Interpreting The Denizens of The Hundred Acre Wood

Freudian & Lacanian psychoanalytical concepts in Winnie-The-Pooh
Abstract

In this paper I have strived to provide a new view on a timeless classic of children’s literature, *Winnie-the-Pooh*. In psychoanalytic literary criticism concepts and theories of psychoanalysis is implemented while interpreting literature; in this paper, I have interpreted the novel incorporating concepts of the psychoanalytic schools of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan while arguing that the denizens of the Hundred Acre Wood are manifestations of parts of the narrator’s unconscious. The first two sections of the paper present the theories and concepts of the two major schools of psychoanalysis as an introduction aimed at increasing the readability of the interpretation. The individual interpretations of each character are then presented separately, every section in some way involving psychoanalytic theory. Kanga, Roo, Piglet, Winnie-the-Pooh, Christopher Robin, Rabbit, Owl and Eeyore are shown to be repressed memories, feelings or thoughts. Included theoretical concepts are the Oedipus complex, the sexual development of infants, the journey of children towards consciousness, Lacanian desire and lack, Freudian dream interpretation and the conception that the unconscious is structured as language, among others.
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1. Introduction

Literature is a part of mankind’s culture rich in diversity and creativity. Not only do writers create textual art but the reading of it is quite of an art as well. During my studies at the English Department at Växjö University I have encountered a very small portion of this art and have also been taught some ways in which texts can be read and understood. Now that literature is the field to which I have chosen to dedicate my third semester of English studies it was only natural for me to write my thesis with a focus on literary theory and criticism. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (813), to “interpret” is to “explain the meaning of something” and an “interpretation” is the “particular way in which something is understood or explained”. The novel subject to interpretation in this paper is the endlessly popular children’s novel *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne, first published in 1926. The storyline consists of bedtime stories told to the child Christopher Robin by an adult, presumably one of his parents. The stories themselves are set in the Hundred Acre Wood where Christopher Robin lives together with his many friends of soft toys, the most beloved one being Winnie-the-Pooh.

Though the novel itself is largely child-oriented, one cannot read the sarcasms of Eeyore, imagine the anxiety-plagued life of Piglet or follow Winnie-the-Pooh in his addiction to honey without sensing something more lurking between the lines. Many aspects of the novel seem not as parts of a literary work created purely for the pleasure of children; sarcasm, for instance, is not a linguistic element commonly known to be entertaining to or understood by children. There always seems to be more than that which is explicitly said in the novel. In this essay, the relationships between the characters and the characters themselves are of utmost importance; the framework used analyse them is psychoanalytic literary criticism, a form of criticism drawing on the work by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and further enriched by philosopher Jacques Lacan.

The stories of Christopher Robin living in the Hundred Acre Wood necessitate the questions of why he lives alone and why only with his toys. Pondering upon these questions and the nature of the characters I have created my interpretation. This essay uses psychoanalytical theories and concepts while developing the argument that:
The characters of the narrator’s bedtime stories, the denizens of the Hundred Acre Wood, are manifestations of parts of the narrator’s unconscious; symbolizing some of his or her repressed memories and feelings.

In her book *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*, Maud Ellman writes that:

it is impossible to understand analysands or literary texts without participating in their dreams or their delusions. The critic necessarily conspires in the text’s imaginings: the act of reading is a process of mutual seduction, whereby the reader and the read arouse each other’s fantasies, expose each other’s dreams. It is when we think we penetrate the text’s disguises that we are usually most deluded and most ignorant, for what we see is nothing but our unknown selves. (10)

In writing this paper I wish not to claim myself to be the master of *Winnie-the-Pooh* and thus I hope that my analysis is not a true depiction of my unconscious. Furthermore, I do not claim my interpretation to be the “truth”. My aim in using psychoanalytic criticism is not purely to analyze but even more so to look at a literary work from a, to me, fresh point-of-view. In short, this paper is a thesis written with two approaches to psychoanalysis, that of Freud and that of Lacan. My hope is that any potential reader keeps this in mind while reading and remembering this quote from Ellman:

There is nothing like Freudian theory to elicit sniggers of embarrassment or snorts of disbelief, and even the abstrusities of Lacan can reduce a classroom to cascades of giggles. Reactions against psychoanalysis tend to be visceral, the body rejecting with convulsions what the intellect refuses to assimilate. (1)
2. Psychoanalytic literary criticism

Psychoanalysis is a scientific field prone to jargon. As the interpretation in this paper incorporates the concepts and theories of the field’s two major schools it is beneficial to the reader to be familiarized with them. As such, the following two sections serve as an introduction to psychoanalytic theory, increasing the readability of and revealing the logic behind the interpretation.

2.1 Freud’s psychoanalysis

Austrian Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was the founding father of psychoanalysis and his revolutionary approach to the unconscious of the human mind deals with a wide array of concepts. The method of psychoanalytic literary criticism is to use these concepts while interpreting literary texts (Barry 96). The three most prominent of these presented and used in this paper are:

1. The sexual development of infants (Barry 97),
2. the interpretation of dreams (Barry 98) and
3. the Oedipus complex (Barry 97), also referred to by Freud as the Kernel complex (Ellman 11).

Freud’s theories on sexuality were perhaps those that largely made him famous. His revolutionary approach included a new view of sexuality saying that in psychoanalysis “the concept of sex goes lower and also higher than its popular sense” (Ellman 12). Sexuality, he says, is not only present in the adult but is prominent in the lives of infants as well. At this early stage in life however, sex is limited only to the excremental functions; that is, the three parts of an infant’s sexuality are the oral, anal and phallic (Barry 97). Another Freudian concept associated with infantile sexuality is the Oedipus complex, explained later in this essay. Besides this sexuality of infants Freud also theorised that “the sexual desire is the force that fuels the loftiest productions of the mind” (Ellman 12) pointing to the importance of sexuality and its influence on the conscious and unconscious parts of our minds.

