

I don't like endings. So I'll start at the beginning.

In 1926 Alan Alexander Milne published Winnie-The-Pooh, a book about a friendly and thoughtful creature, a deep contemplative poet and "a bear of very little brain".

It's a collection of short stories about Pooh and his friends and the gentle low-stakes adventures they get into. It's sweet, uncynical and genuinely very funny. It became a treasured and beloved story, especially thanks to the Disney adaptations.

It's timeless, but was it meant to be immortal? What if you can't escape escapism? Maybe it should just-

[intro]

I. In which we meet Christopher Robin and his bear

A A Milne, an essayist and playwright, based the characters on his son's collection of stuffed toys, a bear, a piglet, a donkey, a tiger and a mother and child kangaroo. Milne himself invented two more characters, Owl and Rabbit which is why they are depicted as real animals and not stuffed toys like his son's. The personalities had evolved through playtime, particularly with Daphne Milne, the mother.

And the son, the one who all had the collection of teddies in the first place, his name was Christopher Robin.

You might have noticed that he shares a name with the character of the stories. How sweet, he named the fictional boy after his own son. Except it might not really be a character.

When you read the book, it's surprisingly autobiographical and it opens with A A Milne talking in first person.

"What about a story?" said Christopher Robin.

"What about a story?" I said.

"Could you very sweetly tell Winnie-the-Pooh one?"

"I suppose I could," I said. "What sort of stories does he like?"

"About himself. Because he's that sort of Bear."

So this isn't a story about a boy named Christopher Robin. This is a story being told to the literal Christopher Robin.

"Christopher Robin, you must shoot the balloon with your gun. Have you got your gun?"

"Of course I have," you said. "But if I do that, it will spoil the balloon," you said.

"But if you don't," said Pooh, "I shall have to let go, and that would spoil me."

When he put it like this, you saw how it was, and you aimed very carefully at the balloon, and fired.

"Ow!" said Pooh.

"Did I miss?" you asked.

"You didn't exactly miss," said Pooh, "but you missed the balloon."

And the book ends with Christopher Robin going back to bed. So this is A A Milne telling stories about his actual son and his collection of toys.

And this had an impact on a child who was suddenly thrust into fame.

His name was Christopher Milne, yes, Robin is his middle name, not his surname.

Christopher became the subject of a lot of his father's works. Before Winnie The Pooh there was the short and stout Edward Bear in the poem "Teddy Bear" and then in his more famous poem "Vespers":

*"Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!
Christopher Robin is saying his prayers."*

A private moment cribbed and published with Christopher's name permanently attached, this was published in Vanity Fair in 1923 and eventually published in a poetry book, along with Teddy Bear, in 1924's "When We Were Very Young". This sweet poem of prayer was said to have been framed in many people's homes and was hugely famous. Christopher Robin had become a household name and he was barely four.

Then came Winnie The Pooh. He's still called Edward Bear to begin with, but he and the rest of the toy collection became superstars, with their real life counterparts coming to inspire their characters. Such as the neckline of the donkey toy becoming loose, making his head sag like it's depressed.

The Milne family would regularly visit Ashdown Forest and Christopher's games would go on to inspire the stories almost verbatim.

During one stormy day, Christopher Milne would place sticks in the dirt to measure how much the water was rising, and one Blustery Day did Christopher Robin the same.

Galleons Lap, The Six Pines, the Poohsticks Bridge, these are all real places, you can go to them. I was actually going to film a video there but I could afford the location fees.

This makes the Pooh stories not a work of fiction but a collection of memories, of the games and characters created partly by Christopher Milne. And in a manner, this is very sweet and endearing. It's a time capsule of a moment that a family can treasure forever. Many of our most beloved stories are inspired by the children around the author.

The Mr Men were created by Roger Hargreaves after his son had asked what a Tickle looked like.

There's nothing unusual about taking ideas from stories created with children and turning them into stories for all children. But perhaps A.A. Milne's biggest error was he took away his son's name and gave it to another boy.

