonted lodging, she could only see herself as a plain fool, unjustified, undeniable, without a shadow of an excuse or explanation (245).

The Olympian imposed 'young-lady' that Selina is being primed to become has already established a firm hold on her personality, and although she had a final brief show of loyalty to the pagan way, she is ultimately overcome, and is soon set to become an Olympian.

Social indoctrination for girls, though not given much consideration in these stories, exemplifies the subtle ways in which Olympian conversion operates. Grahame's treatment of this theme is made more explicit when he tackles this education with regard to boys. Grahame is perhaps reflecting upon the mid to late Victorian anxieties concerning the place of children within society. The intellectual discourse surrounding efficiency and social reform is a contentious one, and the importance of education and child development made the education process a crucial part of political ideology. Claudia Nelson writes that "(f)or some Victorians, [childhood] was a threat, a stage during which desire outstripped self-control and animal nature proved the ineffectuality of civilization" (70). Grahame would likely agree that animal nature and childhood have a common element, but for him the basic 'animal' senses are the basis of our appreciation for what is aesthetically enriching in our daily experience, and to have it quelled in order to make one a more 'effective' citizen is to surrender one's ability to cultivate the pleasures of life.

On this aspect of his writing, Laura Krugman Ray notes that what motivates Grahame's nostalgic comparison between a preferable pagan childhood, and a degraded adulthood "is social, not personal" (11). It should be added that Grahame seems to also fear the prospect of full conversion not only because it separates one from the child pagus, but also because it compromises the simplicity of the child subject and constitutes a betrayal of oneself. Grahame writes that among the narrator's siblings, "this strange unknown thing called school" has "always been before us" (205), and each of the children feel this "grim spectre [that] loomed, imminent, stretching lean hands for one of our flock" (205). In "Lustisti Satis" ("you have played enough", fn 555), the

narrator ironically depicts the method by which the children are prepped for their move beyond the “placid backwater” of their childhood, and “out into the busy world of rubs and knocks and competition, out into the New Life” (208).

Edward, who is ready to be sent to school, is courted by Olympian masters who appeal to his sense of pride, singling him out as different from his siblings: “the Olympians […] seemed anxious to demonstrate that they had hitherto misjudged this one of us” (207). The Olympian preparation of the child who has come of age is troubling. They begin asserting Edward’s elevated status by manipulating his appearance in such a way as to emphasize this new status: “the unnatural halo around Edward got more pronounced, his demeanor more responsible and dignified with the arrival of his new clothing” (207). Along with his new clothing, he also gets a personalized set of luggage, upon which his name is inscribed. After he receives these gifts, he begins to “disappear mysteriously” only “to be found eventually wandering around his luggage, murmuring to himself ‘Edward’- in a rapt, remote sort of way” (207). Grahame suggests that seeing his name in print guarantees his willingness to comply with Olympian indoctrination. Now that he can read his name on his property, his sense of self-importance is affirmed, and he is distinguished from the group. When he comes back “a short three months hence” he is “a scorner of tradition” who now “condemns” his siblings’ play “as rot and humbug and only fit for kids” (209). The process of becoming an Olympian is necessarily bound up with a belief that childhood is a time of ignorance which has to be overcome.[28]

[28] In “The Lost Centaur”, Grahame sarcastically refers to this initiation into the Olympian regime as the “process of developing a Mind, [in] the course of being fitt[ed] out [as] a Lord of Creation” (362)

This process begins with the simple assertion of Edward's own identity as being central, rather than being one of a group (86). These gradual stages lead to individual distinction from the group. This point is highlighted by the narrator's assertion that the siblings were "one in thought and purpose, linked by the necessity of combatting one hostile fate- a power antagonistic ever- a power we lived to evade- we had no confidants save ourselves" (4-5). As they move 'upward' towards adulthood, children are encouraged to take pride in their own identity and to no longer stoop to the level of their former comrades. The child submitted to the educational regime suppresses the play impulse and is taught to divert his energies towards activities which are deemed proper to a responsible adult. Competitive modern life demands contribution to civic stability, and most importantly that the initiated abandon those idle, unproductive activities which are rejected as 'child's play'.

Part Two: One must stoop to see it...

Although Grahame's narrative persona reflects back on the realm of childhood, this process of reflection does not permit a reliving of those experiences, for "the gate has shut to [sic] behind [him]" (129). Instead, recollection is a way of bringing to mind the raw aesthetic capacities and unique perspective of the child. Childhood, on Grahame's account, is an epoch of experience which can be cultivated from aesthesis into theoria during adult reflection. However, the narrator harbours insecurities about his own fall into the more mundane reality of adulthood that lingers over both collections: "a saddening doubt, a dull suspicion creeps over me […] I certainly did once inhabit Arcadie. Can it be that I also have become an Olympian?" (131).

This insecurity, which appears in the prologue to *The Golden Age*, is addressed in several stories in the form of three distinctly idle adult figures who can be understood as having themselves resisted conversion, and who offer hope to the narrator. The first such figure is “the Artist”, a ‘grown-up’ who has been commissioned to paint a landscape near the narrator’s home. The Artist is depicted in such a way as to suggest that the process of maturation is not synonymous with Olympian conversion - in other words, he stands as proof that one may resist the full extent of one’s fate. The boy finds in the “Artist” an empathetic and engaging presence with which he shares a fantasy of “a city where […] you can choose your own house [...] and do just as you like” (183). This imagined city of the idle features famous loaners such as Lancelot, Robinson Crusoe, and other such “nice men in the stories who didn’t marry the princess [...]” (184). The Artist reveals his own sense of alienation from the greater part of society in his contribution to this fantasy city when he includes “the men […] who try like the rest of them, but get knocked out, or somehow miss- or break down or get bowled over in the melee- and get no princess nor even a second-class kingdom” (184). Though, as Lois Kuznets notes, the artist sees himself as a failure, the boy narrator sees him as a hero (Kuznets 70). The Artist is an example of one who can find his own way without completely losing touch with that “free impulse” which gives meaning and vitality to one’s experiences in the world (Gadamer 23).

The narrator meets another such idle adult figure in “A Harvesting”. The boy, once again on a solitary ramble, meets The Rector, “a bachelor” and an “eccentric” (164). This sage-like figure, who, like the Artist, is an unconventional member of society, offers an alternative example of maturity other than that of the typical practical-minded

Olympian. Whereas the artist is a fellow day-dreamer, the Rector is a fellow visionary. The old scholar offers the following insights to the narrator:

> "You have been in the fields in early morning? Barren acres, all! But only stoop - catch the light thwartwise - and all is a silver network of gossamer! So the fairy filaments of this strange thing underrun and link together the whole world [...] Only one must stoop to see it, old fellow, one must stoop!" (166-7)

As Damon Franke notes, Pater wrote of the human subject as being in a "web of nature", and that "the interconnectedness of the material world humbles humanity" (174). The rector's insistence upon the importance of "stooping" highlights Grahame's aesthetic fascination with alternative modes of perception from those of the conventional adult. Stooping becomes a humbling process by which the maturing pagan spirit is able to remain in touch with the sense of enchantment with the world, and resist full Olympian conversion into the anthropocentric mindset which informs the urban industrial complex.[29] The rector's imperative charge that "one must stoop" in order to glimpse the finer threads that connect all things reveals the key to maintaining the pagan sentiment during the transition from child to adult. To "stoop" means to humble ourselves before the wonders of experience, and in so doing we can retain something of that child-like sense of curiosity toward the mysterious connection between the self and Nature.

[29] Such a conception of the development of child-subjectivity is comparable to Walter Pater's notion of the historical development from a 'Dionysian animism' "into a spirit of severe and wholly self-conscious intelligence" which "progres[ses] into the entirely humanised religion of Apollo" (Pater quoted in Denisoff 439). The Apollonian, adult world of normative dominance is pitted against the Dionysian, child world of impulse and desire.

