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National College of Art and Design

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A Critical Analysis of "Winnie the Pooh"

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Joan Fowler, sincere thanks for your tuition and guidance

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INTRODUCTION

A child's mind is extremely complex, functioning very differently from an adult's. A child does not suddenly acquire wisdom at a certain age, but rather absorbs information through experience and education. After its parents, it is stories that are a child's second introduction to life, for it is in a story that a child is first introduced to fantasy and mystery, the very elements of childhood existence.

Parables, fables, fairytales, and mythical folk stories have existed in many cultures for thousands of years. They are used as vehicles to teach morals and instil good judgement and values into a young child. Fairytales introduce a child to fantasy, their objective not to teach a child about society or modern life but rather to teach a child about its inner self, its imagination and creativity as well as life's inevitable predicaments and their solutions.

Many modern stories continue to introduce fantasy and conscious morality, but generally these further attempt to teach a child about specific moral issues as well as aspects of the society that they exist in. However it is important to recognise that all children's literature, ancient and modern, functions as pedagogical vehicles and the story of "Winnie the Pooh" is no exception.

The renowned stories "Winnie the Pooh" (1926) and "The House at Pooh Corner" (1928) are two of the most universally successful children's books of all time. Written in England by Alan Alexander Milne, "Winnie the Pooh" has been translated into thirty-three languages. The Latin version "Winnie Ille Pu" became the *New York Times* best-seller in 1960, the first foreign language book ever to do so, and remarkably remained there for twenty weeks. The popularity of the two books, (each with ten stories) gained in the 1960s assisted by Walt Disney's purchase of the film rights in 1961. Tied in with the release of the film, 169 items from 49 different licensed manufacturers became available and 19 different publications of the two books were on sale. The character of "Winnie the Pooh" still proves as popular and universal towards the end of the century, with new merchandise still in constant production.

“Winnie the Pooh” gives a keyhole view of the life of a happy young bear whose existence seems far removed from society, existing in a beautiful woodland with his companions, free from danger or worry, rather enjoying their surroundings and each other’s company, creating adventures and problems that they eventually solve. It lacks any threat or violence or any great excitement or thrill, but with its beautiful use of language the story offers an insight into Milne’s understanding of the naivete and innocence of childhood, and creates a magical fantasy land of goodness and friendship. However like any children’s books, the “Winnie the Pooh” books were written by an adult and therefore can consciously or unconsciously become weighted with complexity, the author’s experience, and lack naivete. It is therefore not irrational to assume the existence of deep interpretations. The critical analysis of children’s literature has caused stories to undergo extreme scrutiny, citing ulterior hidden meanings and innuendo. Due to their popularity, these stories have inevitably undergone much critical assessment, and the extent of the analytical writings has become complex and varied. This dissertation examines the extent of the critical interpretations of “Winnie the Pooh “ and the traits of the two books that have led to comparisons with other various sources.

In chapter one the interpretation and impact of children’s books in general will be discussed. It will offer a general outline as to the psychological analysis of children’s literature and the qualities it can contain. Fairytales play an important role in a child’s educational and imaginative development. There are many intentional characteristics of these fantasy stories teaching particular lessons to a child. Many modern stories borrow some ancient characteristics, having huge impact on developing a child’s imagination. The intention therefore of this chapter is to examine the importance of literature in a child’s development and place “Winnie the Pooh” in this context, searching for any structural traits of these ancient and modern tales.

In chapter two, the context of the author A.A. Milne will be examined. As well as having an autobiographical element, the novel is seen to unconsciously reflect the society it was created in, the characters perhaps inhabiting a bourgeois or capitalist set-up. Upon purchase of the film rights to the story, Disney replaced the British society of

“Winnie the Pooh” with an American one which was considered more appropriate for the audience. These cartoons have introduced a new modern children’s audience to the story and so it is important to assess the surviving characteristics and new aspects of the animated version. So chapter two will therefore primarily examine the original society in which “Winnie the Pooh” was created, against the society of the film decades later.

Chapter three will deal with some of the critical interpretations of this book. Because of the reflection of peace and innocence in the story, it is seen to be rich in philosophy giving an insight into eastern Taoist philosophy as well as its moral Christian teachings. However, interestingly the novel has been interpreted to contain perplexing sexual innuendoes, underlying eroticism, or passion. The aim therefore of the third chapter is to view and assess the credibility of these often farfetched interpretations.

Summarising, this dissertation will primarily regard the analysis of children’s fantasy literature and examine its importance in a child’s development. An examination of the original setting of the story will follow which will result in an inspection of the existing critical analyses of “Winnie the Pooh”. This is a largely inconclusive task, but the aim is not to decide which critical assessments are true or fair. The issue here is rather to examine the extent of the interpretations of the literature, and assess the varying hypotheses that can occur.

CHAPTER 1

A child does not possess the meaning of life when he is born. A mature understanding of himself and the world around him develops as he grows in life, this psychological maturity gained once he understands himself and therefore can understand others. In order to succeed in life he needs his imagination, intellect and emotions to mutually work together, equally fulfilled so he will go on to develop deeper rationality. A good source to develop his intellect and clarify his emotions is fantasy literature as it stimulates all aspects of his personality, (Bettelheim, 1976, pp. 3-4).

In the modern world, school books are designed to teach skills to children while books written for their pleasure usually consciously inform as well as entertain. These stories will hopefully arouse curiosity in the reader and entertain him, holding his attention while they teach of society and inform the reader of important cultural aspects. Beyond this they are shallow with little significance in the child's inner development, failing to stimulate and nurture the resources he needs in order to cope with difficult personal problems for there are many inner predicaments that may torment a child.

Many ancient storytellers would suggest that if a child deals with his own inner world i.e.; his own personal dilemmas, and if he can make sense of his emotions and enhance his inner resources, he will be capable of coping with any society, for every society's problems develop from human beings. Therefore it is not irrational to focus on the development of the personality of the child so he will grow in confidence to deal with whatever society he is introduced to.

Fairytales attempt to carry messages to the mind of any child who hears them, in an attempt to enhance the inner personality. A child is said to understand his conscious mind when his everyday problems of growing up, sibling rivalry and relinquishing childhood dependencies are understood, (Bettelheim, 1976, p.6). These elements are taught in fairytales through the conscious mind, dealing with situations that the child listener can relate to. However, there are seen to be more subtle messages in fairytales aimed at unconsciously stimulating the child's mind. It is for this reason that all fairytales introduce fantasy, which encourages children to similarly create their own worlds of unnatural activity. In the creation of fictitious surroundings and wild fantasies, a child can unconsciously play out his real everyday dilemmas allowing them to become familiar and inevitably relieving their pressure. These fantastical creations could therefore be seen as essential in the development of his personality. If a child's fantasies are suppressed, they could begin to spread to his everyday life, becoming a dangerous reality. Therefore fairytales and fantasy stories could be argued to be important elements of childhood existence for they can develop the personality, enhancing the imagination, intellect and emotions of children on different levels. The lessons learned in fairytales to develop these elements are not unique to the readers as children but are ever present in their adult lives.

