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## **New Directions in Pooh Studies:**

### **Überlieferungs- und religionsgeschichtliche Studien**

#### **zum Pu-Buch**

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There is little need, at the present stage of scholarship, to attempt a justification of the principle that the dogma of unitary authorship for works of literature must be totally abandoned. In all confidence we may say that a priori we may expect the Pooh corpus (viz. Winnie-the-Pooh, hereafter abbreviated W, containing traditions of higher antiquity than the Deutero-Pooh book, The House at Pooh Corner, hereafter abbreviated H) to be of composite origin; even if there were such a person as A.A. Milne, traditionally the 'author', we may be sure that he did not write the Pooh books. His name does not occur once within the narratives themselves, and we can hardly be expected to take a title-page, manifestly a later addition, seriously./1/

#### **1. Sources of the Pooh Literature**

Composite authorship is clearly indicated by a number of linguistic peculiarities and literary unevennesses./2/ We observe the oscillation between various names for Pooh, an unerring pointer to diversity of authorship. He is called within the space of half a page (W 3.31)/3/:

Pooh Pooh  
Winnie-the-Pooh Winnie-the-Pooh  
Winnie-the-Pooh Bear

--a plain indication of the interweaving of a number of sources. Other names by which he is called in the P-corpus include:

- Edward Bear (W 2.19)
- Winnie-ther-Pooh (W 18)
- Pooh-Bear (W 6.65)
- P. Bear (W 9.132)
- Sir Pooh de Bear (H 10.173)

There is also a tradition that he lived under the name of Sanders (W 1.2), which appears only once in our present texts, since for some reason now forgotten, Sanders traditions have been rigorously expunged from the corpus./4/ The name Sanders does however occur in one of the illustrations (W 1.3) in the archaic script, which, belonging as they do to the pre-verbal stage in the transmission of the traditions, have a strong claim to authenticity. There is a secondary and utterly implausible 'explanation' of the two principal names for Pooh, Winnie and Pooh, which is offered by the final redactor (W intro. x)/5/ and which only displays the editor's acute embarrassment with the double tradition. The complexity of the problem is increased by the appearance within the same chapter (W 3) of the double name of Piglet's grandfather (Trespassers William), again implausibly explained by the redactor as 'in case he lost one' (W 3.30).

Doublets also occur. We may mention briefly the two accounts of meetings with a Heffalump (W 5; H 3). and two accounts of the building of a house.(H 1; 9), variously connected with Eeyore and with Owl. An excellent example of the redactor's method in intertwining his sources may be seen in the account of Pooh's being stuck in the entrance to Rabbit's house (W 2. 24). When Pooh realizes he is stuck, according to the first source:

'Oh, help!', said Pooh. 'I'd better go back.'

But according to the second source:

'Oh, bother!', said Pooh. 'I shall have to go on.'

The redactor has simply set down these two contradictory statements side by side, and then has attempted to harmonize them by his own conflation:

'I can't do either!', said Pooh. 'Oh, help and bother!'

The clearest criterion, however, for the analysis of the sources is the attitude taken to Pooh, who is clearly no 'non-descript individual'./6/ The whole P-corpus may indeed be divided into sources favourable to Pooh, and sources hostile to Pooh.

The dominant impression gained by the modern reader of the books is that Pooh is a Bear of Very Small Brain. The following descriptions occur:

- Bear of Little Brain (W 9.121)
- Bear of Very Little Brain (W 9.130; H 1.174; etc.)
- Bear with a Pleasing Manner but a Positively Startling Lack of Brain (H 10.161)
- He hasn't much brain, and may do something silly (W 9.127)
- Silly old bear.(W 2.25, 26, 29; 3.37; 8.101)

- Silly Old Pooh (W 10.142)
- His spelling is Wobbly (W 6.73)

He is also depicted as getting into scrapes, difficulties, and problems through his stupidity (*passim*).

It is of the greatest importance, however, to notice that this representation of Pooh actually comes from only one circle of tradition, which we may designate the D (or Dopey) source. A very different impression is given by other sources favourable to Pooh. Here he is the hero, deliverer (e.g. finder of Eeyore's tail, W 4), poet in many different genres (e.g. W 7.90), discoverer of the North Pole (W 8), and possibly also of the East Pole (W 9.122), though the tradition is somewhat uncertain at this point, inventor of the Floating Bear and the Brain of Pooh (W 9.129-30), culture-hero building the first house (H 1.27) and inventing Pooh-sticks (H 6). His epithets in these narratives include:

- Brave and Clever Bear (W 9.129)
- Astute and Helpful Bear (H 8.139)
- The best bear in all the world (W 10.143)
- Sir Pooh de Bear (H 10.173)
- And he has bestowed on him a lengthy list of honorific titles (FOP, RC, PD, EC and TF, W 9.130).