Although sexuality was a prominent feature of Freud’s work his theories about the unconscious is the centre around which all his other theories revolve (Barry 96).
Basically, the human conscious is just that, our conscious thoughts and in contrast the unconscious houses that which is hidden to us. There are many processes associated with the latter. The basic concept however, is that the unconscious is where we store our most unpleasant memories and instincts and that we through an unconscious act of repression hide these from our conscious. Moreover, through the act of sublimation we can instinctively mask the repressed problems as things that are acceptable to the conscious mind. Peter Barry here exemplifies that intense religious experiences may be sublimated feelings of sexual desire (96-97). The interesting feature of the unconscious is, according to Freud, the fact that the repressed material can slowly sip into the everyday life of human beings; this is the explanation to a very famous Freudian concept, the “Freudian slip” (Barry 98). In psychoanalysis, that which a patient has repressed may be revealed through several processes. First, a patient may unconsciously choose to transfer the repressed material, redirecting negative feelings towards the psychoanalyst. Second, patients may project negative parts of themselves on to another person, “disowning” them (Barry 97-98). Additionally, the unconscious may influence the dreams of its host (Barry 98). In dreams that which has been repressed may be “acted out” through the processes of condensation and displacement; the former means that several people, memories or meanings are clustered together into one image; the latter entails an image portraying something, the image acting as a kind of symbol, hiding that which has been repressed (Barry 98). In a way dreams therefore resemble literature in the sense that they do not make statements explicitly but hide them behind symbols and associated concepts. That is to say, “dreams don’t say things, they show things. In this sense […] they are very like literature” (Barry 99). Freud also says that dreams largely resemble drama, the dramatic manner in which the events in Oedipus are depicted being that which caught his attention more than the nature of the events themselves (Ellman 6). His work The Interpretation of Dreams did later come not only to speak of ways in which to interpret dreams but also of the “Oedipus complex”.

Ellman writes that “Freud described the Oedipus as the Kerncomplex, the kernel complex at the troubled core of personality” (11). The complex, present in small children, is when the child sexually desires its mother and harbours jealous feelings towards both its father and siblings. As the sexuality of infants is not of the same nature as the one of adults, the desire the child has for its mother is limited not only to the sexual organs. Initially Freud believed that a child always desired a parent
of the opposite sex. Later, however, he changed his mind saying that both boys and girls desire their mother (Ellman 12). The differences between the male and female development of sexuality is instead to be seen in the way and reason why they end the complex. This is where Freud’s theories become liable to doubt since his thoughts on the development of female sexuality is merely a translation of that of the development of male sexuality. The boy resolves the complex and evolves by finally identifying with the father; the reason for the abandoning of the mother is that the father poises a threat of castration. The girl, on the other hand, leaves the mother in appeal to the father for a baby. The baby, according to Freud, acting as a penis-substitute as the girl herself and every other member of her sex has already been “castrated”. Half of the world’s population lives therefore in constant “penis envy”, at least if one is to believe Freud (Ellman 12). It is implied however, that the complex may be retained for “it is only through a drastic realignment, if at all, that [the children] assume the sexual identities allotted to them in society” (Ellman 13). That is to say: a child may never escape the complex, forced to live life in constant sexual distress, forced to witness the father “possessing” the desired mother.

2. 2. Psychoanalysis according to Lacan

French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan provided the theories that made not only psychoanalysis evolve but psychoanalytic literary criticism as well. Among the most prominent of his theories are:

1. The dominant role of the unconscious in both the human psyche and the field of psychoanalysis.
2. The linguistic conception of the unconscious.
3. The journey of infants and children towards consciousness.

His theories, which called for a totally new approach to the conscious and unconscious of the human psyche, were highly controversial when compared to contemporary theories in the field of psychoanalysis. Eventually, Lacan was even forced to leave the International Psychoanalytic Association, forcing him to create his own school of psychoanalysis (Barry 109).
As explained in the previous section, Freudian theory deals primarily with the influence of the unconscious on the conscious. The main idea, again, is that our personality and conscious thoughts are stored in the conscious. However, “this school of thought has been subjected to a fierce assault by Jacques Lacan, who sees the ego as the source of our delusions, rather than the key to our deliverance.” (Ellman 2). In contrast to Freud, he perceives not the unconscious as merely a storage area for unpleasant memories, saving the conscious personality of people from harm. In fact his theories created a “new emphasis on the unconscious itself, as ‘the nucleus of our being’” (Barry 109). The unconscious therefore, is the primary subject of analysis in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Additionally, Lacan’s theories represent a shift in focus, from the psychic health of individual authors, readers and characters of literary works, to a deeper investigation into language itself and its presence in literature (Waugh 206). This focus on language and linguistic devices instead of individual beings is in a way a “bi-product” of his view on the structure of the unconscious. In order to understand this new emphasis, therefore, it is necessary to explore the Lacanian conception of the unconscious.

The Lacanian conception of the unconscious is that it is organized according to a structure resembling that of language (Barry 111). The unconscious is not a pool of mixed memories and emotions but an organized system. The piece of evidence Lacan provides for this view is that the Freudian processes condensation and displacement used unconsciously by dreaming human beings, he says, correspond to the linguistic elements metaphor and metonymy (Barry 111-112; Ellman 5). As condensation mix together several people and feelings into one dream image a metaphor may carry several meanings. Metonymy then corresponds to displacement; an object being represented in language by its parts according to the former; a person being represented by one of his or her characteristics through the use of the latter in dreams (Barry 112). Linguist Roman Jakobson, once identified metaphor and metonymy to be “the twin axes of language” (Ellman 5), inspiring Lacan’s work. He was moreover one of the psychoanalyst’s main sources of inspiration (Barry 108).

