

The Concept of Loyalty in Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*

Instructor Mr. Maytham Ali Khalefa

Faculty of Basic Education College, English Department, Diyala University

Email: basiceng18te@uodiyala.edu.iq

Orcid: 0000-0003-3604-8818

ABSTRACT

The Wind in the Willows 1908, is one of Graham's greatest works of fiction. Many people also perceive it as one of children's literature masterpieces ever written. Writers and scholars alike have addressed a wider range of concepts and issues in the novel. The novel maintains its popularity and appeal due to the enduring nature of the ideas and themes it seemingly never ceases to offer. It has replenished its readers with an uninterrupted variety of themes and subjects that would range from friendship to family, and from class to pastoral world. However, the concept of loyalty in the novel seems to be unaddressed thus far. Therefore, the current research paper is intended to explore and investigate this particular concept of loyalty in the novel assuming that it runs throughout the novel as demonstrated by its characters and the various events related to them

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 8th April 2022

Revised: 8th May 2022

Accepted: 20th June 2022

KEYWORDS: Children's Literature, Friendship, Characters, Loyalty, Animals, Humans

Introduction

Grahame's novel *The Wind in the Willows* has attracted a considerable body of academic writing and research ever since it was published. It is said to have misguidedly been identified as an animal fiction for children. However, it soon came to be recognized as neither an animal fiction, nor a children story:

now at last Mr. Grahame breaks his long silence with *The Wind in the Willows*, a fantastic and whimsical satire upon life — or allegory of life — the author's amusing device being to show the reader the real thing as if it were the play of small woodland and riverside creatures. (Duffy 39)

Nevertheless, it may remain quite certain that many people would misconceive the novel for animal or children fiction since its main characters hold the names of Rat, Mole, and Toad. Yet again, it remains important to ascertain the identity and true purpose of this fictional work that it is a courteously refined work of irony on the totality of humanity. Though holding animal names, the novel's characters "are meant to be nothing but human beings," and the novel as a whole is to be perceived as "entirely successful . . . and no more to be comprehended by youth than 'The Golden Age' was to be comprehended by youth," (Bennett 57-8).

It is mostly thought that *The Wind in the Willows* was perceived as animal and children fiction because before its publication Kenneth Grahame's as a writer of children literature was widely known and rested assured on *The Golden Age* (1895), and *Dream Days* (1898). Therefore, the novelist had to clarify to his readers and put their minds at peace stating that the novel is primarily "a book of Youth — and so perhaps chiefly for Youth," (Chalmers 144). In addition, Grahame further explains that his novel was

supposed to address a particular category of youth; the youth who “still keep the spirit of youth alive in them: of life, sunshine, running water, woodlands, dusty roads, winter firesides; free of problems, clean of the clash of sex; of life as it might fairly be supposed to be regarded by some of the wise small things,” (ibid 145).

Accordingly, the novel continues to spark debates over whether or not it belongs to the category of children’s literature. In fact, it even remains difficult to determine where the novel should restfully and easily fit. The same logic applies for its characters; it is also difficult to decide that they are nothing more than animal characters. Throughout the narrative of the novel, what the reader perceives of those characters is that they fully embody “the model men of private means,” who could “translate readily into the heroes of John Buchan and Sapper [and] P. G. Wodehouse,” (Inglis 118-19).

Whatever the case might be, it is worth mentioning to note that the novel maintains its popularity and appeal due to the enduring nature of ideas and themes that it seemingly never ceases to offer. Scholars and critics alike have skipped the animal-children binary debate, and dedicated more attention to the charm and permanence of the novel’s subjects and themes. In that respect, the novel has proven to replenish its readers with an uninterrupted variety of themes and subjects that would range from friendship to family, and from class to pastoral world. It continues to generate ideas, raise questions, and make allusions, of all sorts, shapes, and categories.