II. In which we say goodbye to Christopher Milne

Christopher Milne was an early example of a child star, which was nice for a shy boy who found it hard to socialise. He then had to leave the figurative woods of childhood to go to boarding school. And no matter what he did, Christopher Robin followed him everywhere he went.

It's well known now the massively negative impact fame can have on child stars, Mara Wilson describes the overwhelming lack of privacy, Jennette McCurdy endured a lot of pressure and abuse from her own mother, Macaulay Culkin was massively typecast. There's little protection from child being exploited as influencers on platforms like TikTok and YouTube. I've even already begun to scale back my son's inclusion online as he grows up in order to protect his right to privacy. Christopher Milne was not given that choice.

He was relentlessly bullied and teased. He realised he could never live a normal life. The books may be finished but he was still Christopher Robin. Stuck as being forever the sweet little prayer boy who played with his teddy bear. All his most intimate moments were available in all good bookstores. Christopher Milne spent his whole life trying to run away from Christopher Robin. The story wouldn't end.

The invention of Winnie The Pooh is somewhat recreated in 2017's Goodbye Christopher Robin. Naturally for a movie adaptation, it condenses and embellishes elements for it to be a more standard Hollywood plot. But perhaps the biggest alteration from reality is Christopher challenging his father over the inescapable fame.

This catharsis makes for good drama but it didn't happen. In real life, it either had little impact on the family as a unit or his father was just unaware of the effects it had on his son. He suffered in silence.

When A A Milne died in 1956, Christopher never returned to that Sussex house near the woods. He had been still pretty close with his father, but after he married his cousin on his mother's side, the already strained relationship with his mother snapped and she never spoke to her son again even on her death bed. He opened a bookstore, which is strange if he was trying to escape the fame of Winnie The Pooh that he'd openly invite book fans to see him.

In 1987 Christopher Milne gave away the original toys. They now reside on display at the New York Public Library. People were horrified - Christopher Robin can't give away the toys! That's unthinkable! The boy gave away his bear, because the boy wasn't a boy anymore. He was a man in his sixties.

So was Christopher Milne's life ruined by Christopher Robin?
Would it have been better if it had stopped? I'm not sure Christopher would agree.

For the longest time, he had refused to accept any of the Pooh royalty money, but when his daughter was born with cerebral palsy, he did eventually accept the money, but only to spend on his daughter to improve her life, not himself. "I had to accept it, for Clare's sake".

In his autobiographies, he doesn't look back at the past with anger or regret. Embarrassment, sure. But he speaks so fondly of playing in the woods and being with his Nanny. Memories of Pooh may be bittersweet but revisiting the past allowed him to reconcile with it, saying that the process "lift me from under the shadow of my father and of Christopher Robin, and to my surprise and pleasure I found myself standing beside them in the sunshine able to look them both in the eye"

Christopher Milne's story has an interesting parallel with Peter Llewelyn Davies, the boy who wouldn't grow up, Peter Pan. JM Barrie had informally adopted him and his brothers when their parents died, and wrote his namesake into the story, along with his brothers John and Michael. Being known as the "real life Peter Pan" hounded him his entire life, that even when he committed suicide, the newspapers still referred to him as Peter Pan. And when Christopher Milne died in 1996 aged 75, he too was still referred to as his famous counterpart.

I think that's why the 2018 Disney film, Christopher Robin, leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It is the fictional Christopher Robin, as evident by the Robin surname, but it borrows heavily from the Christopher Milne's actual life, Ashdown Forest, the house in Sussex and London, all grown up with a wife and daughter, though erasing her disability in the process. It's a story of the boy grown up to a man, a workaholic, straining the relationship with his family and has forgotten his childlike wonder until a reminder from his past shows up and- wait a minute, this is just Hook. Another Peter Pan reference?! Except, instead of rediscovering his childlike wonder in a magical joyous moment, Ewan McGregor rediscovers luggage. Eh. Good work Disney.

III. In which we say goodbye to Christopher Robin

At the very end of *The House At Pooh Corner*, the last of the two collections of Pooh stories, there's something of a lament. It's not explained how but the characters are sensing Christopher Robin has to leave.