Part Three: "I shall explain that you're converted, and see the error of your ways, and so on"

The third and final idle-adult figure who appears in Grahame's stories is sometimes called "the funny-man" (239), and at other times, "the circus-man" (263). This funny man is an obliging adult who has an empathetic, mentoring, and also playful relationship with the children:

> We called him the funny man because he was sad and serious, and said little, but gazed right into our souls, and made us tell him just what was on our minds at the time, and then came out with some magnificently luminous suggestion that cleared every cloud away. What was more he would then go off with us at once and play the thing right out to its finish, earnestly and devotedly, putting all other things aside. So we called him the funny man, meaning only that he was different from those others who thought it incumbent on them to play the painful mummer. The ideal as opposed to the real man was what we meant, only we were not acquainted with the phrase (239).

The children find in the funny man an ally and fellow playmate. However, he is also a kindred spirit who does not use his influence to limit their creative freedoms, but encourages, and even joins them in their play. He is an "ideal" man to them because he behaves in a way that, from the children's perspective, an adult should, given the freedom they seem to have.

In *Dream Days,* "the funny-man" tells a story in which the struggle between reason and desire, between natural and unnatural instincts, is made apparent. In "The Reluctant Dragon", the narrative voice is given over to this funny man. He proceeds to

give a kind of revisionist account of the legend of St. George and the Dragon. The story, in a more explicit way than the idle-adult figures themselves, offers a unique vision of "growing up". In the funny man's version of the story, St. George plays the role of a mock-Apollonian figure representing 'rules' and order. Grahame recasts the serpent as an idle, poetic figure (rather than the dark creative Satan of Blake) who is a kind of caricature of the aesthete pagan-persona found in his essays. That the funny man decides to use the story of St. George and the Dragon is itself revealing, for, Christian "dragon slayers" like St. George typically represented "the triumph of Christianity over evil and the banishment of paganism from the earth" (Alma Mare 197). In medieval times, the dragon had come to represent "the personification of life within the earth- of that life which, being unknown and uncontrollable, is […] hostile to man" (Alma Mare 196).

The dragon of Grahame's tale has lived burrowed in the earth, emerging very recently upon the downs just outside of the medieval village. This dragon is a poet, but of an idler sort - his great sin is not passionate rebellion, but rather the sin of idleness. The Dragon, when accused of being an "enemy of the human race", claims that he is "too lazy to make (enemies) to begin with" (268). He claims that before emerging from the cave, he "had peace and quietness and wasn't always being asked to come along and do something" (267), a state which suited him because, unlike its vicious brethren, he seeks respite from the demands of society:

> all the other fellows were so active and *earnest* and all that sort of thing- always rampaging, and skirmishing, and scouring the desert sands and pacing the margins of the sea, and chasing knights all over the place… whereas I lived to

> get my meals regular and then to prop my back against a bit of rock, and think of things going on and how they keep going on just the same (267).

However, the eventually Dragon emerges because he desires “community and recognition”, and change, for, as time went on, “there was a certain sameness about the life, and at last I thought it would be fun to work my way upstairs and see what you fellows were doing” (268). He happens to meet a shepherd whose son, known only as “The Boy”, becomes the protagonist of the story.[30]

The Boy strikes up a friendship with the Dragon and discovers that the beast is not dangerous, and is in fact quite charming. However, once the rowdy villagers get wind of a dragon appearing near their village, they begin to make up stories in order to summon the knight. The people of the village, sadly, only want a spectacle: “it’s meat and drink to them. Dogs, bulls, dragons - anything so long as it's a fight” (272), the Boy tells St. George, who is naturally inclined to believe he must battle the beast. The saint finds that he is flexible, as long as he can use his position as moral authority to undermine the mobbish intentions of the villagers, who, he is told, “have a poor innocent badger in the stable” and that “they’re saving him up till *your* little affair is over” (272). This is the evidence that he needs to begin to see that the villagers are not being honest.

St. George is eventually revealed to be performative, like the Dragon, which makes them perfect playmates. While the saint is trying to convince the dragon to fight, he appeals to the beast’s aesthetic sensibilities: “this would be a beautiful place for a

[30] Unlike the children of Grahame’s primary narrative, the boy in this story “was treated more or as an equal by his parents” (264-5). The funny-man provides the children with an alternative vision with which to compare their own situation, if only so they can recognize themselves as not being natural inheritors of the low position which their caregivers assign to them.

fight. These great bare rolling downs for the arena - and me in my golden armour showing up against your big blue scaly coils! Think what a picture it would make!" (274). The saint not only appeals to the performative impulse in the dragon, but also reveals his own delight in the aesthetic aspects of his duty. It is clear that the knight wants to put on a show.

St. George appeals to the Dragon's hunger for attention as he promises to give the creature his moment in the spotlight, both in their battle, and in the finale: "according to the rules," St. George will parade the dragon through the marketplace, and the victor shall "explain that [the Dragon is] converted" and has "seen the error of [his] ways and so on" (274-5). This appeals to the dragon, who proclaims, "I'm bored to death up here and no one appreciates me. I'm going into society […] I've got all the qualities to endure me to people who entertain" (275). In this fixed bout, Grahame slyly asserts that the authoritative moral aspect of society is performative in much the same way as the creative aspect. This insight tweaks the platonic idea of the charioteer who struggles to master the wild horse of Desire with the steady steed of Reason. Reason is rewarded with the heroic sense of victory, while Desire plays vanquished - but they are playmates rather than rivals.

The Funny man's tale imparts a deep message to the children of Grahame's stories. Growing up is inevitable, but it does not have to be a complete conversion from child "Illuminati" to adult "Olympian". Estelle Alma Maré suggests that the traditional "legend of St. George and the Dragon is in fact symbolic of the force of radiant energy which releases the power of dark and dense matter" (201). This is also demonstrated in the funny man's story. The Dragon is depicted as having burrowed deep into the earth

before regathering itself and emerging. Grahame perhaps uses the Dragon to represent the way in which the pagan sentiment, which Pater claimed struggles to reassert itself against civic suppression. Children, for Grahame undergo this very process as they are coerced away from their pagan-like predispositions in the name of “growing up” . Maré sees a similar idea at work in the traditional myth: “At birth the human soul is like a coiled up dragon which has the potential to be transformed into a being in whom the darkness of matter may be transformed into light” (201). For Grahame, although maturation is inevitable, not all child pagans must become Olympian. The adult who stoops to preserve communion with the child “Illuminati”, is able to recollect the pagan sentiments of child-subjectivity, and thereby cultivate a leisurely attitude toward life.

In *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days*, (as is also the case in *Pagan Papers*), Grahame focused on the individual’s struggle to recapture the pagan sentiment. In my next chapter, I will explore how Grahame engages the idle ideal of his literary paganism from the perspective of a group of four famous friends who embody the pagan sentiment in an even ‘lower’ and more acutely sensitive creature than a human child. The animal figures of *The Wind in the Willows*, as I will show, represent the fundamentally chthonic relationship between their subjective experience and their habitat. Grahame offers readers of his animal fantasy a view from above, and, more importantly, within a community which is brought together and nearly pulled apart by the ‘play-impulse’.

Chapter 4

"There's the Real Life for You!": Harmony and Habitat in *The Wind in the Willows*

Introduction:

Although *The Wind in the Willows* was not generally well received upon its release, Grahame's vision of riverside life has endured. In fact, its fame as a classic "children's book" has been so well established that most of the critical work concerning it is confined to journals and books which exclusively study children's literature. Peter Hunt claims that *Willows* "may be the greatest case of mistaken identity in literature" (*Willows* viii); although the book "is commonly accepted as an animal story for children", it is, however, "neither an animal story, nor for children" (vii). One of my aims throughout this project has been to present Grahame's work as being more generally valuable to literary studies than strictly as an author of children's literature, and thus I agree with Hunt on this point. However, as we will see, *The Wind in the Willows* is very much an *animal* story indeed.

