

A.A Milne's Eeyore : A Peep into the World of Clinical Depression

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Abstract

Winnie the Pooh is an immensely popular character amongst children. In fact, all of A.A Milne's characters are fun loving, friendly and their lives are composed of living with and for their friends. The plump, honey loving teddy, Pooh and his friendship with Piglet is often seen as a benchmark. Though, there is one more character who doesn't come out in as much limelight as Winnie the Pooh, but is as essential. The character is the gloomy, old donkey, Eeyore, who is represented as the epitome of clinical depression by Milne. Eeyore is depressed for most of his days. This paper shall talk about how Eeyore becomes a character allowing the presence (noticeable) of a being suffering from depression in the mainstream world. Along with making it acceptable and 'normal', Milne also makes his character severely dependent on his friends, which is discussed further in this paper.

Winnie the Pooh continues to be a famous, plump, life loving and hopeful bear, who makes space for himself on several bookshelves. He is cherished, appreciated and looked upon as an ideal for friendship. His friendship with Christopher Robin and Piglet is often considered to be a benchmark for friendship. *Winnie the Pooh* hit the market back in 1926. He was brought to life by Alan Alexander Milne, who anthropomorphized the teddy bear of his son, CR Milne, whom he had named Winnie. A.A. Milne also makes his son a major character in his book, whom he renames as Christopher Robin, known to solve most problems. Christopher Robin shows his humanly dominance over his animal friends. The book, *Winnie the Pooh* does not only talk about the plump, yellow, honey loving teddy bear but takes his friends along in a journey located in the 'Hundred Acre Wood'. The book talks about Piglet, an anxious piglet who tires himself to endless worry, a wise Owl, a hyperactive Tigger for whom life is a dance floor, a haughty Rabbit and a gloomy donkey named Eeyore.

Albeit, almost all of Milne's characters can be seen as symbols for one or the other mental disabilities. Pooh is believed to have compulsive eating disorder while Piglet dwells into generalized anxiety disorder and Tigger is said to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Amidst all other not so visible disorders, Milne allows the readers to peep into a visible world of gloominess represented by Eeyore. This paper shall talk about how Eeyore becomes a character allowing the presence (noticeable) of a being

suffering from depression in the mainstream world. Along with making it acceptable and 'normal', Milne also makes his character severely dependent on his friends, the details of which shall follow in the heading next to the first.

"Eeyore's Gloomy Place: Rather Boggy and Sad"

Milne's Eeyore is a gloomy donkey. His eyes are droopy and his neck remains lowered. He likes to sit alone and think about things over and over again. He feels worthless all day. He admires his tail which has a bow tied to it to such an extent that he thinks he does not have an existence without it. Even with this extent of admiration, or because of it, he keeps losing his tail. Christopher Robin finds his tail often and pins it to him. Eeyore is generally criticized as pessimistic, gloomy, depressed, anhedonic and an old stuffed donkey. Even his place is marked as 'Eeyore's Gloomy Place' in Pooh's map. Whenever Milne grants him speech, he speaks in a gloomy tone,

"Sometimes he thought, 'Wherefore'? and sometimes he thought, 'I'm as much as which?' – and sometimes he didn't quite know what he was thinking about."

"I don't seem to have felt at all how for a long time."

(Ch. 4 – In which Eeyore loses a tail and Pooh finds one)

In contrast to other characters, whose conditions might not be 'as visible' to the reader, Eeyore's

characterization comes out as a typical picture of clinical depression. By including a visibly depressed character in a work meant for children, Milne, first of all, makes it acceptable and normalized to have such a presence in life. Also, Eeyore, however gloomy or stooped low, is welcomed and respected by his friends. He is never sidelined or considered any less than others. In fact, his friends try to make him happy by doing all they can. When it is Eeyore's birthday, Piglet and Pooh make all possible efforts to make Eeyore elated. In return, Eeyore supports his friends in the same manner as they support him. Eeyore is wise and understanding. He often delivers wise lines of the like –

“A little consideration, a little thought for others, makes all the difference.”

(Ch. 8 – In which Christopher Robin leads an expedition to the North Pole)

The publication of Milne's book took place back in the early 20th Century, which was also the time when Freud's ideas were gaining popularity. There is a high chance that Milne was influenced by the normalization of mental disorders or at least their acknowledgement other than 'madness' in the mainstream discourse. Though there is no such clear statement or evidence of this assumption, Milne does present a character, whose condition is fairly visible as that of a being severely affected by some trauma in life. Some fan theories have gone to the length of saying that Eeyore might have been abused by Christopher Robin, being one of his first toys. This theory reasons out this possible behavior of Christopher through the observation that Eeyore's tail has to be attached with the help of a pin. Although Eeyore is all for his friends as his friends are for him, he is anti – social at some points, which are rare, for he comes into the picture only when Pooh encounters him. His choice at isolation speaks for children who like to be with themselves and enjoy their own company. Though, it is no where necessary that such children face/ will be facing clinical depression, Eeyore's deep thinking in his own company is a symbol of a being who feels just alright in one's own company. Milne strikes out several stereotypes by showing Eeyore to be wise and efficient at whatever task he takes forth.

Milne's piece is also written around the time of High Modernism in literature after the end of

horrifying experiences of The First World War. The themes of isolation, deep thinking and existentialism echo through Eeyore. The old, gloomy donkey, thus reverberates his times, which are often considered one of the most dreadful in the history of humankind. While it is true that Eeyore aptly represents his times when connected to them, it is also true that he transcends historical timelines as a depiction of a clinically depressed being.

Milne provides his readers a peep into the mind and behavior of a clinically depressed donkey, who is nowhere dysfunctional. He is not to be sidelined due to his medical condition. By offering the warmth and friendship of the other characters, Milne provides a way out of the gloom for Eeyore, or at least, some respite from it.

Way too dependent?

Milne's Eeyore appreciates the efforts of his friends. He counts on those efforts and reciprocates them by making wise statements to help rescue his friends from inevitable troubles and most importantly, he is present for them. Presence of friends is one essential trope that runs in Milne's creation, not only for Eeyore, but for any friend who might need it.

Albeit, there is one unusual thing about Milne's representation of a clinically depressed being in Eeyore and that is his intense socialization. There are points where Eeyore is found alone, immersed in thinking but those points are rare as pointed out earlier. At most other times, Eeyore is often located with his friends. His constant involvement with a support group is unusual for someone standing as an example of a major depressive disorder. Whereas the lack of interest is common in clinical depression, causing most persons to not spend time with each other, Eeyore's character lies quite in contrast. He is mostly surrounded by his friends whom he considers his source of happiness and being.

While Eeyore's friends are supportive and do not sideline him in any manner, it is clear that he remains dependent on them to make him happy or cause the slightest upheaval in his behavior. He tends to attach his individuality within two spheres. One, being his friends who can do anything to make Eeyore elated and two, his tail, without which, he feels incomplete. Only if Milne could develop his character so that he stops attaching his individuality to his tail and

starts believing that his need to be worthy doesn't depend on the will of his friends to make him happy, he won't need to go back to these two spheres to look for himself.

Milne paints the picture of a clinically depressed donkey in his literature meant for children. This step is as unusual as necessary for disabled beings who are often disregarded, marginalized and sidelined. Mainstream literature meant for

children, especially the one based in England during the 20th Century, focuses on making 'good boys' and 'good girls' according to the English etiquette. It becomes absolutely essential for children to normalize, accept and embrace persons with disabilities and also let them grow at their own pace rather than rushing them to run in the mainstream. Milne's narrative becomes a stepping stone in normalizing mental disabilities and not making them a taboo.

References

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