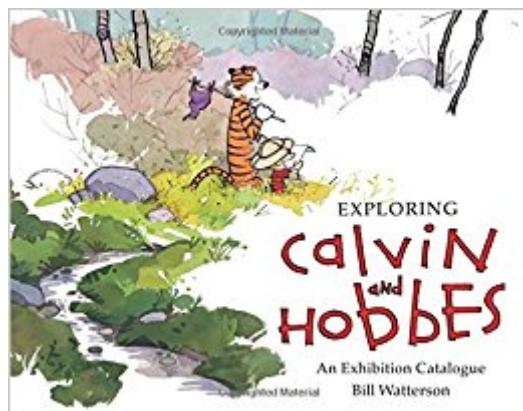


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# Exploring Calvin And Hobbes: An Exhibition Catalogue



## Synopsis

Enjoy this beautiful companion book to the extensive Exploring Calvin and Hobbes exhibition at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library. Includes an in-depth, original, and lengthy interview with Bill Watterson. Exploring Calvin and Hobbes is the catalogue for an exhibition by the same name at the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum at Ohio State University that ran in 2014. The exhibit is Bill Watterson's personal exploration of how the wonder of Calvin and Hobbes came to be. It includes original art of Calvin and Hobbes, along with Watterson's original commentary. The show also includes art from cartoons and cartoonists that Watterson has identified as influential in the development of his art, including Peanuts, Pogo, Krazy Kat, Doonesbury, Pat Oliphant, Jim Borgman, Flash Gordon, Bloom County, and Steadman. The book also includes an extensive, original interview with Watterson by Jenny Robb, the exhibition's curator. The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library & Museum is the repository of the Bill Watterson Deposit Collection (including the entirety of Watterson's Calvin and Hobbes artwork).

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## Customer Reviews

"America's Most Profound Comic Strip" (Christopher Caldwell, The Wall Street Journal) "Bill Watterson talks: This is why you must read the new 'Exploring Calvin and Hobbes' book ... For any true fan of cartooning, it is a must-read, a must-buy, a must-pick-up ... "Bill Watterson has delivered a gift, a trip down memory lane that is populated densely on each side with personal and professional insights - some grippingly specific, some that ring universal, many that resonate as both." (Michael Cava, The Washington Post)

Bill Watterson is the creator of Calvin and Hobbes, one of the most popular and well-regarded cartoon strips of the twentieth century. Calvin and Hobbes appeared in newspapers from November 1985 until Watterson's retirement in 1995. Online: [gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes/](http://gocomics.com/calvinandhobbes/)

(originally posted at [jdouglassanders.blogspot.com](http://jdouglassanders.blogspot.com)) I have had Exploring Calvin and Hobbes: An Exhibition Catalogue on preorder ever since I first heard about it. It arrived on the release day, Tuesday, March 10 (thanks Prime!) and, of course, I read it immediately! It is a pretty quick read, but, for me anyway, this will be a book I will end up rereading and using more in the long run as reference and inspiration. Let me just go ahead and say this: If you even think you want this book or have the slightest interest in "Calvin and Hobbes" or the daily comic strip format whatsoever- Stop reading this and buy the book right now. It is that good and it is that important to comic strip history. If you're still here, I'll outline what to expect from the book and one thing I wish the publisher had done. The book itself is printed on really nice, thick, glossy paper. It is 152 pages long not including an 8 page preface. The book retails for \$19.99 but you can probably get it cheaper here at (I did). The book is a little smaller than the landscape format treasures. It is the same width as the Sunday Pages book but not quite as tall. The book is beautiful. Artwork ornaments almost every page, even in the interview. Some of the artwork is full color. The majority is reprinted original artwork. This original artwork is mostly black ink on paper. If you look closely, you can make out penciling, correction, paste ups of copyright info strips, and other such "behind the scenes" things. Looking at Watterson's originals, I am reminded of Schulz's work where there's actually not a lot to see beyond the actual comic. As Schulz, Watterson is a tremendous artistic talent in the daily strip field and there doesn't seem to be a lot of revealing correction or revision going on. I think this is indicative of the amount of planning and writing both artists put in before ink every touched the comic board. Still, the bits of process you can divine from these reproductions is fascinating. The presentation of the material is as if you are there, touring the Watterson exhibit at The Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum. The text reads as a museum exhibit plaque might, describing the piece of artwork you are looking at on the page. Having the book seems to be the next best thing to actually seeing the exhibit when it was on display at the museum. The interview Face it. This is why you bought the book. You've read every Calvin and Hobbes strip a hundred times, own every treasury, the complete hardcover set, the complete soft cover set, the 10th anniversary book, the book devoted to the Sunday strips, and you've read every scrap of information you can find on the net about Watterson and his creation. Ok, maybe that's just me. But the interview is why you're