In this chapter, I will re-engage with in a structural critique along similar lines as Lois Kuznets or Michael Mendelson, who both suggest that *The Wind in the Willows* stages a confrontation between the domestic and excursive inclinations within the psyche. These competing impulses correspond with the inner tension between Reason and Desire, which I discussed last chapter. However, I believe that Grahame's rendition of riverside life can be further clarified with reference to an ancient theory of the soul, which proposes that it is governed by a principle of motion and rest. Movement (motion) and stability (rest) are the internal and external forces which drive the development of character and plot within the novel. In *The Wind in the Willows*, Grahame uses the

animal to explore the animating principle inherent to all organic beings. The novel demonstrates how this so-called *anima* can achieve an inner harmony and bring balance to the two conflicting inclinations by which it is governed, and establish the sort of leisurely life which I have suggested is inherent to Grahame's writing in general. As I will attempt to show, *Willows* is a tale of friendship and the attempt to secure such a way of life as it is threatened by psychological and communal dissolution.

This chapter is organized in four parts. In part one I will explore the four main characters as archetypal representations of stability (Mole and Badger) and fluidity (the Water Rat and Toad). I argue that Grahame depicts a harmonious balance between his characters that is secured in the contrasting of their basic animal natures. In part two, I examine the plot structure of *Willows*, and show how, by establishing peace with the Wild Wood, and reintegrating Toad, the river-bankers are able to conserve the idle way of life. Part three deals with how Grahame depicts Pan as the ultimate object of Beauty towards which the animal is drawn. Pan instils in the creature a desire for aesthetic fulfilment (i.e. the pursuit of Beauty which can be debased and perverted, as it is in Toad, or refined, as it is in Mole and Ratty). I will ultimately seek to show Pan as a manifestation of Grahame's literary pagan vision by personifying the highest goods - Beauty and Friendship- as being maintained in this animal community. Part four reveals how Grahame provides a sober second look at the how the excesses of the life-movement threatens to undermine the harmonious co-existence of the animal community.

Part One: Summoning, Warning, Enticing, Repelling

Before discussing the nature of Grahame's animal characters, it is worthwhile to speculate upon Grahame's literary interest in animals. The degree of Grahame's anthropomorphism has been contested almost since the novel first appeared.[31] More recently, Catherine Elick has suggested that the anthropomorphic techniques which Grahame employs are meant to encourage the vagueness of his characters' species identification (Elick 48-9). She believes, however, that "Grahame clearly prefers that part of the animal world that borders close upon- but does not infringe dangerously on the human world" (45). This is a compelling view, given that Grahame's animal characters may display certain rodent, amphibian, or mustelid qualities, but their speech, sense of decorum, and manner of dress suggest that they are more like Edwardian gentlemen than thick-furred or warty critters. Nonetheless, the narrative persona of *The Wind in the Willows* suggests an inversion of the traditional metaphysical hierarchy of God, Man, (Child), and Beast. Animals are superior than humans in the order of Being, for Grahame, because they possess a sharper sense apparatus, and therefore have a closer connection to the sublimity of Nature. Thus, like their child counterparts in his short stories, Grahame's animal characters constitute yet another literary embodiment of the pagan sentiment.

Grahame foregrounds Pater's seminal notion in the novel's depiction of animal sensation. In her essay "Bodies and Pleasures in *The Wind in the Willows*", the late Cynthia Marshall claims that Grahame represents "experiences […] of the body" as being "curiously detached from any sustained representation of the physical bodies of the central characters" (59). As a result, the characterization of Ratty and Mole often

[31] See Gaarden (43).

recalls the way the narrative persona of *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days* is presented. That is to say, Grahame presents animal characters less in terms of how they look, and more in terms of how they feel. Although Toad, Ratty, Mole, and Badger are not faithful representations of the actual animals upon which they are based, I believe that Grahame has chosen his four main animals for very specific and telling reasons.

For Grahame, animals are more sensitive than human beings, and therefore are subjects which can reveal a crucial element of aesthetic awareness. In chapter one, I examined the importance of the early essay "The Lost Centaur" because Grahame offers a vision of creaturely subjectivity and identity as being best depicted in the mythical personage of the half man, half horse centaur, who has "the nobilities" of the animal and the human, but without "the baseness" of either (362). In *Willows*, Grahame develops this notion by suggesting that in the psychological framework of even the smallest animals, there are two "calls": one toward movement and change, and one toward rest and stability.[32] In "The Inner Family of *The Wind in the Willows*", Bonnie Gaarden suggests that the four central figures of the novel depict "psychic entities which inhabit everyone's souls" (44). Gaarden, reading the text through a Jungian lens, argues that Ratty, Mole, Badger, and Toad are archetypal figures who represent aspects of the human (and animal) psyche[33] or "anima" (45) which compels each character. However, while Grahame has imbued his creatures with human-like psychological nuance, I believe he explores something even more essential to the nature of living beings. The

[32] Michael Mendelson sees this as a call to domestic stability and to "romantic enthusiasm". I believe that, while this is true, there is a deeper element to Grahame's text which, if clarified, can allow us a clearer understanding of the narrative movements and outcomes of the text. See Mendelson (128).

[33] Several other critics likewise view *Willows* as a sort of satire on human character - especially with regard to Toad. See Green (281-6), Knopfelmacher "Oscar Wilde at Toad Hall: Kenneth Grahame's Drainings and Draggings", and Elick (58-60.).

term “anima”, itself the Latin word for the Greek *psuché* (soul), was in classical philosophy the technical term for that power or principle, the presence of which determined whether or not a thing is alive. Thus, from a philosophical point of view, Grahame presents a similar image of the soul, as that of Aristotle, who, in *De Anima*, argues that the soul is “the essence [..].of the specific sort of natural body that has in itself a principle of rest and motion” (412b, 20). Grahame therefore finds in the animal an embodiment of the struggle between the inclination toward rest and motion.

Grahame represents the dual aspect of “anima” in his depiction of animal aesthesis. Marshall points out that the animals in *Willows* possess finer sensations than humans, and the passage she quotes is worth revisiting:

> “We [humans], who have long lost the more subtle of the physical senses, have not even proper terms to express an animal’s intercommunications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word ‘smell’, for instance to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, enticing, repelling” (*Willows* 50).

In the animal, Grahame finds a means to explore the subtleties of how sensation is inextricably bound together with habitat, and how in particular the so-called ‘lower’ animals are able to connect with the external world around them. In the “delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day”, we find the contrasting impulses: “summoning” and “warning”, and “enticing” and “repelling”. In this, Grahame suggests that animal perception is indicative of the interplay between motion and stability.

This fundamental characteristic of animal sensation is realized in two types of animal: the amphibious animals, Ratty and Toad, and the subterranean animals, Mole and Badger. During the course of *Willows*, Mole and Rat each experience an inner conflict, and by virtue of their respective natures, they are able to help each other endure. Likewise, Mr. Toad, an impulsive amphibian, and Mr. Badger are brought into confrontation. Badger forces Toad to face his own harmful tendencies, and in the wake of Toad's reckless escapades, Badger is brought out of seclusion and into regular interaction with the river-bankers. Therefore, Grahame contrasts earth (rest and stability) and water (motion and fluidity), and the thematic interplay of these elemental principles balance the collective friendship of all four characters.