This linguistic conception of the unconscious then became Lacan’s main argument against the focus of classic psychoanalysis on the individual: “since the unconscious is linguistic, and language is a system already complete and in existence before we enter into it, then it follows that the notion of a unique, separate self is deconstructed” (Barry 113). Culture and human societies therefore, are prominent in Lacanian
psychoanalysis. Drawing inspiration from anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who claimed that “the taboo against incest is the fundamental law of human culture” (Ellman 15), Lacan saw incest as a gruesome crime not only in human societies but in the human unconscious as well. Simultaneously, human laws prohibit sexual relationships between family members and grammar provides rules for combinations of letters and words in language. In short, incest is not only a crime; it “is bad grammar” (Ellman 16) as well, causing havoc in the lives of families where it is committed.

Lacan also published theories on the sexual development of infants and young children, further challenging the work of Freud. The first stage in a child’s journey towards consciousness is the Imaginary. At this stage the child has no concept of “self” and exists in a symbiosis with the mother, linked unconditionally to her (Barry 114; Ellman 16). At an age between 6-18 months however, the child enters into the “mirror stage” (Barry 114). This is when the child first gains an image of an “I”, looking into a mirror and seeing her own image. The pleasure in discovering this image is almost immediately blown away as the child realizes that the image is, in fact, a fake (Ellman 17). As our unconscious is the nucleus of every human being, an image in a mirror of the material body cannot suffice as an image of the true self.

Every human being is then forced to live life in constant lack, seeking this true self, the mirror nothing but a wall teasing of possible discovery (Waugh 284). Lack and desire are, in fact, concepts of high importance in Lacanian psychoanalysis. Upon ending the mirror stage the child then enters, once again, into the Imaginary, residing in it until death. Now the Imaginary is not a “stage” but more of a “specular domain of images, reflections, simulacra” (Ellman 18). In the Imaginary float images of the self, images created to find some sort of resemblance to others, especially to the mother (Ellman 18). The Lacanian Oedipus complex, therefore, is not of a purely sexual nature, the child largely identifying itself with, instead of desiring to possess, her. In contrast to Freud who believed that the father posed a threat of castration Lacan theorizes that it is not the father himself who breaks the bond between mother and child. The force that finally separates the two is the Name-of-the-Father, a spectral image of the father independent of any mortal man. This Name-of-the-Father therefore instates the rule against incest in the unconscious, establishing a proper sense of family members’ roles in the child (Ellman 18); providing a sexual identity approved of by society. Although the Name-of-the-Father succeeds in breaking the
Oedipus complex however, “all pleasure [in the future] will be substitutive, for sexuality consists of the pursuit of metaphorical alternatives to lost felicities” (Ellman 19). That is to say, all pleasures in adult life will act as substitutes to the pleasure of staying unconsciously connected to the mother.

Even though many of Lacan’s theories provide interesting ways in which to understand the unconscious many of them border to that which is impossible to understand. In the realm of the unconscious, he argues, there is a constant shift in meaning of signifiers. The parts of the unconscious need therefore a “needed anchorage in language” (Ellman 19); according to Lacan the phallus provides this anchorage. Psychoanalysts and feminists alike however, have vigorously challenged this idea (Ellman 20-26). The concept of the phallus is due to the difficulty of understanding Lacan’s arguments very difficult to implement in literary criticism. In fact, “Lacan’s conception of the phallus is so difficult to understand that theorists who explain it often find themselves believing in it, in the sheer exhilaration of defeating its opacity” (Ellman 23).
3. The narrator’s unconscious

The following sections present the interpretations of the characters in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. The whole interpretation itself has been formed with attention given to the theories and concepts of both Freud and Lacan. The majority of the interpretation however, is based on Freudian theories and only some partly on those of Lacan. The interpretation presumes that the stories are sequences of repressed material the narrator projects upon Christopher Robin’s soft toys and that these can be interpreted in the same way as dreams. That is, that the characters can be treated as images and symbols of parts of the narrator’s unconscious, present and past feelings, sexual development and memories, allocated to the unconscious. To these images have then been linked the concepts of the psychoanalysts presented in the two previous sections. That is to say, the analysis itself is largely a combination of the methods of both schools of psychoanalysis (Barry 105 & 115).

Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it. And then he feels that perhaps there isn’t. Anyhow, here he is at the bottom, and ready to be introduced to you. Winnie-the-Pooh. (Milne 1)

3. 1. Kanga & Roo

Kanga and Roo are most easily analyzed when scrutinized through the eyes of both Freud and Lacan. Freudian methods of revealing symbolism and Lacanian concepts of lack and desire together form the first argument for the claim of this paper. As for Kanga and Roo, the two are a memory of the narrator’s past. In order to save the conscious from this memory the narrator has unconsciously projected the characteristics of a long gone childhood onto Christopher Robin’s soft toys. The two kangaroos together form an image of the narrator’s childhood; a childhood characterized by an extremely close relationship between mother and child. The kangaroo as a marsupial animal, an animal that carries its offspring in a pouch, forms an argument for this; the mother carrying her child not in her arms but “in herself”.
The memory itself carries several meanings. Firstly, it speaks of the relationship between mother and child. Secondly, it speaks of a child on the verge of entering the mirror stage. Roo is linked and joined with Kanga. She watches him constantly (Milne 88-89) and she carries him in a pouch as a part of herself. In the unconscious of the narrator, the two are joined in one. Roo is a child beginning to find his own identity however, jumping around craving attention from all around as any a child would (Milne 89). He is not worried about being abducted from his mother by Rabbit, playing with him in his house (Milne 94). Furthermore, he is still content with being separated from his mother even though faced by death in the river (Milne 110-113). He emerges from the water, anxious not to be with his mother but with being assured that all have seen the extent of his swimming skills (Milne 113).

Consciously Roo may seem to be acquiring his own identity in a similar way that the narrator once did. Although he craves the attention of others he is still invisibly and unconsciously linked to his mother. Their names form the strongest symbol of all of their relationship, of the narrator’s infantile unconscious. Kanga and Roo are not only mother and child, linked together by family ties; they are both named after their race. Individually however, their names do not form the proper name for their existence. Kanga and Roo form together the name of their existence; together they are the kangaroo. The narrator, therefore, is in constant lack of a proper sense of self. Even though Roo may venture from his mother they eventually join together once more, as they cannot be separated without both being only part of a whole. Thus, the narrator lives in a Lacanian constant lack of self and a desire, a need, for the mother.

3.2 Piglet

As a character Piglet is constantly cautious and anxious. “The Piglet lived in a very grand house in the middle of a beech-tree, and the beech-tree was in the middle of the Forest, and the Piglet lived in the middle of the house.” (Milne 30). Living in the middle of the forest and in the middle of his own house, he is cautious towards something. That something is one of the most elusive, hidden forces of the novel: the father of the narrator. Piglet is constantly cautious and anxious because he is in constant threat of castration. That is, Piglet is the image of the narrator as a child, still
in a close relationship with the mother, a relationship nearing the border to that which is not normal.

Encouragingly, the memory reveals that the father, at least in the narrator’s infantile unconscious, contested the connection between mother and child. Piglet is so tense that he is unable to even be addressed by Winnie-the-Pooh without jumping out of fear (Milne 34). When the two characters hunt a woozle together and it seems to develop into a hunt for several woozles, Piglet suddenly concocts reasons for not staying and eventually leaves his friend (Milne 37); despite bearing traces of courage when planning together with Pooh to catch a Heffalump (Milne 53-56) he finally acts according to his character and flees the trap they planted together (Milne 62). This courage however, was crackling in its appearance already while Piglet was lying in his bed on the morning they were supposed to check their trap together:

What was a Heffalump like? Was it Fierce? […] Was it fond of Pigs at all? […] Supposing it was Fierce with Pigs, would it make any difference if *the Pig had a grandfather called TRESPASSERS WILLIAM*? […] Of course Pooh would be with him […] but suppose Heffalumps were Very Fierce with Pigs *and* Bears? Wouldn’t it be better to pretend he had a headache, and couldn’t go up to the Six Pine Trees this morning? (Milne 61)

The relationship between mother and child is alluded to by the name on the sign by Piglet’s house. When Christopher Robin asks why the sign is saying “TRESPASSERS W” Piglet simply answers that it was the name of his grandfather. Christopher Robin then tries in vain to argue with Piglet about whether or not one can be called Trespassers. Piglet, by confusing Christopher Robin, tries to hide that he himself is in fact a true trespasser, the fact that the narrator was a trespasser in childhood, trying to steal the mother away from the father. Piglet thus signifies the memory of the Oedipus complex itself, of the child trespassing on the relationship of his parents, fearing his father as a threat of castration.
3.3 Winnie-the-Pooh

While being the main character of the narrator’s bedtime stories Pooh is also the most complex and ambiguous image of the narrator’s unconscious of all. In every passage there can be no doubt that he is the favourite of Christopher Robin, the one he brings down the stairs every night before bedtime (Milne 2), the one who joins him upstairs for his bath (Milne 18 & 145). It is therefore logical for Pooh to be the soft toy on which the narrator projects the largest number of memories and feelings, condensing them into the same image.

Many of the actions of Pooh may be linked to the Freudian process of sublimation (pp 6). The very first chapter, for instance, denotes a memory of the narrator’s sexual development masked by an image that is acceptable to the conscious part of the mind. In this chapter Pooh attempts to retrieve honey from a beehive high above the ground in a tree (Milne 3-16) and fails time and again. The attempt itself may seem as an innocent quest for provisions however, to eyes inspired by Freudian theory, it is something else entirely. Winnie-the-Pooh’s attempt to retrieve the honey from the tree is part of a metaphor for the memory of a failure of the narrator’s sexuality to develop normally; this as the three parts of infantile sexuality, the oral, anal and phallic (pp 5), are all present in the novel and as Pooh experiences problems with them all. In the first chapter he fails to defeat the large oak-tree and retrieve the honey, fails to come to terms with the phallus, the tree being its symbol. In the second chapter Pooh gets stuck in the hole that is Rabbit’s front door after eating too much (Milne 23-24); the narrator did not develop a normal sexual behaviour as a child and failed to come to terms also with the anal element of the trinity of infantile sexuality; what is more, Winnie-the-Pooh fails to exit the house, his appetite being his demise. His appetite symbolizes then the third of the three sexual symbols. Not in one chapter does Pooh not eat or think about honey. His constant need for it disrupts his daily life and causes him even to eat the present he is on his way to give to Eeyore on his birthday (Milne 71-72). In the next to last chapter he also experiences signs of withdrawal when he runs out of honey following his escape from the flood. In desperation he jumps into the water to retrieve a note in a bottle from a Piglet in distress, believing it to be honey (Milne 123):
‘This is Serious,’ said Pooh. ‘I must have an Escape.’ So he took his largest pot of honey and escaped with it to a broad branch of his tree, well above the water, and then climbed down again and escaped with another pot … and when the whole Escape was finished, there was Pooh sitting on his branch, dangling his legs, and there, beside him, were ten pots of honey…. Two days later, there was Pooh, sitting on his branch, dangling his legs, and there, beside him, were four pots of honey…. Three days later, there was Pooh […] and there beside him, was one pot of honey. Four days later, there was Pooh… And it was on the morning of the fourth day that Piglet’s bottle came floating past him, and with one loud cry of ‘Honey!’ Pooh plunged into the water, seized the bottle, and struggled back to his tree again. ‘Bother!’ said Pooh, as he opened it. (Milne 122-123)

