

Cocks, G. (1977). A. A. Milne: Sources of His Creativity. *Am. Imago*, 34:313-326.



(1977). *American Imago*, 34:313-326

A. A. Milne: Sources of His Creativity*

Geoffrey Cocks, Ph.D. 

A Victorian child, an Edwardian blade and a Georgian parent and writer, A. A. Milne was quite decidedly out of step with the leading twentieth-century figures in literature and the arts. The *Jugendstil* and *art nouveau* movements were crumbling away before the dark and imperious legions of expressionism; Eliot's *Wasteland* brooded over a new and disheartened Europe while Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound and Aldous Huxley strove to sweep away what were perceived as the flaccid banalities of nineteenth-century English mentality. In their ferocious wake, Milne bobbed happily along, his visions on gimbals, safely tucked away in the nursery and parlor. George Jean Nathan, the prominent theatrical critic, tendered a special disdain for Milne's offerings on the stage, plays reminiscent of Victorian "society dramas":

Mr. Milne has another weakness and that is what amounts at times almost to a girlish cuteness. In almost every one of his plays there come moments when he goes tootsie-wootsie to such a violent degree that it is all even his admirers can do to keep from jumping onto their seats and shouting, "Come on, now, baby, take that thumb out of your mouth!"¹

Milne was not by virtue of his novels, plays and essays, a great artist who touched a nerve deep within mankind through his creations. His inability and unwillingness to deal with human ambivalence, hatred and rage allowed him only the most superficial of characterizations and the most timid of social critiques. The restrained Victorian family environment which provided the inspiration for and content of Milne's art was reflected in his own character and intensified by his immersion

* This essay is a revised version of a paper presented to the Southern California Psychoanalytic Society on January 29, 1973 within an Interdisciplinary Seminar in Psychohistory under Professor Peter Loewenberg of the Department of History, University of California, Los Angeles.

¹ Judge vol. 96 (March 23, 1929), 20.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 313 -

in the past. As his son has noted, "My father's heart remained buttoned up all through his life."²

Milne was, however, unsurpassed in his ability to recapture the childhood experience itself. The famous cycle of *When We Were Very Young* (1924), *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), *Now We Are Six* (1927) and *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928) achieved such a high level of creativity and popularity because it emerged from the artistic response to his own childhood as relived through that of his son, Christopher Robin. Milne devotes fully one-third of his autobiography, *It's Too Late Now* (1939), to the years of his boyhood between 1882 and 1893. Christopher himself has confirmed that his father "wrote his autobiography because it gave him opportunity to return to his boyhood—a boyhood from which all his inspiration sprang."³

An inquiry into Milne's childhood as he himself recorded it and left trace of it throughout his writing must begin with this arresting statement in his autobiography: "When I was a child I neither experienced, nor felt the need of, that mother-love of which one reads so much, and over which I am supposed (so mistakenly) to have sentimentalized."⁴ One familiar with Milne's creations is naturally taken aback to read such a disclaimer. Are we to assume that his series of children's books were merely a device to attain the happiness he was denied as a child? Was his omnipresent humor and mild satire, benign as it appeared on the surface, constitutive of veiled aggression against his parents, particularly his mother, for an unhappy childhood? Does the course of Milne's childhood and adult life provide for yet another critique of the repressive nature of Victorian family and social life?

The answer to these questions must be no. Milne speaks so continuously of an idyllic childhood in his autobiography and all his works are so suffused with positive affect as to allow no room for speculation about maladjustment or trauma. Milne was not an overly outgoing or warm person, but this is not necessarily indicative of defense against massive unconscious

² Christopher Milne, *The Enchanted Places* (New York: 1975), 103.

³ Christopher Milne, *The Enchanted Places* (New York: 1975), 158.

⁴ *Autobiography* (New York: 1939), 37-8.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 314 -

hostility. The jealous harboring of a closed universe was symptomatic of a pampered yet emotionally restrained upbringing in keeping with a middle-class Victorian home and the nature of his creative bent. But then is Milne's creativity to be explained simply as the contented expression of a comfortable childhood, as mere nostalgia? No. An analysis of Milne's creative gifts reveals a deep and abiding motivation stemming from his early infantile and childhood relationship with his mother as well as sibling rivalry with his elder brother Kenneth

John.