"Fairytales survived.....because they began to represent childhood, that vividness of experience in the midst of inexperience, the capacity for daydreaming and wonder. I have since discovered that there is nothing in the least childlike about fairytales." (Warner, 1994, p.XIV).

Fairytales were created before modern society existed and therefore are not dated or society specific. They deal with universal predicaments and life's inevitable problems like ageing and death, and good versus evil, all existential problems of humanity in childhood and adulthood alike. Many modern stories attempt to remain safe, with no mention of ageing. This introduces a child to a false world. The child is aware that he is growing himself and so fears the unknown future and death. Many fairytales begin with the death or potential death of a parent where a child becomes faced with the existential dilemma and it is not confused in a complex plot. An example is the Brothers Grimm story of "The Three Feathers".

“There was once upon a time a king who had three sons.... When the king had become old and weak and was thinking of his end, he did not know which of his sons should inherit the kingdom... after this death”, (Bettelheim, 1976, p.8).

As with death, fairytales introduce the reader to the presence of evil in human existence. It is believed that if a child is unaware of the presence of evil, he will think himself a bad person if he misbehaves, creating a low self-image. Therefore fairytales do not refuse to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our own very natures, making them aware of every person's potential for good and bad, (Bettelheim, 1976, p.7). In fairytales evil is ever present in the form of a witch, wicked stepmother or a big bad wolf, etc. Specific morals are not taught to the reader as in a modern story, but the child is introduced to good versus evil. The child listener follows and empathises with the hero who usually becomes isolated for a time, alone feeling close to nature; a tree or an animal. Examples are Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Hansel and Gretel. The child struggles and suffers with the hero who is finally successful proving virtue as victorious. Morality may become imprinted upon him but he does not now consciously wish to become a good person but rather to act like his particular hero. In fairytales, the evil is not punished, for punishment would be little deterrent from crime. The bad character merely losses out and doesn't gain love as a reward as the hero does in the happy ending, Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Snow White receiving the love of a man, Hansel and Gretel parental love. The child reader would associate with the ending he wants in his own life and so subconsciously knows that being virtuous is how to achieve worldly success like his hero.

Summarising, fairytales deal with aspects of growing up and relinquishing childhood dependencies, attempting to appeal to the child's conscious mind, encouraging him to act like the hero, approaching the world independently. This hopefully imprints morality upon his mind due to the virtuous actions of the hero. The child may also unconsciously absorb the existential human problems of death and evil. Many modern children's stories do not appeal to all aspects of the personality but rather have one intention, to entertain, to safely inform about culture and society or to consciously

encourage morality. Because it is relatively modern, "Winnie the Pooh" will be examined for traits and natural links to the safe modern novel and ancient fairytales.

Christopher Robin Milne was born in 1920 to author A.A. Milne. The original teddy-bear "Winnie the Pooh" was a gift from Harrods for the boy's first birthday, who would go on to become the subject of the two Pooh books, (see Fig. 1). Milne began to narrate adventures to his son set in a nearby forest which would become the magical 'One Hundred Acre Wood'. It was here that Milne's tales existed for the education and entertainment of his son and any future readers of the stories.

The story of "Winnie the Pooh" certainly does not suppress fantasy for the entire story-line exists from the mystic fantastical creation of a world of teddy-bears. There exists a young boy whose best friend is his toy bear called Winnie the Pooh or Pooh for short. Pooh's companions exist of the small and weak Piglet, sad and gloomy Eeyore, intelligent Owl and busy Rabbit. The female kangaroo Kanga with her baby Roo and the ever-bouncing Tigger are late comers to the book, (see Fig. 2). "Winnie the Pooh" dictates the lonely childhood days of Christopher Robin who has found companionship in these stuffed toys and created a world of magical friendship. However a further glimpse at how fictitious this environment is, is offered in small clues throughout. In the first chapter of "Winnie the Pooh" when Pooh is floating with a balloon, (see Fig. 3), he requests Christopher Robin to shoot the balloon with his pop-gun so Pooh can return to the ground. This occurs and the balloon begins to deflate, safely returning the bear. However if one is to look at the accompanying diagram, E.H. Shepard has drawn the toy gun with the cork hanging on a string never having reached the balloon, (see Fig. 4). This little glimpse of reality emphasises the pure fantasy and fictitiousness of this world that Milne has created, where situations have occurred purely for the literary pleasure of the child. Milne has understood the importance of fantasy in a child's life and created it firstly for his son and secondly for the readers of his books.

Like Cinderella, Snow White, Rapunzel, Jack (i.e. and the beanstalk), Christopher Robin struggles alone with no friends. A child reader could likewise empathise with the reality of Christopher Robin's lack of human companionship as any fairytale hero's.



