

ROSS  
KILPATRICK

# Winnie-the-Pooh and the Canadian Connection

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*Lately, there have been increasingly strident claims by both British and Americans for ownership of Christopher Robin's original plush toys: Pooh, Kanga, Eeyore, Tigger, and Piglet. Since 1947 they have resided in the United States, most recently in the New York Public Library. "The Brits have their head in a honey jar if they think they are taking Pooh out of New York City!" declared an irate congresswoman. But as Charles Gordon noted in a recent column on the subject in the Ottawa Citizen: "Canadians, notoriously unconcerned about their own history, don't associate Pooh with Canada, perhaps because they never visit White River, perhaps because they watch the news on CNN."*<sup>1</sup>



CANADIANS are reminded frequently on national television (and by Canada Post, which issued four commemorative Winnie-the-Pooh stamps in 1996) that a bear cub dubbed "Winnie" who would later captivate the five-year-old

Christopher Robin Milne at the London Zoo had originally come from White River, Ontario, in 1914. She had been bought at the station from a trapper by Lieutenant Harry Colbourne, a native of Winnipeg and a veterinarian, who was on his way overseas with the Fort Garry Horse. Winnie served as mascot of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade in England until it embarked for France, when she was left in the care of the London Zoo. She remained there, a great

ROSS KILPATRICK teaches classics at Queen's University.

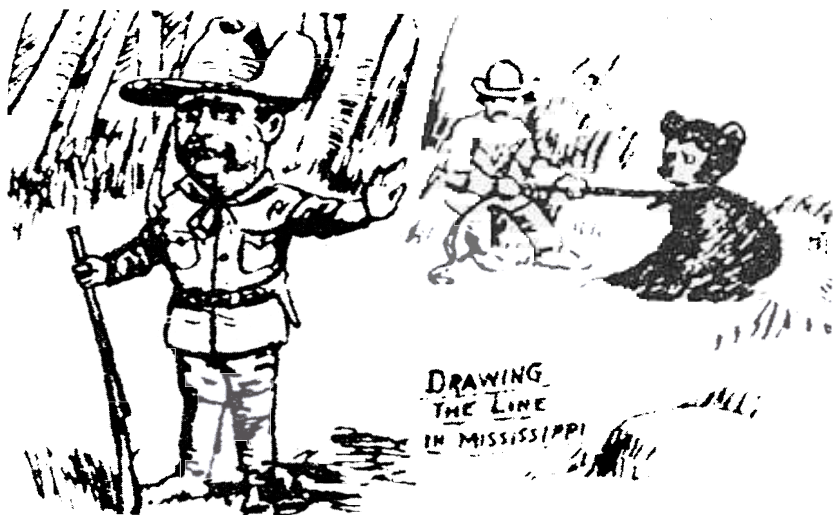
favourite of young and old, until she died in 1934. Bronze statues of Winnie with Lieutenant Colbourne can be seen today in London and Winnipeg, and Walt Disney presented one of Winnie to the town of White River.

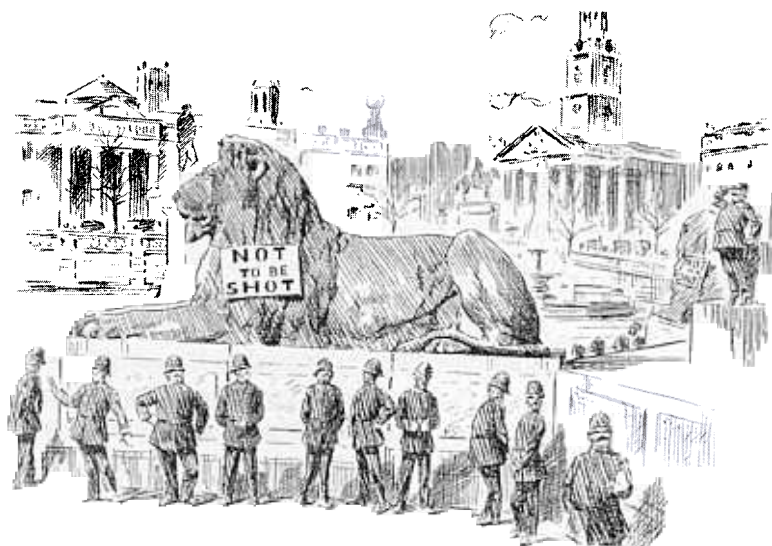
There is little doubt, however, that American claims to ownership of Pooh have some deep roots.

Our Teddy Bear is short and fat  
Which is not to be wondered at.<sup>2</sup>

In A.A. Milne's poem "Teddy Bear" (1924) Pooh was celebrated as "Teddy," an attribution with a history dating back to Mississippi in 1902. In November of that year, President Theodore Roosevelt had drawn the line at shooting a wretched bear, cornered by dogs, stunned by a blow to the head from a rifle-butt, then tied up for him to bag during a hunt arranged for his visit there to arbitrate a boundary dispute with Louisiana. That sportsmanlike gesture by the famous outdoorsman-politician was immortalized by *Washington Post* artist Clifford K. Berryman in his famous front-page cartoon of 16 November 1902: "Drawing the line in Mississippi." The actual denouement of the affair was rather less flattering to the great man.<sup>3</sup>

Soon after that, toy manufacturer Morris Michton of Brooklyn, New York, obtained permission to use the president's nickname for his company's line of plush bears. "Teddy Bear" would soon become universally a term of great affection. Bear classifications by date, manufacturer, type, and country of origin are now all part of world-wide collecting, complete with its encyclopedias and websites. Pooh, for





**A SUGGESTED PRECAUTION.**  
VIEW OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT'S VISIT TO LONDON

instance, is classified as a Farnell “Alpha Bear” (a line manufactured during the ’20s), and was purchased by Mrs Milne at Harrods in 1921.<sup>4</sup>

In England, the Teddy Roosevelt connection became less clear, of course, but the popularity of King Edward VII helped fuel the “Teddy” craze. In Milne’s poem “Teddy Bear,” Pooh’s *alter ursus* is saluted by the king of France:

But is it Mr. *Edward* Bear?  
And Teddy, bowing very low,  
Replied politely, “Even so!”

The heroic conclusion of *The House at Pooh Corner* sees Pooh dubbed by Christopher Robin as “Sir Pooh de Bear, most faithful of all my Knights.”<sup>5</sup>

For all the Teddy Bear’s acculturation in England as an icon of King Edward, however, Theodore Roosevelt’s original bear connection was certainly not forgotten. The president’s arrival in London in 1910 to attend the king’s state funeral was celebrated in *Punch* (11 May 1910) in a cartoon by J.L.C. Boon, “A Suggested Precaution.”

This cartoon certainly implies an enduring interest in Berryman’s *Washington Post* cartoon of eight years earlier. And not two months before (23 March 1910) a *Punch* cartoon by L. Ravenhill represented Teddy Roosevelt, with his son Kermit, about to bag even the Sphinx as a unique specimen of desert fauna!

On 29 June 1910 *Punch* also published a poem by W.H. Ogilvie, "The bear garden that I love." It begins:

The house is full of Teddy bears;  
They creep upon me unawares;  
They catch my feet upon the mat  
And make me think I've squashed the cat;  
I sit upon them during meals  
And shiver at their long-drawn squeals;  
I find them in my bed at night,  
But luckily they never bite.

