

Alan Alexander Milne, Author

(1882 - 1956) Scots by birth, Alan Milne spent his childhood in London, where his father was a preparatory schoolmaster. His early education owed much to the skills of a young teacher and mentor -- H.G. Wells -- years later, Milne described Wells as "a great writer and a great friend." He continued his education at Westminster School and Trinity College, Cambridge. He bequeathed his original handwritten manuscripts of Winnie-the-Pooh and The House At Pooh Corner to the College Library. While an undergraduate at Cambridge he edited Granta for a year -- his first literary efforts were published in the humourous magazine Punch, where a month after his twenty-fourth birthday he started work as Assistant Editor, remaining there until the outbreak of the First World War.

In 1913, Milne married Dorothy Daphne de Selincourt and they had one son, Christopher. Although a noted pacifist, Milne enlisted in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and served in France. His famous denunciation of war entitled Peace With Honour was published in 1934. His writings met with great success between the wars and, in 1924, Methuen published When We Were Very Young, a collection of verses, many of which had already been eagerly read by his regular readers when they first appeared in Punch.

Two years later saw the introduction of the Bear of Very Little Brain in Winnie-the-Pooh. A second book of verses, Now We Are Six, appeared in 1927 and, in 1928, the final volume of the quartet arrived, The House At Pooh Corner. It had seemed to Milne at the time that he should be writing something meatier, like a detective story, which would hopefully earn £2,500! Even after the phenomenal success of Pooh, he was still to remain doubtful and wrote "I wanted to escape from them as I once wanted to escape from Punch as I have always wanted to escape. In vain ..."

In fact, in 1922 he wrote a detective novel, The Red House Mystery -- as well as many novels, essays, short stories and verses, he wrote over twenty-five plays and his autobiography It's Too Late Now was published by Methuen in 1939.

A.A. Milne always acknowledged that it was his wife, Daphne, and his young son, Christopher Robin, who inspired him to write the poems and stories. History has a strange way of mixing fact and fiction, but, whatever the origins, the four Pooh books printed in over twenty-five languages have taken their rightful place in the hearts and on the bookshelves of many millions of people.

In Which We are Introduced to Winnie-the-Pooh and Some Bees and the Stories Begin was first printed in the London Evening News on December 24th, 1925 and broadcast by the BBC on Christmas Day by Donald Calthrop.

Winnie-the-Pooh was published by Methuen on October 14th, 1926; but for too long, Milne's four classics have been relegated to children's bookshelves and Disney children's cartoons.

A. A. Milne didn't write the stories and poems for children. He intended them for the child within us all. He rarely read the stories and poems to his son Christopher, preferring to amuse him with the works of P.G. Wodehouse, one of Milne's favourite authors. This compliment was returned in full by Wodehouse, who described Milne as "about my favourite author." Christopher continued this reading pattern, also entertaining his daughter, Clare, with Wodehouse's classics.

Wodehouse's works continued to live long in the Milne household after his death, as Christopher frequently read the stories to his daughter, Clare and her bedroom shelves contain many of his novels. In a letter to Peter, Christopher wrote, "My father did not write the books for children. He didn't write for any specific market; he knew nothing about marketing. He knew about me, he knew about himself, he knew about the Garrick Club -- he was ignorant about anything else. Except, perhaps, about life."

Christopher first heard the stories and poems when he listened to Peter's recordings more than sixty years after their first publication.

The Pooh books are firm favourites with old and young alike and have been translated into almost every known language -- in a national reader's poll carried out in England by England premier booksellers, Waterstone's, and Channel 4 Television during 1996, Winnie-the-Pooh was placed number 17 in the list of the 100 most-popular books published during the 20th century.

The worldwide sales of the four books between 1924 and 1956 totalled about seven million. Amusingly, once sales passed a million, the publishers stopped counting!

Since 1968, sales of the Methuen edition have averaged over 500,000 a year, with 30 percent of these selling in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. It is estimated that over seventy million copies of the four Pooh books have been sold since their first publication.

The Pooh books are favourites with old and young alike and have been translated into almost every language. In 1985, the Russian translation, Vinnie Pookh, sold more than three and a half million copies in the Soviet Union and, in the

same year, the Latin version, *Winnie Ille Pu*, became the first book in a foreign language to be included in the bestseller list in the United States. There is now a companion volume, *A. A. Milne Domus Anguli Puensis, Librum exornavit E. H. Shepard, Liber alter de Urso Puo de anglico sermone in Latinum conversus auctore Briano Staplesio, Londinii: Sumptibus Methueni, MCMLXXX*.

If, like Pooh, you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, I should explain that Brian Staples translated *The House at Pooh Corner* into Latin, published by Methuen in 1980. Brian had studied Latin as a young boy while at school and many years later, while ill in hospital had busied himself just for fun translating Milne's last Pooh book, with no thought whatsoever to completing it. Fortunately for us all, his fun became reality and the book was published with enormous success. Sadly, Brian's health deteriorated over several months during 1996 and he died of septicaemia in April that year, the same month as dear Christopher Milne passed away.

Before the success of the Pooh books, Alan Milne was a popular dramatist, novelist, and humourist and many of his plays were performed to great critical acclaim in both Europe and America. Today, his plays are rarely performed in the professional theatre, although amateur productions are playing in almost every English-speaking country throughout the world where they still attract large and eager audiences.

Visitors to this website are recommended to seek out his plays, novels and essays in their libraries and antiquarian bookshops. A detailed bibliography of Milne by Tori Haring-Smith was published in 1982 by Garland Publishing Inc. of New York. In 1990, Methuen published Ann Thwaite's definitive biography *A. A. Milne His Life*.

Milne's plays include:

Worzel-Flummery, The Lucky One, The Boy Comes Home, Belinda, The Red Feathers, Make-Believe, Mr. Pim Passes By, The Camberley Triangle, The Romantic Age, The Stepmother, The Dover Road, The Truth about Blayds, The Great Broxopp Success, The Man in the Bowler Hat, To Have the Honour -- or Meet the Prince, Ariadne, Portrait of a Gentleman in Slippers, Miss Marlow at Play, The Ivory Door, Toad of Toad Hall, The Fourth Wall -- or The Perfect Alibi, Michael and Mary, Portrait of a Gentleman in Slippers, Other People's Lives, Miss Elizabeth Bennett, The Ugly Duckling and Before the Flood.

In 1952, Milne underwent an operation of the brain, which left him an invalid. He survived the operation and returned to his home at Cotchford Farm in Sussex, where he spent the rest of his life reading and in country pursuits. After a long illness, he died on 31st January, 1956.

Soon after the publication of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Milne wrote in the *Nation*: "I suppose that every one of us hopes secretly for immortality; to leave, I mean, a name behind him which will live forever in this world, whatever he may be doing, himself, in the next." When he died, thirty years later, there was already no doubt at all that A. A. Milne had achieved more than the ordinary mortal's fifteen minutes of fame -- he had achieved an immortality equalled by few others, though not as he would have wished based on his huge literary output of plays and novels, but rather on the adventures of a Bear of Very Little Brain.

In 1996, his own favourite bear was sold by Bonham's auction house in London to an anonymous buyer in 1996 for £4,600.