Rat and Toad's respective attitudes toward the river and the land capture the defining characteristics of their animality.[34] This is evident in their speeches concerning their preferred mode of travel. Ratty is a participant in the river's current by drifting along at pace with it, and boating is for him what walking is for the pagan persona of Grahame's essays - an essentially idle mode of participation in natural rhythm:

> "In or out of 'em, it doesn't matter. Nothing seems to matter, that's the charm of it. Whether you get away or you don't; whether you arrive at your destination or whether you reach somewhere else, or whether you never get anywhere at all, you're always busy, and you never do anything in particular; and when you've done it there's always something else to do, and you can do it if you like, but you'd much better not" (8).

[34] Sarah Wadsworth also discusses this point, but in terms of inebriation and addiction. I will return to her insightful reading of the text in the conclusion.

When boating you are “always busy”, or in other words, you are never stagnant, and yet, you are never merely giving into busy-ness - “messing about in boats” is not a means to some other end, but an end in itself, and as such it is primarily an aesthetic pursuit, and not merely a physically engaging pastime.

And yet, even though Ratty feels an emotional bond to his river, he is also tempted to explore the Wide World that lies beyond it. The reader gets a hint of his fear and curiosity in the opening chapter of the novel when Ratty overstates his bias against traversing the boundaries of his familiar domain:

> “‘Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World,’ said the Rat. ‘And that’s something that doesn’t matter, either to you or me. I’ve never been there, and I’m never going, nor you either, if you’ve got any sense at all. Don’t ever refer to it again, please” (10).

Rat’s pre-emptive shutdown of any discussion of the Wide World is enough to make us question whether he protests too much. Later, in “Wayfarers All”, this temptation reaches a boiling point, and much like Toad, Ratty begins to court curiosity to see the great beyond. He feels a “stirring in his heart [...] the unseen was everything, the unknown the only real fact of life” (98). Sarah Wadsworth describes this longing as an “impairment of the will” (57); Ratty is impaired by his desire to forsake his home and his community in order to indulge a craving for the unknown.

In the Water Rat’s inner struggle, we can see the urge to move beyond what is stable and familiar. Mole calms his friend by delicately coaxing him back to his river bank home, and helping Ratty resist the urge to abandon the River that is his Muse. This gentle persuasion on the part of Mole has been interpreted by Peter Hunt as being

repressive, but given the internal logic of the story, it is merely a matter of prudence that Ratty should not fall victim to the same excesses as Toad. Wadsworth astutely observes that “the Water Rat can only regain command of his will by resisting the Sea Rat and the freedom to roam that he seems to embody” (58). Very early on, Grahame describes the sea as “insatiable” (6), and, as the Sea Rat himself claims, the desire to voyage cannot be satisfied (96). The incessant pursuit of the new beyond the confines of the known world would never satisfy the curiosity-seeker; his self-defeating adventures would shipwreck the very core of his spiritual being. Using his domestic skills, Mole is able to create an atmosphere of calm in Ratty’s home, and lift him out of his depression.

Likewise, Ratty helps Mole resolve his own issue with his neglected domestic space. In “Dolce Domum”, Mole cannot resist the urge to descend back into the earth. Upon smelling his home, which he has not seen since joining Ratty on the River Bank, Mole is stricken:

> Since his escape on that bright morning he had hardly given it a thought, so absorbed had he been in his new life, in all its pleasures, its surprises, it's fresh and captivating experiences [...] And the home [...] was missing him, and wanted him back, and was telling him so, through his nose, sorrowfully, reproachfully, but with no bitterness or anger [...] The call was clear, the summons was plain. He must obey it instantly, and go (50).

Mole’s “call” is precisely contrary to the one which afflicted Ratty. Whereas Rat was being summoned beyond the River Bank to seek new horizons, Mole feels compelled to return to the home and the seclusion which he had fled in answer to the “divine

discontent" with which the spirit of spring beckoned him. In this episode, as in "Wayfarer's All", the healing sympathies of comradery are shown to be the foundation of a caring and complete friendship. When Mole is distressed over the neglect of his home, Rat takes charge as domestic entertainer. As we can see, Ratty, who is more a creature of fluidity and motion, and Mole, who is one of stability and rest, provide a balance for each other which afford each inner peace.

In Toad's lust for speed and excitement, the inclination towards fluidity and movement is exaggerated to an extreme. While Ratty is portrayed as similar to Grahame's loafer figure, in his lust after mere gratification, Toad is more like the Merchant class "Mercuries" or perhaps even more so, as the decadent dandy "Apollos" of Grahame's essay "The Rural Pan". Compare Ratty's praise of the river: "What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing […] Whether in winter or summer, spring or summer, it's always got its fun and its excitements" (9), with Toad's speech about the open road:

> "There's real life for you […] The open road, the dusty highways, the heath, the common, the hedgerows, the rolling downs! Camps, villages, towns, cities! Here to-day, up and off somewhere else to-morrow! Travel, change, interest, excitement! The whole world before you, and a horizon that's always changing!" (19).

Whereas Ratty not only praises the river, but also the River Bank near it where he makes his home, Toad desires the open road because it allows one to always be on the move to a new and different place. Toad's character personifies the urge to abandon

the security and stability of home and territory, for the excitement of the new. This aspect of his character is most clearly displayed in his attraction to ever faster vehicles.

When we first meet Toad he is attempting to master the art of boating. When this fad passes, he famously takes up caravanning which, hopefully, he thinks, will bring him more excitement. This all changes when he sees his first motor car. Toad becomes entranced, and at once he is enthralled:

> ‘Glorious, stirring sight! [...] ‘The poetry of motion! The real way to travel! The only way to travel! Here to-day- in next week tomorrow! Villages skipped, towns and cities jumped- always somebody else’s horizon! O bliss! O poop-poop! ‘O my! O my!’ (21).

Toad’s declaration that the motor car captures the “poetry of motion” is a direct rejection of Ratty’s (and perhaps Grahame’s as well) idle admiration of natural rhythms and the slow experience of beauty.

The other set of animals, the subterranean Mole and Badger, are both under-dwellers, and they too are each, at times, tempted by their natural inclination toward seclusion, and the stability it brings. When we first meet Mole, he is said to have “lived so long” in the “seclusion of the cellarage” (5), and is thus brought forth by the irresistible call of Spring (5). In the opening paragraph, the stage is set, not only for the character development of Mole, but also for the thematic elements which will be at play throughout his story:

> Spring was moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It was small wonder, then, that he suddenly flung down his brush on

> the floor, said 'Bother!' and 'O blow!' and also 'Hang spring cleaning!' and bolted out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat (5).

Mole is shown here to be made weary by the monotony and stagnation of his all too familiar home. Instead of merely tidying it up, and continuing life as usual, he is moved by a deep need for change - a break from his daily routine and solitude. The "spirit of divine discontent and longing" which is characteristic of Spring, is an erotic urge to move beyond the familiar.[35] Hunt suggests that Grahame is 'subconsciously' pre-occupied with sexual repression in this all male society, but as we can see, the spirit of spring is indicative of a desire that moves the animal, but is fundamental to it, and distinct from mere sexuality. What circulates in the air is a *divine* discontent, as though it is the restlessness of a god which pulls Mole into to the world above where he will find "birds building, flowers budding, leaves thrusting", a world expressive of the erotic urge to couple and create (6). Mole is invited to the familiarity of his dwelling, and bear witness to the playful energies at work above. Like the titular beast of "The Reluctant Dragon", Mole's desire for change and companionship is met with Ratty's eagerness to initiate his new friend into the joys of river bank life.

When Badger is first introduced, he rejects joining the river-bankers for a visit, because, explains Ratty: "That's *just* the sort of fellow he is! [...] Simply hates Society!'" (11). But when Ratty and Mole show up in distress, we find that Badger is quick to help. Bonnie Gaarden claims that Badger is to the friends as "the Self" is to the psyche: "[j]ust as Badger is a director and rescuer, the Self directs the psyche toward expansion and maturity" (45). Mole is drawn to what Badger represents - solitude, security, and

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[35] Grahame's introduction to Mole has much in common with Chaucer's opening lines in *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales*: "Zepherius eek with his sweete breethe/ Inspired hath in every holt and heeth" (5-6), which "pricketh… Nature in hir corages" (11).

submersion - aspects of his own nature which he has challenged in order to join Ratty on the River Bank. Badger helps the young rodent revisit the aspects of his own psyche which the rodent has abandoned by leaving his own home (36).

Badger brings them safely to his hearth, the center of his own dwelling. Since the Mole had become restless for something familiar, Badger has brought him, metaphorically, into that place within that is meant for companionship. It is a place of comfort, safety, and above all, nourishment. Mole's true desire, as I mentioned above, is not merely to get moving and experience change, but also to come together with others. In "The Wild Wood", he longs to revisit the aspect of his own nature which Badger represents. However, Badger's lesson is to show him that a home on its own is not complete unless one shares their hearth with their companions: "It seemed a place [...] where two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment" (36-7). Badger's den promises security and comfort. His home is perhaps representative of that inviting space necessary for contemplation and conversation. Yet, just as the Mole has overcome his secluded and subterranean nature by listening to the call of spring and allowing himself to wander upwards and outwards to make friends, Badger is pulled into the River Bank community.

Gaarden reads Badger's role among the other animals as "the organizing center" (44). However, his position is not so clear. For instance, when "Toad's hour" arrives, Badger takes it upon himself to try to "bring" Toad "to reason" (63); yet, as Sara Wadsworth notes, Badger's methods fail to reform the amphibian (50). Badger first attempts to persuade Toad by presenting the "facts" of the predicament (63). Yet Ratty

is rightfully suspicious of this method, because Toad is not in control of his mania: “[t]alking to Toad’ll never cure him. He’ll say anything” (63). Nonetheless, the “droning” Badger carries on, his voice “rising and falling in waves of oratory” as he delivers a scolding speech which is ultimately ineffective - Toad, being “very easily converted for the time being- to any point of view”, will submit, but only in the moment (63). However Badger does not give up his method easily. He is stubbornly ‘reasonable’, whereas Toad has no control over his emotions, and thus cannot effectively reason for himself.

Badger, who initially appears as a sterner version of the idle-minded adult characters from Grahame’s sibling-stories, is soon brought out of his underground den and into the action with Ratty and Mole. He is encouraged to rethink his own methods, and in doing so, he is able to interact within the community in a way which improves it, and pushes him to be a more versatile friend. As the story reaches a climax, it is Badger’s plan to lead Toad through the tunnels that run beneath his Wild Wood home, and connect to Toad Hall to face the consequences of his reckless behaviour. By being brought into the river-bankers’ conflict with the tyrannous weasels, Badger helps establish a peace between the two communities. Thus, by virtue of the harmony established within and between the principal players in Grahame’s novel, the idle, aesthetically attentive life which allows unfettered enjoyment of the pagan sentiment is secured. In the development of such characters, Grahame suggests that to make the best of life, a balance must be struck between the two seemingly contradictory inclinations within each creature, the desire for stability, and the natural fluidity of spirit. Only then can the stimuli of aesthesis be cultivated into theoretic gratitude.

Part Two: Growth, Development, Hope

The much debated plotting of the novel reveals Grahame's reflections on the importance of habitat and community with regard to the inner balance of the dual tensions within the anima. The external conflict between three demarcated territories which are mapped out in the text: The River Bank, The Wild Wood, and The Wide World is seemingly solved once peace is achieved between River Bank and Wild Wood creatures. Yet, whereas Gaarden argues that *Willows* is "a tale of pysch(ological) growth" (48), Peter Hunt claims that the book is "relentlessly oppressive, turning to fantasy to preserve" an "escapist society" (Hunt 177). Hunt concludes that Grahame's world is stagnant and that *Willows* "lacks… growth, development, and hope" (177), because the basis for the animals 'freedom' seems paradoxically to come from the repression of their impulses. As I have shown, Gaarden's estimation is the more convincing, if we grant a charitable reading which takes into account Grahame's carefully developed themes. Nonetheless, Hunt's conclusion may seem accurate if the way of life that is established by the end of the book is not clarified.

River Bank life evokes the sort of idle life which is presented as being lost in *Pagan Papers*, and the imaginative free play of the 'Illuminati' children in *The Golden Age* and *Dream Days.* For instance, as summer wanes and autumn sets in, Mole reflects on the life which he has earned upon being initiated into River Bank society:

> the languorous siesta of hot mid-day, deep in green undergrowth, the sun striking through in tiny golden shafts and spots; the boating and bathing of the afternoon, the rambles along dusty lanes and through yellow cornfields; and the long, cool

> evening at last, when so many threads were gathered up, so many friendships rounded, and so many adventures planned for the morrow (28).

Time is not a concern. It is place[36] that counts, and the River Bank is portrayed as being in touch with what Grahame has indicated as the seasonal rhythms of Nature's process. The River Bank, though it is representative of stability and home, is far from being a static place, and as such it relays the vitality of Grahame's overall idle vision. Grahame may have chosen this habitat as a loafer's paradise because wetlands are intermediate environments. They swell in spring, bloom and display a wide variety of animal and plant life in summer, and then slowly drain and dwindle off to sleep through autumn and Winter. Being specifically a riverine wetland, Grahame's choice of ecosystem is especially close to the main source of life and movement - the River itself.

The first description of the river is revealing. It is a "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" (6). Personified as a creature engaged in continuous play, the River has as its basic impulse the same principles of rest and motion which govern the animals who depend upon it for their existence. The river "grips" things and then "leaves them with a laugh" - it restricts things, and then releases them. Thus the River is depicted as a great playmate of its inhabitants. Grahame's vision of River Bank life, therefore, is more than an escapist fantasy; it is a place where the *anima* is in playful communion with the source of life and Beauty. Contrary to Hunt's assertion that the novel lacks positive qualities, The River Bank assures the growth, development, and hope of its

[36] For discussions on Grahame and Place, see Lerer "Style and the Mole: Domestic Aesthetics in *The Wind in the Willows*", as well as Kuznets "Whither Blows the Wind in the Willows" and "The Mythic Present in *The Wind in the Willows*".

inhabitants through the conservation of their bond with the river and the land which it nourishes.

The denizens of the Wild Wood, and the ever looming Wide World threaten to suppress the development of the River Bank community in similar ways. For instance, in “The Wild Wood”, Rat cautions Mole about the dangers of attempting to wander by himself:

> “We river-bankers, we hardly ever come here by ourselves. If we have to come, we come in couples, at least; then we’re generally all right. Besides, there are a hundred things one has to know [...] I mean passwords, and signs, and sayings which have power and effect, and plants you carry in your pocket, and verses you repeat, and dodges and tricks you practise [...] they’ve got to be known if you’re small, or you’ll find yourself in trouble” (32).

The river-bank animals live under the threat of territorial hostility, not simply because each animal ‘belongs’ to either ecosystem (wetland or woodland), but also because the wood is patrolled by a gang-like presence who requires an elaborate form of communication of the kind Ratty describes. Also noteworthy in Ratty’s remarks is the vulnerability of the river-bankers because of their size. The small and vulnerable, having no physical advantage over the larger predators of the Wild Wood, have to stick together. Friendship is thus necessary for survival.

Toad’s adventure into The Wide World is therefore all the more jeopardous because he is beyond the reach of his friends. Grahame depicts the human realm as having a grotesquely corrupt legal system at its core that is intolerant of anyone who does not know the “dodges and tricks” which are required as much in The Wide World

as they are in The Wild Wood. In Toad's case, this is especially true when he disobeys human law. When Toad is caught and brought before a judge, Grahame depicts the ruling as absurdly unjust. Toad gets one year for the actual theft, three for reckless driving, and most revealing of all, fifteen years for sassing the police. On top of this ridiculous sentencing, the court officials "make it a round twenty… to be on the safe side" (70). Both the Wild Wood and The Wide World have their codes, and each threaten those who wander in unaware.

