

# Modernist Repositionings of Rousseau's Ideal Childhood: Place and Space in English Modernist Children's Literature and Its French Translations



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## Abstract

It is a little-known fact that several modernists wrote for children: this project will focus on T.S. Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, James Joyce's *The Cat and the Devil*, Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round* and Virginia Woolf's *Nurse Lugton's Curtain*. While not often thought of as a modernist, I contend that Walter de la Mare's short stories for children, especially *The Lord Fish*, take part in this corpus of modernist texts for children. These children's stories, while scarcely represented in critical circles, have enjoyed a wide popular audience and have all been translated into French. Modernism is often considered an elitist movement, but these texts can contribute to its reassessment, as they suggest an effort towards inclusivity of audience. The translation of children's literature is a relatively new field of study, which builds from descriptive translation studies with what is unique to children's literature: its relation to pedagogy and consequent censorship or other tailoring to local knowledge; frequently, the importance of images; the dual audience that many children's books have in relating to the adults who will select, buy and potentially perform the texts; and what Puurtinen calls 'readaloud-ability' for many texts. For these texts and their French translations, questions of children's relations to place and space are emphasised, and how these are complicated in translation through domestication, foreignisation and other cultural context adaptations. In particular, these modernists actively write against Rousseau's notion of the —innocent|| boy delighting in the countryside and learning from nature. I examine the international dialogue that takes place in these ideas of childhood moving between France and England, and renegotiated over the span of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This study thus seeks to contribute to British modernist studies, the growing field of the translation of children's literature, and children's geographies.

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The Modern age in literature is grounded in achievement, amazing in their potential both for emancipation and destruction: atomic energy, space exploration, genetic and biomedical engineering and telecommunications. Technological advances in these areas can either save mankind and the universe or destroy it. The rapid urbanization has created the environmental problems. The race to colonize space, the discovery of DNA standing at par with the discovery of the radio waves, the theory of relativity have shattered the old certainties and have posed threats to the new ideas. The economic depression English literature is the literature written in the English language, including literature composed in English by writers not necessarily from England; Joseph Conrad was born in Poland, Robert Burns was Scottish, James Joyce was Irish, Dylan Thomas was Welsh, Edgar Allan Poe was American, V.S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad, Vladimir Nabokov was Russian. In other words, English literature is as diverse as the varieties and dialects of English spoken around the world. In academia, the term often labels departments and programmes practising English studies in secondary and tertiary educational systems Children's literature: Children's literature, the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children. Alternative Title: juvenile literature. Children's literature, the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials.