



GOODBYE CHRISTOPHER ROBIN will be a May, 2019 LVCA dvd donation to the Hugh Stoupe Memorial Library of the Heritage United Methodist Church of Ligonier, Pennsylvania. Below is Kino Ken's review of that dvd film.

17 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

**United Kingdom 2017 color 107 minutes live action feature drama
DJ Films / Fox Searchlight Pictures Producers: Steve Christian, Mark Hubbard,
and Damian Jones**

**Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
(j) designates a juvenile performer**

Points:

- 2 Direction: Simon Curtis***
- 1 Editing: Victoria Boydell**
- 2 Cinematography: Ben Smithard**
Additional Photography: Juliana Malucelli

Cast: Margot Robbie* (Daphne de Selincourt Milne), Domnhall Gleeson* (Alan Milne), Vicki Pepperdine (Postwoman Betty), Wil Tilston (j)* (Christopher Robin Milne, age 8), Alex Lawther (Christopher Robin Milne, age 18), Stephen Campbell Moore (Ernest Shepard), Richard McCabe (Rupert), Geraldine Somerville (Lady O), Mossie Smith* (Midwife Sharon), Stanley Hamlin (j) (Christopher Robin at 6 months), Kelly MacDonald (Olive Rand a.k.a. Nou, Christopher's nurse and nanny), Dexter and Sonny Hyman (j and j) (Christopher Robin at age 3), Phoebe Waller-Bridge* (*The Times* reporter), Sam Barnes (*The Times* photographer), Mark Tandy (Portrait Photographer), Shaun Dingwall* (Alfred, Olive's beau and eventual husband), Richard Clifford (Toy Shop Manager), Simon Williams* (Zoo Director), Nick Blakely (Zoo Photographer), Robert Pontal (Headmaster), Tommy Roger (j) (Douglas Minor, Christopher's putative protector at school), Simon Connolly (U.S. Radio Host), Richard Dixon* (MC at Pageant), Jim Cartwright* (Military Medic), others

Have you ever wanted to be the star attraction in another person's best-selling book? That's the predicament young Christopher Robin Milne found himself confronting when his father's *Winnie-the-Pooh* books became sensational successes in the second half of the 1920s. Readers failed to distinguish between a fictional character inhabiting storybook pages and the real child made conveniently accessible to the public by guardians blinded by general acclamation.

Simon Curtis's film **GOODBYE CHRISTOPHER ROBIN** undertakes to examine the process by which an undistinguished preadolescent boy becomes an unexpected celebrity placed unnervingly under daily watch by mobbing admirers. What are long-term consequences of such untrammelled idolatry? Too late Christopher's family realizes the toll it's taking on Billy Moon's more publicized identity.

He himself is not the ever-charming, utterly naïve child of nature romping through the pages of a fantasy. In fact, the youngster is battling a lamentable divorce from daily affections expected from two adults who had brought him into the world, however unwillingly on their parts.

Part of that frostiness stems from a fear of his mother Daphne her boy will grow up to become another piece of cannon fodder in an inevitable future war.

If she refrains from becoming too attached to him, then unescapable premature death of sole heir will at least be tolerable, if unwanted.

Father Alan Alexander Milne suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder occasioned by trench duty in France during World War I. That set of experiences turned him from jocular playwright into didactic pacifist, obsessed with a need to transform an apparently blind and unconcerned world bent on repeating past errors. Humor was not high on his agenda, a potentially fatal drawback for a West End wit's career.

Two years after hostilities cease, the birth of a son is viewed as aggravation and obstruction by both progenitors, who are only too content to pass along nurturing duties to experienced nanny Olive Rand. She, in turn, grows from paid staff person performing duties presumably for the chief purpose of acquiring cash to self-appointed conservator of childhood, intent on keeping strangers away from her besieged charge.

As he matures, the individual these others increasingly revolve around becomes more aware of treatment as sporadically acknowledged appendage to a battle-scarred family. Attempting to leverage a place in what appears to be a largely closed adult world, the fourth wheel tells his abstracted breadwinner he wishes the man would write a book *for* him he could read independently and enjoy. This mutates instead into a collection of anecdotes featuring the child's stuffed toys, appearing as themselves. Thus lending credence to the assumption their human playmate is represented with like adherence to fact.