In short, it is likely that the narrator’s sexual development had ceased to be normal already shortly after birth, as they as an infant had no proper sense of or control over the three Freudian parts of infant sexuality. The Pooh bear masks the painful memory in the unconscious however; it was and remains a reality.

Pooh’s constant addiction to honey may be interpreted in another way as well. As mentioned above, the narrator lives with a never-ceasing desire for the mother, wanting to be a part of her and vice versa (pp, 13). Adding to this desire Piglet’s fear of castration and the continued presence of the Name-of-the-Father (section 3.4) in the narrator’s unconscious it becomes quite clear that the addiction of Pooh is in fact a metaphor for a desire for the mother that was not relinquished. Eating and hunger, it seems, may very well represent an insatiable desire. The other characters eat of course. In the last chapter for instance they all eat together at a party dedicated to Pooh (Milne 140). Moreover, Pooh has a meal at Rabbits house, the former eating more than the latter but Rabbit ate at the very least something (Milne 25). However, although the other characters may eat at times Pooh is the only one to eat or think about honey in every chapter. “It was just as if somebody inside him were saying, ‘Now then, Pooh, time for a little something.’” (Milne 72); Pooh’s is not a hunger only restricted to the abdominal region, his whole being needing, desiring, honey. What is more, he is also the only character to eat in excess, the one to give a face for gluttony:

Now, by this time Rabbit wanted to go for a walk too, and finding the front door full, he went out by the back door, and came round to Pooh , and looked
at him. ‘Hallo, are you stuck?’ he asked. ‘N-no,’ said Pooh carelessly. ‘Just resting and thinking and humming to myself.’ [...] ‘The fact is,’ said Rabbit, ‘you’re stuck.’ ‘It all comes,’ said Pooh crossly, ‘of not having front doors big enough.’ ‘It all comes,’ said Rabbit sternly, ‘of eating too much. I thought at the time,’ said Rabbit, ‘only I didn’t like to say anything,’ said Rabbit, ‘that one of us was eating too much,’ said Rabbit, ‘and I knew it wasn’t me,’ he said. (Milne 25)

What this quote also shows is that Pooh actually tries to hide his eating habits and the results of them from the other characters. Another instance is when he eats Eeyore’s present (Milne 72) and visits Owl in order to turn the empty pot into a present (Milne 72-74). “What do you want a balloon for?” [Christopher Robin] said. Winnie-the-Pooh looked round to see that nobody was listening, put his paw to his mouth, and said in a deep whisper: ‘Honey!’ ‘But you don’t get honey with balloons!’ ‘I do,’ said Pooh.” (Milne 9-10). Pooh poorly hides his desire for honey, the narrator in past times most certainly unable to hide the fixation of the mother.

3.4 Rabbit

Even though the Name-of-the-Father once failed to separate child from mother it is but pure logic that the spectral image of the father should be retained in the unconscious of the narrator. As the name has already failed it should not poise a significant threat to the narrator still. Be that as it may, the name is still symbolized as a living memory in the unconscious of the narrator, by Rabbit.

That Rabbit symbolizes the Name-of-the-Father becomes quite clear when observing his behaviour toward the other characters and his house. Observing his behaviour towards Pooh one cannot avoid smiling slightly and sensing his true feelings for his “friend” between the lines. In the three chapters of the novel where Rabbit is included he always acts peculiar specifically towards Pooh. In chapter seven for instance he shows his frustration with the bear, first by speaking very slowly in order to stop him from interrupting and later by interrupting Pooh himself (Milne 81-93). Also, in chapter eight he seems to be trying to provoke Pooh, to do what is unclear (Milne 102). It could be argued however, that the reason Pooh does not retort is because they are all images of the unconscious created to save the narrator from the
memories and feelings they symbolize. Open hostility between soft toys that are supposed to be good friends would perhaps draw the attention of the narrator’s conscious, breaking the protective ward shielding the narrator’s conscious from harm. Though the mentioned passages are interesting, the most ambiguous meaning-bearing conversation of Winnie-the-Pooh remains the one that takes place when Pooh visits Rabbit’s house and the latter is introduced to the reader:

‘If I know anything about anything, that hole means Rabbit,’ [Pooh] said. [...] So he bent down, put his head into the hole, and called out: ‘Is anybody at home?’ There was a sudden scuffling noise from inside the hole, and then silence. ‘What I said was, “Is anybody at home?”’ called out Pooh very loudly. ‘No!’ said a voice; and then added, ‘you needn’t shout so loud. I heard you quite well the first time.’ ‘Bother!’ said Pooh. ‘Isn’t there anybody here at all?’ ‘Nobody.’ [...] ‘Hallo, Rabbit, isn’t that you?’ ‘No,’ said Rabbit, in a different sort of voice this time. ‘But isn’t that Rabbit’s voice?’ ‘I don’t think so,’ said Rabbit. ‘It isn’t meant to be.’ [...] ‘Well, could you very kindly tell me where Rabbit is?’ ‘He has gone to see his friend Pooh Bear, who is a great friend of his.’ (Milne 22-23)

The Name-of-the-Father retains its presence in the unconscious of the narrator albeit as a masked memory. Remembering Freudian theory however, it would seem unlikely that Rabbit could be a symbol of a father figure from times past. As the father of the narrator was supposed to pose a threat of castration, in order to break the Oedipus complex, large portions of the interpretation in this paper risks collapse; the narrator cannot have been castrated; Christopher Robin is not purely an image in an unconscious but an actual child. Applying Lacanian psychoanalytic theory however, changes the tide and Rabbit may once again bear the weight that is the memory of the father figure. For in Lacanian theory the Name-of-the-Father is not an actual man but a force in the unconscious of infants, separating child from mother. No unconscious spectre would be able to castrate a child physically although logically it should be able to do so to the unconscious itself. It is interesting to note that no character of the narrator’s stories, be they human or animal, are connected to any concepts or terms overtly sexual apart from one character. Kanga, as the only female character of the stories and mother of Roo, is the only character that appears to have experienced copulation. In contrast, not one of the male characters or their actions suggests any
sexual activity. What is even more interesting is that all male characters save Eeyore and Rabbit live in or under trees as can be seen in the text and in the pictures drawn by E. H. Shephard (Milne 3 & 9 & 21 & 31 & 44). Why Eeyore does not will be explained in section 3.7. The other characters do however, compensating for the fact that they have been castrated, having built their homes in connection to symbols of the phallus, the trees acting as penis-substitutes. Rabbit is the only male character, besides Eeyore, not to have his abode built at such a location; his home is a hole in the ground, a sharp contrast to the large beech-tree of Piglet’s (Milne 30) or Owl’s grand chestnut residence (Milne 43). Rabbit has no innate urge to acquire any substitute phallus symbol, as he has not been castrated unlike the others.

As a metaphor for the Name-of-the-Father Rabbit continues to carry out its tasks, still trying to separate mother and child. When Kanga and Roo suddenly appear in the forest one day Rabbit is concerned. He talks to Pooh and Piglet, trying to convince them that it is wrong that a strange and new kind of animal has moved in. He talks about the fact that Kanga carries her child in her pocket as well, alluding also that this is wrong (Milne 82-83). Implicitly, the passage is a description of the Name-of-the-Father carrying out its task. Dedicated to the task and with a goal in mind the Name-of-the-Father initially tries to rally the unconscious of the narrator against this unnatural relationship between mother and child. As this partially fails when Pooh is unable to follow its argument the Name-of-the-Father masterminds a cunning plan, to kidnap Roo and then force Kanga to leave the forest (Milne 83-88). Eventually however, as in the narrator’s childhood, the Name-of-the-Father fails. The relationship is retained and Kanga and Roo stay in the forest (Milne 88-98).

3.5 Owl

As far as Freudian and Lacanian theory go, Owl is a character hard to analyse and interpret. He appears not to be a symbol for any particular memory or feeling. Even so, there are circumstances surrounding Owl that are quite peculiar. Firstly, he is a character who tries to appear clever and wise, characteristics his race are usually associated with, even though he cannot in fact read or write properly. When Pooh visits him in order to have him write something on Eeyore’s present he is anxious and makes sure that Pooh is illiterate before writing on the pot. “I’m just [writing] ‘A happy birthday’,” said Owl carelessly. ‘It’s a nice long one,’ said Pooh, very much
impressed by it. ‘Well, actually, of course, I’m saying ‘A Very Happy Birthday with love from Pooh.’ Naturally it takes a good deal of pencil to say a long thing like that.’ ‘Oh, I see,’ said Pooh.” (Milne 74).

Secondly, apart from his need to appear smart, Owl uses a vocabulary that is in no way on the same level as the other characters’, (Milne 45 & 110-111 & 127-129). Only when he has seen that his conversation partner does not understand does he adapt his language. Piglet for instance shows signs of frustration as Owl interrupts his whisper with Pooh, the Owl trying to correct the bear in his superior fashion (Milne 107-108). Furthermore, Christopher Robin, one of the novel’s most patient and loving characters, interrupts and silences Owl during the great flood in chapter 9:

‘I say, Owl,’ said Christopher Robin, ‘isn’t this fun? I’m on an island!’ ‘The atmospheric conditions have been very unfavourable lately,’ said Owl. ‘The what?’ ‘It has been raining,’ explained Owl. ‘The flood-level has reached an unprecedented height.’ ‘The who?’ ‘There’s a lot of water about,’ explained Owl. […] ‘However, the prospects are rapidly becoming more favourable. At any moment –‘ ‘Have you seen Pooh?’ ‘No. At any moment –‘ […] ‘We must rescue Piglet at once! […] Owl, could you rescue him on our back?’ ‘I don’t think so,’ said Owl, after grave thought. ‘It is doubtful if the necessary dorsal muscles –‘ […] ‘Oh, don’t talk, Owl, go on quick!’ (Milne 127-129)

