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Winnie - the - Prude

Pooh Bear was once naked.
As originally illustrated by Ernest H. Shepard in the original A.A. Milne stories, the bear of very little brain was only clad on blustery days, usually only in a scarf, once in a small shirt of sorts (that during the snowy weather). Truth be told, the bear was not alone. Aside from Christopher Robin, the only regularly garbed character in either *Winnie-The-Pooh* or *The House At Pooh Corner* was Piglet. It was probably to hide the mud.

Lately, I've taken to watching Disney's animated versions of the Pooh chronicles, and have noticed something fairly consistent: Winnie-The-Pooh is *perpetually* dressed in something. It's usually a bright red shirt. Sometimes it also involves a scarf.

It's not as if Pooh Bear needed to cover anything up. Teddy bears are usually well-furred creatures, and even if they've been loved to the point of being worn, the patches where fur no longer resides are usually places of pride, to be displayed as tokens of an owner's affection. Besides, the understanding is that Pooh is based on a real, live (well, once live) Canadian bear cub. I don't think grizzlies (or other breeds, for that matter) have ever worn clothes.

And it's not as if the weather called for perpetual clothing, either. The Hundred Acre Wood (which, by the way, appears to be Christopher Robin's suburban backyard in the later cartoons) is, nine times out of ten, enjoying beautiful summer or autumn weather. The only rain clouds seem to be over Eeyore's head. Except on blustery days, of course.

And yet Disney, in its infinite corporate mass-market lack of wisdom, has clothed Pooh. Indeed, Pooh has been dressed since his first animation.

The bear with very little brain, if you will recall, was rather wise in a childlike sort of way. I remember admiring (and emulating) how he could let himself sing, for his own pleasure, as he walked along. I remember wishing for the joy so great that must have been in his heart, for there is no other reason to wish the Wood a very happy Thursday. Perhaps he would sometimes fail, and partake of too much honey, lodging himself in Rabbit's door. But one week as a laundry-rack is nothing com-



pared to the understanding of life Pooh seemed to be suffused with so very much that, when asked of deep things, he could not possibly intellectualize. His soul, along with his body, was naked.

Not in the Disney toons. This Pooh is a fool, a simpleton. His entire motivation for life appears to be the edible byproduct of bee industry. He is shallow, unconnected with himself, unconnected with anything except his stomach. He cannot see his own soul. His every deed, every action is designed specifically to further the pursuit of honeyness. He would voyage through blustering, through packs and packs of woozles, circles of wizzles, for the sake of a honeypot. Once it was a reasonable indulgence. Disney's Pooh makes it into an obsession.

Disney's Pooh has no grounding. He gets into more messes than he solves. This one would not rescue a Piglet in flooded distress. This one would not pull out a drowning Roo (and discover the North Pole in the process). This one would lose himself in a movie theater in search of honey-drenched popcorn, mind you; this one would be

trampled by a sheepdog for a smackerel of something in payment.

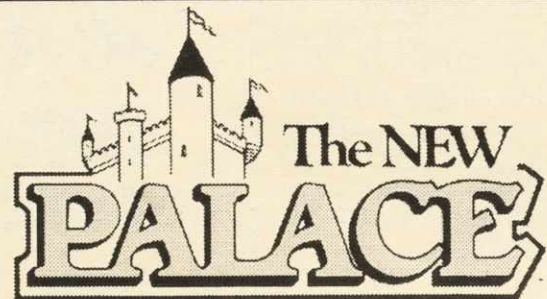
This one knows not the earth, only the hives suspended above it — a lesson not learned in Disney, but learned by the first chapter in the books.

Benjamin Hoff, in his *Tao Of Pooh* duology, discussed Pooh's hidden wisdom according to the books. He also told, in the second book, of the Taoist "Great Separation" origin story — how man became separated from the animals. In a similar vein, we can turn to biblical sources and watch Eve and Adam be chased from the seedbed of nature — for clothing themselves.

Pooh need not be biblical allegory, necessarily. But it is interesting to note how his Disney-imposed red shirt separates the furry bear from nature — from his own nature, from the nature around him. Pooh no longer knows the sweet joy of the Very Happy Thursday. Pooh is no longer a honey admirer with a deep inner joy. Pooh is no longer a bear with deep wisdom.

Pooh is now just a sugar-coated, or honey-coated, cartoon.

Leigha White



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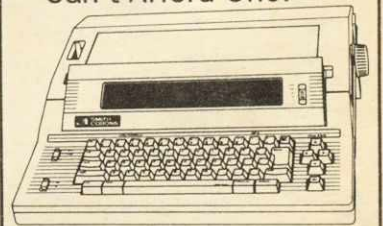
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