Re-Imagining the World Through
Popular Poetry Set in Motion
by the Ultimate Signalling Officer
Alan Alexander Milne

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Abstract

Alan Alexander Milne’s authorship was never limited to being the author of the very beloved teddy-bear, far from it. In addition to being a successful playwrite and editing *Punch*, Milne also wrote several poetry collections which all have been out of print since the 1940s in the entire English-speaking world. His war poetry and social engagement reached far beyond the Bloomsbury group of influential authors and thinkers in the early 20th Century. Milne was a liberal, in terms of what the term denoted in the early 20th century, notably, that is, *not* in the way we perceive the term today, in the 21st Century. As a perhaps eerie echo of the occurrences from a Century ago Milne’s political poetry will be set in motion again; his poetry reflects times of distress and global political unrest. And, in Milne’s own phrasing, ‘it’s a silly thing to say’, Milne’s poetry pinpoints the ever-present core issues of the inner and external struggles of humanity and individuals. Milne believed in Freedom and liberalism as he knew *it in his* days, but he also saw what happened when these values were under threat of being sacrificed and lost. Despite all darkness and despair in the early 20th Century, Milne’s focus as a poet was to bring joy and laughter to people, and he chose to do so with poetry, in popular verse, -a bold move in a world where not even courageous people always had someone to voice their situation and their daily struggles. Milne’s poetry is in many aspects the story of the every-day hero, and the ordinary person, yet his depictions of the human struggles is unique and heartfelt. The main focus of this essay is the ways in which Milne’s idea of liberalism effect his poems in portraying serious political topics through the medium of popular verse with its direct relationship to defining and exploring multitude within every word. For the multi-talented Milne his idea of liberalism revolves around Four Freedoms; freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of religion, and freedom of expression. Without further delay it is time to bring back into the sphere of well-known (war-)poets from the early 20th Century, the liberal humourist and pacifist war-poet Milne.

Search words
20th Century war-poets, Alan Alexander Milne, Winnie-the-pooh, The Great War, soldiers, pacifism,
Introduction

Alan Alexander Milne was a pacifist and liberal ahead of his time. This essay investigates Milne’s poems as an expression of his liberal standpoint; in terms of his political engagement and vision of peaceful international co-existence, and the social relationships between the political public sphere and the individual citizens’ relationship to their social role concerning the concept of ‘honor’. In the early 20th century ‘liberalism’ was considered to be the perpetuation of the imagination that Fascism and Communism are equally evil (Thwaite 461). For Milne, liberalism revolves around Four Freedoms; freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of religion, [and] freedom of expression” (‘The Casablanca Meeting’). The main focus of this essay will be; In what way does Milne’s idea of liberalism effect his poems? How do Milne approach and portray serious political topics? What is the significance of using the medium of popular verse? And, what are the relationships between popular verse and how Milne uses it in order to define and explore the multitude embedded within every word of his plays? It is time to bring back into the sphere of well-known (war-)poets from the early 1900s, the liberal humorist and pacifist poet Milne. This essay will approach Milne’s poetry from the perspective of New Historicism. Historicism and the definition of “the word ‘historicism’, really represents a significant extension of the empire of literary studies, for it entails intensive ‘close reading’, in the literary-critical manner, of non-literary texts” (Barry 179-180). This analysis begins with a background of Milne’s life, followed by Milne’s perspective on peace and war through the concept of honor. This is followed by an analysis of Milne’s poetry via Behind the Lines (1940) and The Norman Church (1948); two of Milne’s less well-familiarized poetry collections.

Background

Milne described himself as becoming a liberal. Milne’s background story begins with Milne’s self-confidence and optimistic outlook in exploring possibilities as the youngest (of three) sons of the teacher/headmaster at Henley House. Milne’s education and approach to life was influenced by his father’s optimism and antagonism to physical punishment. This outlook followed Milne in life into the pacifist perspective that “war is wrong” expressed in Milne’s Peace. Milne’s biographer Ann Thwaite describes Milne as always attempting to be a good man. However, that ‘real goodness’ did not necessarily consist of ‘Victorian Virtues’ (Thwaite 203). Pacifism in the early 20th century Britain were seen as oppositional to patriotism. Milne trained to become a Signalling Officer during the Great War and after returning from Sommes with trench fever in 1916, stayed in the War Office and educated Signalling Officers while he focused on writing books, plays, articles and poetry in his spare time.
Milne’s engagement in politics and his idea of liberalism is one which includes democratic freedom for all, not merely for the few. Liberalism, to Milne, seems to be the freedom of making one’s own decisions and includes what he describes in a letter to the editor of the *Times* as his wish for all people “to enjoy the Four Freedoms: freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of religion, [and] freedom of expression” (Milne, ‘The Casablanca Meeting’). In another correspondence to the editor of the *Times* Milne writes:

> The distinction which I was trying to draw was between the motives of a Government and the motives of a people: and I suggested that, whatever a democratic Government’s motives for war, the surest appeal to a free people was not to their self-interest but to their chivalry” (‘America's Motives’).

Milne’s engagement for ‘chivalry’ and the welfare of the individual is evident in his letter, and in his poetry. When writing this letter Milne had already written to the editor in November 1939 concerning señor Madariaga’s “request for a short Table of Commandments by which the new world shall be governed” (‘Peace Aims’) which he considered an irresistible, ‘impertinent’ and yet an ‘stimulating exercise’ (ibid.) challenge due to the difficulties in attempting to construct such a table (ibid).

According to Milne’s letter to the *Times* any such table would have to include:

(1) The function of Man is the development of his spiritual nature by the exercise of such virtues: the creation of such beauty: the pursuit of such knowledge: and the enjoyment of such happiness: as lie within his power. (2) The function of the State is the encouragement and reconciliation of the different means by which each individual member of the State seeks to attain his object. The State exists for the benefit of Man, not Man for the benefit of the State. (3) The individual shall have complete liberty of thought, and shall not be under any compulsion to conceal his own opinions or accept the ideology of others. (…) (6) Justice between individuals in the State, or between the individual and the Government of the State, shall not depend upon material or physical authority, but only upon the justice of the cause between them (‘Peace Aims’).

Milne’s idea of liberalism and his connection to social ‘commandments’ here, reflects his argumentation in *Peace*, and in *War*. Milne’s social connections went as high as to the secretary of the Prime Minister, and his articles and poems reached far beyond the circles of London. And, thus, Milne’s social influence reaches his contemporaries in various forms. Milne’s texts are in line with the independence and personal freedom which he sought in all aspects of his life; from his effort in pursuing a career as an independent writer, to his position in the Great War, where his sense of
pacifism and liberalism lead him to becoming a Signalling Officer and educator; which allowed him more freedom *not* to kill anyone and included the freedom of flexibility in his whereabouts.

At the core of Milne’s advocacy lies the core-issue to (re-)think the aspects of nostalgia and mythology embedded within all aspects of defining the world in terms of ideas and ideals which permeate and materialize in society. That is, how people think and act from their convictions according to perceptions based on how to define and relate to concepts. This in a world where both technological progress and ideology shifts and effects the meaning embedded in definitions and estimating value from practices and commonly held ideals and ideas. Milne’s conversion in thinking occurred gradually with the experiences he gained from his success and failure in finding his way into becoming a professional writer, and from his experiences during the Great War; with the technological shift in warfare which he implored people to start *thinking* about. Milne describes the mythologic associations people still held to old-time poetic heroism at great battlefield of the past with its one-to-one-man battles with the imagery of the soldier who had been gifted a chain mail for protection by his parents, in a war which pulverized battalions with distance missiles as described by Milne in *Peace*. Milne also did a great deal of thinking especially about the difference and, to him, (the problematic) connections between politics and the Church of England, the Norman Church and further to its relationship to patriotism and, at times, to jingoism. In his childhood Milne was encouraged to *think*, whereas at Westminster students were commanded *not* to think (Thwaite 56). In contrast to this, in his adult life, Milne advocated thinking and continually re-evaluating and re-defining the world. Crucially, Milne implored people to update their mindset and consider the difference brought by the technical progress in lethal mass-destruction weapons about warfare and its effect on the concept of Peace. Milne went from being an optimistic humorist before the Great War into a reflexive mode of seriousness which clashed with the general preference of escapism in entertainment which developed in the 1930s. The ‘war to end all wars’ had come to an armistice and the aspect of bringing ten million lost soldiers into the sphere of mythologic nostalgia of old-time war-heroes prevented the critics and the public from accepting Milne’s attempts to convey that warfare had entered another, and hitherto unknown, dimension in its destructive capacities. Milne’s approach to warfare may not have been entirely unique, but the way in which he used popular verse to convey his message was. In *Peace* Milne is also pinpointing the ridiculous aspect of attempting to go backwards in history into the future and in addition to doing so, also doing so without understanding the crucial role of recognizing the fundamental role of the complexity of the tragi-comical. In portraying these aspects Milne often found himself at odds with the critics of his time, who expected an editor and a “children’s writer” to keep to his genre. To illustrate the exact breaking point where tragedy passes into comedy from its own weight and the absurdity of madness beyond belief. Milne saw the seriousness which constitutes the foundation of humor as vital to really *think* about and describe the world and express those ideas in poetry to bring them into the physical world redefined and updated in order to be in line with progress of modern society and technological progress. This approach is evident throughout *Peace*. But this is also evident in; “I mean to say, you have to laugh” (*Behind* 93) which describes the impossible situation of dealing with the roughness of the technological progress in warfare and the reluctance to
inform people what being provoked into action in modern warfare brings. Milne’s mission was to enable an understanding of the tension embedded within the individual conflict and strife of participating in warfare for the sake of peace, two notions which cannot easily be bridged. Milne’s cause in this was to signal that the advantages of technological progress bring this tension to the surface of the evil of forcing anyone’s soul into the finality of facing death for the sake of life, when despair is so tangible that fear makes people laugh with anxiety. In addition to this, and due to censorship during times of warfare, the elephant in the room, the unspoken thoughts still though, are expressed my Milne in ‘AN ALPHABET’ as;

“E is an Elephant. Don’t be inferring
It came by mistake : I was thinking of Goering”

(Milne, Behind, stanza 5, 5)

Here Milne’s playfulness with words is shining brightly, as if the elephant itself is standing there and is intruding into the poem such as animals has a tendency to do, whereas this portrayal of the movement of the elephant into the poem simultaneous is pinpointing the ever-presence of the thoughts of warfare marked in this stanza as the censorship about mentioning Goering, a name closely associated to everything which went unsaid at the time of WWII. By placing the elephant in the room in the middle of the poem in this way, Milne is emphasizing that mentioned, or not mentioning the elephant in the room, that ‘elephant’ has to be addressed and acknowledged in order to deal with the presence and come to terms with what that elephant is and what has to be done about it. However, sometimes merely acknowledging the presence of the elephant in the room, as a general common metaphor for what cannot be expressed in conversation is an aid to understand and gather individuals in a sense of a shared perspective, to not feel alone in a waste world of insecurities while waiting for news from the front lines. The comical aspect of this stanza is the accessibility I which the reader can imagining the author to gently try to push an elephant out of its place, which is an imagery which makes the stanza tangible and concrete through the playfulness represented in the imagery of a small human attempting to budge an elephant to move anywhere, this imagery is not merely including all ages and classes, it is also a timeless portrayal of the struggle one might envision with trying to persuade an elephant to move. It is also connecting the poem to the realm of entertaining and circus. This comical imagery stands in sharp contrast to the deeds of Goering and the complex associations for Milne’s contemporaries revolving the further associations to warfare and its terror, fear and grief,

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1 This poem follows the pattern of two lines with pairs of rhymes for each letter of the alphabet, with the exception of C where ‘crack’ stands alone on a third row and X where part of ‘under-ground’ has been placed partly a separate line, which also emphasizes the visual shift between something positioned in two different spheres or places. The tone is satirical, almost arrogant, yet the playful simple pattern of simple rhymes stands in stark contrast to the content of each short political punchline within the poem.
which all are aspects that are too broad a scope for this essay. Yet it is significantly crucial to mention the associative connection people had to the name Goering. Especially since it is expressing what Milne describes in ‘HOME SERVICE’ as;

“It’s Folly, not a Sin,
Week after week to listen in
To some unenterprising bore
Who tells you what you knew before”

(Behind, stanza four, 55)

In this stanza Milne’s role in presenting facts through poetry to the people is evident. These two examples above, along with Milne’s depiction of the folly to send thousands and thousands of soldiers to their death are described in his portrayal in Peace that no one would send thousands of ships of the size of Titanic (Milne 56-7) to suffer the same end claiming that shipwreck is the greatest quality of humanity (Peace 57). This is, Milne’s way to make it clear that warfare no longer can be compared to the old glorious battlefields heroic display of courage and bravery, that modern warfare, in fact, is a terrifying slaughter of soldiers, and a waste of life, due to the technological progress involved in WWII. In this horrible situation Milne is creating a safe haven for people where is equally accepted to cry or laugh about the extremely tense emotional situation that his readers were in, in a place of uncertainty not knowing exactly what to think or feel or believe in. Due to his position in the war, Milne’s advocacy is therefore one of pleading to people to renounce war (Peace 214) by creating and achieving an updated understanding of the technological progress in society and adapt the mindset to that new reality.

Milne’s engagement and argumentation concerning the concepts of pacifism and Liberalism, both in private and public spheres were also evident in his work as editor of the magazine Granta and later as assisting co-editor at Punch. One of Milne’s last contributions to Punch is his poem ‘The Last Pot’2 (Thwaite 189). This might appear as a trivial poem about the futile craving for marmalade, but it is not. Beneath the surface the poem is the threnody about the loss of sweetness, but not that of jam, but the loss and sacrifice of ‘a happy home’, ‘faith in experts’ and the loss of joyfulness. This reflects the sacrifices Milne sees in warfare, the loss of ‘home’, in a multi-layered meta-levelled sense of the definition of home. Additionally, with spacing between words, the word ‘Breakfast’ also alludes to ‘break fast’. Milne describes a sweetness (of jam), or life which has been broken into smitherens. Furthermore, the title is also associating to the concept of the last drop; the weariness of warfare.

