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"My Own Little Home": Historical Places of Peace in British Literature

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"MY OWN LITTLE HOME": HISTORICAL PLACES OF PEACE IN BRITISH LITERATURE

By Erin Kayla Choate

Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and Alan Alexander Milne were three children's authors living between 1859 and 1956 who wrote stories revolving around a sense of what can be called a place of peace. Each one's concept of peace was similar to the others. Grahame voiced it as "my own little home" through his character Mole in *The Wind in the Willows*.[1] Potter expressed it through the words "at home in his peaceful nest in a sunny bank" in her book *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse*.[2] Finally, Milne described it in *The House at Pooh Corner* as "that enchanted place" where "a little boy and his Bear will always be playing."[3] As a whole, it seems their definitions centered on the home in the English countryside, usually a small abode equivalent to a cottage within a quiet village.[4] The idea of a place of peace is an old one, but where did this concept of peace come from, particularly for these three authors and the Victorian and Edwardian periods in which they lived? The Industrial Revolution, certain lifestyles of the two time periods, and the nostalgia that Grahame, Potter, and Milne felt for their childhoods are three main historical origins of the peace concept.

Before examining the historical origins, it is necessary to elaborate on the definition of what historian Humphrey Carpenter called "the theme of…Arcadia"[5] and on its general historiography. As stated above, the concept may be summarized as a small home within the English countryside. The idea was not confined to one particular area, but to all of the English countryside. In *The Wind in the Willows*, there is a chapter entitled "Dulce Domum" where Mole and Rat head to Rat's house through a village and see a window from which "the sense of home and the little curtained world within

[1] Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908; repr., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 89.

[2] Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse* (1918; repr., London: Frederick Warne, 1989), 33.

[3] A.A. Milne, *The Complete Tales of Winnie-the-Pooh* (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1994), 344.

[4] Other authors around the Victorian and Edwardian time periods also wrote about the same type of places of peace, but the need to be selective required the choice of Grahame, Potter, and Milne as the focal points.

[5] Humphrey Carpenter, *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985), x, 1.

walls—the larger stressful world of outside Nature shut out and forgotten—most pulsated."[6] The snow-covered village itself is quiet, with people taking tea, laughing, and engaging in enjoyable work and leisure.[7] Carpenter stated that the Arcadia between 1860 and 1930 was a community far from the worries of the outside world.[8] Another historian, Valerie Porter, observed that villages before 1850 were small and self-sufficient with close relationships and without an awareness of the outside world.[9] Returning to the literature, each of the three authors described the homes of their characters as places where they feel contentment and belonging. They are also places set in nature. To name a few examples, Jeremy Fisher has a "little damp house amongst the buttercups,"[10] Rat has his River, and Christopher Robin and all of his friends have the Hundred Acre Wood which holds their separate homes and is, in itself, home. Within their homes, the characters perform quiet activities, such as having a friend for tea, going boating, and exploring the woods. In history, the desire for a home, especially for one in the country, stemmed from a longing for a slower and simpler lifestyle. George H. Ford speculated that Victorians dreamed of "a blissful scene of a green valley in which was nestled a scattered group of thatch-roofed cottages."[11] He drew this conclusion from the knowledge that the Victorians equated the cottage with stability and a quiet life in nature.[12] This perception of and desire for the country cottage continued into the 1900s.[13] The outward definition of the place of peace for the late Victorians, Edwardians, and these three authors was a cottage in an English country village amid nature where they could forget the world and live a simple happy life in peace and safety. Inwardly, the place of peace was an "internalization" of Romanticism or a "making-inward of what was external Nature."[14] Essentially, it was and still

[6] Grahame, 84.
[7] Grahame, 83.
[8] Carpenter, ix, 16.
[9] Valerie Porter, *English Villagers: Life in the Countryside, 1850-1939* (London: George Philip Ltd., 1992), 7.
[10] Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* (1906; repr., London: Frederick Warne, 1989), 9.
[11] U.C. Knoepflmacher and G.B. Tennyson, eds., *Nature and the Victorian Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 29.
[12] Knoepflmacher, 41 73.
[13] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 303.
[14] Knoepflmacher, 173.

is the "inward joy" that the famous philosopher, John Stuart Mill, once described as the one thing for which everyone searches and yearns.[15]