Alan Alexander Milne was born on January 18, 1882 in London at Henley House, a private school for boys run by his father, John Vine Milne. His father was the son of a Presbyterian missionary while his mother, Sarah Maria, came from "peasant stock." In Milne's eyes, his father was beloved and intelligent, but shy, earning affection as well as respect from his children, while his mother was a strong, managerial figure. She is rendered in the autobiography as somewhat affectless, wise, cool and aloof. But it is not sufficient to be content that Milne's relationship with his parents can be gleaned from his conscious recollections alone. Every element of his childhood biography and later life points inferentially to a more substantial relationship with his mother, involving the very first months of life when the mother alone constitutes the baby's world. There is evidence to suggest that Milne's mother desired a girl after giving birth to two sons, Barry (1878) and Ken (1880). Milne grumbles in his autobiography about the Little Lord Fauntleroy outfit he was occasionally required to wear and the curls he sported until age eleven, saying it was something his father conceded to his mother. But the deeper significance of his mother's character and desire in this respect does not escape Milne:

If I were a psycho-analytical critic, and I thought that this Edwardian writer Milne were worth one of my portentous volumes, I should ascribe everything which he had done and failed to do, his personality as revealed in his books and hidden in himself, to the consciousness implanted in him as a child that he was struggling against the wrong

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 315 -

make-up. There was a music-hall song of those days whose refrain was the simple exhortation: 'Get your hair cut!' It is possible that an accidental sight of me inspired it. It is also possible that my mother's need of the reminder inspired, for better or worse, much of my life.⁵

Throughout all of A. A. Milne's creations, the motif of a strong, giving female surfaces and resurfaces. These figures are not castrating tyrants; they are molded in soft shades and are lightly curvaceous, not angular. Such actresses as Ethel Barrymore and Irene Vanbrugh gave these women a stature which transcended Milne's airy epigrammatic style, but the women are still often silly and fatuous though always loving and forgiving. Even the scheming Countess Belvane in his play, *Once on a Time* (1917), a role originally to have been played by Milne's wife and collaborator Daphne, is in the end vindicated, her apparent larceny merely a vehicle for her sentimental largesse toward the common people of the kingdom. Her virtues are praised in a servant's comparison of her and the king:

"I know an old gentleman who bowls every evening. He trundles his skip (or whatever he calls it) to one end of the green, toddles after it, and trundles it back again. Think of him for a moment, and then think of Belvane on her cream-white palfrey tossing a bag of gold to right of her and flinging a bag of gold to left of her, as she rides through the cheering crowds..."⁶

The childlike movements of the king ("trundle", "toddle") as opposed to the benign and majestic figure of Belvane suggest a mother-son relationship with the mother generously dispensing her riches ("on her cream-white palfrey tossing a bag of gold") and maternal favor.

Milne's male characters are good "sons" to their women. Figures such as Belinda Tremayne in *Belinda* (1917), Lady Pembury in *The Stepmother* (1919) and Olivia Marden in *Mr. Pim Passes By* (1920) are each the axis around which plots

⁵ *Autobiography* (New York: 1939), 27.

⁶ *Once on a Time* (London: 1917), 78.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 316 -

revolve and the eye about which many petty male storms twist and whirl. Quite often a woman is the object of two men's claims. Women are omnipresent and in the ascendant:

Most of Milne's heroes are silken and effete, if not effeminate. A languor pervades them, the mark of the Wildan esthete, the dilettante. Men of perception instead of action, they adore rather than rival the women who stride, goddess-like among them. Because the women are strong, compelling, and worthy of admiration, the men must sacrifice a measure of their masculinity and become satellites, subordinates, sycophants, eunuchs to the Mother Goddess.⁷

The representation of Milne's parents is very clear: the strong mother and a kindly, retiring father. The image of his parents persists throughout his works with the number of characters named John, Mary or Sarah or having names beginning with the appropriate letters.

Milne's art, however, is not just representation, but a creative process linked to the most intimate detailing of his childhood, a process that makes artistic representation possible. Phyllis Greenacre has spoken of the "family romance" of the artist as based on a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to sensory stimulation and the symbolic interconnections among stimuli within the family group as well as a deep range of empathy and viability of expressive and projective mechanisms.⁸ The artist is not necessarily or essentially narcissistic, responding to instinctual needs only on the basis of self-gratification; the work of art is as much a gift as a balm. In Milne's case, art as a sublimation of psychological conflict centered around the act of reparation (Klein) as a result of guilt over unconscious fantasies of harm wished against the mother or parent-image. His creativity thus manifested itself in the symbolization of

⁷ Thomas Burnett Swann, *A. A. Milne* (New York: 1971). 107.