We may discern, nonetheless, in the above catalogue, two portrayals of Pooh that are not entirely compatible with one another. According to some tales he is the man of genius and invention (e.g. inventor of the Brain of Pooh), but in others he figures rather as the respective intellectual (e.g. author of wisdom poetry). Thus we may well suspect that we are dealing here with two sources, both perhaps deriving from one original Grundlage, but which we may distinguish and denominate the J (or Genius)/7/ source, and the E (or Egghead) source.

If we add to these three sources JED the work of the redactor of the Pooh corpus, to whom we might conveniently attach the siglum P (Pooh), we have the classic four-source theory that is the objective of all literary analysis. Further, the chronological order of the sources is plainly JEDP, for the following reasons. Only a character such as the J source depicts would have had the dynamism to bring into existence such a fund of narrative traditions; without doubt we owe to the vivid anthropomorphic J source our most reliable knowledge of the historical Pooh. A later collector of traditions from a more intellectual age has overlaid the original J Grundschrift with more intellectual (E) material. D, on the other hand, is the reaction of a later age which had grown tired of the tales about the brilliant Pooh that had so long formed part of the cultural heritage of the nation; we may speak of a re-interpretation of such massive proportions that the authentic Pooh was virtually lost sight of./8/

The P writer has little of significance to contribute beyond editorial matter; he takes for granted the D interpretation of Pooh, his own interest being in chronological matters and suchlike. Even there, however, he is not always reliable; cf. for example W 1.2 'Once upon a time, a very long time ago now, about last Friday'; nevertheless he does preserve some valuable old traditions (e.g. the Sanders tradition, *ibid.*)/9/

## 2. The Mythology of the Pooh Literature

Since on the earthly level the chief focus of attention in the corpus is the hero Pooh, on the mythological plane great importance must be attached to the deity whom he worships. Pooh is of course a devotee of the goddess Honey. The stated time of her service he observes with unflinching regularity--as we learn from H 5.82 it is 11 am (a traditional time for divine service). He speaks of this hour as the time when 'I generally get home. Because I have One or Two things to Do.' Naturally he speaks indirectly of his faith when addressing an unbeliever (Rabbit), but the capitalization makes plain that the things to be done are the performance of sacred acts. Pooh is no ordinary lay worshipper of Honey, but obviously a priest dedicated to her service; his so-called 'house', liberally furnished with 14 or 15 cult-objects (pots) (H 3.35), which he speaks of as 'comforting' to him (H 3.36)--which is the very function of religion--is undoubtedly a sanctuary, a 'house' or temple, of Honey.

Honey is a fertility goddess (cf. the use in the common language of 'honey' as a synonym for 'love', and the frequent use of terms for sweetness as endearments). She is referred to in the old gnomic saying, 'What is sweeter than Honey, what is stronger than a lion?' (originally, 'What is stronger than a Tigger?'). She is frequently alluded to in the Pooh corpus by reverential periphrases such as befit a deity of her stature, e.g. 'a little something' (W 8.116; H 4.56), 'a little smackerel of something' (H 1.2). I should like here to make the suggestion that we have in the figure of Honey a clue to the enigmatic inscription to be found in one of the primitive illustrations (W 1.18) Bath Mat. This is surely the Hebrew bath me'at 'Daughter of a Little', a well-known Semitic idiom for A Little Something.

Honey's consort is Christopher Robin, not perhaps generally recognized as a deity, but plainly such according to the evidence of the P corpus. He has the common double name of a deity, to which attention is drawn in the passage W 3.30: "'I've got two names", said Christopher Robin carelessly'. He can of course say this carelessly only because there is no doubt about his divine status; moreover it cannot be questioned that the first element is theophorous in the strictest sense. A clear proof of his divine power is provided very early on in H (1.6), where it is said: 'Christopher Robin had. spent the morning indoors going to Africa and back'--in the fashion of Canaanite gods. He appears at various times as the *deus ex machina* in order to solve problems no one else can, for example when Piglet is mistaken for Roo and cannot establish his identity (W 7.96). Similarly, he gets Tigger down from the tree when all others have failed (H 4),

and discovers Pooh and Piglet when they are desperately lost in a mist (H 7). Most illuminating of all is the narrative of the loss of Eeyore's tail:/10/ Pooh finds the tail, but only Christopher Robin can perform the miracle of 'nailing it on in its right place again' (W 4.49), as it is crudely called in this early narrative, doubtless written down by an eyewitness immediately after the event. Interesting too is the remark made when the Flood comes: 'It rained, and it rained, and it rained, but the water couldn't come up to his house' (W 9.125). Of course not, for he lives on the mountain of the gods, 'at the very top of the Forest', as it is said (ibid.).