2 Appendix
Milne’s interest for social issues and storytelling also leads him onto the path of becoming a playwright and an author of several books, which received an interest from a large audience.

Milne’s complete authorship and the extremely influential role he had to his contemporaries are too broad to be covered in full in an essay of this scope. Milne’s best-known work which has survived the passage of time is considered focused on the perspective of children. As so many testify, Milne conversed easily with children without patronizing them. Milne himself considered his work to be more in terms of enjoying or not enjoying his way of describing the world, rather than a matter of writing for any specific age group (Thwaite 169). However, Milne’s critics frequently (mis)interpreted his plays and texts as specifically written for children. Except for a few contemporary critics such as Herbert Farjeon who saw that even Milne’s play (‘Make-Believe’), which was compared to his friend’s Sir James Matthew Barrie’s play ‘Peter Pan’, were aimed at an adult audience in how it differed in the aspect of a children’s versus an adult’s perspective in terms of how “it makes fun of the things that children take seriously and it takes seriously (if very amusingly) the particular Christmas longing of the childless for children” (Thwaite 191). This too, exemplifies how embedded Milne’s authorship was, in the broadest sense of the term, within a liberal context of freedom of speech and freedom to think and make up one’s own mind of whether to enjoy it or not, regardless of any social class, age or gender-oriented categorization. In this respect Milne was truly liberal, in refusing to categorize people by any type of social ranking.

Milne’s authorship was compared to both Lewis Carroll (Thwaite 134-5) and to Oscar Wilde as being ‘brilliant’ (Thwaite 187). Milne’s authorship is described as not genre bound but more “within his own rules” (Thwaite 210) which makes it “unique and difficult to define” (Thwaite 135). This is due to Milne’s refusal to stagnate or conform to one specific genre. However, the critique Milne received also revolves the difficulty embedded within depicting the more serious aspects of life from the standpoint of being typecast as a humorist. Milne’s skill as an author and poet is his ability to effortlessly combine both.

In Milne’s poetry this complex co-existence is ever-present. In exploring that “we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry” (William Butler Yeates qtd. in Marjorie Perloff 238), it is necessary to consider the question; How does Milne’s idea of liberalism effect his poems in portraying serious political topics through the medium of popular verse with its direct relationship to defining and exploring multitude within every word. To Milne liberalism also permeates the way in which Milne considered punctuation rules to be optional, for instance Milne added extra spacings in his poems which both emphasizes the intended pause in rhythm and also distinguished his writing style as extremely liberal, also at the grammatical level. This is evident in the chosen poems in this essay, note that all punctuation is made by this liberty of visual impact in Milne’s writing, by applying this stylistic feature Milne is visually demonstrating this idea of liberalism and individual independence also on the actual printed pages of his poetry collections.
In *Peace* Milne is criticizing the idea that a nation rather than individuals can have ‘honor’. Milne defines ‘honor’ in the following way: “‘Honor’, says the dictionary, ‘is a fine sense of, and strict allegiance to, what is due and right.’ Wordsworth calls it ‘the finest sense of justice which the human mind can frame’” (*Peace* 13). Furthermore, Milne adds that; “[a]n honorable man, in fact, is he who carries in his heart some ideal of truth, of justice, of beauty which he values above all worldly advantage, and will not surrender even to Death itself” (*Peace* 14). Crucially, Milne states that; “[a] nation has no honor. No nation takes willingly the ‘risk of death’. No nation suffers all things rather than be false to the truth. No nation shows a strict allegiance to what is due and right. No nation follows right in scorn of consequence” (ibid. 14-5). Hence, to Milne, ‘honor’ is individual rather than national. Although, Milne reflects upon the individual decision on whether to accept the imagination of “Death rather than dishonor” (*Peace* 14), or not accepting this idea. That is, Milne is questioning to which extent and for which purposes honor is purposeful to individuals and what the binary opposition of this statement contains for the individual. Furthermore, Milne argues that;

[b]y derivation ‘prestige’ means ‘illusion’ or ‘imposture’, and we may find that national prestige is, indeed, no more than this; but for the moment I use the word in its transferred, and now generally accepted, sense of ‘reputation’. To miscall this prestige honor is to invoke all the deep spiritual associations of that word; to think of it as reputation is to invoke no associations, for the word has no essential meaning (*Peace* 21).

Thereby Milne explains how a perpetuating and patriotic narrative is created by the socially commonly held imagination of associating the concept of individual honor to battlefields with Romanticism notions, and he is linking it further to nationalism via national prestige in the early 20th century. Milne is pinpointing the deceptiveness of misleadingly mistaking reputation for ‘honor’. The individual within society has many social roles but Milne insists on the freedom to choose for the individual whether he or she can be forced into sacrificing life for the delusional commonly held idea of an idealized heroic Romantic knighthood-wrapped imagination of the identity of the individual. Milne renders the ‘essential meaning’ which individuals inescapably have to relate to socially, a mere hollow shell. Raymond Williams’ definitions of the concepts of “personality” (Williams 232-234) and being “popular” (ibid. 236-238) is essentially relevant to this reflectiveness of individual character and individual honor as always corresponding to social roles of individuals. Williams defines ‘personality’ as a set of “capacities [which] imply consciousness and thought” (232). Essentially, these ‘capacities’ concern; “the existence or individuality of any one” (Johnson qtd. in Williams 233). Milne’s choice to write convey his poetry in the form of popular verse enables an accessibility to his
poetry. An accessibility which also could be consider popularity amongst his contemporary readers. The term ‘popular’, on the other hand, derives from the legal and political (Latin) ‘popularis’, that is, belonging to the people (Williams 236). Williams also defines being ‘popular’ as being “well-liked” (237). Taken that personality is defined as “the general quality of being a person and not a thing” (Williams 233) include the liberty for individuals of independently making decisions concerning how and when to die, and (perhaps also) for which cause. Milne is arguing for this freedom to be superordinate both to the social role (theatre) of religion and to patriotism as an individual choice based on the liberty of the freedom of Democracy. Milne pinpoints the plea to what (hollow) purpose of presence do a national myth of the great heroic soldier’s death add value to those bereaved at a graveyard mourning the sanctity of life. That is, if the sanctified myth of legend is glorified as replacing life and living men. ‘Reputation’ represents to Milne the curtain falling between the futile void left by the social role actors leaving the stage as depicting the false imagination of commonly held myths. The myth concealing the ‘imposture’ illusion of warfare as ‘honorable’ and imprinted upon the individual under false pretense of individual ‘honor’.

The perceived self-image of the individual is closely connected to the mentioned realization of ‘reputation’ described by Milne, yet, ultimately, it concerns the complexity of the topic of the relevance of how realism and modernism are interrupting into the imagination of mythology and mysticism in Milne’s contemporary society. Milne address the topics as crucial in imagination and thus in the self-imagery of the British nation. Milne writes that;

Once more I beg you all to tear away the veil of sentimental mysticism through which you have looked at war, and try to see it as it really is. The words which you have associated with it for so many years: ‘victory’, ‘defeat’, ‘indemnities’, ‘non-combatants’; these words have now lost their meaning; just as the word war has lost its meaning. It is no longer war. It is something for which the word has not yet been invented, something as far removed from the Napoleonic Wars as they were from a boxing-match. This new thing which you are asked to renounce is a degradation which would soil the beasts, a lunacy which would shame the madhouse. In renouncing it, you will be renouncing nothing which History has accepted or Poetry idealized, nothing in which your countries have found profit or your countrymen glory (Peace 209-10).

Milne’s social position made him especially positioned to comment on his time. This compound of life and literature is ever-present in Milne’s popular verse and in his other texts which constantly converses with its social context. In this sense language is always reinterpreting and interrupting into the imagination of the social context. This social context constitutes the foundation for the reading-
process in which the individual reader imagines Milne’s poetry at an individual level and places his or her own existence within the framework of perceived recognition and familiarization.

Defining the term ‘war-poet’ as poets writing during warfare, Milne was a war-poet. Milne, as a (war-)poet and a writer with experiences of warfare himself concludes that “I felt that there was no escape from war until we discarded our old conventional thought about it and looked at it again from the beginning” (Peace 228). Milne stresses that “even after a war, the dispute which caused it still remains to be settled; and it is settled by an arbitral decision, even if the conqueror be the arbitrator” (ibid.). Milne’s conviction remains; “that death, destruction and misery should be avoided” (ibid.) inasmuch as Milne felt himself; “unable to contemplate without shame and horror the abyss of stupidity, dishonor and wickedness into which, under the stress of modern war, nations inevitably sink” (Peace 224-5). Thereby Milne argues that he accepted arbitration as his preferred solution before accepting any declaration of warfare. This, Milne argues; “is the theme of the book” (Peace 225

In the context of imagining the world and creating meaning through that imagination, Milne discusses the underlying layers of meaning embedded within words such as ‘Honor’. He depicts a multi-facetted, socio-cultural and religiously defined identity behind the word ‘honor’, but mostly he finds the constitution of ‘honor’ to be ‘Air’ (Peace 12-14). Furthermore, as mentioned above, Milne argues that a nation cannot possess any honor itself, because;

[a] nation has no honor. No nation takes willingly the ‘risk of death’. No nation suffers all things rather than be false to the truth. No nation shows a strict allegiance to what is due and right. No nation follows right in scorn of consequence. / For a nation has only one law: the Law of Self-Preservation and Self-Advantage. A nation recognizes only one God: Itself” (Peace 14-5).

Milne denotes that; “[o]ne of the difficulties of thinking clearly about anything is that it is almost impossible not to form our ideas in words which have some previous association for us; with the result that our thought is already shaped along certain lines before we have begun to follow it out” (Peace 12). He explores the concept of ‘Human Nature’ as ‘the instinct of life’, or denoting the ‘spiritual nature’ of man rather than necessarily animality (Peace 12-3). Milne concludes that; “in fact, all human life is, or should be, an attempt of the spiritual nature, which is man's alone, to overcome that animal nature which he shares with the beasts” (ibid). He also reflects that; “[i]n the days before the War, when it was the custom to deride certain pacifically minded men as the Peace-at-any-price Party, it would be emphasized proudly that the only peace which a Patriot could contemplate without repulsion was Peace with Honor” (Peace 13). Milne emphasizes that ‘human nature’ and ‘honor’ are
not necessarily inseparable, and thus that taking the ‘path less trodden’ could lead to another outcome than result in notions of “fight” (Peace 13). Milne is thus taking ‘the path less trodden’ by insisting upon pacifism in his authorship.

Milne’s insistence on imagining the world differently led him into social activism. In this effort Milne addresses the need to redefine society as such: “[i]t is not easy to awake the ordinary man to realities, for the last thing which he cares to surrender is his habit of thought” (Peace 122). Due to rapid and wide-ranging technological progress people had to become “air-minded” (ibid) and “speed-conscious” (ibid). Milne expresses the slow adaptation-rate to these changes in terms of realizing; only now, that roads designed for horse-drawn traffic are unfitted for motor traffic. With these developments in inter-communication, with the facilities of modern machinery, the work of the world can now be done in half the time which it used to take. But we shall be many more years before we adapt our philosophy of labour to these modern conditions (ibid).

Milne describes the military technology available as a ‘nightmare’ in which clashes between nations requires methods other than warfare due to the more globalized scale of politics (Peace 122-3). Milne describes a scenario where; “[o]nly a mind dulled by the rust of centuries can allow itself to think that war is human nature; that the only way of avoiding it is to prepare for it; and that when one has affirmed these two great principles one has no further responsibility for anything which happens” (Peace 123). Milne is requesting accountability. He stresses that the way of thinking about war must include the new technology and its effects too.

Milne expresses this liberal way of perceiving imagination best in poetry. Milne’s depiction of poetry is a metaphor of music wherein ‘rhythm’ is defined as;

a difficult-looking word, but what it means is just ‘the time that the verse keeps’. Every piece of poetry has a music of its own which it is humming to itself as it goes along, and every line, every word, in it has to keep time to this music. This is what makes it difficult to write poetry; because you can’t use any words in any order as long as its sense and grammar, but you have to use particular words in a particular order, so that they keep time to the music, and rhyme when you want them to. If you can find words which keep time to the music, and which are just the words you want to say, then the verses which you write are verses which sing themselves into people’s heads, and stay

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3 Referencing to Robert Frost’s poem ‘The Road Not Taken’.
there for ever, so that even when they are alone and unhappy they have this music with them for company” (Milne qtd. in Thwaite 248-9).

Poetry is inasmuch rendered ‘company’ as a remedy against loneliness in Milne’s definition. Poetry is that dance⁴, that connecting indescribable bond between individuals, or between the soul and words in creating meaningfulness. ‘Company’ also associatively concerns the concept of ‘honor’ as ‘reputation’, as discussed earlier. That is, the process within which individuals are finding those connecting linkages between themselves and others which constitutes a national identity which reinforces individual identity through the relationship of that companionship.

In Peace Milne is exploring the mingled perspective of church and patriotism through an imaginary conversation with a clergyman in which the topic of whether the Church of England has the structure, and, thereby, the possibility of ‘feeling insulted’ (Peace 71-2). Milne’s (imaginary) dialogue with a clergyman works as an exploration of “[t]he point where Christianity ends and Patriotism begins” (Peace 72-3). Milne’s message is assiduously repeating that “war is wrong” (Peace 8). In Milne’s words concerning the situation in the 1930s;

[t]he Prime Minister and Sir John Simon think that modern war is disastrous; I think that war is wrong. The Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury think that modern war is horrible; I think that war is wrong. Lord Beaverbrook and Lord Rothermere think that modern war puts too great a burden on the taxpayer; I think that war is wrong. In short, I think that war is a Bad Thing, and all these gentlemen, and millions like them, think that war is now become Much too Much of a Good Thing. (…) It may be said that, since we all want to end war, it does not greatly matter that we condemn it in different degrees and from differing motives. I think that the realization of these differences is of the first importance to the cause of Peace” (Peace 8-9).