In terms of historiography, research has predominantly been done on topics lightly touching the Arcadian theme by several scholars both in the history and literature fields. For example, *English Villagers: Life in the Countryside, 1850-1939* by Valerie Porter looked at how changes over time, especially ones caused by the Industrial Revolution and World War I, influenced the English country village. She stated that the romantic village idea came from nostalgic memories and dreams of villages in the past.[16] Another study, *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, a collection of essays edited and compiled by U. C. Knoepflmacher and G. B. Tennyson, discussed the Victorians' entire concept of nature—how they viewed it in the countryside, in science, in literature, in painting, and so on. One of the essayists, George Levine, remarked on how Victorian fiction points to an admiration for the domestic farm life.[17] Next, Mark Girouard's *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* discussed how the upper classes lived in England from medieval times to 1940. Girouard observed that an idealization of the countryside developed in the cities' middle classes in the early 1900s.[18] Other books such as *Kenneth Grahame* by Lois R. Kuznets were biographies describing the lives of the people and the authors who lived in the late Victorian and Edwardian times. They revealed whether or not the authors drew the Arcadian societies in their books from the reality of their lives and the lives of the people around them or from their imaginative desires. Kuznets observed that Grahame wrote *The Golden Age* by fondly remembering his childhood.[19] Even more books focused on the literary views of rural life. Ernest Walter Martin compiled excerpts of writings from the 1500s to the mid-1900s concerning the title of his work, *Country Life in England*. He included a section of Alfred Ainger's *Crabbe* from 1903, which commented on how the Pastoral Poets gave "sentimental pictures of country life."[20] So, most of the research done by scholars concerned the Victorian and Edwardian countryside, village, lives of people

[15] Knoepflmacher, 185.
[16] Porter, 7.
[17] Knoepflmacher, 137-138.
[18] Girouard, 303.
[19] Lois R. Kuznets, *Kenneth Grahame*, Twayne's English Authors Series (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 59.
[20] Alfred Ainger, *Crabbe*, in *Country Life in England*, ed. E.W. Martin (London: Macdonald and Co., 1966), 117.

and authors, literature, and feelings towards nature, but none of them specifically studied the Arcadian theme and its causes—except one. The only book with Arcadia as its central question was *Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children's Literature* by Humphrey Carpenter. Carpenter noted the similarities of peaceful settings in a certain group of books written between 1860 and 1930 and he endeavored to find the reasons behind them.[21] Nevertheless, he mainly concentrated on the authors' lives of the "Secret Gardens" books and devoted only the prologue to the examination of historical causes; whereas, more time should be spent contemplating the historical origins and the existence of the general population to find the true inspiration for the idyllic life of the time.

Now that the definition of the ideal life and its historiography has been discussed, the historical causes for its appearance can be examined. Many events inspired the views of cottage and countryside in England, but they are considered minor in regards to the larger impact of the Industrial Revolution.[22] England rediscovered nature and its own countryside with the better transportation brought by the Industrial Revolution. The ugliness of the industrial city and the new awareness of nature reinforced the Romantic Movement, which in turn helped produce the idealized vision of owning a home in the English countryside. Romanticism and industry led to the rise of an urban middle class who believed in the merits of a country life and wanted to act on that belief. Last of all, the Industrial Revolution, with its surplus production and shipments of inexpensive foreign food into England, resulted in an agricultural depression which may have further stimulated the search for an "inward joy," the defining characteristic of the place of peace.

The Industrial Revolution began in England around 1770 and continued until about 1850. It was marked by an increase in technology and cities.[23] The rural world opened up to the outside under the Industrial Revolution. Tourism in the countryside increased during the mid-to-late 1700s due to travel journals, better roads, improved maps, and the appearance of larger and more comfortable inns.[24] During the 1800s, the spread of railroads and the invention of the bicycle, products of the Industrial Revolution, gave urban people more access to the country and rural people

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[21] Carpenter, ix-x.

[22] Other events include the Enclosure Movement, the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, and World War I.

[23] Porter, 43.

[24] *Thomas Gray's Journal of His Visit to the Lake District in October 1769*, ed. William Roberts (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 133, 135, 143-144.

more access to towns.[25] According to John Ruskin, people would take advantage of the better transportation to go to the country to escape from "that great foul city—rattling, growling, smoking, stinking—a ghastly heap of fermenting brickwork, pouring out poison at every pore."[26] It is evident from Ruskin and others that, though the Industrial Revolution brought benefits, it also brought pollution, complexity, and poverty. Charles Dickens wrote about the unhappiness of the urban poor. Throughout the literature of the time, there is an expression of fear and disgust of industrialization,[27] along with a need to find simplicity and be "freed from the thrall of the machine."[28] Once in the country, many found the beauty they sought. The travel journals gave pleasant descriptions, such as in Thomas Gray's account of the Lake District located in northern Britain: "the most delicious view," "magnificent heights," and "green and smiling fields."[29] Others living rurally also described it as picturesque. On one page of his diary, clergyman Francis Kilvert detailed the orchards, birdsong, clear air, attractive farms, and daffodils that "grew in forests" around the church in Bredwardine where he lived in 1878.[30] Of course not all of the English countryside was considered lovely, but the majority was. Historian Daniel Pool more objectively described the geography of the Victorian countryside—in the central areas it was gentle hills and fertile farming land, in the southwest it was coastland and more farmland, and in the north it was more a wilderness of rocks and cliffs.[31] The Victorians and Edwardians, especially those living in the towns, were largely reawakened to the countryside by the improved transportation of the Industrial Revolution which enabled them to visit the rural areas. Travel journals and the desire to leave the new world of industry also contributed to the rediscovery. The country they sought was one of natural peace and beauty in contrast to the smog and confusion of the industrial city and, on the whole, they found it.

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[25] Howard Newby, *Country Life: A Social History of Rural England* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble Books, 1987), 96-97.