Loyalty in The Wind in the Willows

The concept of loyalty in Graham’s *The Wind in the Willows* could closely be detected in the events, deeds, and relationships connecting Mole and Rat to Toad and Mole to Rat in particular, and Rat, Mole, and Badger to Toad and all other characters, and sometimes locations, in the novel in general. Toad is first presented to be reckless and disobediently uncontrollable as he sets out on a series of adventures and dangerous escapades. While Toad is deeply engulfed in his risky exploits, Rat is torn between his yearning for home and being loyal to Mole and Toad, eventually suppressing his desire for home to maintain his loyalty. Besides, Rat remains loyal to Toad despite the fact that Toad is not making it any easier.

In an instance of his recklessness, Toad promptly and completely yields to “the old passion”, as soon as he notices the motorcar, thus turning into “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,” (Grahame 69). Such dangerous deeds by Toad not only stand for his “hedonistic egocentrism”, and “represent[s] the dialectical extreme of adventurism”, but also put to a severe test Rat’s, Mole’s, and everybody else’s loyalty, (Mendelson 135).

Out of loyalty, Mole and the others find it difficult to cope up with Toad’s rashness and irresponsible attitude for sticking up to him is excessively costly. On his part, Toad by doing so feels that he is satisfying himself in “fulfilling his instincts, living his hour, reckless of what may come,” (Grahame 69). On that account, Toad has committed a series of offences such as, besides reckless driving, “stealing the motor-car”, which “was the worst offence,” (70). In addition, he adds insult to injury and worsens his quandary by “cheeking the police”, which according to the police superintendent, “undoubtedly carries the severest penalty,” (70). Toad might have paid for his deeds in jail time for twenty years. For all those offences, what happens is that all “the brutal minions of the law fell upon the hapless Toad; loaded him with chains, and dragged him from the Court House”, to prison making Toad “a helpless prisoner in the remotest dungeon of the best-guarded keep of the stoutest castle in all the length and breadth of Merry England,” (70-71).

Loyalty as a concept has been represented in different ways and by people of diverse connections. For instance, in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative in the Life of Frederick Douglass*, loyalty is presented as “a matter of pledging allegiance to one’s owner and not to one’s brother,” (M. N. Khalefa 3068). In other works of fiction such as Harriet Ann Jacob’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, it is the mother who epitomizes “the [concept] of loyalty” and sacrifice as well in her relation to her kids and family, (M. N. Khalefa 450). However, in Kenneth Graham’s *The Wind in the Willows*, the concept of loyalty is demonstrated through the acts and attitudes of friends towards one another.

In that order, the novel shows that through witnessing and suffering the consequences of Toad's reckless adventures, "Mole and Alastair," and the others are assumed, out of loyalty though, to "learn the importance of team spirit: never, never let the side down," (Graham 184). Yet, it seems that he does not deserve such loyal friends all the same. For one thing, Rat, Mole and Badger have to receive a heavy burden dealing with the consequences of the deeds of their irresponsible friend. As soon as he breaks from prison, he comes across Rat who takes him in, provides him with food, clothes, and shelter. Though down in the dumps, wretched, and still on the run, Toad is still boasting about his prison break adventures. Rat does not intend to hurt Toad's pride and brings to his attention the state of his wretched condition. He turns a blind eye to all that averting any uncouth but well-deserved response to Toad's hollow but chancy statements. Thus, Rat pursues in a friendly, sympathetic, and truly loyal attitude tells Toad to "go off upstairs at once, and take off that old cotton rag that looks as if it might formerly have belonged to some washerwoman," (Grahame 120).

Besides, Toad is dirty and smells musty, so Rat kindly asks him to "clean [himself] thoroughly, and put on some of [Rat's] clothes", so that he may look "like a gentleman, if [he] can," (120). Eventually, Rat summarizes to Toad his true condition as "a more shabby, bedraggled, disreputable-looking object than you are I never set eyes on in my whole life," (120). Even then, Toad intends to retort to Rat's comments, but he "caught sight of himself in the looking-glass over the hat-stand, with the rusty black bonnet perched rakishly over one eye, and he changed his mind and went very quickly and humbly upstairs to the Rat's dressing-room," (120).