Christopher Robin was going away. Nobody knew why he was going; nobody knew where he was going; indeed, nobody even knew why he knew that Christopher Robin was going away.

The tone shifts, instead of the carefree utopia where nothing bad happens, the characters are learning how to say goodbye. Poetry is often used as something of a love language in these stories, so they write their own poem, each sign it and present it to him as a parting gift. While Christopher Robin reads the poem, they quietly disappear, never to be seen again. Christopher Robin doesn't notice them go. Only Pooh is left.

The pair take one last trip through the Hundred Acre Woods to the enchanted place called Galleons Lap. Christopher seems to be getting mournful and sulky, claiming to be going "nowhere" and wanting to do "nothing". Then he info dumps onto Pooh, stories of Kings and Queens and Europe and Knights and Brazil. Real world things. Things from outside the Hundred Acre Woods.

This is startling because the Hundred Acre Woods is an Arcadia, a harmonious and natural place, like the Garden Of Eden. A sort of paradise, where there's no problems, the dilemma's are small scale, fears are trivial, it's a place without corruption, cynicism or anger. Having fought in the first World War, Milne spoke out against it in 1934's *Peace With Honour*, something he later somewhat retracted in 1940's *War With Honour*, so perhaps the woods is meant to also represent a place where there is no war. Even in the Kingdom Hearts games, it's the only level where there's no conflict.

Maybe that is why these stories are so appealing and pleasant to revisit. It's a safe space and nothing can hurt you here. While this isn't the same thing as Heaven in a Christian sense, Milne was probably more agnostic on this front, this concept does have a lot of crossover with some religious ideas for its serenity and peacefulness.

But the woods is also a temporary place. And Christopher mentions elements from outside the woods, is a sign he is being pulled away. He cannot stay anymore. He's growing up. Pooh doesn't understand what's happening, he's happy to just be with Christopher Robin.

"Pooh, promise you won't forget about me, ever. Not even when I'm a hundred."

Pooh thought for a little.

"How old shall I be then?"

"Ninety-nine."

Pooh nodded.

"I promise," he said.

The Hundred Acre Woods, this whole book in fact, encapsulates the magic and innocence of childhood and the tragedy that is learning to say goodbye to it, to leave it behind other than in memories. But no matter what happens to Christopher Robin, a part of him, that joyous childlike wonder, will always remain in the Hundred Acre Woods.

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

Disney's "The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh", which amalgamates various chapters across both books, kinda botches the impact of this ending in a few ways.

in that enchanted place on top of the forest a little bear will always be waiting.

Instead of always playing, he's always waiting and the teddy winks.

We don't get this sense of a poignant goodbye, the heartfelt longing to stay, the permanency of the end and the holding on to the treasured memories of childhood. It's not goodbye, it's see you later.

And it's not even just Disney because in 2009 the publishers just made a new book! They just made more books! Chapter one, In Which Christopher Robin Returns. They've made FOUR additional books now, including one where Pooh meets the queen?!

So much for "Stories of Kings and Queens and Brazil."

You may recall earlier, of the animal friends I listed, someone was missing. And I don't mean Kessie or Lumpy. Perhaps you thought I forgot him. So I will make up for that now.

IV. In which we have to explain the gopher

Obviously the Disney adaptation is how most of us heard of Winnie The Pooh, and Disney have made some fun and heartwarming stories out of him. But not without some alterations to the source material.

Gopher is a character invented for the Disney adaptation. He isn't in the original story and his character's introduction seems to reference this.

"I'm not in the book, but I'm at your service"

His character seems to have been entirely lifted from the beaver in *Lady and The Tramp* 11 years prior, speech pattern included.

And, at least to begin with, he really doesn't fit into the dynamic of the others.

As mentioned before, the 100 Acre Woods is meant to be secluded from the outside world, but now here's a Gopher talking about money?

"Hourly rate plus..." to "10 percent"

This is an attempt to have a bigger personality as part of the ensemble but the character did evolve over time. In the TV series, *The New Adventures Of Winnie The Pooh*, he had a very prominent role where he's more of a workaholic pyromaniac. But since *A Very Merry Pooh Year* in 2002, Gopher's role has been reduced to minor appearances and cameos. Barely seen or mentioned ever again.