[26] John Ruskin, quoted in Carpenter, 121.

[27] Carpenter, 121.

[28] Pamela Horn, *The Changing Countryside in Victorian and Edwardian England and Wales* (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), 223-224.

[29] Gray, 45.

[30] *Kilvert's Diary, 1870-1879*, ed. William Plomer (1944; repr., Boston: David R. Godine, 1986), 264-265. Bredwardine is in central western Britain.

[31] Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist—the Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 158-159.

The Romantic Movement was a reaction against several incidents and philosophies, including the Industrial Revolution.[32] It began in the late 1700s and continued into the 1800s. The age of industrialization greatly strengthened Romanticism as the polluted city ignited a desire to escape to the woods and enabled many to do so with the new railways and improved roads. The Industrial Revolution also destroyed cottages and much of the traditional rural lifestyle, thereby, increasing the public's nostalgia for the past.[33] For instance, in 1860, Charles Dickens travelled to the country to visit a beloved garden of his childhood, only to discover that a railroad station stood in its place.[34] Romanticism emphasized emotion, including nostalgia, and idealized the past and the countryside, among other things. Much of the Romantic literature and poetry during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods reflected idealization and a focus on feelings. One historian observed that the Romantic writers conceived of the country as "a God-made paradise" and the village as a "happy land of peasant enjoyment."[35] They also influenced the outlook on the cottage and nature as a whole. William Wordsworth was one of the Romantic poets who greatly influenced people's admiration of nature and the perception of the cottage as "a product of Nature," according to his own words.[36] It was with Wordsworth and others that the Victorians began to view the cottage as a place of emotions that fed the soul.[37] Romanticism emphasized the pastoral and the picturesque as well,[38] and equated them with peace and beauty—an idea furthered by the travel journals and Romantic authors. Although sometimes the authors exaggerated in their accounts due to their love of idealization and emotion, they were frequently true. Francis Kilvert called the cottages about Clyro "cosy" and thought of them as "kindly hospitable houses about these hospitable hills."[39] In comparison to the towns—one man described the slums of Manchester in 1844 as having "heaps of refuse, offal and sickening filth"—the countryside was a place of refuge and inner renewal.[40] There was

[32] Some may think the Romantic Movement is a separate event from the Industrial Revolution, but, according to the evidence, it seems the Industrial Revolution had a great impact on the Romantic Movement.

[33] Horn, 3.

[34] Knoepflmacher, 46.

[35] E.W. Martin, preface to *Country Life in England*, 8.

[36] Knoepflmacher, 24; William Wordsworth, quoted in Knoepflmacher, 73.

[37] Knoepflmacher, 47-48.

[38] Porter, 73.

[39] Kilvert, 74-75.

[40] Knoepflmacher, 33, 46.

also the sense that the village life had been simpler and happier in the past—an idea brought on partly by nostalgia, but once again somewhat true.[41] An old villager named Mrs. Giles remembered life and people in Wiltshire in the 1870s as "contented, and happy, always ready to lend a helping hand. Everyone joined in dancing, sliding, skating in the meadows, or picnics on the downs."[42] As the Industrial Revolution progressed, romantic nostalgia for the conventional country life increased for, as the city grew, more people absorbed the Romantic Movement and remembered the happier times of the past.[43] Carpenter argued that Grahame, Potter, and Milne's writings were a drawing inward of nostalgic romanticized memories of their childhoods and moments spent in the countryside.[44] The Industrial Revolution strengthened the Romantic Movement, which in turn strengthened the concept and need for a place of peace. Romanticism was about idealizations, and the place of peace idea was and is an ideal.

The Industrial Revolution created many new businesses and opportunities for financial increase and, as a result, an urban middle class rose up and grew in power and wealth. Romanticism deeply influenced the new middle class and caused them to believe in the cottage in the country as a comforting, upright life worthy of obtaining or at least visiting. Their newly acquired wealth enabled many of them to buy homes in the country as they desired.[45] Many came in the 1880s and 1890s in search of a "lost heritage."[46] Others wanted to return to the simpler existence to—as Ruskin once said—"watch the corn grow and the blossoms set; to draw hard breath over ploughshare or spade; to read, to think, to have, to hope, to pray."[47] The townspeople received the impression from Romanticism that a true connection between nature and man was valuable and could be found in the countryside.[48] Whether the urban middle class took "hard breath over ploughshare" or not, they were not dependent on such labor for a living; therefore, the peaceful way they lived in the country often was only true for them and not for the actual cottagers who were agricultural laborers. The *Country Life* magazine began in the 1890s; its pleasant descriptions of rural

[41] Porter, 7, 46.
[42] Porter, 46.
[43] Knoepflmacher, 46-48, 173.
[44] Carpenter, x, 201.
[45] Girouard, 268, 270, 303.
[46] Porter, 45.
[47] John Ruskin, quoted in Horn, 223.
[48] Gray, 146; Knoepflmacher, 48; Horn, 219.