In a moment of rare epiphany, Toad begins to recognize the value of Mole and Badger, and his ungrateful attitude in return to such loyalty and true friendship. He confesses of totally being "an ungrateful beast", and decides to "go out and find them, out into the cold, dark night, and share their hardships," (Grahame 126). Nevertheless, Toad's passing moment of appreciation of his friends' efforts and twinge of conscience towards them quickly vanishes as he hears "the clink of dishes on a tray!", shouting "supper's here at last, hooray! Come on Ratty!" (126). Again on accounts of loyalty and true friendship, Rat reflects on the fact that Toad has spent quite a substantial time in prison and excuses his recurrent attitude of irresponsibility telling himself that "large allowances had therefore to be made," (126). Therefore, Rat does not reproach Toad for his flippant frivolity and "followed him to the table accordingly, and hospitably encouraged him in his gallant efforts to make up for past privations," (126).

In such instance of irresponsibility and thoughtlessness, Toad not only leaves his friends in a difficult predicament, but also forgets all about them. Toad only remembers about Mole and Badger when Rat mentions them telling "the Mole and the Badger," said Toad, lightly. 'What's become of them, the dear fellows? I had forgotten all about them,' (Grahame 125). Rat responds disapprovingly to Toad's carelessness and informs him that Mole and Badger whom he has completely forgotten still remember him. In addition, Mole and Badger are taking care of Toad's house and property in an act of true loyalty. Rat's remarks indicate that Toad lacks this quality of devotion and reliability and that Mole and Badger's faithfulness to Toad might be misplaced:

'Well may you ask!' said the Rat reproachfully. 'While you were riding about the country in expensive motor-cars, and galloping proudly on blood-horses, and breakfasting on the fat of the land, those two poor devoted animals have been camping out in the open, in every sort of weather, living very rough by day and lying very hard by night; watching over your house, patrolling your boundaries, keeping a constant eye on the stoats and the weasels, scheming and planning and contriving how to get your property back for you. You don't deserve to have such true and loyal friends, Toad, you don't, really. Someday, when it's too late, you'll be sorry you didn't value them more while you had them!' (Grahame 125-6)

Furthermore, Rat is shown to be more loyal to things, places, and other beings with whom he has gained a state of familiarity. As an illustration of such quality of loyalty in Rat, Toad encourages him to leave his "dull fusty old river", tempting him that he will explore "the world," (Grahame 20). Rat in turn declines Toad's offer for adventure and declares that he is "going to stick to [his] old river, and live in a hole," (20). Further, in a rare instance of loyalty even to familiar places, when Rat himself has a passing idea of leaving his home in Riverbank, the mere idea causes Rat to feel mortified and guilt-ridden of

unfaithfulness. Even the idea of dreaming for “a moment in full abandonment,” of changing his habitat has caused “his loyal heart, ..., to cry out on his weaker self for its treachery” even if it was the remarkable south habitation, (Grahame 95).

On another hand, Mole is shown to be equally as loyal for when Rat enquires whether or not he is going to stick by his side, Mole staunchly affirms; “I’ll always stick to you, Rat, and what you say is to be, has got to be,” (20). Mole on this occasion as on many others has demonstrated unblemished loyalty to all his friends including Toad and the others. Mole’s loyalty is of the kind that does not demand explanations or set forth certain conditions or even enquiries. Rat and Mole are both loyal and true friends; yet, many critics perceive Mole as “the respectable, conformist side of Grahame: conscientious, practical and loyal,” who “stands for all the domestic and public virtues,” (Green 255). In his relationship with Rat, Mole is very intimately attached to Rat. Eventually, Mole acquires a feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment “by seeing his friend give a proper direction to his imaginative powers through writing poetry,” (Willis 109).