So why was he here in the first place?

According to the film's director, Wolfgang Reitherman, Disney had wanted to add a more "folksy, all-American, grass-roots image," to appeal to an American audience. And, perhaps more controversially, to replace Piglet.

You see, when Disney adapted *Winnie The Pooh* into a film, they didn't begin with a feature film. Originally it was a featurette, a short film called "*Winnie The Pooh And The Honey Tree*" and was attached to the 1966 movie "*The Ugly Dachshund*". And it was pretty well received. Not *The Ugly Dachshund*, no.

In America it was received pretty well, thanks to the direction of making it more Americanised and adding more comedy. But in the UK, it had more of a mixed reception. *Winnie The Pooh* illustrator, EH Shepard, called the film "a complete travesty". Many balked at the Disney changes, and when the second Pooh featurette, "*The Blustery Day*" was made, Piglet was added back in and has remained ever since.

Eventually three *Winnie The Pooh* featurettes were spliced together to form the 1977 movie, *The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*, with the added ending I mentioned before. At least Piglet had his place restored as Pooh's best friend. But was this really what the author had intended?

According to Angela Milne, the niece of A.A. Milne, she recalls a story of the real life Christopher Robin discovering a creature in the woods that might have been an escaped gopher from Brighton docks. So a gopher was written into the manuscript, aka "*The Gopher Draft*". This larger than life American character had to be removed as "you will confine the appeal to a handful of illiterates munching hamburgers".

Hey, I'm just quoting here, don't shoot the messenger.

But as for the empty parts of the book left when the gopher character was removed it was suggested by the publishers to use the minor character of Piglet to fill the gopher-gap.

This is MIND BLOWING! Piglet originally replaced Gopher, and, in an absolute clairvoyant fluke, Disney then replaced Piglet with Gopher. The SAME animal! That's amazing! That's impossible! That sounds too good to be true! ...Oh bother.

Alan Milne nor Christopher Milne mention a gopher in their autobiographies. The published original manuscript makes no mention of a gopher either.

Let's look at Angela Milne's article again.

It adds the other characters were rewritten to have American accents as well and A.A. Milne himself started saying "How come you ain't wearin' ya paper Brooklyn Dodgers cap?"

It's a joke. A statement of how Pooh getting Americanization by saying it was always originally meant to be Americanized. Angela Milne is Alan Milne's niece, but this is a parody article for Punch Magazine, think of it like a paper version of The Onion. It's a publication that Alan Milne had also written for in the past.

But to be extra thorough, I did scan through past newspapers for any news story of an escaped gopher and found nothing.

Sorry TV Tropes, we were tricked.

"After all, he's not in the book, you know"

Disney had taken the stories and massively altered them for an American audience. This was and remains to be a massively successful move, and I personally very much enjoy them too. They retain the spirit and charm of the books, but at the time, the changes were divisive, and the corporate Disneyfication of Winnie The Pooh was in many ways personified by a Gopher.

Then things got messier.

V. In which Pooh is surrounded by lawsuits

Pooh has had his fair share of legal troubles.

In 1980, a character actor was accused of intentionally assaulting a 10 year old girl who had surprised the actor from behind. Clearly an accident but it meant that the actor had to demonstrate how the costume lacked the dexterity needed to strike someone with any power. Disney had super strict rules on actors putting on the costume and not shattering the illusion for anyone, no matter where they are. So not only did the actor have to stand trial in costume but in character. Winnie The Pooh has officially stood trial. He answered questions with head nods, foot stomps and dancing on the spot.

"Have the record show that he's doing a two-step,"

Anyway, by the 1990s, the Pooh brand was bringing in \$1 billion a year, which led to one of Disney's longest running lawsuits.