Hence, Milne’s purpose with Peace is a wish for people to think about the idea of war through a moral lens and then renounce war. In Milne’s phrasing, “[i]f you want Peace, you must renounce the idea of War. If you do this, then the way to Peace is easy, and the vast majority of your people will follow you along it with thankfulness” (Peace 211). This approach is evident throughout Milne’s poetry which concerns the questions of human existence; that, at the core, he was expressing a pacifist resistance to violence, even though he had to announce in War with Honor that since the publication of Peace everything had to be filtered thorough as Milne puts it; "[i]f anybody reads Peace with Honor now, he must read it with that one word HITLER scrawled across every page." One man’s fanaticism has cancelled rational argument” (War 1940). The significant shift between Milne’s pacifist outlook and

⁴ See Appendix for Attridge’s exploration of the physical aspect of poetry.
his advocacy for international relations and national connections caused a rift between his liberal outlook and the new international political climate wherein the ‘Four Freedoms’, (that is; “freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of religion, [and] freedom of expression” (‘The Casablanca meeting’), which Milne focused his worldview upon, ceased to be respected as ‘universal truths’. Milne’s outlook promised the ideal of Sanctity of Life. Ultimately, it is Milne’s pacifist ideals which compels him into a defense of the foundation for democracy.

Despite that Milne’s authorship far exceeds being editor at *Punch* (once), it is evident that being typecasted as a humorist and editor, his poetry fell into oblivion due to his success with his plays, books and his nursery poetry collections about Winnie-the-pooh; *When We Were Very Young* and *Now We Are Six*. Notably, to receive such broad critique reflects the audience of Milne’s *Peace*, and his role in society. Milne’s consideration for every dot in completing his poems also include the aspect of humor, and his favorite expression ‘What a silly thing to say’ (Thwaite 133) as something to strive for, or rebel against. (Milne, *It’s Too Late Now* 81) Milne’s poems are always including all of these aspects in an intrinsic and harmonic relationship with rhymes and rhythms, which we will return to later on. These are all aspects of the concept of humor wherein the audiences’ individual relationship to Milne’s poetry has to be mediated during the times of warfare. Milne’s liberalism and pacifism is detected in his declamation against war, and this approach permeates his authorship, and is recognizable via the audience-response wherein he mirrors the contemporary political climate as a mediator of defining and redefining public and individual opinion.

War poetry and the definition of who was a ‘war poet’ during the early 20th century could, and (has been) classified in very different ways depending on who does the classifying. Lyon denotes that;

> the business of war poetry has often seemed to be closely related to telling stories, and relating histories, of wars. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some of the most popular military or battle verse often gave colourful accounts of specific episodes or heroic figures, (…) poets portrayed an image of conflict they had not themselves witnessed: before long, however, readers would be expecting their poets of war, or ‘soldier-poets’ to have come directly from the battlefield to the pen. The desire for a connection between war poetry and the ‘real experience of war is still very strong (1).

Although the British canon of war poetry has largely forgotten about Milne’s poetry, many of his poems are still highly relevant in their depiction of British society. During the first half of the 20th Century access to paper was limited, due to the war; although the printers continued to print books and people continued to read them; in the trenches and in the shelter rooms (Lyon 105). The good quality paper had to be used restrictively, Lyon describes the shortage of paper for publishing books

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5Appendix
during times of (105-6). In the light of this shortage of paper for printing books, it is notable that Milne’s poetry collections *For the Luncheon Interval* (1925), *Behind the Lines* (first published in 1940) and *The Norman Church* (first published in 1948), were all printed on the most high-quality paper available and the latter two were printed with proper paperbacks. Milne’s poetry collections, although printed in the best available paper quality, are surprisingly unadorned with the symbolism which Lyon describes as; “[a]lthough the [war poetry] anthology includes poetry addressing many different conflicts, it displays, as do many other volumes, the extent to which the narratives, symbols and poets of the First World War have come to set the terms of reference for the genre” (18-9). Yet, in Milne’s case the poems themselves are left to fully express the imagery and narratives themselves, without any aid of printed images such as poppies, which were a common depiction of symbolism in its multiple levels of interpretation. Milne’s poems reflect the emotional aspect of remembrance and acknowledges the sense of loss which society suffered in human lives through the beloved ones who never returned home without the physical visualization which poppies represents in the British society. Milne’s poems cover both the imagination of ‘Home’; the domestic sphere, and the life lived behind the lines of poetry in Milne’s contemporary society. This is what Milne explores in his poetry as a pacifist at heart who urged his contemporaries to think about warfare in a new way, instead of dwelling in ideas which glorified and heeded to the imaginations of past time mythologized warfare as a heroic testing of bravery and honor.

Budgen discusses whether the level of authenticity of actual experience of warfare in literary representations presented to children and to civilians required the element of being realistic, or whether anyone could write war-poetry as entertainment for civilians (23-4). Samuel Hynes argues that even ‘middle-aged ignorant civilian’ men could contribute to the genre of writing entertainingly about warfare (Hynes qtd. in Budgen 23). Yeats pinpoints the discussion about the distance-closeness level between war-poet and the narrative-subject as one wherein the self-reflexiveness of the real author cannot blur too closely with the poetic subject. (Yeats in Perloff 139). The role of the poet in the mind of the reader as narrator is a role which has been actively discussed over centuries. In Milne’s case it is the role of functioning as a decoder of the experiences of warfare. This is a significant difference between many war-poets and Milne’s poetry. Milne’s ability to render the horrifying aspects of warfare into a popular verse mode wherein the hardships of warfare is embedded within a more complex structure of the shifting modes and tones within any individual stands in

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6 In *Memoires* Siegfried Sassoon describes how “I had slipped a book into my haversack and it was a comfort to be carrying it, for Thomas Hardy’s England was between its covers. But if any familiar quotation was in my mind during the bustle of departure, it may well have been ‘we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out of it’” (Sassoon, Part Four, Battle [I]).

7 In all this multitude of layered meanings of the plant poppy the toxic quality of the plant as well as its beauty and its level of hallucination makes it a powerful symbol for all aspects of warfare. Its red colour is also significant in symbolism for the bloodshed fields of battle. Lyon describes the symbolism within the poppies and its ever-present influence in the British society as a continuity of re-imagining and perpetuating the mourning of the past through the death of soldiers who sacrificed their lives, which also constitutes the foundation for individual honor and sense of belonging today (22).
contrast to the heaviness of Wilfred Owen’s style and tone. The heaviness of Owen’s poetry and the tone, caused by the meter, is evoking the heaviness which Milne avoids in his active choice to express the reality of warfare through the lens of popular verse.

Moreover, Perloff describes Yeats’s poem ‘Easter, 1916’ as portraying “characters as actors playing out a script largely beyond their control, actors caught up in a street theatre in which their individual identities are subordinated to a larger communal drive” (Perloff qtd. in Kendall 232). This idea conveys the role of the poet as a self-reflexive observer who deals with linking these aspects of individuality and the sense of community in society back through the medium of poetry as a bridge of compassionate understanding of each other as connected and therefore not alone in individual existence. However, Yeats’s approach to the discussion about the closeness-distance scale for self-reflexiveness in poet’s approach to the narrative-subject within the poem is to Yeats a matter of avoiding to make the suffering their own (Perloff in Kendall 139). This balance between self-distancing oneself yet providing the reader with a sense of closeness is essentially what sets Milne’s method of working with popular verse apart from other war-poets in a unique way. Milne was not afraid of merging genres and herein lies his successfulness which also made his authorship a very popular one. Milne was the one everyone read, and hence his popularity might have ended up costing him the acknowledgment from the academic field, which heed to a clear separation between the canonicalized and academical, and the popular.

One of Milne’s more complex topics which he explores in popular verse is the complex interconnections between the concept of Death, and the lack of preparations for any returning soldiers into the British society. Lyon writes that; “the interest in war poetry as a source of humanitarian ideals or political protest coexisted with constructions of war poetry as a celebration of the heroic or nationalistic” (129). And, furthermore, Milne’s social criticism converges with Lyon’s depiction of Auden’s ideas about social class inasmuch as;

the virtues that the deceased [Yeats] praised in the peasantry and the aristocracy, and the vices he blamed in the commercial classes were real virtues and vices. To create a united and just society where the former are fostered and the latter cured is the task of the politician, not the poet (Auden qtd. in Lyon 87).

Crucially, Milne was within his authorship both poet and political, he was “above these rule-of-thumb maxims” (Thwaite 207). Milne was in public typecasted as a (‘mere”) humorist, although he himself refused to be typecasted and constantly demonstrated that he always was interested in attempting something new (Thwaite 210). Milne writes to his friend E.V. Lucas about his strife for something new.

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8 Wilfred Owens war-poetry is described as sharing the suffering of the soldiers (Harold Bloom, Poets of World War I 14). Owen’s war-poetry express patriotic soldiers’ duty and grim death in detail. This stands in stark contrast to Milne’s poetry which express the death of soldiers from a greater distance.
different; “[i]t has been my good fortune as a writer that what I have wanted to write has for the most
pan proved to be saleable. It has been my misfortune as a businessman that, when it has proved to be
extremely saleable, then I have not wanted to write it any more” (ibid). Milne’s talent for humor
seems misplaced after his post as a Signalling Officer at the Somme, where the audience expected
entertaining escapism, (Thwaite 199), Milne sought seriousness.

While there is nothing humorous about Death, the era inevitably concerned with warfare,
sufferings and loss also seeped into Milne’s poetry. To render the comical feature of depicting Death
comprehensible; death must be considered the oppositional difference to life, in a society where many
lived in an existence with the constant expectation of sudden death. Death is an inescapable part of
life and as such it is one of Milne’s themes in his political poetry and in his other publications. Milne’s
statement that “war is wrong” (Peace 8) mirrors the depictions of British society enlarge, and its
relationship to the many lives which ended. The returning soldiers with difficulties to re-adapt to
society is also a topic in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (pp.170-1, Appended). Death as
‘defiance’ and a way of escaping therapy from someone who cannot understand is described as
‘forcing your soul’ by Woolf, who describes death ‘as an attempt to communicate’ with a reference to
the poets and thinkers’ to describe how (warfare) ‘made life intolerable’. What later would become
classified as shellshock but before there were any real attempts to understand the state of mind of
those who have survived warfare, of those who had to force their souls first to commit warfare deeds
on demand, Milne already describes the resignation as;

[i]f in the last four years 10,000 Titanics in succession had struck icebergs and gone to
the bottom, each with a loss of a thousand lives, would any moderately sane person, in
excuse for doing nothing but build more Titanics and crash into more icebergs, utter the
complacent truth that all the greatest qualities of man come out in shipwreck? (Peace
56-7).

The soldiers who physically survived warfare awaited re-adaption to a society unequipped to
understand or help the returning soldiers. As a war-veteran himself, Milne’s perspective on warfare
enabled him to convey the struggles which returning soldiers faced in society, via his poetry. Milne
understood the significance of evoking laughter also among soldiers at the brink of death and despair.

Essentially, Milne was also able to use his social position, and his insights into the grim realities
caused by warfare, to aid charity foundations whose work benefitted individuals who in various ways
were affected by warfare. However, the reintegration of returning soldiers into society was not
socially prioritized, and returning soldier’s needs in order to readapt were often underestimated or
ignored. In a sense, soldiers returned to society as more dependent, and as more fragile than when

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9 Leonard Woolf was a personal friend of Milne according to Thwaite.
they left to the frontlines. Although, writing war-poetry might have had some therapeutic effect in dealing with the trauma for the returned soldiers, the purpose of war-poetry is as manifold as there were readers of this genre.

Crucially, the linchpin of Milne’s method of using popular verse in his poetry in depicting all aspects of warfare, and the impact poetry had upon his contemporaries enabled him to offer both to veterans and to civilians the significant expressions which both evokes and mirrors a corresponding sympathy and understanding between Milne and the individual reader, through poetry. Lyon remarks upon two perspectives of purpose among readers of poetry for the popularity of war-poetry as the “readers progress through a ritualized acknowledgement of the horrors of war” (Somogyi in Lyon 19-20), in order to “achieve a type of catharsis (a purgation of emotions) through the poetry” (ibid). And, that “war poetry far more overtly [can be seen] as a means through which soldierly values are acknowledged and honored by society” (Lyon 19-20). Yet Lyon reminds us about the importance to remember that in the first half of the 20th century the sympathy from a reader concerning the rough conditions of a private soldier and war-poetry were not to be taken for granted, since war-poetry from this era was written “at a time when to be a private soldier in the army was not necessarily a respectable or popular occupation” (28). However, this ‘purgatory’ of the soul could also be applicable to the returned soldiers who wrote war-poetry as a way of coming to terms with and acknowledge their experiences. Yet, the impact of shellshock among returned soldiers was not treated, this due to the fact that the Great War was fought with new technology, and the horrors which soldiers faced where still sinking in among the people behind the lines, including the medical sphere. In this context Milne’s poems function as a literary sanctuary for expressing the complex themes of perspectives of individuals and individual senses of defining ‘honor’ among those behind the frontlines of warfare. Poetry enables a space for individual reflection wherein the dense form of poetry mediates the individual sufferings within humanity and reinforces the significance of a humane perspective in stark contrast to the cruelty of modern technological warfare and the brutal inhumanity at the battlefield. This will be further explored later on in poems such as ‘The Voice of Italy’, amongst others. Milne’s poetry manifests a humanistic perspective of endurance wherein democracy and liberalism balance inhumanity in every aspect of life and death which language can express.

Behind the Lines

In order to understand how Milne’s philosophy of pacifism and liberalism is reflected within his poetry it is crucial to consider the concept of truth in poetry through the lens of popular verse. Milne’s approach to the traumatic topic concerning warfare through the media and mode of popular verse is
unusual in how he renders the ever-present closeness of death into the realm of acceptation\textsuperscript{10}. This is also evident in the tile ‘Behind the Lines’ which conveys some of this embedded complexity both of the topic of traumatic events themselves, but also in depicting trauma through popular verse and the way Milne bridges the tension between the cheerful lightness of poetry through its rhymes and rhythms and the heaviness of grief and loss. Milne successfully conveys how these sentiments come into the ever-presence of existence and non-existence. Hence, Milne’s poetry fulfills the role of a mediator between different versions of reality and dimensions which always must coexist in this world through language as a way of expressing individuals’ connection to the physical world; but, also, as mediator of a coexisting in the metaphysical world and reveals the interdependency between individuals within a society. In this endeavor Milne emphasizes the risk of being “out-of-date” (ibid.) due to the ever-present shifting nature of the world. Milne’s experiences of warfare as a Signalling Officer, in the broadest sense of the term, works as the mediating lens through which he enables the reader to access the decoded society via popular verse. In all depiction of everyday life situations in poetry, all the way to the extreme tension of warfare, finding ways to ease up individual’s mindset is a helpful effort in providing coping mechanisms for the individuals, especially for matters which goes beyond the surface of reading and decoding meaning within texts.

As a Signalling Officer within the war-machinery Milne’s understanding of the communicative role of codification; the significance of informing or encrypting poetry as a way of conveying meaning, enabled this role of communication to also find its way into Milne’s poetry. This is evident in ‘Information’, a poem which discusses the function of information versus disinformation and its association to truths and telling lies;

\textit{IT was officially said}

\textit{This morning that Queen Anne was dead.}

By 10.15 the news as stated

Was generally circulated.

But High Authorities at noon

Perceived that she had died too soon,

And saved a difficult position

By rooting out the Lunch Edition.

\textsuperscript{10} Milne’s poetry in the form of popular verse appeals to the multi-layered complexity within any individual, and contributes to acknowledging an individual acceptance of oneself. This is corresponding to that “our identities are fluid and we do not have a single identity but multiple levels of identity, and shifting and sometimes even conflicting identities which merge in different contexts” (Wardhaugh & Fuller 8). Milne advocated the crucial role of constantly renegotiate group identity, also described by Wardhaugh and Fuller as “it is among groups that individuals form relationships or reject such possibilities” (ibid). They describe the significance of the process within “all must be enacted, performed or reproduced in order to exist” (ibid).
To make it clear, the B.B.C.
Regretted her demise at 3,
And remedied the fault at 5
By hinting she was still alive,
And concentrating on the person
Of Sandy (Organist) MacPherson.
A messenger was heard to say
‘ We’d know about it one fine day ’ ;
A typist said: ‘It won’t be yet,
And anyhow it may be wet.’
The Censors put their heads together
And said there wasn’t any weather.
Things being in a state of flux,
And Lord Macmillan’s motto ‘Lux
Ex tenebris’ (and Lord Camrose’s
The ancient riddle ‘Where was Moses ? ’)
The M. of I. devised a plan
To publicize the birth of Anne.

A score of sound economists
Described her little dimpled fists ;
Ex-diplomats in courtly prose
Explored the wonders of her toes ;
A dozen civil engineers
Wrote memos on her childish tears ;
And notes about her party dress
(Intended for the neutral press)
Which indicated by a dash

The colour of her baby sash

Were specially designed to stop

The truth from reaching Ribbentrop.

At 10 p.m. (the Night Canteen

Re-opening) the facts were seen

In true proportion, and at last,

All danger mercifully past,

The news was formally released:

‘Queen Blank (? Ask Censor) is deceased.’

(Behind the Lines 25-6)11

The significance in Milne’s statement of not having any ‘weather’, as well as the health and presence of the queen is depicted as crucial features for ‘the Lunch Edition’ concerning the essential role of coding, and decoding what truth that reached Ribbentrop through the ‘neutral press’. ‘Information’ evidently reflects the crucial role, behind the lines, which Milne’s authorship represented for the imagination of the warfare. Notably, the tone in the poem shifts, it starts out in an official formal tone, and moves gradually through the register of stating seemingly official information, then acknowledging that the information was given too hastily, and in a humorous way declare that the death is retracted, it is proclaimed to have been stated ‘too soon’. The transition into retracting information moves the focus into the workforce of media and its role to spread information. The tension becomes humorous in the phrasing ‘to make it clear’ and the remedy of merely ‘hinting she was alive’. This also pinpoints the role of censorship and which information which is being conveyed when, where and for which purposes to the ‘neutral press’. The Censor’s denial of there being any weather at all; that neither the associations of ‘a fine day’ nor stating that ‘it won’ be wet’ can be conveyed is crucial in warfare, but the tone of it, helped by the rhythm-scheme, stresses the silliness and tension embedded within what was communicated ‘in a state of flux’. This ‘flux’ concerns the riddle-like circumstances in which the message of the media is conveying in the uncertainty of whether Queen Anne is dead, or not yet. The ‘sound economics’ who describe ‘fists’, ‘toes’ and ‘tears’ are symbolically also stated to be ‘economical’. That is, they are presenting a scarcity of facts by

11 The first line in this poem is a formal press release statement in two rows with one rhyme pair. Apart from the introducing lines the poem has seven more stanzas all six rows each with three rhyme-pairs for each stanza.
adding other information designed to move focus elsewhere while. While the ‘dozen civil engineers’ are inventing the scheme for memos to be presented to the ‘neutral press’. That is, they are re-coding to shift focus from coding language. The anxiety is present in preventing information from deviating from its intended scheme. As all danger has passed, there is a shift in the poem and an expectation of everything being in order at last. The final two lines leaks information and informs the uniformed of the role of censorship in a humorous way. The scale of humor when full-circled in portraying the distress of censorship and presenting certainty, uncertainty and agony of the group who quickly will have to re-set the information screen from hanging loose and thereby revealing the intense work which is supposed to be hidden. From the second stanza to the last the information-machinery is pinpointed in its hammering the message into the reader with the speed and rhythm of the printing press, and ‘circulated’ as the notion that ‘all is well’. The distress behind the scene, and behind the lines of public news, most literary, becomes visible for a moment. In this moment the engineering of censorship is moving through the register of hilarious confusion and anxiety, satire over the silliness of social interest concerning both the public interest in news and the complex duality of deciphering what many must have known to be smokescreens, and stretching further to the attempt to re-establish the error made and the comedy-farce embedded within the face-threatening situation; one which most people could sympathize with as a thrilling yet an awkward scenario to find oneself in.

Milne’s pen made a mark upon the understanding of the war-machine during this era. Milne’s engagement in social issues and politics is also evident in issues where life or death depends upon what is conveyed and interpreted. Milne’s expertise in these issues is evident in the letter which he writes to the editor of the Times (‘Total War’) concerning the complex differentiation between the requirements for information. Milne emphasizes the social tension and clash between how a military operation requires disinformation to avoid revealing which villages are concerned, whereas the civilians essentially require information about which villages that are affected. The role of ‘telling lies’ in the poem ‘Information’ deals with this differentiation of needs of knowing. The crucial role of communication and Milne’s awareness of this significant function is also central in several of Milne’s poems such as in ‘Excelsior’. Milne comments on this poem by stating that;

[j]t was only when I wrote about Italy that the Censor’s eye was turned reproachfully in my direction. For months: we had been told that Mussolini was a Stern Realist unmoved by sentiment, who would take that precise part in the war, at that precise moment, which seemed to offer him the greatest material advantage. But there also seemed to be a strong conviction in official circles that he was continually expecting some insult from me which could only be wiped out by the complete dislocation of his plans. ‘I’ll come in on June 10th,’ he was supposed to have promised Hitler, ‘always provided that Milne doesn’t call me a gangster before then.’ I could never quite believe this (Behind the Lines 48-9).
Milne’s remark conveys a satirical humorist’s perspective. Milne’s social influence within the British society is established however, the actual impact and degree of Milne causing any international political repercussions concerning his political engagement cannot be estimated within the scope of this essay. Notably, ‘Excelsior’ conveys that “[t]his isn’t meant to be the truth, / It’s poetry, about a youth” (*Behind the Lines* 48). This is evident also in the first two stanzas;

THE shades of night were falling fast

*When through a Cornish village passed*

*A youth who carried in the rain*

*A placard with the odd refrain,*

‘Excelsior !’

I write it thus

Because the Censor made a fuss.

He said, ‘Good heavens, look at this!

An *Alpine* village! That’s the Swiss!

The ‘fuss’ made by the ‘Censor’ is evident in the ever-presently crucial interruptions within ‘Excelsior’. Here, the features of poetry are also at work, which is visible in that in addition to conveying a message the right words have to fit into the rhyme-scheme too;

The Censor quivered in his chair ;

‘That’s right,’ he said, ‘now tell them where

And when America comes in!

D’you *want* the enemy to win ? ’

I said, ‘Your pardon, gentle Sir !

Pick any village you prefer.’
The Censor scratched a thoughtful head:

‘Try Moreton-in-the-Marsh,’ he said.

‘It’s good,’ said I, ‘but doesn’t fit.’

‘Well, keep the East Coast out of it.’

I promised him I wouldn’t rest

Until I’d got it in the West. (Stanza 8)

The difficulty of being a Censor and what censorship adds to any communicated message is further evident in the following stanza;

The Censor groaned and wiped his brow.

I said, ‘Well, what’s the matter now?’

The Censor said, ‘My sainted aunt!

You can’t, you absolutely can’t

Go chattering about the snow!’

‘Can’t you?’ I said. ‘I didn’t know.’

‘Good Gort!’ he said, ‘you’ve done it twice!’

I said the second one was ice.

He cried, ‘But snow and ice together

Is telling Germany the weather!’ (Stanza 9)

After some manipulation of the text, they reach an agreement for the message, expressed as; ‘Your pardon, Sir,’ I said again, / ‘We’ll have a thaw and make it rain.’ / That’s right,’ he said, but don’t imply / A fixed condition in the sky’ (Stanza 10). The dialogue within the poem extends to;

The Censor looked a shocked surprise;

‘You mean,’ he said, ‘you’re telling lies?’

Well, yes and no, ‘I said:’ you see,
It’s Longfellow, it isn’t me.’

The Censor went into a dream...

Then murmured, ‘Wait a bit—I seem
To know the feller somehow. What’s
His regiment—the Royal Scots?

I knew a chap in Poona once—
Is this the Longfellow who *hunts*?’

In stanza 13 above Milne’s fascination for the silliness of humanity is evident where the overall structure of the poem of an AA, BB, (to CC, DD) rhyme structure could be questioned as a visual marker of the tension of the overall poem in which the Censor within the poem also affects the real poem written and published on the page by Milne wherein the silly struggle of attempting to make misfits match becomes visually evident by good will. In the pair What’s/Scots and once-/hunts the clash is tangible in how the interpreter’s perspective and intention become the lens through which these pair could go together or not, while they simultaneously pinpoint the crucial role of local knowledge such as the role of pronunciation and dialectal variations. These pairs in particular break the pattern and demonstrates that whatever is read into the meaning is a construction which one willingly makes, or refuse to make. The rhyme-scheme of the stanzas presented in this essay from ‘EXCELSIOR’ is; AA, BB, C / AA, BB / AA, BB / AA, BB / AA, BB, CC, DD / AA, BB, CC, DD, EE / AA, BB / AA, BB, CC, DD, EE / AA, BB, (Not all stanzas from ‘EXCELSIOR’ are presented in this analysis due to the scope of the essay. However the disposition of the poem consists of 13 stanzas, stanza 3 and five consists of only two lines with a simple rhyme-pair, the first and last stanzas are paraphrases of Longfellow’s poem with the same name, while remaining stanzas shift in number of rows they keep to the pair of rhyme scheme of AA, BB, CC with another significant exemption, in stanza 11 this pattern is temporary broken up by the odd pair of ‘war’-’Excelsior’, which clashes and temporarily upsets the structure in the context of stanzas following the patterns of sets of rhymes.

I said, ‘No matter, let it go:
I’m leaving out his ice and snow.’

‘That’s right,’ he said, ‘and leave his rank
And regiment *completely* blank.’ (Stanza 13-4)
In stanza 14 (the last one presented above), Milne portrays the frustration of censor and how his reference to Longfellow, (a well-known American poet at the time) is reduced by the Censor to someone without any military rank or any regiment. This lies at the core of the problematic dual referencing which has to convey one message to the military enemy at the field and simultaneously convey information to the one the message is intended for wherein logic and emotions clash into the hierarchical order of society where civilians view the world through the emotions whereas the military view the same occurrences via logic. To the inhumane warfare-machinery the aspect of rank and regiment is vital whereas to the civilians the familiar reference to the American poet (Longfellow) evokes other associations. This clash is evident in the way poetry in the academic field often tends attempt to separate the logic of the poem from the emotion it might stir in a reader. John Barr comments that; “[m]ost verse has no following in the critical world because it needs none to be understood and appreciated” (Poetry Foundation, part 3), but this quite common perspective presumes the requirement for understanding a poem logically and is thereby deeply dismissal to the ability to feel the poem and deeply engage with the content of the poem at a personal level of adapting it to one’s own experiences. This is something which seldom is acknowledged in the academic field where mainstream readings of the content usually is preferred, since normativity is easier to compare and evaluate than personal connections to the content of a poem.

In ‘Excelsior’ Milne conveys the crucial yet somewhat invisible aspect of censor and the role of censorship during the early 20th century. The phrase ‘No matter, let it go’ Milne is significantly pinpointing how censorship permeated not merely matters directly connected to warfare, but all aspects of written communication. Milne is, in this case, not referring to anyone of military rank, but to the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Yet, the mere risk of anyone listening in inferring it as significant to the case of warfare, twists the message already before it reached the intended receiver. Therefore, Milne is also skillfully conveying the mental and emotional fatigue of sending or receiving a message which due to censor already has lost something of what its meaning along the way. These five words, in particular, are central to the poem and the aim to reach higher, ‘excelsior’ and interconnects Milne’s poem with Longfellow’s poem ‘Excelsior’ in dealing with the strife to reach higher, and the theme of Death.

