



My attention is being pulled to Calvin and Hobbes recently... the comic strip, not those enlightened thinkers. Everyone is at least somewhat familiar with the comic. For those who haven't read it, or others who might like a refresher, it follows Calvin, a rambunctious but creative six year old boy, depicted with spikey, blonde hair and a red t-shirt. He is accompanied nearly everywhere he goes by his stuffed tiger, Hobbes. Calvin doesn't fit in with most of the world yet. His parents are always getting on his case about not eating his vegetables or wreaking havoc in the house, his teacher frequently scolds him for his outbursts at school, and he doesn't seem to have many friends... outside of Hobbes of course. But Calvin isn't all bad. He loves to build snowmen after snowstorms, climb trees, traipse through meadows and woodlands, and is oddly contemplative about his own and other lives. To be Calvin is to be a kid, to be human.

Hobbes complements Calvin quite nicely, actually. This (possibly) imaginary friend is tall and lanky, sarcastic and wise. He is playful and loving, and tends to calm Calvin's wildest fantasies with his rational and thoughtful sensibilities. To the academics out there, it is hotly contested whether Hobbes is a real tiger who comes to life when no one else is looking (like in Toy Story) or whether he is completely a figment of Calvin's imagination. The author of the series, Bill Waterson, says maybe the answer to that question doesn't matter.

...fair enough, Bill.

Some might see Calvin and Hobbes less as two characters and more as a single entity. Two sides of one coin, doing their best to navigate the mysterious currents of life. Whatever your interpretation of the two, it is clear that they are truly inseparable from one another.

I remember the first time I read Calvin and Hobbes. Though I suppose it is more accurate to say that someone else read it to me. I was in pre-school, maybe four years old. I was sitting on an ivory colored cushion while the rest of the kids were asleep for nap time. The son of the lady who ran that preschool, Kevin, sat next to me and read it to me for a reason I can't recall. Maybe I was upset or just didn't want to sleep... I usually just faked it during nap time anyway. Today, I hear the comic singing in the depths of my being, radiating outwards like the inner rings of a tree. I find myself romanced by both Calvin's innocent whimsy and Hobbes's matured wisdom. In some ways, I still feel like Calvin: making things up as I go; wanting to play more than wanting to do my homework; feeling the wind, dirt, sun, and grass beat me into that kind of blissful tiredness after a long day outside – you know the feeling. In another sense, I find myself feeling more like Hobbes – observant, protective, soft. My job is to be present, as stable and dependable as a stuffed tiger might be – attentive and loving, tempering my sense of humor and my taste for play with my responsibilities to that which is other.

And while I find myself identifying with all of the characters at times, even including Calvin's classmates and parents, my own imagination, like Calvin's, seems to be stimulated by Hobbes more than anything else in Waterson's world. Hobbes follows Calvin around through his antics, supporting his child-spirit, but also his physical and emotional well-being. He comforts him with hugs, and lifts him into tree branches. He cautions Calvin when he begins to act impulsively, but also shares Calvin's innate curiosity and a penchant for roughhousing. In these ways, some argue Hobbes represents a balanced or more evolved Calvin – ironic, given the species divide. Critically, Hobbes cannot age. If Calvin is to ever grow older, Hobbes would surely stay the same. I am fascinated by this... fact? What happens to Hobbes as his Calvin grows up? Does he follow him through his teens and adulthood? Does he act differently? Look differently? Does his muzzle gray and his hips weaken? Perhaps the stitching on his plush body falters and needs repairs. Does Calvin even need him anymore? If the answer to this last question is no, what becomes of Hobbes? It is in this distinction of selves and its subsequent questions that excite me right now – not the complexity of the two as one unit, but instead the relationship between them as separate yet intimate entities.

What happens to us as we grow and change? Where do our past selves go? What do we leave behind and what do we take with us? What leaves *us* behind? Calvin and Hobbes is

temporally frozen, with no canon or character arcs. Bill Waterson does not answer these questions directly. The reader starts asking “who is Hobbes with and without Calvin” which begs “who am I with and without the people and places I’m connected to?” Do such distinctions matter? Perhaps all that we are is entirely defined by that which surrounds us. They say “you are the average of the five people you spend the most amount of time with.” Maybe they’re right. Maybe in that sense, we share a kind of loneliness. We’re only human afterall... just reflections in the mirrors that percolate our lives. When those mirrors are stripped away, how do we know who we are? Perhaps we are no one.

Some believe there is something. Something uniquely ours, independent of everything and everyone else. That there is this kernel of essence that is cosmically significant. They might call it purpose, destiny, or God. I’m not sure I’m there yet. At this point, the mirrors still offer me reassurance. They show me what matters. Afterall, we don’t exist in total vacuums. We are all dependent on each other, all of us defined by our relationship to the world we inhabit... like Hobbes is to Calvin. To be Hobbes then is to *also* be human. It is to have a Calvin, something, someone, and somewhere that brings you to life.