Owl, in contrast to the other characters, may not be a symbol or metaphor for any suppressed feeling or memory. Instead, it would be more plausible to interpret him as a sign of the havoc in the narrator’s unconscious. If Lacan is to be believed that the unconscious is structured as a language then Owl is the sign of the lingual confusion in the narrator’s unconscious. As a character he confuses the other characters with his vocabulary and strives to sound wise and smart on every point; the other characters either misunderstand him or show frustration towards him. Language, words and names are also elements of great importance in the novel. Misunderstandings of words and expressions however, are common and the most profound of them all is the one described in chapter eight. Here, all the characters go on an expedition together to discover the North Pole without actually knowing what they are to look for. Christopher Robin and Rabbit’s conversation about the nature of the North Pole reveals how linguistically damaged the unconscious of the narrator is:
'I did know once, only I’ve sort of forgotten,’ said Christopher Robin carelessly. ‘It’s a funny thing,’ said Rabbit, ‘but I’ve sort of forgotten too, although I did know once.’ ‘I suppose it’s just a pole stuck in the ground?’ ‘Sure to be a pole,’ said Rabbit, ‘because of calling it a pole, and if it’s a pole, well, I should think it would be sticking in the ground, shouldn’t you, because there’d be nowhere else to stick it.’ ‘Yes, that’s what I thought.’ (Milne 110)

The vocabulary of Owl, incompatible to the other characters’ (Milne 45 & 110-111 & 127-129), is nothing but grammatical confusion in the unconscious. The Owl, by extension, is a metaphor for the results of the child’s unnatural fixation for the mother, hidden from the narrator’s unconscious; the narrator represses the results of their actions, projects the problem onto the wise Owl.

3.6 Christopher Robin

As a character in the Hundred Acre Wood and in the narrator’s unconscious Christopher Robin is unique. Unlike any other character, he is a metaphor for repressed material carrying not the mask of a soft toy but one of a living human being. It is important to note though that the Christopher Robin living the forest is an entity to be distinguished from the actual one. In the novel the child Christopher Robin listens to someone else’s stories about him and his friends, thus the fictional Christopher Robin cannot be entirely that which the real one is. The mental image of Christopher Robin is indeed to be distinguished from the real Christopher Robin; for the image of Christopher Robin depicts not him at all but a repressed memory of the narrator’s childhood, banished to their unconscious; to this day the narrator unconsciously refuses to remember the child they once were. Henceforth all references will be to the child living in the forest. The arguments for the interpretation of Christopher Robin as a memory from the narrator’s childhood are two: The nature of the relationship between Christopher Robin and Pooh and the former’s status in the forest.

Apart from being the only humanoid character Christopher Robin is also the only one that is loyal and only loving towards Pooh. All the other characters either become impatient with Pooh because of his poor intelligence, try to manipulate him or deliberately confuse him. Christopher Robin however, never shows any signs of
Impatience, frustration or willingness to dominate his Pooh Bear. No, he simply loves him and loves him constantly. When Pooh gets stuck in Rabbit’s front door he shows naught but warm affections (Milne 25); after pointing out that Pooh has gone in circles when tracking the Woozle he does not give him a hard time, instead he soothes the bear: “I have been Foolish and Deluded,’ said [Pooh], ‘and I am a Bear of No Brain at All.’ ‘You’re the Best Bear in All the World,’ said Christopher Robin soothingly.” (Milne 38). As Piglet is accidentally scared by Pooh the boy only laughs, afterwards saying: “Oh, Bear! […] How I do love you!” (Milne 64). Lastly, in the final chapter he gives a party in honour of Pooh, a grand celebration to which all denizens of the forest are invited (Milne 133-144). The narrator’s repressed memory shows a child in love with the desire for the mother. The image of Christopher Robin depicts a child loving the metaphor for a memory of past desires. The Pooh Bear, plagued by an oral fixation corresponding to a desire for the mother and lacking character and intelligence to handle his problem, is loved by the child entirely. In short, Christopher Robin’s unconditional love for Pooh corresponds to the narrator as a child unconditionally loving the desire for the mother itself despite recognizing the stupidity of it. The second argument for the interpretation of Christopher Robin as a metaphor for the narrator as a child is, as mentioned, his status among the other characters in the Hundred Acre Wood.

All through the stories of Christopher Robin and his friends he holds a special place in the hearts of all the others. With him present the creatures grow calm, brave and confident. He is the one to whom Piglet runs when he is scared (Milne 62-63). Furthermore, when Pooh and Piglet are about to catch the Woozle and Piglet sees Christopher Robin he says, “‘You’ll be quite safe with him. Good-bye’” and runs home (Milne 37). Christopher Robin is also the one to bring hope to the animals when Pooh is stuck (Milne 25) and the one whose advent shortly precedes Piglet’s release from Kanga’s care (Milne 96-97). Yes, status-wise Christopher Robin is the most prominent person in the forest. It is quite intriguing that one of the images should have such an influence upon the others. Yet, as he is the personification of the narrator as a child, the all-powerful person who unconsciously masked and allocated them all to the unconscious, it would seem logical that he should have some power for himself. It is no surprise then that Christopher Robin influences the others in the way that he does. In two chapters he even uses his power explicitly. In the very last chapter for instance, he calls upon Owl whistling in a special way, the bird instantly
answering the call “flying out of the Hundred Acre Wood to see what was wanted.” (Milne 133). Moreover, in chapter eight he shows the full extent of his influence. In a truly imperialistic fashion, he decides that they should all go on an expedition to find the North Pole without actually knowing what to look for. As Christopher Robin inspects his gun Pooh ventures forth in the wood and summons all the other animals. Finally, all the characters go on the expedition together, Christopher Robin leading his own army of conscripted animals that follows him unconditionally and without questioning his authority (Milne 101-108). Having presented the interpretation of Christopher Robin only one character remains to be interpreted and presented: Eeyore.