life came from the prosperous urban middle class and spread the unrealistic idea that being amidst nature created peace for everyone.[49] Frequently, however, only the established landowners and the new urban middle class could afford to pursue the ideal life and both did. Historical records show a rise in the building of scenic but impractical cottages and villages in the mid-1800s.[50] The romantic preoccupation with a rural lifestyle continued into the early 1900s and broadened to include the country house, as well as the cottage.[51] Unfortunately, though, as the townspeople came pouring into the countryside during the 1800s, the expansion of railways, roads, and buildings gradually turned much of the country into suburbs. The urban middle class's desire to live the peaceful life slowly demolished that way of life.[52]

Another cause of rural decline was the agricultural depression England experienced that officially began in 1879 and did not dissipate until the early 1900s.[53] The Industrial Revolution was the main cause of the depression as it brought an increase in trade with large amounts of inexpensive imported food flooding into England.[54] In his analysis of British literature and history, Carpenter concluded that the "faltering in Britain's fortunes" helped induce the Arcadia theme.[55] The economic and political unrest of the time caused many people to worry, including Beatrix Potter who, in 1885, wrote: "I am terribly afraid of the future."[56] Carpenter deemed that Britain's troubles sparked authors to look inside themselves for security and the "inward joy," and several did—going back to memories of visits to the country.[57] It is evident that the agricultural depression caused many people besides authors to search for security, as well. Historian Pamela Horn indicated in her research that it was when the agricultural world suffered and faced extermination that the urban middle class felt its greatest desires to return to the country and what they thought it held—the basic joys of human life.[58] Edward Hudson started the *Country Life* magazine in order to promote

[49] Horn, 224.
[50] Horn, 28; Porter, 73.
[51] Horn, 223; Girouard, 302.
[52] Newby, 96; Horn, 224-225.
[53] Horn, 1, 32.
[54] Girouard, 300.
[55] Carpenter, 14.
[56] *The Journal of Beatrix Potter from 1881 to 1897*, transcribed by Leslie Linder (New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1966), 161.
[57] Carpenter, 14-15, 17.
[58] Horn, 2-3.

and preserve life in the countryside.[59] Overall, as Britain's troubles increased, so did her yearnings for the simpler, happier times and surroundings.

The Industrial Revolution had a significant impact on the Utopian views of the late Victorians and Edwardians. It resulted in a rediscovery of the countryside, romanticism for the countryside, a longing to return to the countryside by the rich urban middle class, and an agricultural depression which strengthened the desires for the countryside. Other than the Industrial Revolution, the lifestyles of certain people in the late Victorian and Edwardian time periods also helped create the idea of the country cottage as an idyllic place of peace. Some people actually lived peacefully in cottages.

Rural society of the mid-to-late Victorian period was characterized by farming and a firm social hierarchy.[60] The classes were divided into the aristocracy who owned ten thousand acres or more, the gentry who owned one to ten thousand acres, the squires who owned one to three thousand acres, the farmers who owned some land at first but gradually became renters of land, and the agricultural laborers who were hired to farm the land.[61] The agricultural workers and craftsmen were the people who lived in the cottages.[62] The cottage and its surroundings were often pretty. Kilvert described a woodsman's cottage as "seated in a pleasant nook in the wooded hillside looking towards the rising sun…the garden was in the most exquisitely neat order and the house beautifully clean."[63] Beatrix Potter's Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle also lives in a house set in a hill with a "nice clean kitchen."[64] Joseph Arthur Gibbs lived for a time in a Cotswold village in the 1890s and wrote that most of the cottages were gabled, built with local stone, and between two to three hundred years old. He also stated that almost all of them were neat and had "an air of homely comfort which calls forth admiration of all strangers."[65] Of course, the country cottage was not always

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[59] Girouard, 303.

[60] Newby, 220-221.

[61] Pool, 164-165; Newby, 63-64; Porter, 64.

[62] Pool, 165. The cottagers will be the primary focus since it is the cottage life as the place of peace which is being examined.

[63] Kilvert, 267.

[64] Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* (1905; repr., London: Frederick Warne, 1989), 18, 21.

[65] J. Arthur Gibbs, *A Cotswold Village or Country Life and Pursuits in Gloucestershire*, 3rd ed. (1918; repr., EBook: Project Gutenberg, 2004), http://www.gutenberg.org/files/11160/11160-h/11160-h.htm (accessed November 12, 2014), Ch. 2 and 3. The Cotswolds are in the South West of England.

beautiful. George Eliot once related two kinds of villages—a slum with "dingy" and "dark" cottages and a "trim cheerful" village with "bright" cottages and their "little gardens."[66] Kilvert also encountered the dark cottage. He once went to see a dying man who lived in a "dark hole in the hovel roof."[67] A cottage also sometimes looked clean on the outside but was dirty on the inside. A poorly kept cottage was frequently the fault of a bad cottager or landowner.[68] Such was the case in Hertfordshire where Edwin Grey grew up. He observed that usually it was the drunkards of the village who left their homes in a neglected state.[69]