Fig. 1: The Original Toys

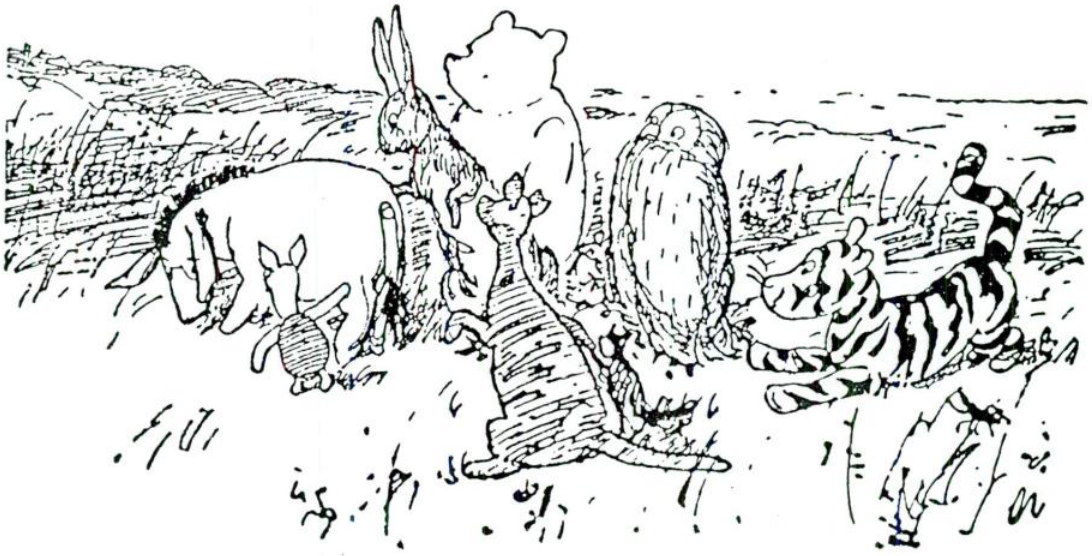


Fig. 2: Shepard's Cast of Characters



Fig. 3: Shepard's "Winnie the Pooh" with Balloon

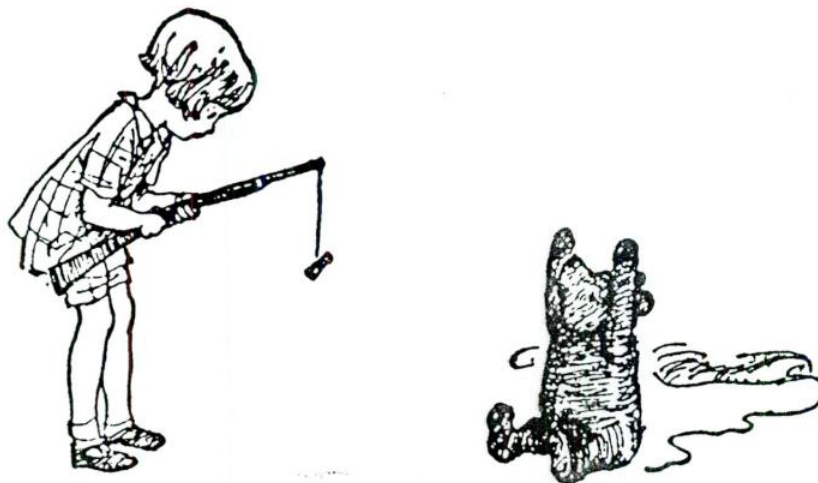


Fig. 4: Shepard's "Winnie the Pooh" and Christopher Robin with Gun

However Milne did not create Christopher Robin to be the hero. It is Pooh who receives the empathy of children, Pooh is the humble, spontaneous kind bear who suffers and struggles but whose virtuous traits achieve him his worldly success. The child reader could associate with Pooh and realise that it is these characteristics that gain him the unique love of the young boy.

"Winnie the Pooh's" world may appear on the surface a safe existence of companionship but lurking in this world are forms of evil: the Woozle, the Heffalump and the spotted or Herbaceous Backson, all mythical beasts that have been conjured by the fears and suspicions of infancy. Their presence is felt in the otherwise peaceful forest as a threat that the characters must overcome.

"Winnie the Pooh" is not a safe modern story. It does deal with the existential problems of evil and death. The very theme of the novel is Christopher Robin's childhood days, which are coming to an end for he is about to leave Pooh and his companions for adulthood. One is introduced to the toy characters who hold the mystic capacity to live only in the present, but Christopher Robin is growing and aware of the future. It is the inanimate characters that represent childhood and the absolute lack of planning in a child's day. Pooh has no capacity to look beyond the following few minutes in his life, enabling him to wander in any direction with equal joy. However Christopher Robin is mortal and must grow.

"Christopher came down from the forest to the bridge, feeling all sunny and careless, and just as if twice nineteen didn't matter a bit," (Milne, 1998, p.253).

Milne has explained that children are mortal and grow quickly into adults where they are in no hurry for they would know that death was the next stage. Christopher Robin is aware that he is about to grow, for in writing the stories his father is teaching him about adult problems. He knows he must relinquish his dependencies on his parents and nanny and face the world and school alone. The stories of "Winnie the Pooh" are a final chance to preserve the childhood of the boy forever.

“By the time it came to the edge of the forest the stream had grown up, so that it was almost a river, and being grown-up, it did not run and jump and sparkle along as it used to when it was younger but moved more slowly. For it knew where it was going and it said to itself ‘There is no hurry’. But all the little streams went this way and that, quickly and eagerly, having so much to find out before it was too late,” (Milne, 1998, p.242).

As the end of the book approaches, Christopher Robin is looking to the previously explained ageing river “slipping slowing away beneath him” , (Milne, 1998, p.253). He is aware that like the stream, he can no longer postpone the sequence of time. He finds his immortal companions at play perhaps symbolically, on the bridge unaffected by growth, watching the river age beneath them, and he becomes more aware of the impossibility of a permanent childhood. He is also aware that he will lose the wisdom of the mystic present once he begins to learn about facts and figures and forgets what it feels like not to know or care, (Crews, 1979, p.83). He makes a final request of Pooh not to forget him even when he is one hundred. Pooh will be ninety-nine but forever preserved as a child in the enchanted forest. Milne has not merely introduced death and ageing to the unconscious minds of children but has furthermore clearly and honestly shown every part of their mind that they have a limited time. The last gestures are a desperate effort to save something of childish dreams so as not to scare the child reader.

“But wherever they go, and whatever happens, in that enchanted place on the top of the forest, a little boy and his bear will always be playing”. (Milne, 1998, p.316).

A.A. Milne although introducing a child to society and conscious morality as any modern novelist does, has borrowed many ancient traditions. “Winnie the Pooh” does not deny a child reader the knowledge of death or evil and so leave them with no fears and with false expectations. The child may become more aware of fantasy, hence like a fairytale, enhancing his inner being so he will cope with any society or problem. Milne acknowledges the presence of death and evil and the lonely struggle of growing up while also introducing fantasy, moral lessons and humour. The books of “Winnie the Pooh” therefore fit into many traditions of children’s literature. It now becomes

necessary to examine the context of the author to assess the impact of the various aspects of the society in which he created "Winnie the Pooh" searching for any further possible associations with the books.

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CHAPTER 2

A.A. Milne's literary career began at the turn of the century when many literary changes were occurring and he achieved his popularity and financial security from his regular submission of stories to *Punch* magazine, where he would go on to become assistant editor in 1906. Living in a bourgeois environment, his stories introduced a fictitious "Rabbit" family who were a total reflection of a middle class environment. Milne had gained huge success in this renowned literary circle but after the eruption of World War I, he fought on the front line for three years losing his role as assistant editor in *Punch*. He would now be in the position of having no obligations and so set about writing novels and plays. However Milne was no longer just a wealthy aristocrat, he was a war veteran. He had re-entered the capitalist English society at a time of post war disillusion and extensive poverty with many soldiers returning home to depressed situations.

After the birth of his only son in 1920, Milne began to focus on writing children's poems and stories. He would be aware of the previous sixty year period of great children's literature in England with the production of classic children's stories like Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865), "Through the Looking Glass" (1871) and his personal friend J.M. Barrie's "Peter Pan" published in 1911. However "Winnie the Pooh" was written only a few years after Milne's return from the horrors of war and he would still be suffering the effects of its moral and mental degradation. Milne may have written children's literature as a healing device for this post-war depression, and because the majority of his work was previously intended for an adult audience, it is possible to argue that he was influenced by his middle class

position, bourgeois society, capitalism and the war, unconsciously allowing his experience and opinions seep into the children's books.

In his creation of the 'One Hundred Acre Wood', the home of Pooh and his companions, Milne has been seen to produce a middle class wealthy society in which all the chief characters are property owners who see no apparent necessity to work, and possess endless supplies of their favourite foods. One could argue that this is a land of childhood make believe and fantasy, unintended to represent reality and adulthood. However, this society does not solely display a fantasy land removed from Milne's surroundings. Perhaps there exists an underlying tone of the existing social reality of England where one is offered a glimpse of the social truth of this capitalist existence as in the characters' clear possession and division of land.

