

The Noble Man: Recovering the Wonder of Manhood

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*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 1 Cor. 13:11*

3: Three Questions

There are probably not very many American boys, over the last 40 years, who have not been introduced to the characters in the Disney adaptation of A. A. Milne's classic Winnie-the-Pooh stories.

The adventures of Christopher Robin and his toy animals who play in the 100 Acre Wood, have entered the realms of myth and metaphor. There is Pooh, the cuddly bear who has trouble thinking very hard or well, and Piglet, his anxious and fearful stuffed-pig best friend. Then there are two who are real, and not stuffed at all. Owl, who is a wise, storytelling, old bird, and Rabbit, a practical, responsible bunny. Eeyore is the pessimistic and gloomy overstuffed donkey with a push-pin tail. There are others as well, like Kanga and Roo, and the Wood is a pretty sedate place until Tigger, the springy, orange and black-striped jolly jungle cat, bounces in with gusto and hyper confidence, boasting about everything that "Tiggers do best."

The wonderful thing about Tiggers,
Is Tiggers are wonderful things,
Their tops are made out of rubber,
Their bottoms are made out of springs,
They're bouncy, trouncy, flouncy, pouncy,
Fun, fun, fun, fun, fun!
But the most wonderful thing about Tiggers is
I'm the only one!¹

I imagine that right now you are smiling, at least inside. Unless I am way off on this, the boy in you lights up when Tigger sings his braggadocios refrain. Am I wrong? You like Tigger just because he is rambunctious and fearless, and also because he is careless in the face of challenges like bouncing into trees, giving no thought as to how he will get down. That's boyhood, and it is wondrous.

Yet, in our world, there are those who would try to convince you that such boyish exuberance is also dangerous, and that it needs to be stifled, channeled and redirected to things that are more...well, more...docile, and compliant. Boys are told, over and over, that the world would be a better place if they would grow up to be, not boys. The

¹ *Winnie the Pooh and Tigger too*. 1974. Directed by John Lounsbery, based on the stories of A. A. Milne and written by Ralph Wright. 25 min. Walt Disney Pictures. VHS.

spring must be taken out of Tigger, and maleness must be deconstructed and reinvented.

Sometime between the ages of 10 and 15, boys begin to think of other things than rhymes and childish games. The world leaps up before them, they leave the Wood, and they start to seriously consider what kind of man they might become. The desire for fun is not lost, after all, they are still boys, but they just find it in other ways, through sports, music, and hobbies. In truth, they still like their Leggos, but puberty hits and boys think more about girls, although at first they don't know why. It can be a confusing time, filled with snares for the unwary, the ill-prepared, or the fatherless. Lewis Carroll expressed such a thought in his dark poem, *The Walrus and the Carpenter*, where two unlikely characters walk the beach looking for an oyster dinner. Speaking to the oysters who have followed them out of their safe beds, the Walrus talks nonsense.

"The time has come," the Walrus said,
"To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings."²

By the time the fat oysters know what is going on in this riddling chat, before they know who they are, where they are going, or how they will get there, they have all been eaten. Even though we are no longer young boys, these are the three questions that haunt our thoughts. We joke about it, wondering what we will be "when we grow up." But, this is a serious matter, and you must consider these same questions.

Who am I?
Where am I going?
How will I get there?

We will talk about them in a continuation of this reflection, next time.

² Carroll, Lewis. *Through the Looking Glass*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), p. 145.