Furthermore, rural laborers were often subject to bad conditions which helped contribute to making the cottage and rural life a less than ideal existence. According to historical records, agricultural laborers had to work longer days for little pay—many were at poverty level.[70] Grey attested that only a few cottagers could save some pennies if they were frugal and had only a small family.[71] Most laborers, however, had larger families, so they further suffered from crowded home lives.[72] A cottage typically had between one room for the extremely poor and four rooms for the more well-off.[73] Grey's firsthand account supported the historical research. He stated that almost all of the cottages in his Hertfordshire village were filled with too many people and several of the bigger families shared one bedroom.[74] Also, Horn and others have indicated that cottages frequently had contaminated drinking water and were encompassed by sewage.[75] Kilvert documented an incident when a boy almost drowned in sewage.[76] Grey and Gibbs, however, both encountered clean water supplies in their villages and mostly clean surroundings, so unsanitary conditions depended on the place.[77] The agricultural workers also had to endure, as Gibbs phrased it, a "dulness of…existence" and a "monotonous round of daily toil" with few

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[66] Knoepflmacher, 35.
[67] Kilvert, 72.
[68] Knoepflmacher, 35, 37.
[69] Edwin Grey, *Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village* (St. Albans: Fisher, Knight and Co., 1935), 52.
[70] Horn, 91; Newby, 80.
[71] Edwin Grey, 66.
[72] Horn, 92.
[73] Pool, 190.
[74] Edwin Grey, 46-47.
[75] Horn, 92-93; Porter, 142-143.
[76] Kilvert, 72.
[77] Edwin Grey, 47; Gibbs, Ch. 2.

opportunities for relaxation and entertainment.[78] Nevertheless, no matter how tedious it was, working on the farm was essential as it guaranteed the laborer a home—the cottage came with the job and to lose one was to lose both.[79]

With all of these disadvantages to country life for the rural laborer, it was no wonder that many left for the town during the Industrial Revolution. By 1851, over half of England's population had moved to the cities.[80] In fact, the Revolution did not make circumstances any easier as the advent of the machine brought a decline in the number of men needed to work the farm.[81] Both Gibbs and Kilvert talked about men without work and traveling to find employment.[82] The agricultural depression also had a negative impact on country life, as previously mentioned. Gibbs blamed the depression for the abandoned villages in the countryside.[83] Oftentimes, the serenity that strangers observed in the occupied villages was a façade masking concerns and hardship.[84]

The rural upper classes also suffered from the drastic changes in the society and economy. Not only did the rise of the middle class result in the decline of their authority, but the shipments of foreign food lowered their incomes so that several had to sell their land and houses. Otherwise, the upper classes usually lived comfortable lives in country houses and employed between ten and fifty servants. The prosperous aristocracy also valued the Arcadian qualities of hospitality and a content family life at home, as seen in the family portraits of the period.[85] In fact, the rural aristocracy, gentry, and wealthy middle class often lived out the Arcadian dream. Francis Kilvert and J. Arthur Gibbs were both well-off, lived in places of peace, and engaged in the peaceful lifestyle. Kilvert enjoyed reading, gardening, and going on picnics, among other activities.[86] Kenneth Grahame's Rat and Mole went picnicking, as well as A. A. Milne's Pooh, Piglet, and Christopher Robin.[87] Gibbs could "linger in the woods" and be still just listening and watching nature and life go on around him.[88]

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[78] Gibbs, Ch. 2; Newby, 92-93; Edwin Grey, 186.
[79] Horn, 92-93.
[80] Knoepflmacher, 31; Porter, 43.
[81] Porter, 43.
[82] Gibbs, Ch. 3; Kilvert, 225.
[83] Gibbs, Ch. 2.
[84] Horn, 3.
[85] Girouard, 270, 272-273, 276, 300.
[86] Kilvert, 42, 69, 270.
[87] Grahame, 12-13; A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 54-55.
[88] Gibbs, Ch. 15.

Although the rural laborer of the late 1800s frequently struggled to survive, they also were often content[89] and enjoyed some of Arcadia as well. The beautiful surroundings already discussed and the feeling that the village was "far from the madding crowd's strife"[90] served a significant role in producing an Arcadia, even for the poor lower classes. In spite of the Industrial Revolution and depression, a few villages flourished and retained the old customs.[91] Many of the villagers in the Cotswolds and Hertfordshire, if not elsewhere, were "healthy, bright, clean, and old-fashioned" and lived to advanced ages.[92] Gibbs' villagers also felt closely tied to one another, regardless of class.[93] Cottagers were kind and hospitable to outsiders as well; Kilvert said he felt "welcome and beloved everywhere."[94] Agricultural laborers also took pleasure in gardening vegetables and flowers.[95] Gardens are a prominent feature in Beatrix Potter's books. So, the place of peace did exist somewhat between 1860 and 1900. An even closer example of its existence comes from Kilvert's visit to a family on a little farm—neither poor laborers nor rich landowners. Kilvert wrote, "I think they have the true secret of happiness" and recorded how the father, in difficult times, had "always been cheered and brightened and helped by the thought of the beacon light of home…and the love that awaited him there."[96]