3.7 Eeyore

Wielding sarcasm and bitterness as weapons in conversations Eeyore holds the status as the gloomiest and most depressing character in the novel. The “Old Grey Donkey” (Milne 39) is a metaphor and symbol for all negative feelings and thoughts the narrator has ever had concerning his or her sexual past and the motherly fixation of childhood. Assuming that it would be highly unlikely that a human being could carry out any actions or feel any feelings without considering them critically; it would be plausible to argue that a person showing no sign of thinking any critical thoughts about actions or feelings have repressed them and banished them to the unconscious. Eeyore is the amalgam of all the narrator’s critical thoughts.

This interpretation explains why he retains his gloominess throughout the stories. For even though he is temporarily happy when Pooh finds his tail (Milne 47-49) and on his birthday (Milne 79-80) he immediately returns to his past mood. He is, himself, critical towards nearly everything and everyone. When he is first introduced to the reader, for instance, he is paranoid believing that someone has taken his tail: “’You must have left it somewhere,’ said Winnie-the-Pooh. ‘Somebody must have taken it,’ said Eeyore. ‘How Like Them,’ he added, after a long silence” (Milne 41-42). Moreover, when everyone is rejoicing that Roo survived his near-death experience and that Pooh had found the North-Pole Eeyore is bitter that no one cares to ask about his numb tail (Milne 114-115). When Pooh accidentally sits himself on a thistle during the expedition Eeyore says that “’It doesn’t do them any Good, you know, sitting on them,’ […] ‘Takes all the Life out of them. Remember that another
time, all of you. A little Consideration, a little Thought for Others, makes all the difference” (Milne 109). At one point he is even critical towards himself (Milne 65) Not only is he critical of others; he is critical of the fact that others are not more critical as well. During the grand party given in Pooh’s honour Eeyore makes a final lunge at teaching his fellow forest-dwellers critical thinking. In this climactic passage he implicitly tries to provoke the others by overtaking Pooh’s party; he acts as though they have all assembled to celebrate something he did, this despite the fact that he must have known the reason for Pooh sitting at one end of the table (Milne 141-142). In the end he fails, Christopher Robin giving Pooh his present without paying Eeyore any notice. Even though doing the best he could do to educate the others, they continue their celebration. This passage may also be interpreted to be a big effort of the condensed critical thoughts and feelings, of Eeyore, to provoke the other characters, an effort to provoke the conscious of the narrator to notice and give them attention. The critical thoughts and feelings about the past, it seems, may never be consciously thought or felt by the narrator, merely continuing their residence in the unconscious. If this is so then this analysis of Winnie-the-Pooh ends in a very, very pessimistic fashion.
4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to interpret the characters of *Winnie-the-Pooh* employing psychoanalytical concepts, theories and methods and this has been done. Nearly all characters, it has been argued, are metaphors or symbols for repressed memories, thoughts and feelings. The narrator who tells the stories about the Hundred Acre Wood and its denizens to Christopher Robin, it seems, is a person with a complicated past. Kanga & Roo both form a symbol for a repressed memory of the narrator’s childhood, of a childhood when child and mother were parts of a whole. This extreme close relationship needs however, according to both schools of psychoanalysis, to be broken. Piglet, constantly nervous and afraid, depicts a memory from when castration was to be feared. The narrator did, as a child, trespass upon his or her parents’ relationship, Piglet having the word included in a name written on a sign outside his house. Winnie-the-Pooh also symbolizes a memory, the memory of the narrator’s infantile sexual development. Furthermore, Pooh’s oral fixation, his constant desire for honey, is a metaphor for a repressed feeling, for the desire the narrator once had for the mother.

In contrast, Rabbit is not an image of any repressed material but the Name-of-the-Father, the name transcending the real father. Having castrated all the images of the narrator’s unconscious, as they now live in connection to symbols of the phallus, it is obvious that he once failed to separate child from mother. Yet, he still tries, concocting and carrying out a plan to kidnap Roo from Kanga. Owl symbolizes all this turmoil in the unconscious of the narrator. Lacanian theory says that the unconscious is structured as a language. Owl, impersonating linguistic confusion, is a character striving to use as an advanced vocabulary as possible, this knowing that no one in the forest will understand him. Frustrated with the confusion depicted and caused by Owl the loving and patient Christopher Robin finally shows signs of frustration towards him, telling him to be quiet.

Christopher Robin then is a metaphor for the narrator as a child. As a metaphor for the child Christopher Robin has a particularly close relationship with Pooh. He is the image of the originator of all the images and owner of the unconscious of interest; as such, Christopher Robin is a character who highly influences the other characters and who is the unquestioned master of the Hundred
Acre Wood and its denizens. As a metaphor for an amalgam of critical and negative thoughts Eeyore then concludes the interpretation. Paranoid and depressing he wields negativity almost as a weapon in conversations with the other characters. Contesting the happiness and gaiety of the others he tries to spread his way of thinking, to catch the attention of the narrator’s conscious.

As for this paper, it has reached its aim in investigating the claim stated in the introduction. Characters of Winnie-the-Pooh, the denizens of the Hundred Acre Wood, have been interpreted incorporating psychoanalytic theory and concepts and have been shown to be parts of the narrator’s unconscious.

Pooh and Piglet walked home thoughtfully together in the golden evening, and for a long time they were silent. ‘When you wake up in the morning, Pooh,’ said Piglet at last, ‘what’s the first thing you say to yourself?’ ‘What’s for breakfast?’ said Pooh. ‘What do you say, Piglet?’ ‘I say, I wonder what’s going to happen exciting to-day?’ said Piglet. Pooh nodded thoughtfully. ‘It’s the same thing,’ he said. (Milne 144)
5. Bibliography


