Culture



Ewan McGregor, as Christopher Robin, shares a scene with Winnie the Pooh in the live-action adventure movie "Christopher Robin." (CNS/Disney/Laurie Sparham)



by Rose Pacatte

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Last year's "Goodbye Christopher Robin," a biopic from director Simon Curtis about Winnie the Pooh creator A.A. Milne and his son, Christopher Robin, focused on the estrangement between father and son caused by stuffed Pooh's success as a literary character. This new, live-action, CGI-animated Disney film continues Milne's fable about a community of imaginary stuffed animals in the woods; it is a wake-up call to the now-grown-up Christopher's atrophied imagination — and ours as well.

Just before young Christopher (Orton O'Brien) leaves for boarding school, he visits the Hundred Acre Wood near his home in the countryside to say goodbye to his imaginary forest friends, especially Winnie the Pooh (voice of Jim Cummings). Christopher promises never to forget Pooh — "You silly bear" — not in a hundred years.

The years pass, and Christopher (Ewan McGregor) joins the army to fight in World War I. When he returns to London, he meets Evelyn (Hayley Atwell). They soon marry and have a beautiful daughter, Madeline (Bronte Carmichael.) Jobs are hard to come by after the war, but Christopher finds one as the financial manager of the Winslow Luggage Company that caters to the wealthy.

Evelyn and Madeline are very disappointed when Christopher tells them he cannot go to the family's country house with them for the weekend because he has to work. Evelyn chides him for choosing work over his family and missing out on the life that is right in front of him. Meanwhile, Christopher tries to avoid a too-friendly neighbor who always wants to come over for a game of cards.

Back at the Hundred Acre Wood, Pooh gets up to find that there is no "hunny," and all of his friends are missing. He goes to look for them and says, "I always get to where I'm going by walking away from where I've been." He goes to the tree where his friend Christopher Robin used to stay, and when he walks through the door, he finds that it leads to another door that opens in a kind of park. He is a little tired, so he takes a nap on a bench.

At the end of a long day trying to find ways to cut costs and save jobs at the luggage company, Christopher comes home and sees his neighbor. Rather than getting

trapped in a card game, he escapes to the little neighborhood park and to his great surprise, finds Pooh. Christopher is so confused, he says, "No, no, no! This can't be happening. It's stress." To which Pooh replies, "But it's not stress. It's Pooh." Pooh tells Christopher that he has lost all his friends.

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The next morning, after a catastrophic encounter with a honey jar, Christopher takes Pooh home on the train to find their friends, much to the confusion of other passengers. On the way to the station, Pooh sees balloons for sale and Christopher buys him a bright, red one. They tiptoe past the country house so that Evelyn and Madeline won't see them. When they find Pooh's friends, there is great rejoicing.

But this is not the end. Christopher must get back to work. All the important papers he carries in his briefcase have scattered to the winds, but Christopher does not know it because someone has stuffed the briefcase with a donkey's tail and other things. Pooh, Eeyore (Brad Garrett), Piglet (Nick Mohammed) and Tigger (also Jim Cummings) find Madeline, who goes with them to bring the important papers to Christopher in London. When Evelyn realizes her daughter is missing, she jumps in the car to look for her, and all kinds of things happen on the way to London.

"Christopher Robin" is delightful. Pooh has such a small brain, true, but he manages to say things that are simple, wise and make you stop and think. Eeyore is terribly dry and funny and sounds a little depressed. On the way to the parking lot after the screening, I chatted with a family that was so excited about the film. I told the parents, "You know, every convent has an Eeyore." The dad, who worked for Disney, replied that every family has one, too. The little girl's favorite character was Eeyore. All Garrett had to do was transfer his persona from "Everybody Loves Raymond" to Eeyore; it's a perfect match even with an American accent. "I don't remember being cheery," he says.

Official trailer for "Christopher Robin: (Disney 2018)

Director Marc Forster ("The Kite Runner" and "Quantum of Solace") told journalists that he made this film because his daughter asked him to make a movie for her. More than two writers on a film usually spells disaster but, in this case, the three writers Alex Ross Perry, Oscar-winner Tom McCarthy ("Spotlight") and Oscar-

nominated Allison Schroeder ("Hidden Figures"), bring a light touch, imagination, smart dialogue that transcends age, and humor to the continuing story of Winnie the Pooh and his human friend.

When Christopher and Pooh first start out to look for their friends in the forest, Christopher pulls out a compass that greatly interests Pooh, whose sense of direction is not exactly going north. But neither is Christopher's sense of direction in life moving forward in a meaningful way. The compass becomes a symbol for the characters' goals and direction as well as a gift from one friend to another.

The red balloon stands out as a symbol of playfulness and imagination against the dreary backdrop of post-war England and the film's muted color palette. It also symbolizes the freedom of childhood that Christopher needs to remember so that he can be happy in himself and be a good husband and father. The film shows that problems get solved when there is inner freedom marked by imagination, a creative spirit, love, family and friendship.

It's also interesting that part of Christopher's burden is not just his concern for himself and his family but also the jobs and well-being of his co-workers. There is solidarity and great mutuality in the film. For as Pooh says to the other stuffed animals, "It's always a sunny day when Christopher Robin comes to play," but now, "perhaps it's our turn to save Christopher."

If you are in serious need of a respite from your concerns, "Christopher Robin" is just the film to make you smile. Take out your compass, whatever it may be, and buy a bright red balloon. It could change everything.

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