The Edwardian Era from 1901 to 1910 was similar to the late Victorian Era in many ways. Rural society was still divided into the same classes with the landlords and farmers in control.[97] The effects of the Industrial Revolution and agricultural depression carried on into the early 1900s and the better-off were still enjoying the benefits of life in the countryside. The rural laborer continued to suffer from bad conditions, yet some still found peace and beauty in their country lives. Clifford Hills was born to agricultural laborers in 1904 and lived in Great Bentley, Essex.[98] He loved his childhood village which was a close community where anyone

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[89] Edwin Grey, 109-110.
[90] Gibbs, Ch. 2.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Gibbs, Ch. 3; Edwin Grey, 27, 52.
[93] Gibbs, Ch. 2.
[94] Kilvert, 229.
[95] Edwin Grey, 112; Gibbs, Ch. 15.
[96] Kilvert, 242.
[97] W.H. Hudson, *Afoot in England* in *Country Life in England*, ed. E.W. Martin, 135; Newby, 212.
[98] Thea Thompson, introduction to "Clifford Hills" ch. in *Edwardian Childhoods* (1981; repr., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 37-38.

would drop by for tea and he and his family would walk through the woods and admire the bluebells.[99] A reader of the account is reminded of the foxgloves in the forest in *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*.[100] However, Hills said most of the community was poor and his own family "lived hand to mouth" with "never enough money."[101]

Progress and effects from the Industrial Revolution and agricultural depression persisted into the 1900s. According to historian Thea Thompson, Edwardian England was "the most urbanised country in the world."[102] During the Edwardian period, the outlook for the country cottage life, if anything, seemed to rapidly grow worse. By 1901, only twelve percent of men in England and Wales worked on the land, and by 1914 half of Britain's food was being imported. The farmer still struggled against the production of the machine and the village increasingly lost its crafts and traditions. From 1881 to 1911, land employment decreased by eighteen percent, resulting in landlords' refusal to build any more cottages or make anything more than a few repairs on the old ones.[103] According to a 1913 survey, the wages of the farm laborer in all of England's counties except five, were lower than the funds necessary for survival.[104] Some improvements, though, were made as well. In 1908, old age pensions allowed older cottages to continue living in their cottage homes. Between 1875 and 1908, the Agricultural Holding Acts were passed which permitted tenants to choose how they farmed and gave them compensations and more secure tenures.[105]

While the countryside seemed to be fading away more and more in the face of progress, the fascination for rural life increased even more.[106] In the early 1900s, the urban middle class came flooding in more than ever before.[107] The newcomers often tore down the countryside and transformed it into suburbs.[108] However, not all of the upper and middle classes were destructive and some—as in the late Victorian period—actually found the

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[99] Clifford Hills, interview by Thea Thompson, *Edwardian Childhoods*, 42-44.
[100] Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck* (1908; repr., London: Frederick Warne, 1989), 22-23.
[101] Hills, 41-42.
[102] Thompson, 37.
[103] Robert Cecil, *Life in Edwardian England* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969), 111-112, 115, 124, 126.
[104] Horn, 217.
[105] Cecil, 113, 118-119.
[106] Horn, 223.
[107] Cecil, 131.
[108] Porter, 7; Cecil, 125.

idyllic life they sought. Edith Holden and Sir Edward Grey were two well-off individuals of the Edwardian age who managed to prove the existence of the place of peace. Edith Holden was a naturalist who lived in Warwickshire and kept a diary of her observations in 1906. In this diary, she documented not only the beauties of nature, but also some of her activities including berry picking, country walks, gardening, feeding the birds, and searching for mushrooms. On one occasion, she picked some violet leaves in the woods.[109] In Milne's *The House at Pooh Corner*, Piglet also picks violets in the Hundred Acre Wood.[110] In fact, all of the peaceful endeavors she engaged in are reminiscent of Grahame, Potter, and Milne's characters and their pastimes. Sir Edward Grey and his wife also kept a diary of their life from 1894 to 1905 in a cottage at Itchen Abbas in the Hampshire countryside. Sir Edward received the land from a cousin and then built the cottage originally for fishing outings, but it became something more.[111] Grey described it as "a lovely refuge" and "something special and sacred, outside the ordinary stream of life."[112] He and his wife refused to let any work or social engagements bother them when they went there on the weekends. Instead, they watched birds, fished, bicycled, and took walks.[113] The cottage was a place where they had "perfect peace" with its red roof and walls covered in flowers.[114] Its location on the Itchen River and comfortable interior was similar to Rat's home in *The Wind in the Willows*.[115] In the end, when looking at the lifestyles of the late Victorian and Edwardians, it becomes apparent that the Arcadia in books is partly based on reality after all.

The Industrial Revolution and the lifestyles of the periods have been examined and proven as two historical causes of the Victorian and Edwardian place of peace. Next, the lifestyles and inspirations of three authors—Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and A. A. Milne—need to be discussed. They and other authors propagated an idea that was already present but they also helped create the place of peace concept by envisioning it more clearly

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[109] Edith Holden, *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 6-7, 9, 15, 143, 155.

[110] A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 250.