Additionally, the farce-like structure of the poem is also notably comical in its structure where the tension between the serious Censor and the other character in the poem are keeping a conversation which easily could be acted out as a comedy at a theatre. This is no surprise due to Milne’s ability to not limit himself and his authorship to merely one genre. This is evident in the way the letter-writer is somewhat making fun of the Censor and his confusion about the role of not presenting the truth is hilariously well-written. Especially since that is essentially the role of a Censor, to adapt truth and reality to the inhumane circumstances of warfare and battlefields and considering who might be listening in, or reading messages. The aspect of the way people construct their idea of the world comes through in remarks such as their agreement to “make it thaw” then, with the tangible sense of an author who has to change the story to fit the context, which further is a comical flirt from the author to the reader of bringing the reader into the world of the author, while it is made evident in the
persistence of the narrator-“I”’s claim that it is not “I” who is the one constructing this letter, nor who is responsible for the lying, but; ‘it’s Longfellow, not me’. This too have the comic effect of anyone attempting to push the risk of any criticism onto someone else, a social “skill”, or trick which most people can relate to and finds intriguing since a mystery of some sort is embedded within most such situations. This is a level of farce and comedy which most people can access easily while the seriousness which usually is kept beneath the surface is contributing to the almost clown-like felling to the poem of being allowed to see what is supposed to be concealed. This tension between the strictly serious and vital in censor is combined with the animateness of someone who is constructing reality and presumable has the ability to decide and control even the weather. The comingling of the very strictly official in censor and the phrase ‘this chap of yours’ ranges over social class boundaries and portrays the way in which the entire society was brought into the field of warfare linguistically and also in the effects of warfare at the frontline as well as behind the frontlines, the aspect of what is ‘behind the lines’ in a dual sense here is crucially essential; both as representing life in the 21st British society but also to denote the weight of well-chosen words to bring the essence of this time to life via poetry for Milne. Milne is pinpointing the veil which sometimes seem very thick like a theatre curtain and sometimes very delicate and thin, like gossamer. This in an era where uncertainty dominated people’s mind and the sense of being left without any control permeated daily life. This poem presents a pause in the seriousness of the situation and Milne is creating a realm where one, for at least one moment, can pretend that one is in charge over one’s choices and that there in fact still exists silliness to laugh at in the world, which ultimately bring to the reader, Hope. Milne’s way to transcend traditional genre boundaries makes his poetry distinguished from the normative in the era in which he wrote his poems. Although the themes and topics which Milne deals with require a respectful and serious approach, he still manages to convey them with a linguistically constructed sense of an embedded smile, yet, not a condescending smirk. There is a liberal and allowing friendliness to Milne’s poetry, even to the sharper tones in which he portrays the tensions and conflicts between concepts, ideas, perspectives and how individuals relate to their circumstances and the limitations of individual choice.

Furthermore, the answer of whether telling lies or not, as both yes and no, leads us into the aspect of the role of lies to the prospect of winning a war. Essentially notably, however is the homage Milne pays to Longfellow’s poem ‘Excelsior’, in which the first and the last stanza in Milne’s poem is a paraphrase of Longfellow’s first stanza;

“The shades of night were falling fast,  
As through an Alpine village passed  
A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,  
A banner with the strange device,  

Excelsior!”
(Longfellow, ‘Excelsior’, Poetry Foundation)
The further references embedded within Milne’s poem ‘EXCELSIOR’ to Longfellow are evidently indicated by mentioning Longfellow in the poem itself and describing the subject as a “American by birth”. The duality of the meaning behind the title itself, ‘EXCELSIOR’ is presenting both something `higher`; which in turn indicates both a rise of effort in rhythm strength and Death itself. The other meaning of the word ‘Excelsior’ denotes the fine shavings of woods usually used for stuffing furniture, that is, what presents the content, or filling of anything. These ‘coincidences’ make for a connection between the two poems, Milne’s and Longfellow’s, wherein the final death in Longfellow’s poem is echoed in Milne’s poem. This is also in line with Milne’s choice of placing both ‘EXCELSIOR’ and the poem ‘TO AMERICA’ in the same collection of poetry. In this respect Milne is emphasizing the historical connections between the British society and the American society and bridges details of the seemingly familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar. In this respect Milne’s poetry is intrinsically interconnected with the larger picture of the history of poetry and poets before him, while it also adds a new spark of attention both to the topic, but also to the shared experience of poetry which Longfellow’s poetry belongs to. Yet, the mystery of the ‘higher’ which is the unknown aspect of Death remains poetically beautiful, sad and although hinted, still just beyond reach. Here both poems join in reaching just as far as poetry can reach, beyond this point anything within the realm of being excelsior cannot be made tangible in the physical world.

The topic of truth against fiction, popular verse and the requirement of disinformation or information is developed further and contrasted in ‘The Patriot’, where Milne deals with the concept of ‘lies. In ‘The Patriot’ Milne conveys the importance within every single statement as inevitably crucially communicative as information, or disinformation and how telling a lie, however small it might be, have great further implications;

THE weather : One must keep it dark,

And I was wrong to say,

On rising with the oldest lark,

‘Oh, what a lovely day !

O all ye little hills, exult ! ’

I cried aloud on Wednesday ult.,

And by this innocent remark

I gave the show away.
Well, there it was, the day was fine;
The surest of our clocks
Had fixed the hour (by striking 9)
At 10.15 approx.,
And by 11 I should be
Comparisoned upon the tee
In trousers of a spring design
And regimental socks. (Stanza 1-2)\(^\text{12}\)

By referencing a ‘lark’ and a ‘lovely day’, Milne portrays how these small and seemingly unimportant ordinary occurrences such as a bird and an emotional response to the day reveals a weather forecast to an enemy, as well as the location, (where larks dwell), and thus dissolves keeping the enemy in the dark concerning which conditions they could expect. Notably, however, Milne’s in-poem narrative-‘I’, who attempts to solve this blunder by confusing the time given by his reliable clock, merely makes it worse by revealing the time difference between stated time and actual time. In ‘The Patriot’ Milne pinpoints a crucial aspect concerning war-machinery versus the human need to communicate in (re-)establishing existence through a connection to places and significance of establishing time and place in order to confirm individual identity, whether this identity express information, or disinformation, the purpose of its presence is vital. The poem is relevant because Milne is hinting heavily in ‘The Patriot’ that although this at a first glance seems to be about playing golf, it is connected to the theme of coding language in times of war, and thus links further to the advocacy for depicting the role of truth; information, and disinformation which Milne depicts in the poem ‘Information’. Milne’s approach to popular verse is keeping to the poetic genre-specific features which “obeys Coleridge’s definition of poetry, the best words in the best order” (Thwaite 97) and requires “Carlyle’s definition of genius, transcendent capacity for taking pains” (ibid), which results in;” the concealment of art.” (ibid.). According to Milne, this is what results in “the most exact laws of rhyme and metre as if by a happy accident, and in a sort of nonchalant spirit of mockery at the real poets who do it on purpose” (Milne qtd in Thwaite 97)\(^\text{13}\). The topics of Milne’s popular verse are themselves not light.

\(^\text{12}\) The stanzas in ‘THE PATRIOT’ follow the rhyme-pattern of A, B, A, B, C, C, A, B where the second stanza’s A-pattern has the playful design of ‘fine, 9, design’ which embodies a creative fun aspect of juxtaposing the visual appearance of words on paper with the phonetical similarity, which is a further example of Milne’s creativity and liberalism in how to use language. The poem consists of six stanzas of which all keep to 8 lines each.

\(^\text{13}\) Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s definition of poetry is famous from a conversation recorded in July 12, 1827 and published by Henry Coleridge in Table Talk in 1835. Thomas Carlyle’s definition of ‘genius’ has become a proverbial saying (Oxford references).
Milne’s poetry pinpoints this ambivalent dilemma wherein individuals existed; a dilemma which derives from political decisions, wherein the concept of ‘honor’ has been distorted. Thereby is the distorted imagination enabling the idea of a national ‘honor’; an idea which further complicates the imagination concerning the dichotomy of Good and Evil, both in thought and action. The further complication includes the process for returning soldiers in their strife to create meaningfulness and (re-)shape individual identity within a double allegiance between their former duties within the warfare-machinery and a peaceful humanity as individuals, which has to be reconstructed from the smithereens of living in trenches; an existence wherein every moment could be the last one. This includes the individual sacrifices that such state of mind requires in actions, which might not promote individual honor, but rather retroactively oppose individual honor.

Additionally, the concept of Good versus Evil frequently appear in Milne’s poems where the sacrifice of men to death is questioned by Milne as mothers (or women) rather prefer having a living family-member, whether a son, a brother, a husband, or a father, than the remembrance of a dead hero. In Milne’s poetry the idea that Heaven (and God) exist to constitute an oppositional dimension to Hell and misery in this world, present humanity with a dichotomy in which the ultimate comparison between the contradictory ideas of Good and Evil can be compared by contrast to what it cannot be. For example, in the poem ‘To America’ in *Behind* Milne is stressing the ‘Good versus Evil’ dichotomy as the (final) fight to defend freedom. This poem is an excellent example of the way in which Milne approached serious themes in popular verse and made the theme of warfare accessible to his readers in a less threatening way. Milne’s poem level the reader with the soldier at the field and the civilians behind the front in his lines of poetry by acknowledging the shared sentiment of ‘yes, War is Hell’.

Yet, by presenting the circumstances of warfare Milne is bringing the dimension of a sense of control by using words which are more predictable and familiar as a contrast to the harshness of warfare to the individual reader. When reading this poem, the reader is not brought low by the gloominess or warfare and thoughts of Hell, but rather drummed into a more secure and certain place by the effect of the popular verse format. Milne’s poetry offers the reader a realm wherein dealing with warfare still encourages hope rather than despair. Serious poetry is usually aiming at describing the existential issues of, what is worth living for? what is worth dying for? what is love? and how deep can love run? The painfulness of not being able to fully answer these questions lies at the core of serious poetry, along with the mystery of the purpose of presence, and the mystery of what lies beyond death itself, the futility of a human life in the scope of the grand eternity and what to make of those feelings of loneliness, feeling small in a vast universe and how to find a cause to live and die for. Yet, the focus in serious verse is often on the suffering, and often leaves the reader in a depressed mood for not being able to figure out the answer to these questions, nor being able to help the narrative-“I” with the its confused state of mind. Milne does not shirk from these themes, he merely presents them in another way, in which the reader does not have to take on the full responsibility for the sufferings of the world. Although the sense of unity with those who suffer is heartfelt also in Milne’s poetry, his

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14 Often referred to as Armageddon.
poems fulfil Milne’s goal that poetry should be like a friendly company at any time it is required the rhymes and rhythm of the poem is a constant reminder of that loneliness can vanish for a while in the company of a poem. There is still an optimism embedded within Milne’s poems that there is still hope, an assurance of that there still are distinguishable differences to be made and that luring sense of togetherness and unity; a humane and emotional response to the inhumanity of warfare. Yet, without the bitter aftertaste in poems such as the ones written by Wystan Hugh Auden, where the grief lingers in another way in the heart and mind of the reader, as for instance in ‘Funeral Blues/ Stop all the clocks’ and from reading Ode to The Medieval Poets (1971). This is evident in Milne’s stanza three;

Yes, ‘War is Hell’.

But Peace is Hell if it’s Peace with the devil in power.

Yet, if this is not your quarrel and not your hour,

If you have chosen Peace, you have chosen well.

But scatter your armies, burn your ships,

Tear the breech-block out of the gun;

Never again can you fight who fight not now,

No rallying-call can ever rise to your lips,

There lives no Faith to which you can make your vow,

There is no Cause to fight for: only the one,

Only one gage of battle, only one battle-song:

Right against Wrong. (Behind the Lines 95)

Milne’s plea is for not allowing ‘the devil’ to come into power, but the poem also expresses the only fight worth fighting. To Milne, without the freedoms he values, there will never be any ‘Cause’ to fight for, (the Four Freedoms he values), should they be lost. To Milne, the advocacy within this poem to deescalate, reducing military authority is in line with his pacifism, yet simultaneously his poem depicts the final battlefield of values and the ideological clash between Democracy and dictatorship derived from the risk of autocracy. In this poem the existential core-values of existence reveal the complexity of what is ‘Right’ or ‘Wrong’, and it denotes the internal conflict within every individual who is undetermined in whether action or inaction is constituting the pathway towards the goodness which excludes ‘Evil’. Milne’s initial lines; “Evil has struck again: / Again the broken faith” (ibid 95),
visually functions as a mirror through the usage of doubling the word ‘again’; the word-pair represents the return of something already banished, already gone, already lost, yet the return is not unfamiliar as it returns. Essentially the contradictory end-words here are ‘Evil’ and ‘faith’, - a contradiction; like the opposing ends on a magnet, they cannot connect yet they inescapable must co-exist, although as each-others counterparts which cannot meet. The first stanza is expressing the return of evil, but it is also depicting liberalism and Milne’s pacifism through resistance; knitting mittens for the soldier, which was an ordinary occupation for women during warfare, which is implicitly evident in how mothers had to send their sons to the evil of warfare;

EVIL has struck again:
Again the broken faith.
And little homely lives in happiness–
The mother knitting in her rocking-chair,
The daughter, laughing, holding out proud hands
To where her baby stands
Bashful, uncertain, in its party dress-
Are twisted into fear
Are tortured into pain,
Are closed in death. (Behind 95).15

15 Just as in Terrance Hayes’s ‘The Golden Shovel’ (1981) after Gwendolyn Brooks’s ‘We Real Cool’, this stanza could be read down either as the first words, or as the last words and form the additional, but shorter forms of the same message, read as first words; EVIL Again, And, The mother, The daughter, To, Bashful, Are twisted, Are tortured, Are closed (in death). Or, read as last words down; again, faith, of happiness, rocking-chair, proud hands, stands, part dress -, into fear, into pain, in death. Essentially, Milne’s poem consists of 3 stanzas, with respectively 10, 17 and 12 lines with a variation of rhyme-scheme-pattern for each stanza. This poem display a more uncertain tone, partly due to the less predictable rhyme-scheme, which is enhanced by the interrogative mode of the poem which is evident in ‘the repetition in the middle stanza’s ‘Well, are you coming in?’ which both initiates and ends the middle stanza and is further stressed by the eeriness of line number 13 (in numerology and Christian faith), where the line ends with ‘win’, which completes the rhyme-scheme between the two ‘in’ in the stanza as an interrogative plea, general question, and as a direct political request for aid. The significance of line 2-3 and 14-15 express repetition, which also function as an echo of a recognizable past, which corresponds and enforce the message of the first two lines of the first stanza; that ‘EVIL has struck again : / Again the broken faith’ which also justifies the request for aid. In the first stanza the situation is explained, in the other a request for aid is expressed and in the third stanza is attempting to restore the faith and courage which is absent in the first stanza by claiming that this is the moment in history to react and act. If not now, then when? This makes the third stanza a combination of the first two where both fear, faith and hope has to be rallied to reverse the repetition of the evil which has risen again. This too, in a sense is a rebellion against repeating the past, which is in line with Milne’s advocacy for re-thinking the world and constantly update one’s mindset to the world as it is.
Milne’s philosophical commitment to pacifism is evident in this stanza through the ‘broken faith’ which return is marked by the back-and-forth movement by the rocking-chair. When ‘Evil’ returns the ‘proud hands’ of the daughter, a depiction of the continuity of the nation, which are aimed towards the placement of her ‘baby’, who stands in a ‘bashful’ and ‘uncertain’ place in its ‘party dress’; ‘party dress’ here signals simultaneously the social role of the ideological future of the nation, but also the actual clothing, which for many children, too, included a military connection either as involved in warfare as informers, or through the loss of (usually male) close relatives, fathers, brothers, uncles to the war-battlefield. The significance of the ‘baby’ is rendered the loss of the future for generations as they are described as being; ‘twisted into fear’, tortured into pain and, or ‘closed in death’. The outcome of warfare is inescapable the destructiveness of humanity and the individual under the enforcement of Evil; that is the technological advanced machinery which indiscriminately destroy all humanity, and all aesthetically associations to Beauty which Milne considers to be the worth-while-living aspect of humanity.