These three items would have been approved by the assistant editor of *Punch*, none other than A.A. Milne. "Teddy Bears" and "Teddy's Bears" were evidently a source of professional amusement to the future author of *Winnie-the-Pooh* well before the First World War, when Milne took a leave of absence from *Punch* to serve in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. (On his discharge in 1918 he resigned as assistant editor to become a full-time writer.)<sup>6</sup>

"As a child Milne had clearly enjoyed fantasy literature about animals." Paula Connolly cites Milne's own *Autobiography* for his great affection for Reynard the Fox and Uncle Remus, and the stories in *Aunt Judy's Magazine*: "... here was a magic which children, from generation to generation, have been unable to resist." Milne gave full credit to those authors for his own "laurels" as a children's writer. The boys' authors he read included W.H.G. Kingston, Robert Louis Stephenson, and Richard Jeffries.<sup>7</sup>



A very Canadian-looking  
Charles G.D. Roberts.

UT there is one eminent young people's nature-writer conspicuously absent from this list: New Brunswick-born poet, essayist, and novelist Charles G.D. Roberts (later Sir Charles, 1860–1943).<sup>8</sup> Already a distinguished poet, Roberts had made a name for himself in North America and England, beginning in 1896, in the tradition of his contemporary Jack London, with a succession of successful nature novels. In 1907, in fact, he found himself (along with writers Jack London, Ernest Thomas Seton, and William V. Long) embroiled in a lively public debate with President Theodore Roosevelt, whose stern views about such "Nature Fakirs" among the lit-

erary fraternity were publicized through an interview with Edward Clark (and Roosevelt's own subsequent article) in *Everybody's Magazine*. Roosevelt took issue with Roberts on one detail of his short story, "Night Trail" (1907), in which he has a single lynx rout a pack of wolves: "Now the thing is so utterly ridiculous that any man who knows both the wolf and the lynx loses patience."<sup>9</sup> The affair even inspired a delicious cartoon by T. E. Powers in the *New York Evening Journal* of 24 May 1907, sending up the whole nature writers establishment.

For his part, Roberts entered the fray with relish, insisting that the president was confusing the *Lynx Rufus* with *Lynx Canadensis*, and the Western Timber Wolf with the Eastern Brush Wolf. When all the silliness settled down, however, the president and Roberts became warm friends, and Roosevelt revealed that he was a great admirer of Roberts' poetry.

Roberts lived in England and on the Continent from 1907 to 1924 (and like A. A. Milne he enlisted in the British army at the outbreak of war). Prior to and during that period he published some two dozen nature books, novels, and short stories, some of which were also serialized in magazines in England and the United States. Those publications began with *Earth's Enigmas*, in 1896, and ended in 1936 with *Further Animal Stories*. One particularly popular collection was entitled *Babes in the Wild*. Appearing in serial form in 1908 and 1909 in the US, and again in 1912 and 1913, it was issued in book form in 1912 by Cassel & Co. in England, and by Macmillan in the US (under the title *Children of the Wild*). After the war it was twice reissued by Dent & Son, in 1920 and 1921, the latter retaining the original illustrations by Paul Branson. (And it would be re-issued yet again in 1928.)

One of the stories in *Babes in the Wild* rings familiar to Pooh fans. Teddy Bear finds himself alone in this world after his mother and sister are caught in a trap. Hunting for berries, he tumbles into a deep depression or bowl, where he smells "the warm delectable smell of honey" coming from "a small hole near the top of [a] dilapidated old [maple] tree." From his mother he had certainly learned of bees' hot tempers, but –

... being a bear of great decision, he lost no time in wondering what he had better do. The moment he had convinced himself that the honey was up that tree, up that tree he went to get it. ... Most cubs, and some older bears, would have relinquished the adventure at this point; for as a rule, it takes a wise old bear to handle a bee-tree successfully. But Teddy Bear was no ordinary cub, let me tell you, – *or we would never have called him 'Teddy'....* [words in italics appear only in the serialized US version]

Hauling himself up softly from branch to branch, he made no more noise than a shadow.

Teddy is eventually driven back down the tree by the bees' assaults,

... swinging down from branch to branch, whining and coughing and spluttering, and squealing all the way. From the lowest branch he slid down the trunk, his claws rearing the bark and just clinging enough to break his fall.