What kind of a deity is Christopher Robin? Here we can be in no doubt. We learn very early (W 1.7) that 'he lived behind a green door in the Forest', which by itself is clear enough to all those who have sat beneath the shade of the Golden Bough themselves. Two illustrations (W 10.134; H 10.166, significantly in both books) set the matter beyond dispute by their depiction of Christopher Robin's dwelling place as actually a tree. Christopher Robin is a vegetation deity, who lives in the tree, and it is no accident therefore that the whole action of the books (except for the D framework) takes place within the forest as the sphere in which the vegetation deity may be encountered, With this understanding of Christopher Robin, his relationship with Honey becomes perspicuous.

Is he a dying and rising God? It seems so, though we have only the barest hints. At the end of H, Christopher Robin is 'going away', a euphemism, we may believe, for the annual death of the vegetation. The mysterious character of the change of the seasons is beautifully expressed in H 10.159:

Nobody knew why he was going; nobody knew where he was going; indeed, nobody even knew why he knew that Christopher Robin was going away. But somehow or other everybody in the Forest felt that It was happening at last.

Everyone knew that 'Things were going to be Different', that is, that the sacral cycle of the year was passing into a new phase. In the 'enchanted spot', the high place 'on the very top of the Forest' with its sacred circle of sixty-something trees (H 10.169-71),/11/ the ritual drama is enacted of the death or departure of the deity. Before he dies, Christopher Robin ensures by an act of will that the world will survive and continue to keep turning until his return:

By and by Christopher Robin came to the end of the things [i.e. the eschatological moment], and he sat there looking out over the world, and wishing [i.e. exercising an act of will] that it wouldn't stop (H 10.173).

His perpetual rebirth is alluded to in the last sentence of H, in which it is promised that wherever he goes and whatever 'happens' to him (a well-known euphemism for death),

in the enchanted spot he will always be 'playing'--that is, performing his role in the sacred drama.

The suggestion may finally be made that the Pooh material found its cultic setting in the festival of Christopher Robin's rebirth and re-enthronement as king (compare, for example, his 'looking out over the world' in the passage just quoted). Christopher Robin is only once actually called king in the P literature, and significantly this occurs very close to the end of the second of the books (H 10.174); but we have a very clear piece of evidence from two illustrations in W (1.1; 10.146), in the first of which he is depicted descending the stairs, and in the latter of which he ascends the stairs, a symbol of his re-enthronement after ritual humiliation. We therefore may propose that the *Sitz im Leben* of the Pooh-corpus is the enthronement festival of Christopher Robin.

The name of the deity worshipped by Piglet, who lives in a different 'house' from Pooh, has been consistently deleted by the final editor, who was concerned only to glorify Christopher Robin and his consort Honey. But in spite of their differences of belief, it is noteworthy that Pooh and Piglet were able to engage in syncretistic or ecumenical activities. An important pericope on this theme affords a valuable insight into cultic practice of the time.

Half-way between Pooh's house and Piglet's house was a Thoughtful Spot where they met sometimes when they had decided to go and see each other, and as it was warm and out of the wind they would sit down there for a little and wonder what they would do now that they had seen each other (H 8.125).

This passage, with its key phrases 'half-way', 'warm and out of the wind, and 'wonder what they would do now', may well be regarded as the inspiration of later ecumenical movements. As is well known, the tendentious editor of the P corpus has fabricated the tale of Piglet's final conversion to the faith of Pooh, by depicting his 'coming to live' with Pooh (H 9.158), but no credence should be lent to this manifest implausibility.

A shadowy father-figure, of whom Christopher Robin is apparently the son, appears at the beginning of W, but plays almost no part in the narratives thereafter. As he is associated with a bathroom (W 1.18), he perhaps plays a similar role in the Pooh pantheon to that of El at Ugarit, sitting at the source of the two streams (hot and cold; cf. the illustration, W 1.18). Christopher Robin then corresponds to Baal, and Honey to Anat; we are dealing therefore with an extremely ancient mythological system.

### **3. The Gattung of the Pooh Literature**

The Pooh literature is essentially wisdom literature. A ready proof is the frequency with which aphorisms occur. Two examples will suffice. Pooh remarks about poetry:

Poetry and Hums aren't things which you get, they're things which get you. And all you can do is to go where they can find you (H 9.144).

Note the terse monosyllabic form of the utterance. Pooh's own sub-Aristotelian logic, recognizable as the product of 'clan wisdom', is well illustrated in the following logion:

We keep looking for Home and not finding it, so I thought that if we looked for this Pit, we'd be sure not to find it, which would be a Good Thing, because we might find something that we weren't looking for, which might be just what we were looking for, really (H 7.121).