The whole confusing business starts with a modestly homey devotional poem sent by Alan to Daphne. Its formulator never imagines it will become treasured international property and balm to Britain's grieving citizens still smarting from a lost generation of youths. Daphne's keen on reinvigorating her husband's flagging creativity. So she conveys to a magazine publisher Alan's confidential olive branch designed as a bridge over the gap between herself and her mate. That elicits a payment, signifying reinstatement of Mr. Milne as worthy wage-earner and not merely retired country squire. Perhaps temporary getaways from London aren't a total fiasco.

To her amazement, an assortment of external exigencies forces a preoccupied ex-soldier into suddenly playing twin roles of entertainer and storyteller for a child who, much to his disappointment, gets transferred into

papa's less-than-exuberant care because Nanny Olive's mother is gravely ill. Meaning a conflicted employee will have to attend at once to her own kindred. Life seems harsh and unfair for the junior Milne until he discovers his new caretaker can share in the wonders of nature and whimsicalities of children, among those an inclination to say one thing and mean something entirely different. Case in point being a breakfast request for porridge, an alien food which turns out to be just as thoroughly lumpish and unappetizing as its name. Strangely, discomfort brought about by that revelation serves to draw diners closer, each perceiving humor in experimental folly.

Mother's plan for reentering the charmed family circle is to bribe her boy with new toys and dramatic voices. He finds those initially irresistible. Yet they pale over time. Worse, what launches as frolics in the Hundred Acre Woods with papa gradually reverts to business and profitable anecdotes illustrated by voluntary enabler and fellow ex-warrior Ernest Shepard. For Shepard, these scribblings constitute a vital therapeutic restoration badly needed by his friend Alan. They're infused with joie de vivre relayed by son to father and back again in mutually beneficial partnership. Is that all these accomplish?

Sadly, no. Billy Moon is missing somewhere, not truly present in the stories. Nor is he appreciated for his uniqueness by their inventors, who promptly engage in marketing his image. Behind the façade of every interview, broadcast celebration, and celebrity appearance lurks an alter ego unrecognizable and overbearing. Then rock of stability Nanny Olive leaves the premises to marry Alfred Brockwell rather than imperious nine-year-old minor.

Faced with a choice of either attending to long-term fathering or pursuing a suspended career churning out works for adult readers, the senior Milne picks the latter. Christopher is motored off to a succession of British public schools, presumably to remove him from prying public eyes. Out of sight, out of mind. Paradise is left behind as schoolmates taunt and bully him, at least partly from envy of their resident star's universal recognition.

When World War II comes along, abused student elects to enlist in the Army, a decision irking both his generators. Failing to pass entry requirements, he prevails on misgiving paternal authority to pull strings and overrule local brass, claiming the older man owes a favor to him for earlier destruction of a normal upbringing. Thus obstinate equalizer finally ships off to various fronts as an undistinguished Tommy.

Posted at the edge of a shaky civilization he learns how significantly comforting the world of Pooh and C.R. are to homesick troopers from his native land. Though still refusing to associate himself with another party's fictional character, a more accepting and mature individual eventually returns to his roots, but not before word reaches rural England that Platoon Commander Christopher Robin Milne is missing in action and probably dead. After an interval of bitter mourning, the two elder Milnes resign themselves to his loss. Then, much like a resurrected prodigal, the dead man wends to ancestral haunt like an unanticipated ghost restlessly seeking out related survivors for the purpose of tying up loose ends. In this case, the crime still unatoned is one of identity theft.

Director Curtis ends his production with a reconciliation of sorts in Ashdown Forest. He skips over the controversial cousinly marriage which drove a lifelong wedge between Daphne and her son, as she had planned a different connubial outcome for him. Omitted also is a renowned author's widening dissatisfaction with an heir's adult attainments, notwithstanding such similarities as a parallel college degree in mathematics and giftedness in woodworking.

Otherwise, this film treats respectfully the lives of its literary originals. Employing when possible actual locations, it shines with geographic verisimilitude.

Wil Tilston is a remarkably enchanting Billy Moon, always on the lookout for distinction and acceptance, inserting ad hoc choreography of his own manufacture, exuding innocence when not discumbering himself of animosity directed against anyone and everyone coming between appointed caretaker Nou and their joint pleasures. Margot Robbie is fully invested in appropriating Dorothy Milne's mannerisms and defensive detachments, disclosing a personality ill at ease with conventional notions of maternal behavior, too ambitious and self-reflexive to share abundantly with a miniature semblance of herself the love poured out freely only to the dream image of a never materialized daughter. Daphne's conscious stabs at remolding amorphous male offshoot into an idealized female version more to her liking is clearly suggested by Christopher's girlish outfits and untrimmed hair, though not overtly remarked on by anyone. Instead, handled in the discreet manner Mrs. Milne herself would have preferred. The endowment of Robin for a filial middle name

reveals still another clue to dogged pursuit of a girl or girl-substitute to adorn and pet.