⁸ Greenacre, "The Family Romance of the Artist," (1958) in *Emotional Growth*, N. Y. 1971, Vol. 2, p. 107. Greenacre goes on to say that a sustained interest in the creative potential of the child on the part of one or both of the parents is an indication and encouragement of a "creative destiny." Milne notes in his autobiography that his father "realized that his youngest son was Destined (under Providence) for Great Things ..." (44).

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 317 -

his own childhood and thereby drew the limits of his artistic abilities. Milne's dedication of *The House at Pooh Corner* to his wife suggests the deeply reciprocal and exclusive nature of the reparative love relationship that stems from infantile ambivalence and reaches back into the past to comfort both mother and child:

You gave me Christopher Robin, and then
 You breathed new life in Pooh.
 Whatever of each has left my pen
 Goes homing back to you.
 My book is ready, and comes to greet
 The mother it longs to see—
 It would be my present to you, my sweet,
 If it weren't your gift to me.⁹

Here is the mother who gives the gift of life, nourishes and protects her child in his total helplessness and dependence upon her. The juxtaposition of the creative instrument ("pen"), its orientation ("homing back to you") and reparative whole ("My book is ready, and comes to greet") with the image of the mother elaborates the effect of the reciprocity sentiment in the last two lines.

Milne is therefore quite correct to place such importance on his "struggle against the wrong make-up." The infantile phases through which he passed were reinforced and imparted a peculiar cast by his position within the family, his mother's attitude toward him and his cultural and historical context. Milne's guilt as an infant over the ambivalence inherent in the depressive position of infancy must have been exacerbated by weaning, which usually takes place around the age of nine months. As the youngest child, favored and beautiful, this separation from the mother must have seemed all the more onerous. This separation and its incumbent anxiety were most probably repeated during the next few years with the coming and going of governesses Milne records in the autobiography. His desire to provide his mother with the girl she had always wanted as reparation for this early ambivalence and as preservative of his treasured childhood to a great extent lay behind

⁹ *The House at Pooh Corner* (New York: 1950), vii.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 318 -

his love for his wife. In giving her a child he was providing another love gift or reparation for the internalized figure of his mother. We may carry this theme further when we discover it was Milne's fondest wish that he sire a little girl,¹⁰ a wished-for fulfillment of his mother's desire and another feminine object upon whom he could shower affection. He had planned to name his child Rosemary, but whether or not he and his wife desired a second child is not known. Milne, at any rate, subsequently "adopted" Christopher Robin's closest friend, Anne Darlington, dedicated *Now We Are Six* to her and immortalized her in "Buttercup Days." Christopher and Anne radiated a "closeness that extended to my parents, for Anne was and remained to her death the Rosemary I wasn't."¹¹ Christopher Robin himself was outfitted in girlish clothes and wore long hair, just like his father who now acceded to his wife's preferences as part of the reparation pattern toward his mother, the happy recollections of his childhood and a cultural heritage that indulged the "angelic" nature of little girls. Furthermore, Milne dedicated his *First Plays* (1919) to his mother and in a collection of short stories published shortly before his death, he characteristically addressed the volume to a feminine readership. Milne also claimed that it was his wife whose idea it was in the first place to bring their son's nursery to life and a female editor, Rose Fyleman, who encouraged him to write children's verses; throughout his life he continued pleasing and praising the women who inspired him.

There is another factor, however, that intrudes sharply into the infant's life and that is the oedipus complex which, according to Klein, begins developing during pregenital life and involves the infant's first dim awareness of the oedipal triad which he attempts to deal with through essentially oral-incorporative modes. The mother seems to possess everything the infant wants; she withholds pleasure and is a rival to the infant's desire for the father. All this frustration leads to increased aggression and guilt. But here Greenacre's hypothesis that a gifted or creative child is more sensitive to stimuli

¹⁰ "The World of Pooh Lives On," *Life*, vol. 40 (February 27, 1956), 119.