Additionally, Milne’s later remark to ‘To America’ stresses the importance of international connections, which he also advocates in Peace, and in War as crucial to international policy. The importance of alliances is evident in;

Perhaps by the time this appears America will be more directly engaged in the war than she is now. Meanwhile she can take comfort from this thought. The British Empire fights alone; but if Britain is submerged, and the war crosses the Atlantic, America will not fight alone. She will have Canada by her side (Behind 96).

Milne’s remark reflects the content of Peace and his shift in perspective into the publication of War where he is explaining his (still) fundamental pacifist approach as his ideal, but that in facing the reality of Hitler there is no turning back from another war, according to Milne. In ‘To America’ Milne makes that approach to the shift in the political climate quite clear; that there will be no freedom to fight any other war later, if this war, for democracy, would be lost. Notably, Milne is also remarking upon the fact that Britain stands alone in this war and compares it to that America will have Canada by its side if the war should cross the Atlantic. This is, according to Milne, a war, which perhaps even is the Final war - the war between Good and Evil. In Milne’s ‘To America’ it is evident that the dichotomy of Good and Evil inevitably revolves the Four Freedoms which he considers essential to liberalism, and the possibility to heed to the Sanctity of life as a liberal Human Right as predominating and fundamental features in his pacifistic liberal outlook.

Milne’s approach to both pacifism and towards fascism is evident in ‘The Voice of Italy’;
WHEN threats and insults filled the air,
We passed them by for what they were,
Shrugged our shoulders at the venom
Of editors who had to pen ’em.

The threats grew louder day by day …
We tried to look the other way.
We hoped that it was only bluff,
And hoped that Hope would be enough.

But louder still the Voice declared
That war for which it was prepared …
Which left us nothing else to do
But make some preparations too.

The Fleet proceeded to its station …
And half the Vice cried ‘ Provocation ! ’

‘ Encircled !’ screamed the other half.
I mean to say, you have to laugh.

(Behind the Lines 93)16

Milne’s poem pinpoints the ambivalence between reacting to a provocation or not reacting to a provocation. He is also describing the ambivalent thin line between comedy and tragedy in ‘you have to laugh’. Ultimately, this discrepancy in attitudes revolves, and reveals, the contradiction between a pacifist’s outlook versus the militant perspective concerning sentiments of whether or not to take offense by attempts of violation or mortification. Evidentially the poem depicts the clash between imagination of individual honor and national ‘honor’. Milne describes the latter as a false notion,

16 Here we see the rhyme-scheme of two pair AA, BB / AA, BB…
foreign affairs cannot be a matter of ‘honor’ in his outlook, and, hence, cannot be violated at all by threats. Milne’s metaphor in Peace about old-fashioned duelling (27 & 33-5) demonstrates that the traditional British sense of feeling wronged cannot be applicable to international warfare wherein the progress has developed into mass-murdering high-technological warfare in which neither individual nor any sense of national ‘honor’ survives the battle. Only the foundational cause for the conflict survives modern warfare unharmed. In his later comment to the poem Milne describes how nothing worth-while survives warfare;

I think that greater unhappiness has been caused by the word ‘realistic’. A ‘realistic attitude to the world’ is an attitude which discounts all sentiment, all ideals, all art, all literature, all beauty; which, in fact, discounts all that makes life worth living. The ‘realist’ inhabits an utterly unreal world, such as never existed; yet imagines that he alone is seeing the world as it is. If Mussolini, that arch-realistic, were indeed a realist instead of an overgrown, sentimental schoolboy, he would realize the truth about Italy; which is that her contribution to civilization always has been and always will be Beauty; not a goose-step imported from Germany, and ‘the song of our machine-guns” (Behind the Lines 93-4).

Milne’s approach to the importance of aesthetic values is evident in this statement and throughout his poetry. In Milne’s comment above, as in all of his poems, his social criticism towards the influence of ‘realists’ is not mild. However, it is worth remembering that the era might have demanded extreme clarity not to be muddled by censure during times of warfare. Essentially, his statement also reflects Milne’s personal disapproval of ‘the song of machine-guns’ and is thereby also a statement of pacifism. Milne’s poem and his remark upon it is further testimony to his unwavering sense of freedom of speech and liberalism, to continue with social criticism also during the threat of the international political circumstances wherein Milne already reflected in his War (18-9), that people no longer could take freedom of speech for granted and survive. Freedom of speech is not a ‘universal’, nor an ever-present occurrence, it never has been and it never will be. This renders Milne’s outlook a vital one for the ‘voice’ of freedom of speech and its value to the British society during the 20th century. Milne’s (war-)poetry is a beacon of light, a safe-haven, at a stormy sea for those who were drowning in anxiety over their individual actions, or inactions, during the early 20th century. Milne was a Signalling Officer, that is, a reader and interpreter of signs, (including being an interpreter and sender of morse code, which also has its own rhythm not unlike that of poetry) for the British Military, but, essentially, he offered the individual reader the same leadership of ‘decoding’ how to deal with the ever-present issues of surviving warfare and the casualties of warfare through his poems. Readers would agree or disagree with Milne’s statements, but they would reflect the occurrences in the world from the perspective of a humorist depicting the most desolate places for humor to still
dwell. As in ‘The Voice of Italy’, in Milne’s poetry the liberty of Hope and individual Faith are restored to his readers, and a sense of certainty in an era dominated and marked by individual and national uncertainty. As a Signalling Officer Milne also saw the significance of poetry as contributing to and being “part of History” (Milne, *Behind*, ix). He is, thus, also considering the timeframe in which poetry outlives any “gaucherie of the out-of-fashion” (ibid.), and this is significantly evident in the way Milne saw his role as a communicator of his time as not merely a momentarily role. Milne ends *Behind* with a salute to the brave men of his time, and with the words; “it is June now; one of those lovely, still, country evenings, blue, green and golden; such an evening as almost compels faith in the doubting, courage in the fearful, by the calm and steadfast assurance of its beauty” (*Behind* 101). However, Milne’s final words for the book denotes the density of History hanging over the words as he concludes that;

 Italy is in the war. France has fallen. Well, we are alone. Much will have happened before these words are in print, but, be it good or ill, may we live and die as gallantry as those happy few, upheld by something of their spirit” (ibid).

Milne’s awareness of that he wrote poetry about the essence of humanity in an era where the inhumane and warfare-machinery thundered the loudest comes through as a mission to interpret life in the 21st Century British society also as liberal defiance against the inhumane. In this sense, and perhaps also by the choice, or *perhaps* that the ending-page of *Behind* is page-number 101, the significance of Milne’s poetry moves beyond what is tangible and fully can be translated into a complete understanding almost a century later. However, the immortality of Milne’s poetry and the depth of passion and compassion in which Milne writes his political poetry is as relevant today as it was when what mysteries lie behind those lines then, also can, if not explore, then, at least, hint today at, the-beyond-human-language aspects of humanity.

The Norman Church

In *Norman* Milne’s liberalism voices a political concern regarding how gender roles define not only Christianity, but also perpetuates the religious presumption that empowerment and social authority as ‘naturally’ male-orientated. This is crucial in suppressing the female perspective which is evident in Milne’s questioning of this ‘naturalized’ hierarchical, and patriarchal social ordering. Additionally, in *Norman* Milne explores the magnitude of grief and loss of various forms of disempowerment, regardless whether it derives from social suppression, or dealing with the complexity of death and loss of limbs or the loss of life, or the loss of meaningfulness; as a mental death before

17 *Per haps* is the older British English form of *perhaps* and acknowledges the influence of chance/*haps* in everything that happens.
the physical death due to the depression of warfare. In this mode of depression, the individual still has
to (re-)create one’s own relationship to oneself and to society through the process of (re-)imagination.

In Milne’s perspective the spheres of religion, politics, social and hierarchical structures, and
patriarchal order are com mingled. These themes permeate Milne’s poetry during the first half of the 20th
century. Milne’s liberalism and ideas of equality are throughout his poems deeply concerned with all
aspects of life. Milne’s thoughts about gender, and gender roles, in relationship to politics and
religion, in particular, show a man ahead of his time. This is evident in *Norman*, Milne’s four poems
concerning Religion, Faith and Salvation. Milne explores the patriarchal religious narrative in these
two following stanzas in *Norman* in relationship to social development too. Milne explores the
imagination of why God is considered to be male when the scriptures states that God made both man
and woman to his images, -is God then not supposed to be *more* than what a man and a woman can be
together? Yet, the religious narrative has locked God into being ‘merely’ a man, a father, to some
extent, and always portrayed in opposition to women rather than *unified* with both male and female
gender narratives and imaginations. Milne puts this in terms of;

*We think of God as ‘Him’ because
Man ruled the world and made the laws,
And, seeking GOD, could only find
A man-like image in his mind.
To women, too, of Easter race
Who meekly sat with covered face,
Submissive to their lord’s decree,
The Lord was naturally ‘He’-
What other pronoun use? What else was there to be?*
(*Norman* ‘Three’ Stanza X).18

Exactly how rhetorical this question embedded in this stanza is read could vary, but, yet, there is the
associative linkage in that question-mark ‘What else were there to be?’ and ‘what other pronoun
use?’ . Here, Milne is inviting the reader into the poem by adding questions to ponder, or try to answer.
Yet, he conveys it in a manner which simultaneously ‘speaks to’ those who favour liberalism and
equality; the poem expresses a mixed message which is adaptable to a multitude of standpoints.

18 Here the rhyme-pattern in this stanza is AA, BB, CC, EEE
Inasmuch Milne is both inviting the reader into his process of thought, that is, would there be any other word, or pronoun to use, which would fit better into the rhyme of the line, while he also pinpoints the rigidity within his contemporary Christian society in acknowledging the role of women as equal to men in society. In these questions Milne depicts societal inequality in the alienation of women, while he split the conclusion in two, which express the equality within Milne’s idea of liberalism; those who cannot imagine another pronoun, and those who can imagine another pronoun.

Additionally, and inevitably, one has to question whether if divinity is given to humanity or whether it is imposed by men onto men and women. Milne makes it clear that his standpoint is that if there is a God; all-seeing, all-knowing, there would be no need for any Angel recording human deeds, especially not any Angel who merely attach value and significance to some ‘decrees’. Milne’s line ‘Man ruled the world and made the laws’ pinpoints that women are left out of creating decrees and are not well-represented within church. Through this portrayal Milne pinpoints how the imagination of God is not unproblematically a single-minded effort to make. Milne comments upon this discrepancy in imagination with another stanza;

But to make GOD progenitor,
With Mary, of the Child she bore
Interprets in a special sense
The sex we use for reference
Had women ruled, we should refer
To our imagined God as ‘Her’;
And build upon the sex implied
A mother-legend to provide
A creed for all, as much, as little, justified.
(‘Three’ Stanza XI).

In this stanza Milne is establishing the firm linkage between the process of imagination in the past, with imagining in the present through; ‘the sex we use to refer’, as inconsequently viewing the world through the lens of a male perspective. A male standard set to stand corrected by a ‘Recording Angel’. That is, the idea of an ever-present observer who, as Milne depicts it, constitutes an evaluating

19 The rhyme-scheme is AA, BB, CC, DDD
conscience, an Angel, a divine force; one which the conduct of men has to be held accountable for their actions to. This is evident in;

Are conduct and a mindless creed
The only lenitives to plead?
Let the Recording Angel look
In our, not his, Accounting Book:
And follow, page by laboured page,
The story of Man’s pilgrimage,
Since first, emergent from the slime,
Through wastes of unrecorded time,
He thought to stand upright, and, standing, strove to climb.

(Norman ‘Four’ Stanza IX).

Here Milne is fast-forwarding the history of humankind to the point where humans dictated how to be a man or woman of good Faith. Milne is stressing the ‘Accounting Book’; the tool by which individuals are to feel ashamed of themselves as ‘in our, not his’ assessment (referring to God). Milne also pinpoints the ‘unrecorded’ time in-between in which there seems to be no reckoning of recording at all by the ‘recording Angel’. Milne is manifesting the discrepancy here between what is given weight in the ‘Angel’s book pages of recordings’ on the whole and what is overlooked. In doing so Milne is also challenging the point and method of recording merely some occurrences, he also illuminates that not all occurrences actually matter in a significant way which has to be remembered in pages in the accounting book. Here the aspect of keeping record as entitlement for gaining public empowerment reveals the systematic social flaws. Milne stresses the paradox experienced by individuals in times of war; the paradox of defining oneself and individual sense of honor situated within the social circumstances of sacrificing the religious sense of individual honor, or surrender ideals and social structures, such as the political system. Either way, individual sacrifices seemed inevitable rendered an involuntary demand of standpoint. Here, Milne’s poems enable a multi-layered depiction of dealing with this paradox; to follow orders and die for the cause of others’ life, or surrender without a fight, as well as the grey area of being forced into making that individual decision and accepting not being in control of the circumstances of any continuity of individual existence.