The human characters of the Pooh books (that is, excluding divine figures like Christopher Robin) have one striking feature in common: they are all wise men or sages, personifications of various types of wisdom.

Pooh's wisdom is, as we have seen, inventive wisdom (according to J), or respective wisdom (E).

Owl's is academic wisdom: he can spell Tuesday so that you know it isn't Wednesday (H 5. 76), and Christopher Robin respects him for this, because 'you can't help respecting anybody who can spell Tuesday even if he doesn't spell it right' (H 5.73). But academic wisdom is largely useless, as Rabbit notes: 'There are days when spelling Tuesday simply doesn't count' (H 5.73). Piglet's description of Owl is a very apt account of academic wisdom: 'Owl hasn't exactly got Brain (sc. in Pooh's sense?), but he Knows Things' (W 9.118).

Rabbit's wisdom is practical, organizing wisdom, as Piglet says: 'He hasn't Learnt in Books, but he can always Think of a Clever Plan' (ibid.). Recognition of the nature of Rabbit's wisdom explains the difficult passage at H 8.128, where Piglet remarks 'Rabbit has Brain', to which Pooh responds, 'I suppose that's why he never understands anything'; that is, his wisdom is not respective wisdom like Pooh's (E).

Kanga's wisdom is intuitive wisdom; once again Piglet has isolated the essential quality of her wisdom: 'She isn't clever, Kanga isn't, but she would be so anxious about Roo that she would do a Good Thing to Do without thinking about it' (W 9.118).

Eeyore's wisdom is philosophical or speculative wisdom; he thought about things. Sometimes he thought sadly to himself Why?, and sometimes he thought Wherefore?, and sometimes he thought Inasmuch as which?, and sometimes he didn't quite know what he was thinking about (W 4.39-40).

This is arguably the best account that has ever been given of the nature of philosophical thought.

Piglet's wisdom is the wisdom of faith; when he is in trouble he has no recourse to the various types of wisdom we have outlined; he simply says, 'I wonder what Christopher Robin would do' (W 9.118), and he casts himself on the mercy of others with the message in the bottle, irresistible in its naivety: 'HELP! PIGLET (ME)' (W 9.119). This is obviously intended by the editor as the climax of the book, coming as it does just before the final chapter in which Christopher Robin's 'departure' is recounted. It is a reasonable hypothesis, though one that requires further development, that a primary aim of the redactor was to demonstrate the supremacy of this type of wisdom over against those types represented by the other characters.

We are now in a position to give a comprehensive statement of the Gattung of the P corpus, and have thus attained the goal of all study of an ancient document; the Gattung is without doubt that of cultic wisdom literature in epico-mythological form.

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footnotes

1. I follow here the view of S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 9th edn, 1913), p. ix: 'The age and authorship of the books of the Old Testament can be determined (as far as this is possible) only upon the basis of the internal evidence supplied by the books themselves . . . no external evidence worthy of credit exists'.
2. To use a phrase of G. von Rad in his Genesis commentary.
3. References are given to chapter and page in the popular paperback version (*The Living Pooh*).
4. Possibly Sanders has been eliminated because he knew too much; cf. his erudite work on *The Tendencies of the Synoptic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
5. The page reference 'x' probably symbolizes the mysterious and unknowable character of the real reason.
6. The phrase is that of J.H. Eaton, *Psalms: Introduction and Commentary* (Torch Bible Commentary; London: SCM Press, 1967), p. 71.
7. To forestall any criticism of the use of the sigium J for the Genius source, it should be pointed out that in classical documentary theory J never stands for words beginning with J (cf. J for Yahwist).

8. For a moving description of the age of D, cf. J. Bright, *History of Israel* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1972), p. 319: 'All over the contemporary world a certain anxiety was in the air. The ancient civilizations were coming to an end; the dikes were cracking, and a dark hood lapped without. Men were haunted by a gnawing insecurity. It was a dangerous time, a time when a man needed the help of his gods. Side by side with the excitement of newly found independence, there walked a profound unease, a premonition of judgement.'

9. The above analysis has been brilliantly characterized by R.K. Harrison as demonstrating an 'ability to arrive at definitive conclusions on the basis of only part of the total evidence, accompanied by a distinct reluctance to introduce anything more than the slightest theoretical modifications even when much more complete evidence is available' (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [London: Tyndale Press, 1970], p. 507).

10. Cf. David J.A. Clines, *The Tale of the Tail: or, The Story of the Story* (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*, 1001; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

11. Reference is clearly being made to the Babylonian sexagesimal system of reckoning.