[111] Sir Edward and Lady Dorothy Grey, *The Cottage Book: The Undiscovered Country Diary of an Edwardian Statesman*, ed. Michael Waterhouse (London: Victor Gollancz, 1999), 30.

[112] Edward Grey, 18-19.

[113] Edward Grey, 12, 18-19, 111, 115, 123.

[114] Edward Grey, 19.

[115] Edward Grey, 19; Grahame, 4-5, 21.

and personally. Childhood greatly affected Grahame, Potter, and Milne and the places of peace in their books.

Kenneth Grahame was born in Edinburgh on March 8, 1859, into the upper middle class. When he wrote *The Wind in the Willows*, he had two central inspirations: his childhood and his adult life. His childhood, though, seems to have affected him the most. Although Grahame did not have a particularly easy childhood, he still nostalgically viewed it as a time free of cares. He used writing to relive his boyhood and forget his stressful marriage and adult life.[116] Despite hardships like the death of his mother and the neglect of his father,[117] Grahame enjoyed his childhood and it greatly impacted *The Wind in the Willows*. For example, Grahame largely set the book at Cookham Dene in the Berkshire countryside where he lived in a house on the Thames when he was very young. It was there that he developed a passion for walks through the countryside.[118] The two major themes of *The Wind in the Willows*, escape and home, can also be found in Grahame's early days. First, in terms of the escape theme, Mole abandons his spring cleaning for freedom outside, Rat feels a call to go to sea, and Toad is ecstatic for "the Open Road."[119] It is possible that Grahame longed to drop all responsibilities like his father did.[120] As for the home theme, all of the characters live in "comfortable womb-like burrows" and value domesticity.[121] The book even ends with Toad singing a song about coming home.[122] Carpenter argued that Grahame valued the home after being forced to move around so much as a child.[123] Even as an adult, Grahame said he often had a dream of "a certain little room, very dear and familiar" with "always the same feeling of a home-coming, of the world shut out, of the ideal encasement" and the knowledge that "all was my very own…."[124] As Mole says when he wants to return to his hole underground, "it was my own little home."[125] Grahame was also inspired by his adult life, though he derived no central

[116] Carpenter, 118-120, 151, 153.
[117] Kuznets, 2-3.
[118] Kuznets, 2-3.
[119] Grahame, 1-2, 186, 38. The escape theme is also called the adventure theme.
[120] Carpenter, 117.
[121] John David Moore, "Pottering About in the Garden: Kenneth Grahame's Version of Pastoral in *The Wind in the Willows*," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 45.
[122] Grahame, 255-256.
[123] Carpenter, 117.
[124] Moore, 46.
[125] Grahame, 89.

themes from it. For instance, Grahame had a friend named Edward Atkinson who lived on the Fowey River and owned thirty boats. He became the model for Rat.[126] His most significant inspiration in his adult years was his son Alastair. *The Wind in the Willows* began as a bedtime story to his son on his fourth birthday in 1906.[127] Grahame's surroundings may also have influenced him. For example, Grahame's characters live by the seasons like the agricultural laborers.[128] Nevertheless, not everything in the book was true in its portrayal. He created the world with idealizations such as the Thames River which, though polluted in reality,[129] was all "glints and gleams and sparkles" in the book.[130] Overall, his childhood, especially his time spent at Cookham Dene, became a "felicitous space"—a place of safety and imagination—for him.[131] Grahame defined the felicitous space through the words of Rat as he talks of the River: "It's brother and sister to me…. It's my world, and I don't want any other. What it hasn't got is not worth having, and what it doesn't know is not worth knowing."[132]

Beatrix Potter was born on July 28, 1866, into an upper-middle class household like Grahame.[133] Potter used childhood nostalgia less than Grahame and Milne because she lived in an actual place of peace—Hill Top Farm.[134] However, her childhood days still greatly influenced her. In her journal, she stated: "As we struggle on, the thoughts of that peaceful past time of childhood comes to us like soft music…. We do not wish we were back in it…for the very good reason that it is impossible for us to be so, but it keeps one up, and there is a vague feeling that one day there will again be rest."[135] Growing up, Potter loved the holidays she and her family spent in the Hertfordshire countryside at Camfield Place and at Dalguise House in Perthshire, Scotland. It was at Camfield that Potter first came to love nature, and in Scotland she sketched her first drawings.[136] She described Camfield as a "perfect whole where all things are a part…the distant sounds of the

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[126] Kuznets, 11, 117.
[127] Kuznets, 14.
[128] Kuznets, 103-104.
[129] Kuznets, 102.
[130] Grahame, 4.
[131] Kuznets, 101-102.
[132] Grahame, 10.
[133] Linda Lear, *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2007), 9.
[134] Carpenter, 140-141.
[135] Potter, *Journal*, 81-82.
[136] Lear, 13, 26-27, 35.