This stanza keeps to the same AA, BB, CC, DDD-pattern as the other stanzas in Norman.
Due to rapid progress, and individual uncertainty, the empowerment which does provide control becomes vital. Milne's poem ‘Four’ deals with empowerment and the forces within human control. Milne also explores the concept of ‘inventions’ in a multi-layered sense, as technological progress. This is evident in;

The new ‘inventions’ Man extols,
The strange new forces he controls,
The grand ‘discoveries’ of Man,
Have waited since the world began;
Lay waiting long, long years, until
He closed his hand on them- and still
New forces seek to abdicate
Their rights to Man, and wonders wait,
Impatient for his coming, but alas! So late.
(Norman ‘Four’ Stanza XV).  

Considering this stanza to denote technological progress, it is while waiting for the return of Messiah that people ‘impatiently’ turn to cruel warfare-methods. This is also reflecting Milne’s ideas about the clash between religion and the Church of England and patriotism as entangled with religion in his contemporary British society. An entanglement which makes it difficult to distinguish where religion ends and patriotism or nationalism begins. Embedded within that transfer lies the essential issue of where an individual’s honor is or even could be. As Milne argues in Peace, if a nation at all can have any honor, since a state is an inanimate construction which cannot hold any honor in itself. Therefore, Milne argues, the church is actively implementing an idea which is not religious. The idea that a man’s duty as a man of Faith lies not merely in obeying the ten commandments and his own actions, he must also simultaneously be extending his priorities to include the military national identity. Due to the clash between these dimensions, a choice is inevitably between the interest of the state and the interest of the individual. That is, the conflict between being a man of good Christian faith religiously and commitment to the Ten Commandments, which includes no killing, versus choosing the prevailing interest of the state’s imagined pride and prestige, and become a solider who kills. This links further to abstract idealized images of reality and society, and to questions revolving human existence. Ultimately, it reflects the individuals’ agony in making decisions with dire consequences.

21 All stanzas in Norman keep to the same rhyme pattern scheme.
and how individuals defined themselves in times of war through that process of determining whether to continue to exist, or risk not existing, and for what Cause is any individual upholding or losing their individual ‘honor’.

Milne deals with these existential questions in *Norman;* such as does eternity exist due to its essential linkage to determining what exactly individual honor is and for what purposes and religiously determined places individual honor is require to be purposeful in the imagination of an eternity, an after-life, and, ultimately, individual freedom of the deliberation of the soul without any constraints of fear. Milne’s poetry offers that space of unity, where one individual’s decision corresponds with the decisions which others have made, or were about to make, as a linkage between those in doubt and those who were certain of their decisions in times of war. The immortality embedded within words written and within thoughts expressed is described by Milne in ‘Four’ as the ‘seed’ which reaches beyond the division-line between Life and Death. There is a sense of liberalism, of freedom, contrasted by continuity in Milne’s poetry in dealing with Death. In *Norman* Milne’s reflections concerning the sanctity of life, and especially the role of poetry in times of war, which is evident as;

This is our world. No need to grieve
For other worlds, if Death can leave
Some seed of us to fructify
When we beneath the earth shall lie.
The living world revives her dead:
Each line they wrote, each word they said,
Each little thought let fall may free
Its gentle ripple in the sea,
Which, slowly widening, glides into Eternity.
(‘Four’ Stanza XIX).

Significantly, Milne ends *Norman* with the line which reaches into ‘eternity’. This is where he leaves the reader, at the verge of the end of the written word and hinting at the endlessness of what is ‘widening’ in front of the reader; which is the clash between the momentum of the tone and rhythm of deeply reflection and a slow change in progress which dissolves into two following blank pages before the book ends. Moreover, in how Death leaves a ‘seed’ to fructify, Milne is expressing the tension between loss of more words while he simultaneously is stressing continuity. In this sense
Milne is pinpointing the process which liberates even the dead as perpetuating individual honor and whatever springs from the seed; what remains within the world after the body had been claimed by Death. Here, Death is also the great equalizer which significantly express the importance of the individual honor of the dead to the living, as transgressing into immortality. Essentially, Milne describes ‘Eternity’ as embedded within the imagination of the existence or non-existence of the soul after death. Clifford Geertz, “a liberal humanist” (Montrose 398), writes that “[i]n order to make up our minds we must know how we feel about things; and to know how we feel about things we need the public images of sentiment that only ritual, myth, and art can provide” (Interpretation 89). Milne is providing this linkage, within the form of popular verse, wherein he request of his reader, via the artform of poetry, to ponder eternity and what it means at an individual level to ‘glide into Eternity’. The tone, here, due to popular verse provides a safety-net, a safe-haven to ease into these issues, which the heaviness of Siegfried Sassoon’s or Wilfred Owen’s poetry cannot provide.

Moreover, and in contrast to Milne’s poetry, Robert Graves’s ‘To An Ungentle Critic’ stanza 1-2, for instance, echoes the Romantic era through the repeating the last words in stanzas; ‘behind the town’ is referencing the sun, the Romantic nation of nature via the sun, hidden behind the industrialized society imagination of a town, and the reader is accused of merely looking for ‘newer images’. By repeating ‘air’ Graves is capturing the (fearsome) threat of something transforming or transporting through the air, yet Graves never makes this fear tangible for his readers. Graves acknowledges his commitment to the Romantic ideals through ‘in my worn-out words’, Graves is thus identifying words and established ideas which are endlessly repeating the past ideas of the heroic. Contrastively, this too, marks a difference between Milne and his contemporary war-poets in his unique capacity to include his readers into the action, and his advocacy to re-think the world and understand the world as it is now, without dwelling in the past. Milne’s perspective enables the reader a comfortable distance to warfare. Milne offers his readers an “attractive” (Nesmith, The Children's Milne 172) observer’s position of space to view poetry from, which is strikingly similar to the play-genre in its format. Nesmith finds Milne’s poetry to be ‘attractive rhythms and rhymes’ which only can be surpassed by the works of Robert Louis Stevenson (ibid. 172). This due to the ‘charm of reality’ and Milne’s ‘power of imagination in depicting his own experiences’ concerning how “[f]ew poets are gifted with the light, playful touch, the ingenious imagination, the humorous interpretation” of reality (ibid). She emphasizes Milne's “conviction that writing (...) requires the very best that a writer has to give” (ibid) and concludes that Milne “has spared no effort to give (...) [his] readers the best of his talent” (ibid). Milne’s way of conveying lightness and hope as a bridge into issues which are difficult to deal with is also evident in;

Men hope that, when the body dies,
The soul, released from it, will rise
To join some glad community
Of spirits from the flesh set free.

What hope, what promise, does it give,
If, now and then, the flesh re-live?

What proof of an immortal soul

Is the bare record on the scroll
Of Death: that once a body ’died’… and was made whole?

(Norman ‘Three’ Stanza XVII).

Here Milne questions faith and religion concerning the ‘immortal soul’ of ‘that [which] once a body ’died’, when there cannot be any ‘proof’ of any afterlife. The questioning is not a social criticism but a complaint to the end of life, yet perhaps with the aspect of Why? extended to all the death caused by warfare. These two stanzas from Norman also depicts the commonly imagined community revolving ‘Eternity’ in which the hope of remembrance cannot fully reach. Geertz writes that “[o]nly when we have a theoretical analysis of symbolic action comparable in sophistication to that we now have for social and psychological action, will we be able to cope effectively with those aspects of social and psychological life in which religion (or art, or science, or ideology) plays a determinant role” (Interpretation 135). And this is what Milne uniquely present his reader with, a sophisticated and brilliant way of comingling emotions to create a balance between ‘momentum’ and the stretch into the sphere where words cannot express human existence nor human suffering, Yet Milne makes it a joyful place; one to long for rather than one to fear to enter. Ultimately, in the lines; ‘The living world revives her dead: / Each line they wrote, each word they said, / Each little thought let fall may free / Its gentle ripple in the sea, / Which, slowly widening, glides into Eternity’, Milne’s metaphor is presenting life and death as the ripple upon water effect. That is, that every life and every word and thought a soul carried out in life still are there; that they are ever-present -like the uncountable drops in the sea; that each life and each soul matters still, regardless of social ranking, and exceeds the boundary of death. In this sense Milne is attempting to bridge the communicative gap between dimensions and extend imagination and thought into eternity as an ever-present awareness; as a consciousness of nostalgia and memory in remembrance, although a fragile one, one without any echoing back-effect, a one-way communication. Notably, yet, not one of perpetuating and immortalize heroism, but rather perpetuating the individuals -in their own right. Essentially, Milne denotes how each individual is like a drop; one among many drops, which constitutes an aspect of equality. The plea in ‘let may fall free’ reflects Milne’s advocacy for liberalism concerning personal growth wherein ‘slowly widening’ represents how the sense of personal honor depends upon an individual’s surroundings.
In *Norman* Milne uses popular verse and the extended last sentences as a method of slowing down the rhyme. Thereby he creates a space *within* his poems which enables possibilities for reflection and calmness, a mindfulness of finding the eternal *within* time and space. This pinpoints the linchpin in Milne’s equalizing liberalism, which he also advocates in *Peace and War*, that the continuity within reimagining the world, to always reflect, helps the individual to find or redefine the idea of individual honor, and the individual relationship to society and human existence. Milne shows with this method of writing his poems that this space for reflection also can be achievable through poetry itself as a medium between the, sometimes, absurd aspects and relationship between the individual and society. This is evident in the pause to inhale and exhale, designed to slow down both speed of machinery, speed of heart and speed of thought.

Derek Attridge advocates “an approach that begins not with the abstractions of metrical feet or grids of weak and strong positions, but with the psychological and physiological reality of the sequence of rhythmic energy pulses perceived, and enjoyed, by the reader and listener alike” (1016). This constitutes a co-creation embedded within poetry itself between the poet and the reader-listener. Additionally, Barry concludes that the discourse of understanding writing includes an entire “‘mental set’ and ideology which encloses the thinking of all members of a given society” (179). However, a discourse which is neither ‘singular’ nor ‘monolithic’ but always revolve ‘a multiplicity of discourses’ (ibid). This makes the significance of the ‘operation of power structures’ onto structures essential to notions of family, and to ‘layers of government’ crucially influential, especially when it comes to the overarching impact of how political power operates and ‘suffuses’ all spheres, which includes aspects of possibilities to affect transformation of society – and possibilities for change (ibid.). Inasmuch Barry establishes the foundation for the accompanying outlook of any ‘mental [mind] set’ through which imagining the world emerges and progress. Milne advocated this mind-set to be liberal and progressive.

In *Norman* the setting of the individual, its surroundings, and the individual sense of creating and reinforcing a sense of ‘honor’ is embedded within the setting and the concept of time and development. The stagnation of society is evident in Milne’s ‘One’, where time stands still around its stagnation of movement;

Four-square upon its little hill
The Norman church is Norman still,
And still the clock by some design
Insists on saying ten to nine.
And still the Vicarage relays
The formula of ancient days…
And children into manhood grow,
And minds go question to and fro,
And find no answer there. Yet seek it even so.

(Norman Stanza XXXVII).

This stanza is an important expression of the early hour in the beginning of the day ‘ten to nine’ as if imagining the moment at the beginning of something, when in fact it is not any movement or development towards anything. Just as the review of Milne’s *Peace* met a reluctancy toward the effort of change, as if the minutes ticking ahead toward the effort of movement is less convenient to the mindset to wrap around change, than the imaginary provided by mythologized past as a continuity of more of the same. Yet, in this stanza ‘children into manhood grow’ but ‘find no answer there’. When there is no aspiration towards progress and evaluating social and technological change then dwelling in the ‘nine to ten’ seems a good way of avoiding confronting what cannot be answered. In a society where the approach is that of ‘the Norman church is Norman still’. Milne challenges this approach to ‘the formula of ancient days’ in which the ‘design by ‘the clock’ never seems to be updated while the children grow to men. Yet, it implies a human-mind at work (once, but not ‘still’) through the perpetuating ‘design’ which is a human-made construction. The widest perspective of the term ‘still’ is something existing, which is not moving, thus, has stagnated, yet maintain its impact upon its surroundings. In *Norman* Milne’s exploration of the magnitude of grief and loss of various forms, of dis-empowerment throughout time is ever-presently stating the connection of equality.

Ultimately, Milne’s poems convey the dimension of desperation within human existence and human suffering which is concerned with the ambivalent tension just between laughter and crying in varying degrees. That is, the extreme satirical humor, wherein humanity constitutes itself (re-)defines itself and exists within. The dimension which enables an emotive connection to how the ambivalence in topics and make sense of situations wherein one cannot determine of whether one is crying with joy, or relief, or is crying from desperate sadness and despair. There is also a space of allowance within Milne’s poetry where it is acceptable to laugh when the tears have run out for the horrors of the evil of modern warfare. -A chance for the reader to breath and try to see the tragi-comical features of human existence also during hellish circumstances. Comedy and tragedy may be portrayed as two separate faces, but it is the same individual who feels both emotions equally deep, and thirst equally for someone to share laughter as tears with, and that is what Milne offers his readers, sympathy and compassion for all types of passionate feelings across the scale of emotions which an individual deals with in an era of war. In this sense, all humans, regardless of social ranking are equals in their happiness and grief and in experience loss in the early 20th century Britain. Essentially, it is crucial to remember about Milne’s authorship that; “Milne would go on speaking out for comedy to be taken as seriously as tragedy, for popular verse to be taken as seriously as serious verse” (Thwaite 271). Above
all, Milne’s sense of an inclusive liberal equality permeates his poetry. Milne’s poems convey the entanglement of the human and limited, versus the inhuman limitlessness of warfare.