A reader is first introduced to Pooh as a bear who lives in a forest all by himself under the name of Sanders, the name written above his door in gold letters. Owl resides at "The Chestnuts", an old world residence of great charm which was grander than anybody else's, (Milne, 1998, p.55). However, it is in the ominous old sign beside Piglet's home "Trespassers W," that could further offer a reminder of the distinction of land owners and the intimidation felt by the proletariat. Piglet's facetious assumption of this as his grandfather's name only gives a further reminder of the hereditary handing-on of the so-called sacred law of property. Whether Milne was consciously aware of not, these socio-political implications are cited in "Winnie the Pooh" with Milne going on to display the symbolic representation of the struggle of rich and poor, the oppressor and the oppressed in his English society.

Each character in "Winnie the Pooh" has individual traits and thoughts. In his attempt to create a community with animals of different species and personalities, Milne has reached a level of universal appeal. On the surface the books appear to display equality and a commune spirit, reflecting democratic co-operation, for example in the expedition to the North Pole where no character takes a servile role. However there does exist in "Winnie the Pooh" an underlying hierarchy of heroism that reflects the characters' resemblance to social archetypes. Could the expedition to the North Pole be nothing

other than a symbolic ordering of the hierarchy? Christopher Robin describes it as “a long line of everybody”. If so, there is an essential distinction between the superficial temporary order and the intrinsic permanent one. Initially Christopher Robin comes first with Rabbit, then Piglet and Pooh, then Kanga with Roo and Owl and Eeyore, and Rabbit’s friends and relations follow. Moments later in the message that is sent back from Christopher Robin to Pooh, Piglet, Kanga and so on, the correct order has been accurately restored, (see Fig. 5), previously distorted by Rabbit’s ambition and Pooh’s modesty. Rabbit tires vainly to dominate the action in his search for meaningless aristocratic distinction.

“It was going to be one of Rabbit’s busy days. As soon as he woke up he felt important as if everything depended upon him. It was just the day for organising something, or for writing a notice signed Rabbit, or for seeing what Everybody Else Thought about it. It was a perfect morning for hurrying round to Pooh and saying ‘Very well then, I’ll tell Piglet,’ and then going to Piglet and saying ‘Pooh thinks – but perhaps I’d better see Owl first.’ It was a Captainish sort of day, when everybody said ‘Yes Rabbit’ and ‘No Rabbit’ and waited until he had told them,” (Milne, 1998, p.226).

One hypothesis would suggest that in his creation of Rabbit, Milne represents the exploiter of labour in a bourgeois industrial society. Urged by shame, he busies himself with producing bureaucratic notices. Rabbit pretends that arbitrary decisions have been democratically reached, implying above that he has asked Pooh his opinion. On this day, Rabbit moves in vain from character to character to drum up support for his scheme. The others employ typical defences of the disinherited working class when subjected to high-sounding exhortations of their oppressors. Christopher Robin pretended not to be in, Owl and Pooh replied with ambiguity while Piglet made himself inconspicuous. Eeyore tried to educate himself to retort in kind, clear proletarian responses to their rulers.



Fig. 5: The Hierarchy of Heroism

Milne has created power seeking Rabbit and his intellectual companion Owl. Owl is seen to be Rabbit's hand-servant representing the true scholar in bourgeois industrial society, his extensive knowledge spreading a veil of confusion over the activities of the rulers and stealing the proletariat of their rights to protest because of his ability to confuse issues with complex language. For the bell-pull at the entrance to his fine place of residence, Owl has stolen the very tail from Eeyore's body. Eeyore is the most downcast, alienated member of society who resembles the generation of soldiers that returned from World War 1 to have lost their jobs and homes. Milne has doomed Rabbit's and Owl's oppressive natures to failure in not granting them the support from any of the other characters. He further allows Pooh with the help of Christopher Robin to achieve success in his activities which would ironically but optimistically promote the potential revolt of the proletariat and overturn of the bourgeois. This possible display of social reality or criticism and political innuendo is not unique to A.A. Milne in the world of children's entertainment. After years of literary success, Rudyard Kipling similarly began a career as a children's author producing "The Jungle Book" which held a similar theme to much of this adult novels set in British ruled India. Moreover, many decades later the foremost producers of visual material for children, the very representative of mass culture, Disney, is known for consciously including innuendo and propaganda in their material.

"Disney.... Has since become a model showing how to unmask ideological content within the most innocent-seeming brand of that most innocent-seeming of genres, the children's comic," (Kunzle, 1990, p.159).

The Walt Disney Corporation is in control of thousands of comics, television programmes and films designed for children's entertainment. Upon a study of the Disney comics by *Art Journal* in the summer of 1990, evidence of many themes arose such as the worst values of Capitalism in such areas as family relations, the money ethic and attitudes toward Imperialism.

If one was to examine Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge cartoons and comics from the 1960s, there are many obvious relationships to advanced capitalism to be found. For

example, "A Spicy Tale" of 1962 reflects the U.S. pursuit of essential mineral and agricultural substances in Cuba. The naïve Donald and young ducks go to Cuba under the pretence of the Cubans wanting to be taught agricultural techniques in return. However, the natives wish to be introduced to American pop-culture instead and Elvis Presley's music.

This tale comes after the Cuban revolution of 1959 and although a humorous children's comic strip, the story is a political statement on America as an imperialist superpower as well as a reflection on the spread of the most unproductive superficial symbol of advanced capitalism. In all of these duck stories, Disney has consciously used characters from alternative native cultures and backgrounds disguised as humorous subjects to children. This material promotes certain racial views amongst children, reflecting the ignorance to the many multi-cultures of the greater America.

Uncle Scrooge cartoons show the incarnation of the spirit of American Imperialism at its most aggressive and world-wide stage. Scrooge, a symbolic pseudonym for Uncle Sam or the USA acts as a money-seeking tyrant who spends his time diving around in his money bin, a reflection on America's greed for capital while many of its supplying countries are suffering.

In the very year these political cartoons were being produced (1962), one hundred and fifty members of Disney staff were involved in a production of "Winnie the Pooh". Not one of the senior men on the film had previously heard of "Winnie the Pooh" who was written nearly forty years previously. Disney kept very close to the story of Pooh, but sacrificed some essential aspects of the story for new American mass cultural aspects. Although they had the opportunity, there is no suggestion here that they have exploited the story for political reasons but have adapted it to appeal to an American audience. As this animated American version is the only introduction to "Winnie the Pooh" for millions of children world-wide, it is necessary to examine its national characteristics that are now seeping into the world's children, especially after a world-wide report on 8th January 1999 stated that "Winnie the Pooh" is about to top Mickey Mouse's historic merchandising sales making him Disney's most popular and influential character ever.

