

Can Books Save Trees?: Rethinking the Roles of Anthropomorphic Trees in Recent Children's Books

Trees have spread their roots deeply across children's literature. However, as eco-critical concerns about portrayal of nature rise, we encounter problems from seeing trees in books as immaterial and metaphorical. While trees as nature request us to emphasize their physical being and vulnerability in the face of human destruction, they are also the main material for papers and books – books about saving trees!

In her essay on environmental justice children's literature, Kamala Platt asks "How does children's literature portray the troubling reality of our world in order to address social issues and to promote a path toward productive resolutions without shattering a sense of hope . . .?" (192) To form an answer, I turn to symbolic meanings of anthropomorphic trees, in the hope that by partly becoming humans, these trees can gain better communication with human children. In other words, through the fictional situation of simultaneously being humans and trees, the book raises empathy in child characters, and ultimately in child readers, to save trees in fictions and reality.

I choose three recent children's books with anthropomorphic trees as central characters: *The Real Boy*, *The Tree in the Courtyard*, and *Wishtree*. Each book ends hopefully with the tree being saved from extermination. Yet it is the personification of trees that invites us to examine the deeper connections between humans and trees, so as to realize the troubling relationships we create. To hope books can save trees is to hope the child readers are capable of discerning truth from reading fictions.

Works Cited

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