Peter Hunt contends that Grahame is punishing Toad for his desire to go against the "escapist" and repressive River Bank community (178). Yet, as we can see, Grahame's description of the law and the means of punishment is comically over exaggerated. It seems clear that Toad's punishments do not fit his crimes. In fact, whereas Hunt finds to be *Willows* to be "infused with fear", which keeps "all of the major characters repressed" (178); it is evident that repression is the very thing Grahame depicts as being the greatest threat to the River Bank. The Wild Wood predators instill fear into the river-bankers (as well as the smaller woodland animals), and as they move into Toad Hall, they centralize their control. Grahame also suggests in his parody of the human legal system that there is a repressive element at work, which deals out unfair punishments to those who fail to play by its rules. Therefore, The Wild Wood and The Wide World are each governed by the kind of social-Darwinist ideology that Grahame describes in *The Golden Age* as "the busy world of rubs and knocks and competition", which poses a threat to his vision of the literary pagan ideal (208).

Grahame is not condoning the extreme excesses of Toad, but repression and restriction are not being advocated either. Gaarden notes that *Willows* rather suggests

"that all impulses are not equal and that a movement which at one stage of development amounts to healthy growth, may, at another, do psychic damage" (50). This is demonstrated in the differences between Toad and Mole's embodiment of the "divine discontent and longing" which compels each of them to search for change. However, whereas Mole is able to find a healthy balance, mostly thanks to the efforts of Ratty and Badger, Toad lacks the self-control to moderate his desires. He is the hapless target of consumerism: a weak-willed creature with no cultivated sense of pleasure or aesthetic fulfillment, and thus can be carried away by whatever seems desirable in the moment. Through the efforts of his friends, Toad is "enlisted into effective combat against Toadishness" (Gaarden 52). Just as Bager lead Mole to face the important aspects of his nature, the four friends likewise lead Toad through Badger's tunnels up into Toad hall. The ousting of the tyrannical and excessive villains is also the final epic battle, which ostensibly allows Toad to overcome his own harmful character.

Thus, what Gaarden calls "the inner circle" of *Willows* is also the stabilizing center of the wetland habitat which houses not only Ratty, Mole, and Toad, but also a larger community which, other than Otter, is at the periphery of the tale. Earth and Water, as represented by the subterranean and amphibious animals, presents a symbolic convergence of contrary natures. A balance is struck between these opposite elements which brings a harmony to the overall narrative, and the wetland habitat upon which the story is staged. The River Bank, like all wetlands, demonstrates this unity: water is the source of life, sustenance, growth, and renewal, and the earth of the bank is the stabilizing foundation upon which a diverse cast of creatures can forage, mate, build their homes, and delight in their habitats.

Part Three: Friend, Helper, Healer

The harmony established by the novel's central friendship, as well as the ecological symbiosis inherent to The River Bank, is given divine significance when Rat and Mole are granted a vision of Pan. David Rudd suggests that the apocalyptic revelation reveals the structural continuity of Grahame's novel. Pan "make[s] manifest the 'invisible' coherence" of the text (Rudd 5). As he points out, the text, though it has an overall circular motion, features two story arcs (the adventures of Ratty and Mole, and the mis-adventures of Toad) which interweave to form a complex, but controlled narrative. These critical observations can be extended further. The revelation of Pan not only can be seen to bring more visible continuity to what seems a two track plot line, the goat-god also establishes the novel's true stakes. Although Ratty, Mole, and Badger strengthen each other by their respective virtues, Toad is pulled into the insatiable Wide World, which threatens to imprison him. The action of the plot, therefore, is to bring back the one friend who has abandoned his nature to such a degree as to lose himself in the process.

Pan reveals the underlying presence which brings harmony to the opposing tensions symbolized by Earth and Water. This harmony becomes embodied in Mole as he feels Pan's presence: "a great Awe fell upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground" (76). This "Awe" is described in terms which bring together the attributes of both elements that Grahame has been contrasting using the characters of Ratty and Mole. Mole becomes a living unity of the fluidity of water, and the stability of earth, and these contrary properties are resolved within as he sees the divine figure. This resolution makes him feel "wonderfully at peace

and happy" - a form of peace reminiscent of the higher stage of theoria which Ruskin professes in which the beholder achieves "full comprehension and contemplation of the beautiful as a gift of God" (16). Mole, as Grahame depicts him, seems to capture what Peiper claimed is achievable only through true leisure, namely that sense that one is "steep[ed] [...] in the whole of creation" (41).

In this episode, we can see once again how Grahame conceives of the animal in Aristotelian terms. The ancient Greek philosopher believes that organic beings are animated because they are compelled by a universal object of desire, which he refers to as the "first" mover. For Aristotle, God is a power at the core of the universe which compels all things toward it, but is itself unmoved: it is "first and everlasting among unmoved things, and the principle of motion for the other things" (Physics 259a 10-15). The vision of Pan exposes a simple truth about animal existence. Desire cannot be sated, but is that motivating force which compels all creatures to participate in the creative play of nature itself. For Grahame, to witness such an entity is to have revealed the ultimate object of all desire, and, as a consequence, the animal would cease to have a motivating desire, because all desire would be fulfilled. Therefore, Pan performs a memory wipe on the two animals:

> As they stared blankly, in dumb misery deepening as they slowly realized all they had seen and all they had lost, a capricious little breeze, dancing up from the surface of the water [...] blew lightly and caressingly in their faces; and with its soft touch came instant oblivion. For this is the last and best gift that the kindly demigod is careful to bestow on those to whom he has revealed himself in their helping: the gift of forgetfulness (77).

This “little breeze” that Pan blows toward them is no doubt meant to carry a bit of the discontent with which he inspirits Spring, so that they are able, in future, to be re-inspired. Pan causes forgetfulness “lest the awful remembrance should remain and grow, and overshadow mirth and pleasure, and the great haunting memory should spoil all the after-lives of little animals helped out of difficulties” (77). If the vision of Pan were to be held in the memory, it would obscure all of the animals’ future experiences.

For Grahame, this inability to achieve total happiness makes life a real aesthetic adventure. This sense of discontentment is what draws the animals together, and, as their friendship grows, they learn to transform their wistfulness into gratitude for the existence of Beauty. Beauty in nature is symbolized by Pan’s music. Grahame writes in “The Rural Pan” that Pan “is hiding and piping the low, sweet strain that reaches only the ears of a chosen few” (333)- those who have endured modernization and still retain the ability to catch Pan’s song over the rising din of the city. Pan’s piping is fullest “[i]n the hushed recesses of Hurly backwater, where the canoe may be paddled almost under the tumbling weir; there the god pipes with freest abandonment” (333). In the ancient mythos, Pan’s music is indicative of unfulfilled gratification, and the creative translation of animal lust into artistic expression (Borgeaud 82-3). However, although Pan’s music “originate[‘s] in a deficit”, it nonetheless “is that which it replaces” (86-7) - namely, the transformation of erotic energy. The divine music is thus not simply an expression of the god’s inability to achieve gratification; it is also a celebration of the inability to sate lust, which compels animals to procreate. Pan’s music, according to Bourgaud, is “the divine word that in the pastoral world fertilizes” the animal kingdom (87). As I have suggested, Grahame adopts this aspect of Pan’s history in *Willows*, and

in *Pagan Papers*, as he depicts the god's music as the expression of a lonely spirit consoling itself with the beauty of the transformation of eros into art. This is why Pan is also the ultimate "Friend" and "Helper" (77) of the animals. He not only draws them closer to Beauty, he also brings them together, and although Toad flees from the River Bank, Pan's spirit of helping is at work within the amphibian's friends who do not give up on him, or their River Bank home.

