



A. A. Milne

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In this definitive work, biographer and children's author Ann Thwaite traces A.A. Milne from his birth in 1882 through a rather traditional upbringing into adulthood. For a brief period, he was one of England's most successful playwrights. But Milne's novels, plays, and essays were eclipsed by his four major books for children (WHEN WE WERE VERY YOUNG, NOW WE ARE SIX, WINNIE-THE-POOH, and THE HOUSE ON POOH CORNER), which distressed him greatly.

Thwaite draws from sources such as Milne's autobiography (IT'S TOO LATE NOW) and his son Christopher's memoirs (THE ENCHANTED PLACE and THE PATH BEHIND THE TREES). She has also meticulously unearthed new material: old family memoirs, photographs, and letters, including many written by Alan Milne (as he was known) to his beloved older brother Ken. The resulting biography presents some little-known information and dispels myths. Thwaite tells about Milne's war service, for example, and mentions a brief affair that disrupted his marriage. She refutes the canard that Milne did not like children. She also reveals that the Pooh in E.H. Shepherd's illustrations is not the real Pooh, but rather a teddy bear named Growler that belonged to Shepherd's son. Because Thwaite includes so many particulars and quotes so extensively, her narrative is slow reading. A noticeable exception to her chronicling is the relative lack of detail about Milne's estrangement from his son, upon whom the character Christopher Robin was based.

After the children's books were published in the 1920's, Milne's work for adults was essentially ignored, and he grew bitter. In later years, however, Milne gained perspective. In 1952, shortly before the stroke that made him an invalid until his death in 1956, he wrote, "There was an intermediate period when any reference to him [Pooh] was infuriating; but now such a 'nice comfortable feeling' envelops him that I can almost regard him impersonally as the creation of one of my own favourite authors." Milne remains a favorite author of millions, young and old. His books have been translated into twenty-five languages, strong support for Thwaite's conclusion that there are no better stories for reading aloud, for finding one's way back to the world of childhood.

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