Disney's Wolfgang Reitherman began directing "Winnie the Pooh" for a wide American audience. He feared for the Britishness of the story and so replaced the characters' accents and dialogue with mid-western American accents and expressions deemed acceptable to the whole American market. The story promotes mass culture with U.S. colloquialisms like: Gee, huh?, gag and bud; popular American slang. In the place of Tigger's "I say, come on, where are you?" one now hears Tigger scream "Hey you blokes, where in the heck are you guys?" In altering the language, Reitherman has drawn attention to America's selfish existence as a super-power, existing as its own world, with its own language, the slang expressions and incorrect grammar acceptable to the American public, and now due to the popularity of Disney's Pooh, influential to the rest of the world. Evidently, Disney are less concerned with the informative aspect of the book as they are with its entertainment value. This can also be viewed in the informative sections that were left behind in the written version.

It is widely accepted that Pooh is not a very intelligent bear but he is not just stupid. Milne has cleverly allowed Pooh to seem un-clever as a device for his own son to pose questions to his father, pretending it was the bear who didn't understand. Milne would then explain to Pooh, enlightening Christopher without threatening his ego. In omitting the conversation between father and son from the story, Disney have inevitably created a character who is plain stupid. Milne had proven Pooh's intelligence in allowing him to ponder on historical philosophical thoughts, wandering around the forest contemplating "what it felt like being somebody else", (Milne, 1998, p.35), (see Fig. 6). He had addressed adult philosophical issues in the stories like Pooh wondering why bears liked honey, what causes the attraction, and the different actions of the many species of animals is reflected in his songs.

"It is a very funny thought that if bears were bees,
They'd build their nests at the bottom of trees,
And that being so (if the bees were bears),
We shouldn't have to climb up all these stairs", (Milne, 1998, p.20).

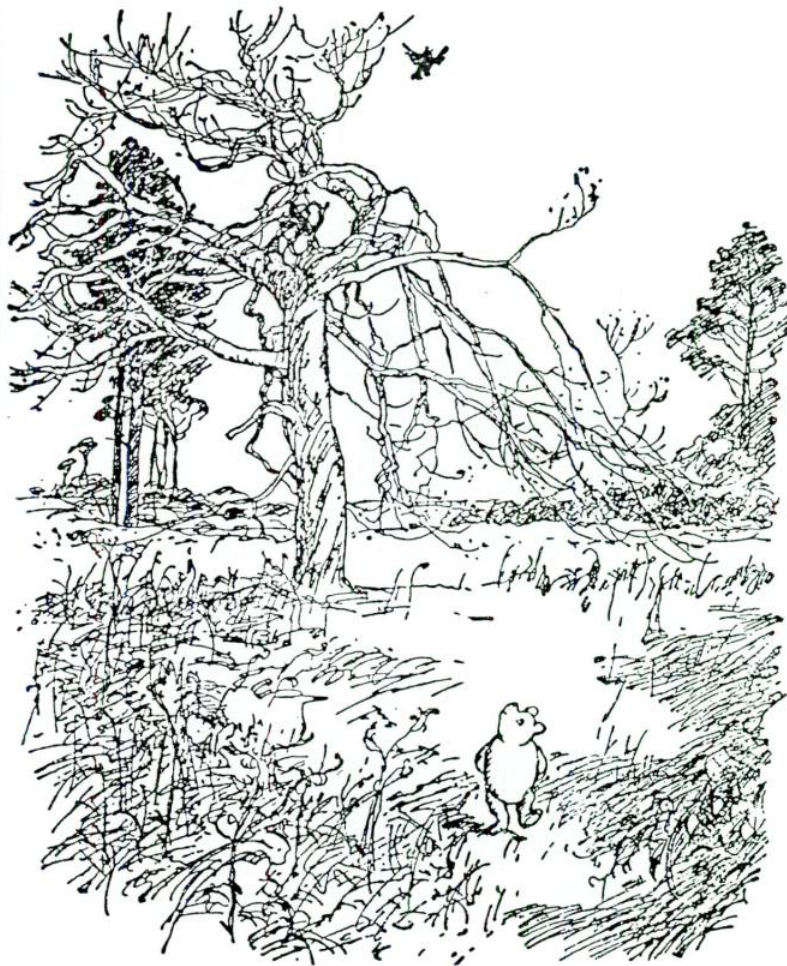


Fig. 6: "Winnie the Pooh" in the One Hundred Acre Wood

Disney have ignored these songs completely as, “their sheer nuttiness seems to have been too much of a challenge”, (Twaite, 1992, p.165). How could Disney reflect Pooh as nothing but a stupid bear when his complex mind can baffle two adults - The Sherman brothers? They replaced this cultural insight with this crude portrayal of Pooh as merely a fat, stupid bear,(see Fig. 7).

“Winnie the Pooh, Winnie the Pooh,
Tubby little cubby all stuffed with fluff,
He’s Winnie the Pooh, Winnie the Pooh,
Willy nilly silly ole bear”, (Disney 1966).

Similarly, Milne had created a world of friendship and fantasy evident when Christopher Robin stayed up to read to Pooh for a week when he was stuck in a hole. In Disney’s version, Pooh struggles alone and dreams about food, while Christopher Robin goes home. Furthermore, Pooh’s relationship to Piglet shows children friendship and trust, the key to this story. Reitherman felt there simply wasn’t room for Piglet in the film, and replaced him with a gopher who conveyed “a folksy, all American, grass roots image, which Americans would go for”, (Smith & Leblanc, Daily Mail, April 1966), (see Figs. 8 & 9). How can a specimen of true friendship be less pleasing to the American public than a rude, disgusting rodent who had the nerve to call Pooh “a stuck up bear”, (Disney, 1966).

Reitherman and his team have attempted to simplify the story of “Winnie the Pooh” with no complex thoughts, no confusing songs and simple characters. The essence of the story may appear unchanged but Pooh himself comes out of the process an unintelligent and overweight American,(see Figs. 9 & 10). It is not conveyed that he possesses any insight into life or that his obsession for honey is a mere childish obsession. However perhaps the American audience empathise with Pooh’s actions as he has now become one of the most popular Disney characters ever.

In the next chapter, further interpretations drawn from more diverse and culturally different adult approaches will be inspected suggesting that Pooh has cross cultural intergenerational appeal.