Rat demonstrates a further example of loyalty in the novel when he agrees to travel with Toad, though he realizes that their journey is going to be long and uncertain. It is nothing more than utter loyalty of Rat that has motivated him to accompany Toad in his trip. On Mole’s side, his imagination is easily and overwhelmingly enticed by Toad’s highlighted “prospects of the trip and the joys of the open life and the roadside in such glowing colors that the Mole could hardly sit in his chair for excitement,” (Grahame 20). Rat, however, has different reasons for deciding to go on this trip. He is not overcome by Toad’s colorful account of the trip or what is awaiting them. Rather, he is authentically concerned with the wellbeing and safety of his friends—Mole and Toad now—as Mole is now convinced to accompany Toad.

For Rat, his qualms and fears for Toad and Mole travelling alone and camping in the open would not be appeased unless he goes along with them, and so he does: “and the Rat, though still unconvinced in his mind, allowed his good nature to over-ride his personal objections. He could not bear to disappoint his two friends, who were already deep in schemes and anticipations, planning out each day’s separate occupation for several weeks ahead,” (Grahame 20).

In view of that, all the acts and deeds of assistance, devotion, and support Rat and Mole demonstrate to Toad and to each other, are all assumed to represent an attitude of true loyalty. Nevertheless, there have been some arguments that suggest that the novel does not present help and devotion as remarkable qualities for their own sake. Rather, such arguments propose that the power of such qualities is vested in their “ability to harmonize the contraries: to put adventure, the willingness to do something, at the service of friends and family,” (Mendelson 136). The amalgamation of such differing natures and/or drives, for instance, is assumed to result in “this new divine thing that caught up [Ratty’s] helpless soul and swung and dandled it, a powerless but happy infant in a strong sustaining grasp,” which is demanding but loving, normal yet overwhelming, (Grahame 75).

In that respect, the novel undoubtedly presents several associating parallels of such combination of opposites that are similar to the contrast above. One illustration would be the decisive moment of truth and recognition that comes to Mole while he is with Rat “in that utter clearness of the imminent dawn, while Nature, flushed with fullness of incredible color,” which joins the day with the night causing Rat to speak of such experience as “something very exciting and rather terrible,” (Grahame 77-79). Hence, it could be argued that such blending can only occur once true loyalty concurs with distinct individual command, as it is the case with Rat and Mole. Such moments as the argument will show seem to prevail over a considerable portion of the story.

A clear case of illustration is the collective efforts of Rat, Mole, and Badger who join together and haste “instantly to Toad Hall,” in which “the work of rescue [for Toad] shall be accomplished,” (62). In this rescue mission, Mole and Rat offer their perception of “power at the helping hour,” (80). This vision and effort of extending help at the time of need would indicate nothing more than sheer loyalty. In addition, such loyal quality could supposedly symbolize “the essential moment in Grahame’s narrative argument when friendship, home, and helping take on some of the allure of romantic individualism, and when we as readers become alert to the middle ground in Grahame’s dialectic,” (Mendelson 136).

Furthermore, it is argued that the novel not only presents opposites to validate and single out a certain quality, assumingly loyalty in this case, but also builds such binary constructs in its narrative

structure. Observing the various events and occurrences relating and interconnecting all characters to one another, it becomes obvious that no character or character's views really seriously conflict with another character's. Interior or emotional conflicts or fights could hardly be detected among all characters. Despite the fact that all friends undergo some sort of thoughtless exploits or fortuitous misfortunes, no serious peril or wretchedness afflicts them or falls upon them for almost all time.

In each instance, they successfully manage to prevent or appease all disasters and miseries as a result of true companionship and honest collaboration. Accordingly, it could be observed that "loyalty, tolerance, mutual aid, and sympathy predominate; necessity, work, mortality, family life, and illness hardly exist," (Gilead 148). What actually turns out to be the ultimate outcome in almost every single incident is an "abundance of food and leisure; and evil can be conquered by luck, by the protection of stronger and wiser fellows, or by a good fight whose happy outcome is providentially ordained," (ibid).