Conclusion

In exploring Milne’s poetry less familiarized collections *Behind the Lines* (1940) and *The Norman Church* (1948) the following has been established: That from the quarrels with others, as explained by Yeates, Milne’s poetry has shaped a liberal and pacifist rhetoric which has enabled his poetry to express his ideas of serious political topics in popular verse through the lens of liberalism in defining and exploring the complexity of language and human existence. Essentially, how Milne’s poetry manifests a humanistic perspective of endurance wherein democracy and liberalism balance inhumanity in every aspect of life and death which language can express, in contrast to the inhumanity of the modern warfare-machinery. Crucially, in Milne’s poetry Hope is brought back to his individual readers, and a sense of certainty in an era dominated and marked by uncertainty.

Additionally, the surviving letters Milne wrote to the editor of the *Times* confirms the image of Milne as deeply engaged in social issues such as national and international policy and charity. The letters pinpoint the aspects presented in this essay about Milne’s engagement in fundraising for those in need and the amount of time he spent as a benefactor for charity organizations in addition to his political criticism in public spheres. This engagement places Milne’s books *Peace* and *War* in the light of someone who had made it into the ‘who’s who’-context as influential to his contemporaries, and this not merely as a playwright, although frequently dismissed by critics as a ‘mere’ humorist. However, Milne was a humorist who always influenced peoples’ minds and would (continue) to be ‘that Punch editor’, who now (also) wrote plays, and books. Yet, in everything which Milne fashioned, he was searching for personal freedom and independence. Milne was a true liberal, but in his own way.

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22 Milne’s insistence upon spacings between punctuation marks also in writing is a visual remined of his all-including sense of equalising liberalism. Thwaite states that “Milne's punctuation is [uniquely] his own. In 1912 he wrote to Clement Shorter at the *Sphere*. 'I do feel strongly that punctuation is a matter entirely for the author. It is not an exact science like spelling.' And, again, in 1917: "Don't let the printers interfere with my punctuation ... Right or wrong, it's my own"” (xix).
Works Cited


Appendixes

The Last Pot

Much have I sacrificed: my happy home,
My faith in experts' figures, half my money,
The fortnight that I meant to spend in Rome,
My weekly effort to be fairly funny;
But these are trifles, light as air when weighed
Against this other – Breakfast Marmalade.
(Milne qtd. in Thwaite 198).

To America

EVIL has struck again:
Again the broken faith.
And little homely lives of happiness–
The mother knitting in her rocking-chair,
The daughter, laughing, holding out proud hands
To where her baby stands
Bashful, uncertain, in its party dress–
Are twisted into fear,
Are tortured into pain,
Are closed in death.
Well, are you coming in?
It’s a fight between Good and Evil,
It’s a fight between God and the Devil.
Where do you stand to-day?
Which are you for? You have chosen, yes,
But is it enough for men to bless
The men who fight, and to turn away?
Is it enough for women to cry,
And to say, ‘Poor things,’ when the innocent die?
Is it enough to give your prayers,
And then—go back to your own affairs?
It's a fight for all that you counted dear,
It's a fight for all that you fought to win;
The fight is on, and the issue clear:
Good or Evil,
God or the Devil ...
Well, are you coming in?

Yes, ‘War is Hell.’
But Peace is Hell if it’s Peace with the Devil in power.
Yet, if this is not your quarrel and not your hour,
If you have chosen Peace, you have chosen well.

But scatter your armies, burn your ships,
Tear the breech-block out of the gun;
Never again can you fight who fight not now,
No rallying-call can ever rise to your lips,
There lives no Faith to which you can make your vow,
There is no Cause to fight for: only the one,
Only one gage of battle, only one battle-song:
From “Rhythm in English Poetry” by Derek Attridge

Attridge writes that;

...the use of a commonplace underlying form explains why we latch on to the rhythms of “Disobedience” so immediately, but it doesn’t explain why its rhythms are so distinctively jaunty, to infant and adult alike. To begin to understand this, we need to pay attention to what happens between the beats, where the necessary slack phase is either occupied by one or more unstressed syllables or left empty. (A beat is constituted not just by the energy pulse that creates it, but also by the relaxation that occurs before and after it; I call these phases of relaxation “offbeats”)

He argues that “I don’t believe it’s possible to discuss rhythm without relating it to the movements of the human body. A poem like [Milne’s] “Disobedience” [, but this is also applicable to all of Milne’s poetry,] actually seems to invite not just regular reading but a beating of the hand or a nodding of the head – and this phenomenon occurs not because a rhythmic structure, such as melody, has been imposed upon the language, but because the language, read aloud, produces a rhythmic organization that encourages regular muscular movement. The explanation for this lies in the spoken language of English, which, like every spoken language involves a distinctive use of the body’s musculature to produce a sequence of sounds of different qualities and durations. The muscles controlling the lungs expel air in regulated bursts which are modified by the larynx and the higher speech organs of the mouth to emerge as recognizable syllables. This production of syllables tends, like all repeated muscular activities, toward temporal regularity (it’s much easier to do keep-fit exercises if you employ regular movements, which is why it helps to do them to music). What’s important for the experience of regular rhythm is not exactly equal durations but the psychological and physiological experience of periodicity” (ibid. 1022-3).

Whereas much...
has come about at a time when the easy availability of recordings and recording
devices has given the human voice a cultural centrality it hasn’t had since printing
became the dominant representation of language. Whether English poetry as an art of
the voice, and, through the voice, the body, is rejuvenated by influences from other
cultural forms, and from other cultures, or dwindles to a diversion or scholarly pastime
of the very few while newer cultural practices thrive, there can be little doubt that
rhythm will continue to play a vital part in that realm of social and cultural experience
in which human beings exploit the inseparability of formal urgings from their most
insistent concerns and durable pleasures (ibid. 1034-5).

From Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*;

Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the
impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew
apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. / But this young
man who had killed himself- had he plunged holding his treasure? ‘If it were now to
die, ‘twere now to be most happy,’ she had said to herself once, coming down, in white.
/ Or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose he had had that passion, and had gone
to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust,
extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage – forcing your
soul, that was it – if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed
him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), Life
is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that? / Then (she had felt it
only this morning) there was the terror; the overwhelming incapacity, one's parents
giving it into one's hands, this life, to be lived to the end, to be walked with serenely;
there was in the depths of her heart an awful fear. Even now, quite often if Richard had
not been there reading the Times, so that she could crouch like a bird and gradually
revive, send roaring up that immeasurable delight, rubbing stick to stick, one thing with
another, she must have perished. She had escaped. But that young man had killed
himself” (Woolf *Mrs Dalloway* 170-1).

Remark to Milne’s poem ‘Information’

Lord Macmillan was Minister of Information – (what a long time ago that seems)–and
Lord Camrose had been called in to help him. It was supposed that all the Ministry's
propaganda was written by such experts as are mentioned in the fifth verse. But this
was not so. Having placed myself at the Ministry's disposal in September, I was asked
to do a very delicate, difficult and (as it seemed to me) important piece of work in a
very great hurry. Indeed, it almost looked as if I might have to take a special train to
London, clutching the precious manuscript, so as to get it there in time; but luckily it
was agreed that the few hours' delay would not matter. I worked at it from morning to
night, and got it by post to London the next evening. Three weeks later I was told that
'They' (Authority too high to mention by name) had now decided that it wasn't wanted
after all. When the war broke out again in May, I wrote to the new Minister and said
that I would gladly go on writing anything that wasn't wanted, so long as it was really
helping to win the war. The legs of this noble and disinterested offer were neatly
knocked away (at the very moment, had I known it, when I was posting my letter) by
the Government's requisition of authority to conscript anybody or anything which it
wanted. But instead of sending two men round for me with a sack, as Goebbels would
have done, the Minister not only gave me every opportunity of being useful, but tried
to leave me with the impression that it was I who was doing him an extraordinary
kindness. I thank him’ (Milne Behind the Lines 26-7).

‘Information’

_It was officially said_

_This morning that Queen Anne was dead._

By 10.15 the news as stated

Was generally circulated.

But High Authorities at noon

Perceived that she had died too soon,

And saved a difficult position

By rooting out the Lunch Edition.

To make it clear, the B.B.C.

Regretted her demise at 3,

And remedied the fault at 5

By hinting she was still alive,

And concentrating on the person
Of Sandy (Organist) MacPherson.

A messenger was heard to say
‘We’d know about it one fine day’;
A typist said: ‘It won’t be yet,
And anyhow it may be wet.’
The Censors put their heads together
And said there wasn’t any weather.

Things being in a state of flux,
And Lord Macmillan's motto ‘Lux
Ex tenebris' (and Lord Camrose's
The ancient riddle ‘Where was Moses ? ’)
The M. of I. devised a plan
To publicize the birth of Anne.

A score of sound economists
Described her little dimpled fists ;
Ex-diplomats in courtly prose
Explored the wonders of her toes ;
A dozen civil engineers
Wrote memos on her childish tears ;

And notes about her party dress
( Intended for the neutral press)
Which indicated by a dash
The colour of her baby sash
Were specially designed to stop
The truth from reaching Ribbentrop.

At 10 p.m. (the Night Canteen
Re-opening) the facts were seen
In true proportion, and at last,
All danger mercifully past,
The news was formally released:
‘Queen Blank (? ask Censor) is deceased.’

(Behind the Lines 25-6)

**Excelsior**

*THE shades of night were falling fast
When through a Cornish village passed
A youth who carried in the rain
A placard with the odd refrain,
‘Excelsior!’*

I write it thus
Because the Censor made a fuss.
He said, ‘Good heavens, look at this !
An *Alpine* village! That’s the Swiss !
This chap of yours appears to be
Infringing Swiss neutrality ! ’

‘You know,’ I said, ‘there’s just a chance
This Alpine village was in France.’
'Geography’, the man replied,
‘Is for the Censor to decide.
But even if the place were French,
There’d be an observation trench,
A listening-post, or what you will,
Sited on some convenient hill.
And now you’re going to tell the Huns
Exactly where to train their guns!’

I said, ‘This youth, for what it’s worth,
Was an American by birth.’

The Censor quivered in his chair :
‘That's right,’ he said, ‘now tell them where
And when America comes in!
D’you want the enemy to win? ’

I said, ‘Your pardon, gentle Sir!
Pick any village you prefer.’

The Censor scratched a thoughtful head :
‘Try Moreton-in-the-Marsh,’ he said.
‘It's good,’ said I, ‘but doesn't fit.’
'Well, keep the East Coast out of it.'
I promised him I wouldn't rest
Until I'd got it in the West.

The Censor groaned and wiped his brow.
I said, ‘Well, what's the matter now? ’
The Censor said, ‘My sainted aunt!
You can't, you absolutely can’t
Go chattering about the snow!’
‘Can’t you?’ I said. 'I didn't know.'
‘Good Gort!’ he said, ‘you’ve done it twice!’
I said the second one was ice.
He cried, ‘But snow and ice together
Is telling Germany the weather!’

‘Your pardon, Sir,’ I said again,
‘We'll have a thaw and make it rain.’
‘That's right,’ he said, ‘but don't imply
A fixed condition in the sky.’

The Censor wasn’t happy yet:
‘A point,’ he said, ‘of etiquette—
This chap of yours, this feller bore
A banner— Now in modern war
It isn’t done. At Waterloo
My Uncle Henry carried two;
At Inkerman, I recollect;
We still considered it correct;

But when we come to Spion Kop
Or Omdurman– 'I shouted 'Stop!
This isn’t meant to be the truth,
It’s poetry, about a youth
Who didn’t fight in any war,
But simply said ‘Excelsior!’

The Censor looked a shocked surprise:
‘You mean,’ he said, 'you're telling lies?'
‘Well, yes and no,' I said: 'you see,
It’s Longfellow, it isn’t me.'
The Censor went into a dream...
Then murmured, 'Wait a bit–I seem
To know the feller somehow. What’s
His regiment—the Royal Scots?
I knew a chap in Poona once—
Is this the Longfellow who hunts?'

I said, 'No matter, let it go:
I’m leaving out his ice and snow.'
‘That's right,’ he said, 'and leave his rank
And regiment completely blank.'

*The shades of night were falling fast
When in the corridor I passed,*
While hurrying to catch my train,

A liftman with the odd refrain,

‘Excelsior, or Going Down!’

I took the lift and left the town.

(Behind the Lines 46-8). (Italicisation in poem made by Milne.)

The Patriot

THE weather: One must keep it dark,

And I was wrong to say,

On rising with the oldest lark,

‘Oh, what a lovely day!

O all ye little hills, exult!’

I cried aloud on Wednesday ult.,

And by this innocent remark

I gave the show away.

Well, there it was, the day was fine;

The surest of our clocks

Had fixed the hour (by striking 9)

At 10.15 approx.,

And by 11 I should be

Comparisoned upon the tee

In trousers of a spring design

And regimental socks.

At breakfast—and the gods forbid

The meal I love the most
Should dwindle—there were *(semper id)*

Two scrambled eggs on toast.

(…)

I’ll play like Cotton,’ and I did

An 84 at most.

If I tell Hitler how I made

The ball pull up and stop

Stone dead at each approach I played,

Will he tell Ribbentrop ?

Shall Goering know (I think he should)

How accurate I was with wood ?

Need any golfer be afraid

Of talking golfers’ shop ?

He need not; and no secrets now

Come oozing out from me,

And when the wind is East by Sou’

I say it’s Sou’ by E. ;

And oh! my lips are tightly sealed

About our forces in the field—

For all I talk about is How

*I did an 83. (Behind the Lines 86-7)*

**TO AN UNGENTLE CRITIC (By Robert Graves)**

*The great sun sinks behind the town*

*Through a red mist of Volnay wine....*

But what's the use of setting down
That glorious blaze behind the town?
You'll only skip the page, you'll look
For newer pictures in this book;
You've read of sunsets rich as mine.

A fresh wind fills the evening air
With horrid crying of night birds....
But what reads new or curious there
When cold winds fly across the air?
You'll only frown; you'll turn the page,
But find no glimpse of your "New Age
Of Poetry" in my worn-out words.

(Graves stanza 1-2)

**Note 12.** John Venn’s diagram used to express the relationship of creating meaning adapted by Susan Holbrook in *Read (and Write About) Poetry* p. 8.

Above is the Venn diagram showing us where meaning is. You are always an important part of developing a poem’s meaning. There it is, right out in the open, not hidden at all.