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Fig. 7: Disney's "Winnie the Pooh"

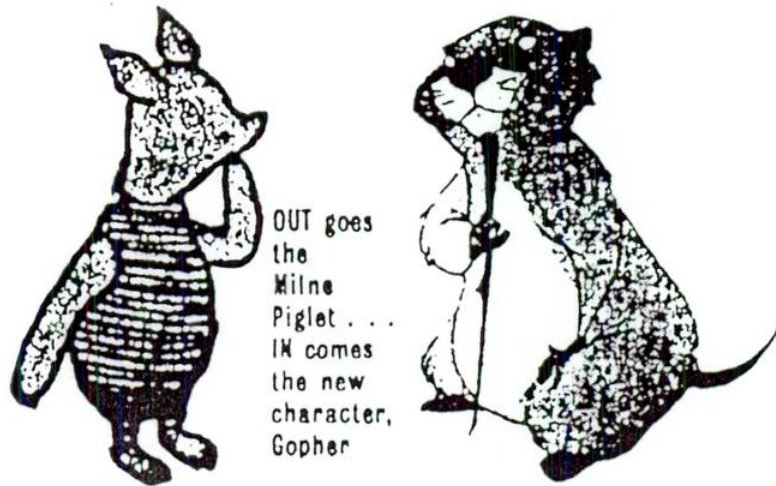


Fig. 8 Shepard's Piglet and Disney's Gopher



Fig. 9: Disney's Cast of Characters



Fig. 10: "Winnie the Pooh"; Shepard and Disney

CHAPTER 3

"There is often heard the opinion that psychoanalysis is unfriendly to literature", (Crews, 1979, p.125).

"Winnie the Pooh" has undergone much varied critical assessment. Pooh has been used as a teacher of various subjects, some authors showing little knowledge of Pooh, using him to teach unrelated subjects for example cooking or keep-fit perhaps allowing his fame to promote their literary material. Others more interestingly however, have gained an understanding of the essence of Pooh's world and have borrowed episodes and occurrences from the stories using these to give an in-depth lesson in their chosen topic. Examples are business and management manuals, a western philosophy guide as well as books on the Chinese philosophy of Taoism, some of which offer interesting revelations.

In a more academic critical assessment, Pooh finds himself a catalyst for parodies of various schools of literary criticism. In a unique book titled "The Pooh Perplex" author Frederick C. Crews makes apparent revelations in the adventures of Pooh, citing sexual and Christian references and contradictory observations of the inhabited society. He pretends to be many academics and provides many diverse fashionable contradictory criticisms about Pooh's adventures. Crews' writings show how the same book can be so widely interpreted, with a broad variety of sound interpretations. Many of his revelations are a satirical attack on literary criticism in general but regardless of their witty and satirical intention, the humorous approach cannot completely deter one from what they reveal. These assessments as well as the previously mentioned interpretations ensure "Winnie the Pooh's" status as a classic. However as there are so many contradictory interpretations available, it is necessary to examine the extent of each of them.

The adventures of "Winnie the Pooh" occur in a woodland area at the residence of author A.A. Milne. Such a setting was chosen due to its appeal in reality to Christopher Robin Milne, son of the author who spends his youth at play outside. Each adventure in the story takes place in the forest amongst the trees and animals. The philosophy of Taoism has been associated with in the activities of Pooh as Taoism promotes this simple, natural and uncomplicated lifestyle favouring the outdoors. A.A. Milne was most likely unaware of this Eastern religion but his creation of Pooh's world is seen to have paralleled the Taoist message, with Pooh's simplistic attitude reflecting the essence of the Tao.

Conceived by Chinese mystical philosophers of the 4th and 5th Centuries BC as a way of understanding man's co-operation with the natural world, Taoism is neither a formal religion nor structural philosophy but a sympathetic and accessible way of thinking. The true Taoist will learn carefully from individual experience and from the observation of the world around. Taoist literature is full of allusions to the behavioural patterns of the natural world and promotes an understanding of this world as well as a simplistic attitude, comparable to the attitude of Pooh, (see Fig. 11). His daily routine is to eat and visit his companions, never deterred by lack of reason for such a visit perhaps merely to wish everyone a happy Thursday. He solves each problem that occurs through not complicating the issue, in just being "a bear of little brain", (Milne, 1998, p.56), his simplistic way comparable to the state achieved after much practice of Taoism.

In Taoist scripture, Hui-tse describes in parable a large tree whose branches are crooked and tough, a tree which is no use to any carpenter or builder alike. But this tree provides shelter, shade and beauty, its primary functions in its natural state and these natural functions are more important than any secondary ones which would use the wood for building or carpentry. Taoism recognises the importance of utilising one's inner nature and how people and inanimate objects alike are at their most valuable in their natural state. One could nearly believe that Milne was aware of Taoism, especially in his lack of certainty when explaining the creation of the unique name Pooh

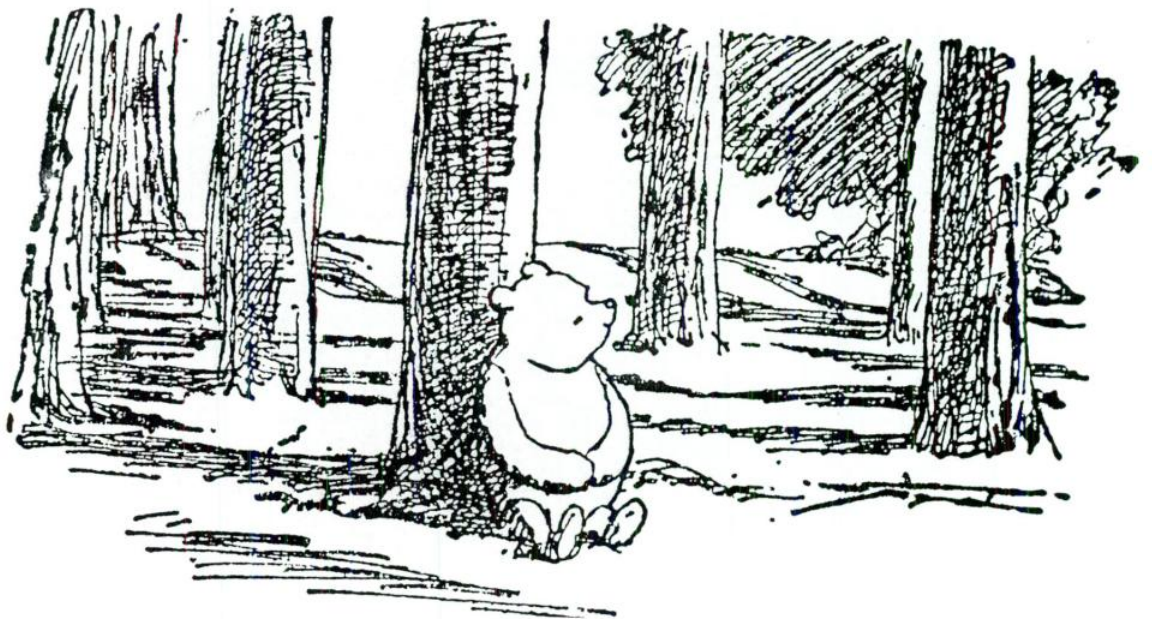


Fig. 11: Shepard's "Winnie the Pooh" in the Enchanted Forest

which spelt P'u in Chinese would directly translate as "wood uncut" or "the un-carved block", a Taoist expression emphasising the essence of objects in their own natural state being at their most powerful. A comparison to this aspect of Taoism is seen in Chapter 4 of "Winnie the Pooh" when Eeyore loses his tail. Owl has taken it from its primary role and used it as his door bell-pull. It was Pooh who recognised the importance of this object for its natural aesthetic function and retrieved it. Through stories, Milne tries to give the message that his son Christopher's worldly success does not depend on intelligence or strength, but rather, like Pooh, he can achieve much with simplicity utilising his own inner nature. All the characters that Milne favours and allows success in their activities have traits like spontaneity, humility, kindness and enthusiasm; their success never rates in accordance with their intelligence. It is here, in the promotion of simplicity and inner nature that comparisons to Taoism are seen to be evident.

Milne has created intellects like Rabbit and Owl to contrast this simplicity, whose daily activities are organising and reading encyclopaedias, respectively. Benjamin Hoff suggests that Rabbit's character exerts knowledge for the sake of being clever. Owl impresses knowledge to appear wise, Eeyore knowledgeable for the sake of complaining about something, (Hoff, 1982, p.16). However in creating Pooh, Milne has not merely created naïve stupidity for he has given Pooh the self-knowledge of this simplicity and an awareness of the other characters' lack of accomplishment for their knowledge.

“ ‘Rabbit's clever’ said Pooh thoughtfully,
‘And he has brain...

I suppose that's why he never understands anything' ”

(Milne, 1998, p.274)

Pooh is aware of Rabbit's inability to understand due to his intelligence. He is in no way naïve to this. In the apparent childish statement above, he has preached the same message as the wise Chaung-tse, explaining that a well frog cannot imagine the ocean, nor can a summer insect conceive of ice. How then can a scholar understand the Tao? He is restricted by his own learning, (Hoff, 1982, p.24). In the above statement Pooh reflects that the wise are not learned, the learned not wise which is interpreted as being an inevitable preaching of Taoist wisdom.

Milne has made Pooh aware of Rabbit's lack of achievement due to his intelligence and further complimented Pooh's ego by allowing him to be Christopher Robin's favourite. So although Christopher Robin himself appears as a character in the story, Milne has used Pooh as a vehicle to further teach his son lessons, a lesson in modesty taught in the very fact that Milne pretends to be dictating the story to his son's teddy bear and not his son, unable to flatter and feed the self-love of Christopher, in this modest didactic relationship.

One has similarly seen the story compared to Christian biblical occurrences. A suggested hypothesis would situate Eeyore, as God on earth, classically disguised in his role of the lowly ass. Interestingly, the very pronunciation of Eeyore in Italian is IORE meaning "I king". One has seen in the chapter depicting Eeyore's birthday that he received two gifts with the offer of a third expensive one from his three male friends. This birthday celebration is comparable to the birth of Jesus, the gifts resembling the Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh from the three wise men. Eeyore would go on to be baptised in the Chapter 6 of "The House at Pooh Corner" (the Poohsticks chapter) and would attempt to offer salvation to baby Roo when he is in danger in the river with his last supper occurring at the final banquet when Eeyore decides that it is he who shall give the final poetic speech, (Crews, 1979, p.59). However evident these revelations are, there are many more equally strong moral Biblical interpretations to be found.

The characters are faced with many situations comparable to parables from the Bible and old fables. As the bible preaches that all men are created equal, Milne introduces Kanga to the existing society. He has chosen an animal of a different species, sex, colour and dimension and the other characters soon learn that she is to be treated equally. Similarly, Piglet is situated in the story as a character with a particular limitation. He is aware of his smallness but uses it to his advantage in climbing into Christopher Robin's bag so he too can go to school and learn. The characters learn that like the lepers in the Bible, those who are different should be accepted. Furthermore, one is introduced to the effects of greed and over-indulgence. Zacchaeus taught the Christian children of the world that greed prevents happiness just as Pooh did after his over-indulgence in honey got him stuck in Rabbit's doorway, having no fun or food for

a week. A similar lesson was carefully constructed in Aesop's fable when he describes the dog viewing the reflection of his bone in the water and after jumping in for a second bone, loses the first. These fables, like the Bible's parables are constructed with solid moral intentions aimed to teach the difference between right and wrong; the essence of a moral judgement. A.A. Milne's apparent empty tales of a happy-go-lucky bear is seen to preach a similar and equally strong message about good values and judgement to the many millions of children in the world, who perhaps don't read the Bible, the story functioning as a humanist text.

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Creating children's stories is an opportunity for authors to create fantasy with unusual looking characters with strange original names having many bizarre habits. One intention of these stories is to entertain a younger and therefore more naïve generation and so any abnormal amusing occurrences are widely acceptable. However this gives way to authors to exert their conscious or unconscious adult fantasies and opinions disguised in children's stories.

Many writers of material for children make little attempt at disguising their conscious outside references. The cartoon Captain Pugwash introduces small children to characters "Roger the Cabin boy" and Seamen Staines and one can't help but shiver at the thought of a child enjoying old Master Bates. Lewis Carroll's depiction of Alice's adventures in Wonderland created for children a world of true magic and fantasy but a world that arose from the result of a dose of drugs with bizarre hallucinating experiences. The examples are obvious and explicit to adult viewers or readers, the innuendo and underlying themes consciously and cleverly introduced. However the discovery of these underlying themes in some children's stories has led to the questioning of the alleged purity of all material written for children because the adult authors are unable to rid their unconscious of experience and adult fantasy. The popular children's cartoon "The Magic Roundabout" has been seen to resemble the result of the intake of particular drugs with Zebedee bouncing around repeatedly as though he has just taken speed, Dillon stuck in a state of psychedelic fantasy while Dougal could resemble someone after an amount of hash, continuously circling the same tree. Crews suggests that all children's books are knit together by archetypal patterns emanating from the unconscious minds of their authors, (Crews, 1979, p. 42). Naturally much examination and censorship now occurs in all children's literature and television. However essential it is, it has led to the citing of all kinds of ulterior meaning and innuendo, not always apparent to the author. An analysis of A.A. Milne's stories are no exception especially as he has written many plays and novels for an adult audience.

"Winnie the Pooh" received the former half of his name; Winnie from a North American black bear in London Zoo, called Winnepeg, (see Fig. 12). This explanation is provided to readers in the opening lines of "Winnie the Pooh".



Fig. 12: Christopher Milne with Winnipeg

“So when Christopher Robin goes to the zoo, he goes to where the polar bears are, and he whispers something to the third keeper from the left and the doors are unlocked, and we wander through dark passages and up steep stairs, until at last we come to the special cage and the cage is opened and out trots something brown and furry and with a happy cry of ‘Oh bear’, Christopher Robin rushes into his arms. Now this bear’s name is Winnie, which shows what a good name for bears it is”, (Milne, 1998, pp.13-14).