As soon as Teddy Bear had got rid of his assailants he clawed down through the leaves and twigs and moss ... till he came to the damp cool earth. Ah, how he dug his smarting muzzle into it, and rooted in it, and rubbed it into his ears and on his eyelids. ... And his glossy fur was in a state of which his mother would have strongly disapproved. But his twinkling eyes burned with wrath and determination.

He goes up the tree again slowly and deliberately, pulls away "a strip of rotten wood" and gorges himself to bursting while the bees scurry to save what they can of their precious honey.

Then, very slowly and heavily, grunting all the time, he climbed down the bee-tree. ... He just waddled over to a nook between the roots of the nest tree, curled up his sticky nose between his sticky paws and was soon snoring.<sup>10</sup>



ON Christmas Eve of 1925, the *Evening News* published a new bear story for children by A.A. Milne, entitled "Winnie-the-

Pooh." (The following year it was to appear as the first chapter of Milne's famous book of the same name.) It was also read over the wireless at 7:15 p.m. on Christmas Day "from all stations" by Donald

Calthrop. E.H. Shepard had not been available to collaborate as illustrator for that original newspaper version, so J. H. Dowd was commissioned to provide the pictures.

As the first chapter in Milnes' book *Winnie-the-Pooh*, the story begins:

In Which  
We Are Introduced to  
Winnie-the-Pooh  
and Some Bees,  
and the Stories Begin.



We immediately meet an “Edward Bear” bumping down the stairs behind a Christopher Robin, and are transported to Hundred-Acre-Wood. Pooh finds an “open place in the middle of the forest, and in the centre of the place is a large oak-tree, and, from the top of the tree, there came a loud buzzing noise.”

Pooh doesn't smell the honey, however. He hears the bees – and he is not driven from his perch by painful stings, but simply falls to the ground when a branch breaks – right into a prickly gorse-bush – “he brushed the prickles from his nose.”<sup>11</sup>

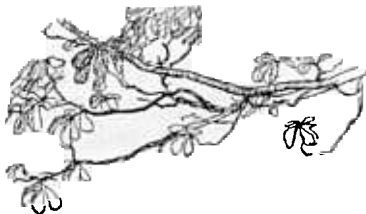
Pooh collects Christopher Robin (who has brought a gun and a blue balloon); then he goes “to a very muddy place that he knew of, and rolled and rolled until he was black all over ...” The balloon ruse to fool the bees into thinking that the muddy bear is a black cloud in the sky fails, of course, and Christopher Robin has to fire his pop-gun to bring Pooh back to earth clear of the bees.



Roberts had supported himself during his stay in England and the Continent (1907–1924) by writing nature stories for the *Windsor Magazine* and various periodicals in the United States. While there is no direct evidence that he knew A.A. Milne, it seems very likely that he would have. Milne's fondness for stories for young people would have attracted him to Robert's work, and “Teddy Bear's Bee-Tree” had appeared in *Saint Nicholas Magazine* (New York) in 1913 in addition to its appearance in the various editions of *Babes of the Wild*. Milne's prominence as a writer and editor of *Punch* would have placed him in



the same circles as Roberts, himself a member of the Authors' Club and Poets' Club in London. They both shared an interest in the views of Teddy Roosevelt. (Roberts was in New York in 1902 when the Berryman cartoon appeared, at the time when Milne was at Cambridge as editor of *Granta*.) The "Punchian" humour of the Roberts-Roosevelt tiff of 1907 (especially the Powers cartoon) would not have escaped Milne as editor of *Punch*.