Disney had bought the Pooh merchandising rights from Stephen Slesinger, Inc (aka SSI) but in 1991 Disney were sued for outstanding royalties leading to a case that ran for 18 years. This got real scrappy. Disney at one point destroyed more than 40 boxes of Pooh paperwork, including one marked "Winnie the Pooh, Legal Problems." Why would you label

a box like that, that's like carrying around a folder for all the murders I've done. At one point SSI hired private detectives to go through Disney's trash searching for evidence.

The New Adventures Of Winnie The Pooh ended in 1991, the year the lawsuit began. And throughout the 90s there were a lot of repeats which made it Pooh's most lucrative years at Disney but little of that was actually new material. And it's not surprising given that this court case had millions, maybe billions of dollars on the line for Disney so they were probably cautious of creating money they might have to give away.

By 2009, the lawsuit was over and Disney now owned Winnie The Pooh entirely but the damage was done. Disney made the 2011 Winnie The Pooh movie which was to be a revival of the Pooh franchise, but by this point CG animation had taken over. So the franchise once again went dormant, with one last gasp attempt with 2018's live action Christopher Robin and a 2014 pilot by Cartoon Saloon that never got picked up.

So why was there a last-minute rush for Pooh all of a sudden?

Under U.S. copyright law, one of the ways works enter the public domain is after 95 years from first publication. So Winnie The Pooh entered public domain in 2021. The characters, the artwork, even Christopher Robin himself.

Even though the Disney specific image of Pooh in a red shirt won't be public domain until 2027, Pooh going public domain will have a big impact on Disney - but they're probably more worried right now about Mickey Mouse in Steamboat Willie becoming public domain very very soon.

So after all that, despite years of squabbling and mudslinging, Pooh belongs to no-one now. And people were free to make their own spin on the beloved characters. Such as-

VI. In which Pooh murders a bunch of people

Winnie The Pooh: Blood And Honey is not a good movie and you are not surprised by this. Once the rights to Winnie The Pooh went public domain, a horror movie based on the IP was rushed out.

We've had the kid thing turned horror thing before with The Banana Splits Movie, Choo Choo Charles and that one about the Grinch. Krampus too, kinda. There's a plethora that borrow from the uncanny kid-friendly aesthetic for horror purposes. To an extent, you can say Child's Play, Annabelle, M3GAN or even IT does this, recontextualising kid-friendly things like children's dolls and clowns into horror.

So the premise is nothing new.

The premise is that the Pooh characters are not teddies, but animal-like abominations that Christopher Robin befriends. But he grows up and has to leave, just like the book. But, unable to fend for themselves, they become so starved and feral, they eat Eeyore, and swear to kill any humans that enter the woods.

For something unable to fend for themselves, they sure seem pretty good at fending for themselves.

Plus, it's just a dude in a mask. Like, come on. There's nothing animalistic about this, it's just Mike Myers if he was painted yellow.

This tacks on the Pooh name but does nothing with it.

Like at one point Pooh runs someone over with a car. What does that have to do with Winnie The Pooh? Nothing.

It doesn't take much effort to actually use Winnie The Pooh material in a horror context. You could have him be a living teddy bear, like Chucky. Pooh makes traps, like for the Heffalumps, that's an easy one! It's just a hole! In the film he kinda commands a swarm of bad CGI bees, like a bee-bender. Why not fully submerge someone's head in bees? I don't even like horror movies that much but even I can come up with plenty of ideas just loosely inspired from the source material but they don't care.

I'm not against the idea of genre-bending reinterpretations, like horror, but people only watched this film because it has Winnie The Pooh's name on it. It is devoid of imagination to cohesively work Pooh and horror together in anything other than lip service. And now we're getting a sequel and a Christopher Robin horror TV show.

It reeks of shallow cynicism, greedy opportunism, and they don't even have the audacity to make it any good.

Hasn't all this gone on long enough?

VII. In which we have a Contradiction

An Introduction is to introduce people, but Christopher Robin and his friends, who have already been introduced to you, are now going to say Good-bye. So this is the opposite. When we asked Pooh what the opposite of an Introduction was, he said "The what of a what?" which didn't help us as much as we had hoped, but luckily Owl kept his head and told us that the Opposite of an Introduction, my dear Pooh, was a Contradiction; and, as he is very good at long words, I am sure that that's what it is.