¹¹ C. Milne, 23.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 319 -

around him and that from the earliest years can escape with wonder into a world of "collective alternates"¹² becomes relevant to Milne's artistic development. At given crisis points, when demands remain unsatisfied, the infantile paradise is crumbling and the uncertainties of the oedipal complex emerge, a gifted infant will, instead of embracing manic denial as a neurotic response, flee to the solace of "collective

alternates,” seeking in creative idealization release from anger and guilt. Greenacre warns that these concepts are tentative, perhaps only metaphorical, but in Milne's writings we can discover traces of an oedipal-sibling complex, which was symbolized artistically in the figure of his elder brother Ken. He envied his brother for the love Milne imagined him to have received from his mother and, as the youngest, successfully strove to overcome his brother's advantage, a confrontation into which the classic oedipal conflict with his shy, beloved father was swept along. Thus, two “collective alternates” appear in A. A. Milne's works: the strong giving female and the oedipal-sibling motif involving the united symbol of his brother and father. The reparative desires which emerge from depressive anxieties merge with this almost ineffable ability of the creative child to symbolize and desexualize conflicts and thus mitigate their effect. Greenacre also notes that a good relationship with parents, especially the post-oedipal father, will spur creativity, a relationship Milne in fact enjoyed.

If the child is successful in mastering the crises of the first five or six years, he maintains a store of libidinal energy which is available for the actual forging of artistic symbols during latency. If the child lacks what Greenacre calls the “inherent gift” of creativity, such a flowering of creative ability will survive the storms of puberty only as hobbies or avocations. For Milne, the span of years from age six to age eleven proved fertile ground for artistic symbolization. The two boys (less than two years apart in age) took long walks together, exploiting a child's newly found initiative to the fullest. Two symbols came to represent Milne's flight from ambivalence and toward reparation and creative idealization: the number six and the theme of overeating. Milne had inherited a facility

¹² Greenacre, “The Childhood of the Artist,” (1957) in *Emotional Growth*, Vol. 2, p. 485ff.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 320 -

for numbers from his father and his interest in mathematics continued throughout his life. It has been hypothesized, moreover, that a concern with even numbers may betray ambivalent attitudes towards the mother.¹³ The number six is also crucially related to the oedipal content of Milne's relationship with Ken. For example, in the poem “A Thought” from *Now We Are Six* these elements are clearly present:

If I were John and John were Me
Then he'd be six and I'd be three.
If John were Me and I were John,
I shouldn't have these trousers on.¹⁴

Here we see the reversal of roles, the restoration and exaggeration in age differential of the real-life relationship of sibling terms (“Then he'd be six and I'd be three”), the overt oedipal imagery (“trousers on”) and the recognition in the last line of guilt over the whole poetic process of this reversal. The age of six is also viewed as a high and neutral ground between the infantile “neurosis” of the first five years and the waning of childhood during the next five.

The theme of overeating, besides being a recreation of his early demands upon his mother, in terms of its selective representation served as a device “validating” the flight from the mother-image and symbolizing the denial of anxiety raised by ambivalence. That is, if Milne recalls overacting, it is as a symbol of the denial he was attempting to act out during a childhood that built upon his mother's Victorian physical aloofness and the mediation of successive governesses: a denial of the presence of the mother as well as justification for his flight (“she would not feed me”) and thus an escape from the consequent guilt over ambivalence and fear of dependence upon the mother. The first mention of this practice in the autobiography comes when Milne speaks of the summer holidays, the earliest he can remember at Cobham in Kent in 1888. He was six. This particular one was marred by illness which, according to Milne, stemmed from overeating. Indeed,

¹³ Harold Jeffreys, “The Unconscious Significance of Numbers,” *Int. J. Psycho-Anal.* 17 (1936), 223.