However, the unspoken threat that hangs over the apparently tidy ending is the inevitable expansion of the Wide World. As in "The Rural Pan", where Grahame concludes the essay lamenting the eventual loss of Pan's aesthetic habitat,[37] so too in *Willows* there is a hint of impending danger beneath the conclusion. The reacquisition of Toad Hall, the taming of the Wild Wood, and the harmony of the four friends and their River Bank community, on the surface, appears final. Although the animals are shown to be able to keep each other in check, the slight glimpse of the Wide World reveals a territory governed by human ignorance that is expanding its reach beyond the urban center via technological advancements in modes of transportation (the steam boats, trains, and of course, motor cars).

Badger may be confident that no matter how far the "great builders" of humanity push into their habitat, it will only be a matter of time before they collapse, and the badgers reclaim the land:

> 'People come- they stay for a while, they flourish, they build- and they go. It is their way. But we remain. There were 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,

[37] See my discussion in Chapter 2, on page 20.

> and back we come. And so it will ever be.' [...] And they don't bother about the future, either- the future when perhaps the people will move in again- for a time- as may very well be' (38).

However, Grahame subtly suggests that the new threat may not be so easily overcome. Badger's prediction that "people" will return is perhaps a sad bit of dramatic irony. He is confident that when they do, it will only be a matter of time before his kind re-establishes itself. However, the builders that came before were limited. Now the motor cars, coal engines and great steam boats are able to spread their damage at an accelerated rate. The introduction of such machines, for Grahame, constitutes a threat both to the river-bankers' way of life, but also, implicitly, to the sensitivity toward the very desire for Beauty itself, which will prove the ruin of Pan's realm.

Part Four: Mr. Toad's Wild Ride

The animals of *Willows* reveal the simplistic basis of our seemingly highly sophisticated modern world. We believe that our governments and civil engineers, specialized, trained, and professional as they all are, operate under the influence of the gradual evolution of rudimentary animal urges to the complexities of the civilized world's technological achievements. However, in the rapidification of urban expansion, and in the depletion of natural resources caused by hubristic consumption, The Wild Wood and The Wide World meet, and human pretension is revealed for what it is: unchecked animal lust. Mr. Toad captures this perfectly.

Sara Wadsworth argues in an excellent treatment of *Willows,* that Grahame's narrative can be successfully read in the terms of inebriation and addiction. Wadsworth claims that there are "submerged motifs of intoxication and addiction" that are "integral

to the text's broader treatment of the tensions between desire and contentment, unfettered freedom and the tonic of self-control, and voluntary regulation as opposed to coercive forms of social control" (44). As we have seen, the friendships between Mole, Rat, and Badger are mutually beneficial in that each friend brings to the other a balancing influence which promotes "self-control" over "unfettered freedom", as well as "voluntary regulation", over coercion. Wadsworth's insights into the text's treatment of inebriation can lead us to perceive a subtler aspect of Grahame's story. His wide-ranging vision of the natural impulse in all life underscores the susceptibility, inherent to all creatures, to excess.

Grahame makes Toad a parody of the natural excessiveness inherent to humanity. The human species had invented new methods and machines which helped to spread itself further and faster, and due to the thrills of speed, the technologically progressive urban world had lost its sense of self-control. Such a relinquishing of the will is akin to intoxication because the sense of responsibility is thrown to the wind in the ecstasy of fast-paced change and excitement. Toad demonstrates the way in which unchecked craving for speed can throw one outside of one's own control:

> the old passion seized on Toad and completely mastered him, body and soul [...] all sense of right and wrong, all fear of obvious consequences, seemed temporarily suspended. He increased his pace, and as the car devoured the street and leapt forth on the high road through the open country, he was only conscious that he was Toad once more, Toad at his best and highest, Toad the terror, the traffic-queller, the Lord of the lone trail, before whom all must give way or be smitten into nothingness and everlasting night (69).

The threat, as depicted above, is that the machine has the effect of collapsing the distinction between itself and its pilot. This collapse, Grahame suggests, can bring about the annihilation of creation, since the distinction between pilot and machine breaks down, and machine becomes essentially unpiloted and out of control.

Grahame's depiction of Toad represents the modern discontent with slow pace which Mark Taylor diagnoses in *Speed Limit* as being key to the loss of free time and temperate pacing which occurred during the rise of industrial modernity, and has reached a fever pitch today: "[o]ne of the first products of speed is the increasing impatience with slowness" (14). Taylor argues that "[t]he experience of speed is the creation of the modern world; modernization *is*, in effect, acceleration" (14), and as we can see in Toad, the most susceptible characters are those who cannot restrain themselves. Toad is paralysed by his lust speed because his natural bent toward movement leaves him vulnerable to an excessive craving for rapidly occurring stimuli.

The Wind in the Willows suggests that the inevitable encroachment onto the animal world is the result of such unrestrained consumption. Yet it also invites the human to face the animal. In this confrontation, all that the human world has built in order to transcend nature is brought into comparison with the animal world and its idle enjoyment of the bounties of its habitat. We are left with this question: why do they often seem more content despite their simple natures and their vulnerabilities, than we, with all of our "progress", who seek distraction from our lives and attempt defy Nature?

Grahame's pastoral vision speaks to us now more than ever because what was once obvious to his first readers has perhaps become lost on readers today: Mr Toad's wild ride is not one we ought to be on. It ends in desolation. In *The Wind in the Willows*,

however, the protagonists are able to solidify a way of life which celebrates the divine discontentment because that is what makes the pursuit of Beauty worthwhile. The bonds of their friendship are strengthened, as I have argued throughout, around this pursuit, and Toad himself eventually achieves a measure of sobriety. The life style stabilized in *Willows*, is one which corresponds to the classical notion of leisure that I have pointed out in each of Grahame's works thus far, in that such a way of life is most conducive to the theoretic apprehension of beauty and "the whole of creation" which Peiper believed true leisure would grant. In its depiction of cultivated friendship, self-reflection and self-mastery, Grahame's final work of fiction incorporates the finest expressions of the so-called 'pagan' world: the famous maxims inscribed at the temple of the oracle of Delphi: "Know Thyself" and "Nothing in Excess".

Afterword

Throughout this project I have attempted to show that literary paganism provides a key to understanding Grahame's body of work. Rather than being an expression of a "bourgeois pastoralism" (Dingley 51), or a "suburban" fantasy (Greenslade 148), Grahame's aesthetic offers readers a means to uncover some of the writer's insightful challenges to modernity. Grahame suggests that a society predicated on the notion that the economic interests of human beings trump the inherent value of natural habitat inevitably degrades both the landscape and stifles our more nobler aesthetic capacities. Adherence to the ideals necessary to the functioning of such a society causes the inhibition of the inner desires that provide the stimulus for our aesthetic sensibilities. For Grahame, the cultivation of the human spirit requires reviving the "pagan sentiment".