farmyard, the feeling of plenty."[137] The farms and woods of Hertfordshire and the forest and rocky rivers of Perthshire inspired her and so did the Lake District. The Potters began going to the Lake District on holiday when Beatrix was sixteen. During her visits there, Potter toured the countryside and developed an affinity for the village of Near Sawrey and the nearby Esthwaite Water.[138] In 1896, she wrote that Near Sawrey was "as nearly perfect a little place as I ever lived in" with "such nice old-fashioned people" and "flowery little gardens."[139] In 1905, Potter bought Hill Top Farm outside Near Sawrey. Hill Top Farm was Potter's place of peace and one of her greatest inspirations. She set many of her books in and around Hill Top. *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher*, published in 1906, is set in Sawrey and at Moss Heckle Tarn—a nearby lake with water lilies.[140] Jeremy Fisher's boat is a water lily in the story.[141] She placed *The Tale of Tom Kitten* (1907) at Hill Top and the garden into which Mrs. Tabitha Twitchit "turned out" her children was Beatrix Potter's own flower garden.[142] Children also inspired Potter. She wrote most of her stories for children she knew and loved. The first book, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), began as a collection of "picture letters" to her friends, the Moore children.[143] Potter's childhood holidays in the countryside laid the foundations for her books by producing the love of nature and the love of a place. She portrayed a living Arcadia in her books that was based largely on the reality of her peaceful life. Her contentment is reflected in her remark at the end of *The Tale of Johnny Town-Mouse*: "For my part I prefer to live in the country, like Timmy Willie."[144]

Alan Alexander Milne was born on January 18, 1882, to a lower middle class family.[145] Milne related his two major inspirations for the beginnings of the Christopher Robin and Pooh stories in his autobiography: "There on the other side of the lawn was a child with whom I had lived for three years…and here within me were unforgettable memories of my own childhood."[146] His son Christopher affirmed that it was his "boyhood from

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[137] Potter, *Journal*, 431.
[138] Lear, 5.
[139] Potter, *Journal*, 417, 422.
[140] Lear, 7, 212-213.
[141] Potter, *Jeremy Fisher*, 18.
[142] Lear, 218-219; Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Tom Kitten* (1907; repr., London: Frederick Warne, 1989), 22.
[143] Lear, 142.
[144] Potter, *Johnny Town-Mouse*, 59.
[145] A.A. Milne, *Autobiography* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1939), 23, 35.
[146] A.A. Milne, *Autobiography*, 280.

which all his inspiration sprang."[147] It may have been a love of his boyhood days that caused Milne to purchase Cotchford Farm in Sussex in 1925. Milne had spent a pleasant part of his childhood in that area of England.[148] Cotchford Farm was a beautiful place. Christopher Milne described it as "a cottage, a little bit of garden, a lot of jungle, two fields, a river and then all the green, hilly countryside beyond, meadows and woods, waiting to be explored."[149] It truly was a place of peace and the setting for the Pooh books. Along with his childhood memories, which caused him to write about and buy an "enchanted place," Milne's son Christopher Robin also inspired him. However, even observing his son served as a tool to relive childhood. Christopher stated: "My father, who had derived such happiness from his childhood, found in me the companion with whom he could return there…we grew up side by side and as we grew so the books were written."[150] In his writing, the character Christopher Robin often represented Milne himself as well as his son.[151] Nevertheless, it was through watching his son play on Cotchford Farm and describing his son's stuffed animals that the Winnie-the-Pooh stories came to be.[152] The world of Winnie-the-Pooh is centered on trees.[153] According to Christopher Robin, that "in real life, was how it was."[154] Poohsticks Bridge was real too and Christopher and his father played Poohsticks on it just like the characters did in *The House at Pooh Corner*.[155] Posingford Wood was the basis for the Hundred Acre Wood.[156] Many other places and activities in Pooh's adventures were founded on real life. A. A. Milne's childhood deeply influenced him in producing his enchanted place—set in idyllic Cotchford Farm, the place of peace in the Pooh books is a mixture of nostalgia and reality.

When Kenneth Grahame, Beatrix Potter, and A. A. Milne wrote their books, they depicted a place of peace derived from the world around and within them. The late Victorians and Edwardians idealized the cottage in the English countryside as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution. The cottage

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[147] Christopher Milne, *The Enchanted Places* (1974; repr., New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 172.
[148] Christopher Milne, 201.
[149] Christopher Milne, 69.
[150] Christopher Milne, 173.
[151] Christopher Milne, 38.
[152] A.A. Milne, *Autobiography*, 286.
[153] A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 2-3, 5, 9, 46-47, 130, 231.
[154] Christopher Milne, 81.
[155] Christopher Milne, 72; A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, 258-259.
[156] Christopher Milne, 79.

became a source of security and inward joy as they faced a new world of change. Upon examination, it seems the place of peace, although an ideal, was possible as several rich and poor people, including the authors, actually lived the quiet life in the country. So, the Arcadia of Grahame, Potter, and Milne's books and the time period was a combination of romanticism and nostalgia on the one hand and a true reality on the other. In 1898, J. Arthur Gibbs stated: "It is often said that in books like these we paint arcadias that never did and never could exist on earth. To this I would answer that there are many such abodes in country places, if only our minds are such as to realise them….Let us have all that is joyous and bright in our books, and leave the trials and failures for the realities of life."[157]

[157] Gibbs, preface.