This introduction to the story of “Winnie the Pooh” occurs outside the narrative style of the rest of the book. It is the one admittedly factual piece of the otherwise fictitious novel, a trip to the zoo an actual occurrence in the real Christopher Robin’s life and so it is highly essential that it is critically evaluated. This introduction has provoked Frederick C. Crews, posing as one Karl Anschauung M.D. to cite sexual symbolic innuendo, this occurrence having a coitus equivalent. Wandering through dark passages and up steep stairs to be embraced by a furry object could signify a male’s search for a female sexual organ, (Crews, 1979, p.130). This search continues throughout the story but it becomes more specifically, the erotic genital fluid that becomes important and Pooh bear is the seeker of satisfaction from this substance, a more highly symbolic set-up. Thankfully, the boy is left aside, honey takes up the role of this much desired substance, Pooh now representing the male species in their search for such.

In the chapter “When Piglet meets a Heffalump” the comrades discuss how catching one would be possible and of course the solution is honey for no male can resist it. Pooh becomes over-excited in his fantasy of this jar of honey.

“ ‘I (piglet) should make a trap, and I should put a jar of honey in the trap and you would smell it, and you would go in after it....’
‘And I would go in after it’ said Pooh excitedly, ‘only very carefully so as not to hurt myself, and I would get to the jar of honey and I should lick around the edges, first of all pretending that there wasn’t anymore, you know, and then I should walk away and think about it a little, and then I should come back and start licking in the middle of the jar’....”,
(Milne, 1998, p.65).

One could scarcely deny the sexual play between the two companions. If one allows the honey to represent the female genitalia, the situation could easily relate to the teasing of the subject before completing the satisfaction in the centre, in this erotic, sexual fantasy. Furthermore, interestingly the situation does not occur in such a gentle manner as Pooh previously imagines, stepping back to ponder upon thoughts of more honey. Piglet sets the trap for the Heffalump but Pooh cannot permit another male to achieve euphoric satisfaction from his honey and so proceeds to aggressively devour the substance until he is completely satisfied and ends up symbolically capped with the jar of honey on his head.

One sees many similar occurrences of this desire for honey in the story. In the opening chapter, Pooh floats to the top of a tree, in an attempt to locate some honey. As Crews suggests :

“A.A. Milne himself imagines as flying upwards towards honey, aided by a balloon and shot down by a gun. This is self explanatory. On the wings of male potency – symbolised by the expanded balloon which characteristically ‘deflated’ was by the primal scene – A.A. Milne hopes with infantile naivete the previously explained honey to seize”, (Crews, 1979, p.133).

The present symbolism is further cited here, the erotic theme comparable to a seductive adult novel, Pooh representing Adam, unable to resist the temptation and seduction, the honey borrowing the apple’s role. In a sexual game, Pooh continuously attempts to fool and betray the bees so he can seize their honey for his enjoyment. But it is far beyond honey that symbolic sexual references can be cited. The pinning of Eeyore’s tail onto his posterior could reflect a mild comparison to Freud’s views on anal sexual tendencies, or the very loss of the tail to castration anxiety. Eeyore’s compulsion with inserting and exerting his burst balloon from a jar, along with Tigger’s repetitive bouncing on persons could refer to copulation and Piglet needing to go to bed early after seeing Christopher Robin reveal his braces shows comparisons to infant homosexuality. Many unconscious underlying themes are valid here but equally so are more innocent ones.

Reanalysing the opening lines about the trip to the zoo, one could alternatively associate the young boys embrace of the bear as a reflection on his need for love and affection. Upon this recognition, A.A. Milne fulfils his son's need for such with the constant reassurance of the love and admiration of his teddy bear. Milne doesn't introduce his wife, Christopher's mother into the story in any form, and the lack of this mother figure is ever present throughout. Milne perhaps recognises that his son is suffering the destruction of his Oedipus complex, continuously lavishing this affection onto Christopher through a toy instead of a maternal figure.

"The phase Christopher is entering is that of maximum repression when toys, hobbies, games and schoolwork hopefully will receive the libido that was previously lavished upon thoughts of Mummy", (Crews, 1979, p.44).

However perhaps A.A. Milne was merely aware of the lack of maternal impact on his son's life and so echoed this in the novel. Christopher Robin Milne was certainly aware of it for as an adult he would say:

"It was my occasional encounter with my parents that stand out as the events of the day.... she (my mother) was very happy to spend an occasional half hour with me playing on the floor", (Milne, Christopher, 1974, pp.21-2).

A.A. Milne had no female characters in the story until his conscious introduction of Kanga in Chapter 7. He confesses that, "the newcomers were carefully chosen with the idea of not only giving pleasure to the reader but also fresh inspiration to the chronicler of their adventures", (Twaite, 1992, p.144). The introduction of the carefully selected female Kangaroo did not go unnoticed for it had a huge changing impact on the story. Firstly, Kanga as sexual object was now a female presence in the previously male society. She was the reality of the previously desired symbolic honey. However, Milne safely places her with her child as a protective sheath on her person amongst the sexually frustrated male characters. Her role is not of woman or girl but of a mother. Moreover, this introduction of a maternal figure introduces Christopher Robin to the love of a female, so although justifiably Crews depicts the female kangaroo's arrival as the installation of the emasculating female as overseer of the doomed frolickers, (Crews,

1979, p.45), her arrival further teaches Christopher about love and real family relationships, one of the aspects of the adult society he would soon enter.

One has seen the various diverse assessments of the two "Winnie the Pooh" books. Pooh has been used to illustrate Taoism, philosophy and Christianity and has been the subject of various psychoanalytical interpretations, citing contrasting adult associations in the children's stories. These various hypotheses suggest that "Winnie the Pooh" is functioning as a pedagogical vehicle for adults aswell as children, functioning on different but equally valid levels of interpretation.

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CONCLUSION

“Winnie the Pooh’s” world-wide popularity is undeniably evident in the present proliferation of toys, posters, clothes, stationary, and many literary reproductions. However due to the fame of this bear and his companions, many critical assessments and interpretations have inevitably arisen. This dissertation has set out to examine the various suggested hypotheses of A.A. Milne’s “Winnie the Pooh” and “The House at Pooh Corner”.

The stories of Pooh have undergone Christian, Taoist and sexual interpretations with many diverse and contrasting views arising. Simultaneously the texts have been assessed for traces of ancient fairytales and moral parental lessons which are further seen to be sacrificed in Disney’s animated version. Therefore the stories of Pooh live on in a variety of forms, functioning on many different levels for the various readers.

The stories exist, for many, as a social and moral test; a representation of community and a promotion of morality. For the author himself, the stories represent the diary of his son Christopher, who will be forever preserved with his teddy bear in this childhood fantasy land. Furthermore, due to the amount of modern critical assessment, the texts now live on with potential for various diverse adult interpretations.

For the child who is first introduced to “Winnie the Pooh” in the One Hundred Acre Wood, (whether it be Milne’s or Disney’s version), he would be unaware of the critical attention the stories have received. It is important to recognise that “Winnie the Pooh” holds the potential to touch their hearts in the simplest way, immortalising him forever in the memories of many generations.

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