I don't like endings.

I have a lot of discomfort when it comes to endings. I don't know, that sense of finality, when something is over, that's it. That's terrifying.

I've stayed in friendships for longer than I should have because the concept of losing a friend was worse than staying with someone really toxic.

I've stayed in jobs for longer than I should have. I now get to be creative as a job, I could have had this much sooner but I didn't want to leave.

This isn't a fear of change, like technological advancements or character redesigns, it's the fear of permanent change. I'm so scared of permanent change, I have sticker sheets that I will never use because I can't commit to where they'll go.

This also manifests into my fear of death. Sometimes dwelling on my own sense of mortality, even for a moment, floods me with panic.

I don't like endings. But I like endings in stories. It's a Contradiction.

There's a lot of talk of shows that have gone on for way too long, The Simpsons is a classic example. But it's obviously still an incredibly popular show. Just because I stopped watching it, who am I to take that away from anyone.

And yet, shows that build up to a predetermined ending is so satisfying, like Gravity Falls. It was always intended to be two seasons, to reflect that summer break, and it's over. I'm sad it's gone but I'll be sadder if it ever gets more episodes because it would undercut the importance of an ending.

A thing is only beautiful because it's temporary. We can't stay in the woods forever.

Should Winnie The Pooh have carried on beyond the ending? Yes, these stories have been a source of huge comfort to a lot of people around the world - unless you're the president of China - it's meditative and serene, it's uncomplicated, it's... nice. I don't want to take that away but isn't a story stronger with an ending? This has been an overcomplicated and painful mess, it should stop.

Is this what Alan Milne wanted when he ended the story? For it to just carry on ad nauseam? Let's look at that ending one more time, but from another perspective.

Alan Milne wasn't thrilled that Pooh would overshadow his body of work but Christopher Milne describes his father as someone very nostalgic.

My father, who had derived such happiness from his childhood, found in me the companion with whom he could return there.

And this sense of reliving childhood manifested in several ways. In his written works, who the boy actually represents is interchangeable:

The Christopher Robin who appears in so many of the poems is not always me. [...] So sometimes my father is using it to describe something I did, and sometimes he is borrowing it to describe something he did as a child.

Christopher also notes a trip to a particular restaurant, taking a particular route with a particular bus, because it was a routine, all part of the memory for Alan Milne of going there as a young boy, with his older brother, Kenneth Milne.

And when the holidays were over and I was back at school, his first letter to me would recall that happy lunch that he and I had had together. He and I - and the ghost of Ken...

Alan Milne was very close to his brother Ken. They were both poets and often collaborated together. Alan may have been the more talented of the pair, but it was never a source of resentment. They were a huge part of each other's lives, inseparable. As Christopher grew up, he said:

But he, I now suspect, saw me as a sort of twin brother, perhaps a sort of reincarnation of Ken.

Looking at this ending, it's unusual for Christopher Robin to feel the need to say goodbye to Pooh. For Christopher to sense the permanency of this farewell feels weighty for a carefree boy like him. In this moment, is this really Christopher Robin speaking, or is it Alan Milne. Throughout the journey, yes, Pooh would have adventures on his own, but Pooh, like all the animals friends, find warmth in Christopher Robin. He looks up to Christopher Robin like a protector, a comfort, a guide. Christopher Robin knows what to do. Pooh adores him and he adores him back. They need each other. In this way, the boy and his bear are like siblings. Christopher Milne had no siblings.

So they went off together. But wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the Forest a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.

When House At Pooh Corner was written, Alan's brother Ken had fallen ill and died the following year, aged just 49.

Christopher Milne may not have had much sentiment for his commercialised childhood, which is entirely reasonable. But if Alan Milne had found joy and comfort reliving his childhood vicariously through his son and in turn Christopher Robin, then maybe that enchanted place on the top of the forest is more for him than for anyone else. A place where there's no war, no illness, no death. A place where a boy and his bear, or a pair of brothers, will always be playing, for as long as they want and it never has to stop.

I don't like endings. But I like this ending.