

Martina Jagielski 2022
A.A. Milne, *Winnie the Pooh*

Dear Mr. Milne,

It has been a while since I've picked up your book. To be perfectly honest, I don't really know what compelled me to read it, as after all, your stories were the fuel for my bedtime stories for many years when I was younger, and bedtime stories aren't really the acme of entertainment for teenagers (no offense). As I read all the adventures you dreamed up, I noticed a few things. I never truly realized how books for "young" children could also be applied to people of all age ranges, if you have the desire to look for its uses. Now, don't get me wrong, I love reading books that aren't written for "toddlers." Agatha Christie is one of my favorites. I think you'd like her; you're both British (score!) and write stories that have more under the surface. Don't worry, though, your books have a special place in my heart ... and my mother's. So now while I was reliving the nights when I curled up in my bed sheets with my Pooh bear in one hand and my mother's hand in the other, I also started to see some things in your writing that I've never noticed before (hats off to you for that, I might add, and for getting me to pick your book up again).

The primary thing that stood out to me was that you wrote all your characters to have some form of mental illness. When I was 5 or 6, hyper behavior only seemed to be a burst of energy, and a sad donkey was only a sad donkey. I liked how you included lots of illnesses that aren't really written about in children's books, or not written long-term; depression, anxiety, ADHD, personality disorders, and schizophrenia. It wasn't the disorders themselves that caught my attention, though, but rather it was how loved all of your characters are, despite their mental fallbacks. No matter what Pooh, Piglet or Tigger did, all their friends still loved and accepted them as equal and valid, not characters that are defined by their mental illness. The bond of friendship and even sacrifice you introduced throughout your story was super important, but I think for me at least, the acceptance and patience all of your animals demonstrated for one another is much more meaningful and lasting. If I didn't acknowledge it back then, I will acknowledge it now - mental illnesses and any type of illness or disability doesn't stop someone from deserving love and care. They shouldn't be treated as a black hole, a disease, or abnormality. Every human is complex and has issues specific to their experiences, and the bare minimum anyone should do is provide them with the support and kindness they desire.

I like that you normalized this for young readers, therefore instilling this in them and spreading acceptance. As someone that has anxiety and feels like the world is caving in sometimes, I like that you provide a reminder that everyone is loved, sometimes, that's all it takes. I'm happy that it was your story I chose to idolize throughout my childhood and well into my teenage years. (I can't even begin to tell you the amount of Winnie the Pooh merchandise I still have. I think you would be happy, though.)

And of course, I appreciate your stories because they're wholesome. They give me this warm, fuzzy feeling that is rare and I really enjoy your use of small songs or poems Pooh sings to himself. (I often sing along with him.) You always make these funny solutions that I never think are possible - making Pooh fly up on a balloon, disguised as a cloud: brilliant - and making every eccentric idea seem like a possibility, which is very useful since I'm very uncreative. I'm quite encapsulated by your stories, even if I'm "too old" for them, because they make my soul smile.

Your Friend,
Martina