

"Tyrannosaurs in F-14s?!?!?!?: Childhood Make-Believe, Power, and the Visual Language of Dinosaurs in *Calvin and Hobbes*"

Bill Watterson's seminal comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* introduces us to Calvin, a child who frequently creates and adopts imaginative roles and alter-egos, including but not limited to: an alien, a noir detective, and a superhero named Stupendous Man. One alter-ego seems to appear more than any other: Calvin repeatedly reimagines himself as a dinosaur. Calvin's prehistoric persona is distinct not just for its frequent appearance but also for its visual depiction. When Calvin adopts other roles, he keeps the form of a human child wearing, say, a superhero or astronaut costume. However, when Calvin dons the mantle of the dinosaur, the visual iconography radically changes such that Calvin *becomes* a dinosaur drawn in realistic details instead of as a boy in a dinosaur costume.

This presentation examines scenes of Calvin's dinosaur role-playing within *Calvin and Hobbes* to understand the significance of this narrow form of make-believe. I argue that the visual markers of dinosaurs act as signifiers of a key concept within childhood: *power*. Michel Foucault looks to power as a positive force in society, providing those with power the potential to enact change in the world around them. By utilizing visual semiotics and Foucauldian power, it will be shown that adopting the persona of a dinosaur empowers Calvin in different situations, elevating the visual language of the dinosaur beyond a humorous gag to operate as a metaphor for transgressive childhood power.