Frequently dour, panicky, or inattentive, Domhnall Gleeson's Alan A. Milne reflects conflicted personas battling for primacy inside a man insecure in any role. Picturing himself a failed father, guilt-ridden ex-combatant, improvident husband, and superficial author, Milne seems trapped between the worlds of make-believe and reality, possibly tainting his immediate descendant with his own uncertainty regarding both conditions. Discriminations between those made by the writer don't click with his model or end up as self-delusions. He cannot recapture the past, a Holy Grail receding faster and further from his grasp as years pass. It becomes obvious his reputation will ultimately rest solely on the foundation of juvenile stories penned for home entertainment.

As Nou, Kelly MacDonald benefits from delivering the script's most pungent lines. She's far less effective and affecting when emoting as fosterer of a lonely, oft-overlooked child. There seems lacking any strong emotional empathy between her off-camera self and Master Tilston. She's no boy's ideal of a play partner, for sure. Inclined towards preachiness, an internally seething cauldron of repressed criticism herself hungering to become the object of someone's constant love, Olive Rand's personality is far too vaguely delineated here. She mirrors all the pain of servitude and its limitations without showing obverse bubbly joy in varied accomplishments and discoveries of her charge.

Stephen Campbell-Moore's Ernest Shepard is a bit too self-conscious. He doesn't appear to be inhabiting his character unreservedly. The type of easy affability required by the role seems to escape him, making viewers acutely aware of role-playing in lieu of one hundred percent submersion in a part.

Period costumes are exquisitely realized, along with accurately reproduced interior furnishings.

Lighting is sumptuously superlative. Cinematography, if not filled with memorably ostentatious imagery, is nonetheless highly conducive to a faithful representation of pastoral delights.

Inadequacies of mixing mar generally laudable sound recording. These cause some speeches to be heard as muddles rather than discreet, sharply enunciated utterances.

Alas, there's a rushed feel to the editing of World War II-era sequences, as if filmmakers can't wait to be on the cheerier side of things. Insufficient

explanation is forthcoming about changes wrought in Christopher's perception of Winnie-the-Pooh's impact on other people, especially young soldiers who first heard them in the privacy of a family gathering. Why does he still reject any claim to be a key participant in their creation, ever refusing a share in accruing royalties? Is he trying to punish his father for what happened years earlier when the lad felt he was being sold like a piece of merchandise? If so, further clarification would be helpful.

Alternately jubilant and wistful, Carter Burwell's music is a major plus factor, mirroring discrepant bouts of gloom and cheerfulness that appear in Christopher's life, a discordancy or ruefulness closely following every triumph. Sun and shadow chase each other throughout, a game matched by orchestral colorations fluctuating between bright and dark tones.

Should you set aside time to see this film? Absolutely. Apart from valuable insights into a prominent artistic family, it engenders reflection on bloodline dynamics. How should children be treated when they threaten to overshadow their parents? What obligation do elders have to protect them from intense public scrutiny, no matter how well-intentioned that may be? At what point does muse change into commodity? When that takes place, should profits be split between artist and prototype? If so, how?

The Twentieth Century Fox Searchlight dvd release of **GOODBYE CHRISTOPHER ROBIN** includes an audio commentary by director Simon Curtis and co-scripiter Frank Cottrell-Boyce, a theatrical trailer, production stills, and eight illuminating behind-the-scenes featurettes, each running approximately two minutes or so. Titles and rough runtimes are as follows:

"A Walk in the Woods" 2 ½ minutes

"Healing a Nation" 2 ¼ minutes

"A. A. Milne" 2 minutes

"Hello Billy Moon" 2 ½ minutes

"Daphne Moon" 2 ¼ minutes

"The Story" 2 ½ minutes

"Christopher Robin & His Nanny Olive" 3 ¼ minutes

"The Cast" 2 ½ minutes

"Gallery" (of production still photos) 2 minutes

This reviewer is indebted to <https://bluray.highdefdigest.com> for featurette timing data.

With an MPAA rating of PG, the film is suitable for teens and adults, though more edifying for older viewers. It could certainly pass muster as exceptionally fine Father's Day fare.

**One last question to think about after screening the movie just reviewed:
Which of the two would you rather be: Christopher or Alan Milne?**