Grahame's makes effective use of a narrative persona to suggest directly and sometimes obliquely what such a revival would entail. By developing an attitude suggestive of indulgence, idleness, and the willingness to stoop to embrace the non-adult/non-human perspective, Grahame's style embodies the pagan sentiment that Walter Pater claimed is inherent to all aesthetic perception. Grahame's prose essays capture his attempt to present this pagan outlook in a series of reflections about various idle activities, most notably walking through rural spaces which connect one to the rhythms of the land. Not only does Grahame find in the rural sphere the required space to roam freely, he also implicitly suggests that this sphere is conducive to leisurely reflection and the cultivation of character. As he writes in "The Romance of the Rail":

> To all these natural bounds and limitations it is good to get back now and again, from a life assisted and smooth by artificialities [...] But the getting back to them

> is now a matter of effort, of set purpose, a stepping aside out of our ordinary course; they are no longer unsought influences towards the making of character (322)

For Grahame, going on rural excursions is one way of getting back in touch with the vital energies from which the urban dweller is insulated. As I have endeavored to show throughout, Grahame makes a connection between the pastoral aesthetic and the attitude which he suggests best facilitates the cultivation of sensual pleasures into theoretic gratitude towards the sublime in nature. This attitude is a necessarily idle one. The spirit of idle indulgence presented throughout Grahame's slight body of work is akin to the classical notion of leisure in that to truly appreciate the sensual connection we have to our world, Grahame suggests, we must not allow ourselves to become mere servants to the economic demands of society. Idleness, like leisure, is not engaged in as a respite from work, but is adopted as a mood to be maintained in the face of the spreading urban industrial complex. Grahame need not be taken as suggesting that we simply stop working and become slothful and disinterested in labour. Rather, I believe his literary paganism is best understood as the expression of a consolatory conviction that what is pleasant in experience ought to be cherished because it is fleeting, and worldly demands will never cease. Idleness, therefore, is just that state of mind that we should aspire to, that we should keep in mind while we work, like children who try to finish their chores so they can get back to playing.

The development of Grahame's thought follows a unique course in his writing. His early essays are primarily concerned with presenting a challenge to the more mainstream convictions of his day regarding hard work and social progress. He

attempts to craft a literary persona which is part dandy and part rural flaneur. In this sense, the early essays are perhaps reflective of certain aspects of the Decadent movement, if only to a minor degree. Yet, as he continues to write and develop, his vision proceeds from the aesthetic observer of country lanes, who is begrudgingly held up in the city, inwards toward a childhood that was all but in symbiosis with the rural landscape. Grahame's intellectual development as an author therefore inverts the traditional chain of being, moving from the adult aesthete cultivating aesthesis into theoria after long days in awe of the natural world, to re-exploring cherished memories where the direct connection to that world was but the awareness of being alive, rightfully taken for granted. The child, in a natural state of idleness and pagan delight, however, is forced to compromise and convert to a responsible adult. Grahame does not suggest that this should not be so, only that it is regrettable. And he thus proceeds further up his reconceived ontological ladder, toward the animal, which he fancies expressive of the deepest, most elemental aspects of the human and animal psyche. With *The Wind in the Willows*, he develops a final vision of the pagan good life: a world in rich in the fluctuating bounties and beauties of nature, and populated by a cast of characters who work to stabilize each other in order that they may enjoy their enviable position in the natural order. Reflecting on one's childhood also allows the adult to rekindle the child's intuitive conviction of being at home in his or her environment. However, since the adult cannot fully re-experience the pagan sentiments of childhood, Grahame's literary paganism is given fullest expression in *The Wind in the Willows*.

Working against the transcendentalist notion that human beings occupy a "higher" ontological status within and "above" the natural world, Grahame explores the

pagan sentiment in its purest expression as fully embodied in the acutely sensitive animal. This is especially the case with Ratty and Mole from Grahame's *Willows*, who are granted a vision of Pan, the hybrid god of divinity and the material world, who represents the immanence of the life-giving energies which humankind forsakes when it seeks to cleave itself from its place among the animal kingdom. Grahame's fantasy rendition of the animal reveals the tendency to be misled by psychological imbalances which occur due to the natural inclinations that, if unchecked, result in the loss of self-control. Unlike Oscar Wilde or Michael Field, Grahame presents a type of literary paganism which embraces both the Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of ancient thought. In "The Reluctant Dragon" as well as *The Wind in the Willows*, Grahame depicts these psychological forces acting as playmates, rather than as combatants battling within the soul.

One consequence of acknowledging Grahame's contribution to the heretical challenge of literary paganism is that it hints at a more robust and fascinating phenomenon to which many critics have not given due recognition in the late Victorian and Edwardian era. By considering the cultural interest in paganism, not just as it is expressed in Grahame, but also with some of his contemporaries, we gain a more nuanced look at a literary milieu which is perhaps too often scoffed at as being less worthy of serious critical reflection than that of the Victorian and Modernist periods. Below I list just three potential critical approaches which may help to bring literary paganism, and more specifically, Kenneth Grahame's unique version of it, into dialogue with current scholarship.

“Slow” Criticism

Whereas Damon Franke argues in *Modernist Heresies* that literary paganism “collocated” ancient Mediterranean myth, ritual, and religious symbolism with those of Christianity (14), I have argued that Grahame’s “heretical” positioning of paganism is, for the most part, mainly a pastoral assertion of the value of rusticity against urban sprawl, both in terms of its geographic restructuring of space, and its influence over aesthetic perception. However, Grahame’s project includes a critique of the detrimental effects that industrialism and urban living have had on leisure. The contemporary “Slow Movement” has a potentially corresponding outlook as that of Grahame’s literary paganism, in that it “challenges the frantic pace and standardization of contemporary culture” (Berg and Seeber x). Grahame and his contemporaries were among the first to witness the rise of a culture increasingly obsessed with time management. Therefore, one particular avenue of critical discourse with the late Victorian interest in paganism is to put it into dialogue with the growing critical discourse around slowness, leisure, and learning. Grahame inhabits an era that witnessed the early stages of what would become the high-speed, technologically dependent, globalized world, and his work is thus ripe with critical possibility. An analysis which takes Grahame and other authors such as Stevenson, Jerome K. Jerome, and Rupert Brooke to task specifically for their challenge to modernization would perhaps yield rewarding results.

Ecocriticism:

Another, more well established approach to literary criticism that would prove fruitful for Grahame scholarship is that of ecocriticism. Grahame’s writing could provide an interesting case study for further ecocritical investigation. As I have only gestured

toward in my engagement with his work, Grahame is interesting because he does not attempt an accurate representation of nature per-se, but instead offers an aesthetics of the interplay between perception, awareness, and "reality". Grahame's style features a refusal to commit to straightforward representation, and yet, paradoxically, the fantasy is perhaps more mimetic because it does not assume the authenticity of objective reality, and instead privileges the process of representation. In doing so, Grahame offers a glimpse of the psychological re-construction of the "extra-textual" world. Further ecocritical investigation focused on this aspect of his work would no doubt offer another interesting perspective to the claims I have made regarding Grahame's literary pagan critique of modernity, and its merits and shortcomings.

"Pagan Criticism"

Another fascinating (if perhaps undeveloped) mode of criticism has recently appeared with the publication of Zhange Ni's *The Pagan Writes Back: When World Religion meets World Literature*. Ni presents what she has dubbed "pagan criticism": "a reading strategy that pays due credit to the context-specific formations of both religion and literature" (1). Pagan criticism "illuminates the prehistory and ongoing transformation" of religious and non-religious culture due to the fact that "literary texts inevitably bear traces of the several historical iterations of discourse on paganism that undergird the symbiotic formation of religion and the secular" (5). Ni's pagan approach may offer a more historically detailed look at how religious and secular cultural developments figure into the character of Grahame's persona and participation in literary paganism.

In this thesis project, I have presented several features of Grahame's work which warrant scholarly re-engagement. His contribution to the literary interest in aesthetics, leisure, and paganism are significant, and, as I have suggested, still have much to offer readers today. The avenues of criticism which I have suggested would indeed prove insightful as modes of investigation for any and all of Grahame's writings, and for literary paganism in general. Critical engagement with Grahame's aesthetics which considers certain principles from the "Slow Movement" may draw out in more detail his interest in leisure. As well, further ecocritical work may provide readers and scholars alike with an understanding as to how Grahame's pastoral aesthetic fits into the historical literary discourse around the human relationship with the natural world, and Ni's "pagan criticism" may provide further insight into the place of his paganism in the encounter between religion and secularism in the late 19th century. Overall, I hope I have shown that there is indeed much by way of "history and philology, knowledge and insight" (Lerer 2) to be gained from the writings of Kenneth Grahame.

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