The events relating the reckless adventures of Toad as he loses Toad's Hall and repossesses it with the help of his friends further consolidates the perception of good and friendship winning ultimately despite certain misadventures. It also reflects upon the assumption that reckless and irresponsible actions might jeopardize "the stability of society," that may only be "restored by loyalty and constancy in the face of danger," (Sterck 25).

In that vein, the instance in which Toad goes to jail and spends sometime is gloomy and desperate. Yet, the general atmosphere soon shifts from Toad's imprisonment in "the grimmest dungeon that lay in the heart of the innermost keep, ..., of the stoutest castle in all the length and breadth of Merry England", to a state of relaxation and tranquility in which Mole is indolently lying on "the blessed coolness!" of "the river [bank]," (Grahame 71-72). Additionally, readers could detect the alteration of Toad's state from loneliness and seclusion into a state of sweeping and wide-ranging assistance. Such interplay of meaning in association with the various events in the novel is highly significant as it is suggested to expressively drive home the point of loyalty discussed herewith.

As loyalty is a positive and honorable quality, the novel mostly relates it to family and friend categories and idealistic motivations and incentives. On the occasion in which both Mole and Rat set out in a search expedition to find Otter's son, Portly, they actually demonstrate an act of loyalty and true friendship. Yet again, that Portly is "so adventurous", yet "no harm ever happens to him," further enhances the assumption of opposites presented and constructed in the novel, (Grahame 72). More often than not, the various adventures that the novel builds into its narrative serve as the source of those friend's eagerness and delight, which demonstrates itself in the act of helping out and thus conceivably loyalty.

Moreover, Rat stands out among his friends as one who can also exercise and extend to his friends gentle delicacy and respect just at the right time. On the above-mentioned occasion when Rat and Mole go looking for Portly, Otter's son, they neither gloat nor brag about their assistance, nor do they even inform Otter that they have found his son. Rather, after they ensure the safety of Portly, they leave him for his father to find him on his own and watch from a distance. Such deed Rat and Mole demonstrate would not only imparts goodness and innocence on their part, but also speaks of the quality of true loyalty they both enjoy and can exercise. This quality of loyalty could as well be best observed "in the loyalty which induces Mole, Rat and Badger to put up with Toad, to attempt to reform him, and, when he proves incorrigible, to restore him to Toad Hall, taken over during his absence in prison by the weasels and the stoats," (Sterck 26).

As mentioned earlier, Rat demonstrates more proclivity to extend a hand of help at the time of need, with more delicacy of attitude, too. When he realizes that Mole went missing in the Wild Woods, Rat never hesitates to head for the wood immediately. He actually does that with utter faithfulness and honesty, as he "looked grave, and stood in deep thought" as soon as word of Mole's missing reaches his ears, (Grahame 31). Further proving his loyalty, we can observe how darkness or fear could not deter Rat from carrying on in his search for Mole. It is already dusk "when he reached the first fringe of trees"; yet, he "plunged without hesitation into the wood, looking anxiously on either side for any sign of his friend," (31).

Though dark and alone, Rat valorously and strenuously "working over the whole ground, and all the time calling out cheerfully, 'Moly, Moly, Moly! Where are you? It's me — it's old Rat!'" (32). Rat's search for Mole not only indicates valor and loyalty in friendship, but also care, truthfulness, and patience in

accomplishing his mission. While searching in the wood, Rat “had patiently hunted through the wood for an hour or more, when at last to his joy he heard a little answering cry,” (32). As the quote indicates, finding Mole has not given Rat pride or glory, but joy, a more vibrant feeling of true happiness that speaks of him as a true and loyal friend.