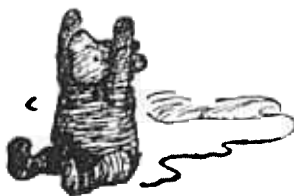
He was getting rather tired by this time, so that is why he sang a Complaining Song. He was nearly there now, and if he just stood on that branch

*Crack!*



**S**O this charming tale is perhaps more Canadian than either of the feuding parties in New York or London would care to admit. Pooh's namesake, a Northern Ontario black bear named "Winnie" (after her first owner's hometown of Winnipeg), was the flesh-and-blood bear that captivated Christopher Robin and his father at the London Zoo. And the plot of the very first chapter of *Winnie-the-Pooh* – in which a hungry bear climbs a tree in the woods "silent

as a shadow" to steal honey from angry bees, falls to the ground, rolls in mud, and tries again – is the creation of a New Brunswicker, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts. Of course, we will have to accept with true Canadian tolerance that, unlike Roberts' "Teddy Bear" of "great decision," this *Pooh* of ours is but "a bear of very little brain," and must, more discreetly than valorously perhaps, forego his honey till it comes safely in a jar.





## Notes

- 1 Charles Gordon, *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 March 1998.
- 2 A. A. Milne, *When We Were Very Young*, illustrated by E.H. Shepard (London: Methuen, 1924).
- 3 The hunt was extensively covered in the press. See the *New York Times* for 14, 15, 19 November 1902. The true story of how the president "refused to make an unsportsmanlike shot" is given on page 1 of the *Washington Post* of 15 November. The exhausted bear had been run down and trapped in a water-hole by the dogs. Holt Collier jumped from his horse and dazed it with a blow from his rifle-butt, whereupon it was tied to a tree: "When the President arrived he would neither shoot it nor permit it to be shot. 'Put it out of its misery,' said he to Mr. Parker, and the latter ended its life with his knife."
- 4 See Pauline Cockrill, *The Teddy Bear Encyclopedia* (London: Dorling Kindersly, 1993), p. 50; C. R. Milne, *The Enchanted Places* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p. 77.
- 5 A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*, illustrated by E.H. Shepard (London: Methuen, 1928), p.177.
- 6 A.A.Milne, *Autobiography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939), pp. 249-67; Ann Thwaite, *A.A. Milne - His Life* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 153-93.
- 7 Paula T. Connolly, *Winnie-the-Pooh and The House at Pooh Corner: Recovering Arcadia* (New York: Twayne, 1995), pp. 5-7; A.A. Milne, *Autobiography* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1939), p. 44.
- 8 See two biographies: Elsie M. Pomeroy, *Sir Charles G. D. Roberts: A Biography* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1943) and J. C. Adams, *Sir Charles God Damn: The Life of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).
- 9 Edward B. Clark, "Roosevelt and the Nature Fakirs," *Everybody's Magazine*, 16 (1907), pp. 773-4. Other pieces on this subject were Theodore Roosevelt, "Nature Fakers," *Everybody's Magazine*, 17 (1907), pp. 427-30, and Edward B. Clark, "Real Naturalists on Nature Fakers," *Everybody's Magazine*, 17 (1907), pp. 423-7. For a recent study of Theodore Roosevelt and bears, see Anne Innis Dagg, "Prestige, Power, and the Naming of Bears," *Queen's Quarterly*, 104/1 (Spring 1997), 97-106.
- 10 Charles G.D. Roberts, *Babes in the Wild* (London: Cassel, 1912), pp. 140-54.
- 11 A. A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*, illustrated by E. H. Shepard (London: Methuen, 1925), p. 9. (The book was published in the same year by Dutton in New York and by McClelland & Stewart in Toronto.) This investigation was inspired by an earlier article in this journal by my Queen's colleague Dr Donald H. Akenson: "Winnie-the-Pooh and the Jesus Seminar," *Queen's Quarterly*, 104/4 (Winter 1997), 645-58.

Isn't it funny  
How a bear likes honey?  
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!  
I wonder why he does?



“It’s a very funny thing,”  
said Bear,  
“but there seem to be *two* animals now.”  
*Winnie-the-Pooh*