¹⁴ *Now We Are Six* (New York: 1950), 69.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 321 -

Milne's very first appearance in print (in a local newspaper in 1890) concerns a walking tour of his and Ken's in which oral indulgence, significantly, is coupled with independent ambulatory initiative:

We walked to Edenbridge, six miles, and drank out of a pump—and while we were drinking a girl came to us and told us we were drinking river-water, so we went into a shop and bought some ginger beer. After we had had a good drink we walked to Hever.... When we got to Hever, a distance of nine miles, we had a good dinner. While we were waiting for dinner we went over Hever Church and Castle, where Queen Anne Boleyn was born. We then had a lovely dinner of ham and eggs. Afterwards we went two miles across some fields, and ate some lovely nuts, and then into a road which led to Chiding Stone. When we got there we bought some biscuits and ginger-beer, and went on the Stone and ate them. Then we walked to Cowden. On the road we met a gentleman who showed us the way (he himself was going to the Isle of Wight). He left us at Cowden, and here we hoped to have a rest. When we got there we found there was no room at the inn! We then hurried away to the station a mile off, and took train to Tunbridge Wells. Here we found a lovely hotel called “Carlton Hotel”; we had a tremendous tea of ham and eggs, after a grand wash and then went to bed. It was nineteen miles walk that day altogether.¹⁶

In 1930 there appeared a short work for limited publication entitled *When I Was Very Young*, a wistful portrayal of the brothers' early

years together. In this piece Ken is named John, again indicative of one element in his symbolic stature. In this slim work Milne relates an oral fantasy he and Ken had when Alan was six. They would wake up one morning and find everyone in the world dead. Hurrying down to the candy shop, they would gorge themselves on sweets. It is revealing that E. H. Shepard's drawing of this scene shows a dead woman

¹⁵ *Autobiography*, 79.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 322 -

in the door of the candy store, particularly since Milne habitually discussed with Shepard the form and content of the drawings to accompany his texts. This entire fantasy is decidedly oedipal and incorporates Milne's oral demands and distress at weaning, for all of which Ken (John) evolved as a rival, an escape and a symbol.¹⁶

Finally, in the introduction to the first of his famous works for children Milne united these maternal symbols, his eating validation and the imagery associated with the number six: "Well, I should have told you that there are six cows who come down to Pooh's lake every afternoon to drink..."¹⁷ This orality was further expressed in Milne's depiction and animation of bears in his children's stories. Bears are a symbol for the good mother and also the good parents who in the depressive phase are conceived of as one and the same and introjected as such. The oedipal component, as we have seen, is at work as well and the child must deal with his aggressive impulses toward the early oedipal couple. In the autobiography, on the first page Ken is to be turned into a "two-headed bear," symbolic of his dual role as an oedipal symbol representing himself and also the united oedipal couple of infancy. The bear's symbolic importance is pointed up in the poem "Lines and Squares":

Whenever I walk in a London street,
I'm ever so careful to watch my feet;
And I keep in the squares,
And the masses of bears,
Who wait at the corners all ready to eat
The sillies who tread on the lines of the street
Go back to their lairs...¹⁸

¹⁶ Milne's oral demands received reinforcement from his childhood environment. Greenacre maintains that during the Victorian era sibling rivalry was expressed by food preferences and privileges. See Greenacre, Swift and Carroll: *A Psychoanalytic Study of Two Lives* (London: 1955), 173-4. The Victorian age's treatment of childhood also literally burst with oral imagery. Cf. Nina Auerbach, "Alice and Wonderland: A Curious Child," and Albert Wertheim, "Childhood in John Leech's 'Pictures of Life and Character'" *Victorian Studies* 17 (1973), 44 & 79.

¹⁷ *When We Were Very Young* (New York: 1928), ix.

¹⁸ It seems that the unconscious sexual imagery of the epigrams "Step on a crack, break your mother's back" and "Step on a line, break your father's spine" is suggestive here. "Crack" suggests the female sexual organ, while "line" has a solid, intrusive, phallic nature to it. The breaking of backs and spines is oedipal with all the incumbent fear, hence obsessive prohibition. On bears, cf. "Teddy Bear" in *When We Were Very Young*, 85-9, "Miss Waterlow in Bed" in *A Gallery of Children* (Philadelphia: 1925), 39-40, and "Furry Bear" in *Now We Are Six*, 47.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

- 323 -

By stepping in the squares the child is repressing through an obsessional exercise aggressive feelings (and still possessing the mother) which would result in his being eaten by the bears. This fear of being eaten is in turn a projection of his own desires to orally devour the unified parent-couple as symbolized by the bears.