In a similar instance, Rat helps Mole in a truly friendly and faithful manner find his home again. He lifts Mole’s spirit and cheers him up telling him: “we’re going to find that home of yours, old fellow,” replied the Rat pleasantly; ‘so you had better come along, for it will take some finding, and we shall want your nose,” (Grahame 52). When they finally find the house, Rat does his best to assuage Mole’s shock to see his house in a shabby form as “his ground [was] kicked up by other animals into little runs that ended in earth-heaps,” (53). In addition, Mole “saw the dust lying thick on everything; saw the cheerless, deserted look of the long-neglected house, and its narrow, meagre dimensions, its worn and shabby contents — and collapsed again on a hall-chair, his nose in his paws,” (54). Mole realizes that the state of his house a lot less than fitting for him, let alone inviting Rat to it. Feeling miserably depressed, Mole dreadingly implores, “‘O, Ratty!’, ‘why ever did I do it? Why did I bring you to this poor, cold little place, on a night like this, when you might have been at River Bank by this time, toasting your toes before a blazing fire, with all your own nice things about you!’” (54).

In a spirit of a true and loyal friend, Rat, “paid no heed to his doleful self-reproaches,” made by Mole and carries on, “running here and there, opening doors, inspecting rooms and cupboards, and lighting lamps and candles and sticking them up everywhere,” (54). Besides, Rat praises the state of the house cheerfully exclaiming, “‘what a capital little house this is!’, ‘So compact! So well planned! Everything here and everything in its place! We’ll make a jolly night of it,’” (54). Rat goes on making a fire, prepares the “sleeping bunks,” and tells Mole to “try and smarten things up a bit. Bustle about, old chap!” as if he is accommodating Mole in his own house, (54).

Concluding Remarks

The Wind in the Willows could be seen to have celebrated certain reckless adventures; however, that celebration is intended to highlight and enhance a growing quality among friends, which is loyalty. Though, as the argument has shown, no reckless adventure or irresponsible deed whether by Toad or any other escapes punishment and reckoning, all misfortunes eventually lead to one outcome; more solidarity, more collaboration, and hence more loyalty among friends. All friends have shown a sense of loyalty and devotion, in variable degrees however. In addition, the novel seems to have promoted through the various deeds of its characters a sense of communal and collective efforts as more favorable to individual ones.

Works Cited

1. Bennett, Arnold. Books and Persons: Being Comments on a Past Epoch, 1908–1911. London: Chatto and Windus, 1917. Print.
2. Chalmers, Patrick R. Kenneth Grahame: Life, Letters and Unpublished Work. London: Methuen, 1933. Print.
3. Duffy, Maureen. A Thousand Capricious Chances: A History of the Methuen List 1889–1989. London: Methuen, 1989. Print.
4. Gilead, Sarah. "The Undoing of Idyll in The Wind in the Willows." No Name (N. D.): 145-158. PDF.
5. Graham, Kathryn V. "Of School and the River: The Wind in the Willows and its Immediate Audience." Children's Literature Association Quarterly (1988): 181-186. PDF.
6. Grahame, Kenneth. The Wind in the Willows 1908: A Novel. Ed. Peter Hunt. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. PDF.
7. Green, Peter. Kenneth Grahame: A Biography. London: Murray,. London: Murray, 1954. Print.
8. Inglis, Fred. The Promise of Happiness: Value and Meaning in Children’s Fiction. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1981. Print.
9. Hussain, Mohammad Naji and Khalefa, Maytham Ali: The Recovery Of SelfIdentification In Frederick Douglass's Narrative Of The Life Of Frederick
10. Douglass. (Palarch’s Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(4). ISSN 1567-214x),2020.

11. Hussain, Mohammad Naji and Khalefa, Maytham Ali: The Corrupting Power Of Slavery In Harriet Ann Jacob's Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl ,
12. Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(1). ISSN 1567-214x. 2020.
13. Mendelson, Michael. "The Wind in the Willows and the Plotting of Contrast." *Children's Literature* (1988): 127-144. PDF.
14. Sterck, Kenneth. "Rereading The Wind in the Willows ." *Children's Literature in Education* (N. D.): 20-28. PDF.
15. Willis, Lesley. "'A Sadder and a Wiser Rat/He Rose the Morrow Morn': Echoes of the Romantics in Kenneth Grahame's The Wind in the Willows." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* (1988): 108-111. PDF.