There is scant unhappiness, though, in Milne's works. A malevolent Woozle is hinted at but never confronted and a Heffalump is tracked but never captured. The internal valence emotionally of these works remains overwhelmingly positive. When Christopher Robin must say goodbye to his animals and takes Pooh up to the top of the forest at Galleons Lap, this is the enchanted part of the wood, a place where there are "sixty-something trees in a circle" and where "a little boy and his Bear will always be playing."¹⁹ The feminine imagery (Lap), the use of the number six, the holistic-incorporative and phallic nature of trees in a circle and the boy alone with his bear are striking metaphorical expressions of the reparation to the maternal figure that so dominated Milne's life and of the solitary and wistful nature of his art.

On May 21, 1929 Kenneth John Milne died. He had been taken ill in late 1924 and forced to retire from the civil service. During his brother's illness from 1924 to 1929, Milne's children's works were in part an attempt to deny the pain he felt because of his triumphs over Ken. (Above all, Ken had hoped to be the writer of the family.) The references to Alan's and Ken's childhood together are many. The image of Kenneth John Milne (and through him John Vine Milne) is brought out to a great degree by the plethora of "J's," as in "The Christening" (John, Jack, James and Jim), "Happiness" (John), "Jonathan Jo," "Disobedience" (James James Morrison's Mother, King John), "King John's Christmas," "A Thought" and the race between two raindrops, John ("he's

¹⁹ *The House at Pooh Corner*, 177, 178.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

the one I want to win”) and James, in “Waiting at the Window.” Milne's books in this cycle, therefore, are also an unconscious attempt, at least in part, to buttress the internalized image of his brother and his attendant symbols against the impending loss of the external object as well as an outright expression of early loss, pain and denial.

That same year Christopher Robin left for school. Milne was finished with writing children's books and the year of the Great Depression marked the beginning of a steady decline in Milne's literary fortunes. In 1929 he wrote the first of a series of memorial works to Ken, a play entitled *Michael and Mary*. The publication of *When I Was Very Young* the next year and the autobiography, dedicated to Ken (“who bore the worst of me and made the best of me”), at the end of the decade completed the memorial triad to Ken and the symbols he embodied. This mourning for his brother represented by these works indicate a depressive reaction to the fact of Ken's defeat and death that was to persist until Milne's death in 1956. In September and October of 1952 Milne suffered a severe illness that left him in serious condition for over three months until his recovery from a major operation in January, 1953. In February, 1954 he underwent brain surgery which left him partially paralyzed and unable to walk. He also suffered an attack of pneumonia but had improved greatly by late March, 1954. He died on January 31, 1956. It is possible here that we are dealing with an anniversary reaction,²⁰ for Milne lived until just after his birthday in the fourth year after his first serious illness. This could constitute a recreation of his brother's own four-year-long illness, ending with his death.

Milne also attempted during the 1930s to recapture some of the old style. This effort included two three-act plays which reached as far back as possible to try to rekindle his creative spirit and to recapture his Victorian muse. *Miss Elizabeth Bennett* (1936) was an adaptation of Jane Austen's Regency novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, concerning the courtship practices of English society from a woman's point of view and recalling in Mrs. Bennett his own mother's role as a teacher

²⁰ George H. Pollock, “Anniversary Reactions, Trauma and Mourning,” *Psychoanal. Q.* 39 (1970), 347-72.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

of young girls. *Sarah Simple* (1937) engaged the “return” motif so dear to Milne, only this time it concerns a man and a long-lost wife who returns to claim him, a turnaround indicative of the symbolic losses of 1929. Tellingly, the women are named Sarah and Marianne. But the image of his mother was fading, as expressed in his novel of 1946, *Chloe Marr*, a *femme fatale* who, though central, is perceived only through the eyes of her lovers and remains a hovering, veiled enigma until she is killed with a new lover in an air crash. At the height of his creativity, however, Milne's visions, though swaying in the gusts and currents of the twentieth century, remained lovingly fixed on his childhood. This was not simply nostalgia, but a deeply creative process born of Milne's early unconscious perceptions of his world. As he wrote wistfully in 1929,

Life's morning radiance hath not left the hills,
Her dew is on the flowers. Those were the days...²¹

²¹ *Those Were the Days* (New York: 1929), v.

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the PEPWeb subscriber and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form.

Article Citation

Cocks, G. (1977). A. A. Milne: Sources of His Creativity*. *Amer. Imago*, 34:313-326

WARNING! This text is printed for the personal use of the subscriber to PEP Web and is copyright to the Journal in which it originally appeared. It is illegal to copy, distribute or circulate it in any form whatsoever.