getting the book. Watterson speaks! The rest of the book is great, but after the interview, it is bonus material. Anyway, in case you didn't know, the book starts with a wonderful interview between Jenny Robb and Bill Watterson that goes on until page 35. It is a basic Q and A type setup with Watterson's artwork throughout. Very nice. If you are a C&H completist or enthusiast, some of the information will be rehash- Mr. Watterson's career path that led him to C&H, how the camping strips are based on real life experiences, Calvin's dad was based on Watterson's father, the way Watterson challenged (and changed) the Sunday strip format. But, even for the enthusiast, there is a lot of new information presented here. Mr. Watterson comes across very well. Not at all the bitter hermit his "reputation" might suggest. He seems very down to earth and humble, almost to the point of being dismissive of his own talent. He describes a lot of the process that went into creating C&H. He describes how he juggled the unique demands of writing/drawing a daily comic strip, how he handled the balance of daily gags with longer story arcs, and one particular account of how he lost his lead on his deadline (and how he got it back). I personally love Watterson's comments on anti-plot. Great information for those interested in creative process. Toward the end, Watterson gives (hopefully) a definitive answer to why he ceased the strip and an optimistically (for me anyway) vague answer to whether he would consider doing another comic strip. And, of course, you can't have any form of media featuring Bill Watterson without the obligatory discussion of merchandising. Some of the most fascinating parts of the interview involve Watterson's discussion on his attitude toward the future of the daily comic strip format and what has happened during the fragmentation of our pop culture. During the technology portion of the interview, I also had a great mental image of Calvin's dad (as an analog for Bill Watterson) fumbling with an iPad while trying to read his online newspaper. You'll know what I'm talking about when you read it! After the interview, the remainder of the book is divided into chapters focusing on different topics. The first 3 are a chronological look at the development of Watterson as an artist (Influences, Early Work, and Getting Syndicated). **Influences** In Influences, Bill Watterson describes influences on his comic work. Each book page is devoted to an artist and has a sample piece of artwork from the artist, as well as commentary by Watterson. Artists featured here start with the oft mentioned influences of Schulz, Kelly, and Herriman. But this group is also extended to include Alex Raymond, Trudeau, Berke Breathed, Oliphant, Borgman, and Ralph Steadman. The influence artwork is presented in the same manner as Watterson's own: Ink on paper original submissions. The strips are well represented, especially the Walt Kelly strip. It is evident much of the Calvin/Hobbes dynamic was pioneered in Pogo. In fact, replace Pogo and Albert with Calvin and Hobbes and you could almost keep the same dialogue, save the swamp-speak. That is to take nothing away from Watterson's work. He refined

the premise and took it to a sublime level of perfection. It is also nice to see influences acknowledged by Watterson that go beyond his big 3 (Peanuts, Pogo, and Krazy Kat). Early Work Influences is followed by Early Work. A few political cartoons followed by a couple Watterson's early strip submissions to syndicates. The last couple strips end up being about a sort of Proto-Calvin named Marvin, only with bangs covering his eyes. The pieces are all here, it's just time to get them into place. You can see the teddy bear with the almost-Hobbes-face in a talking animal strip Watterson pitched. There's little blond boy with a tiger named "Hobbes" in the next strip. Marvin, our missing link to Calvin, battles Mrs. Wormwood in the next strip, complete with Spaceman Spiff-esque imaginings. It is as if all these ideas perfect stormed into a cohesive strip. Maybe that's just part of the magic of Watterson's work. Getting Submitted Getting Syndicated is a page of the original C&H submission follow by a page of the first 3 C&H dailies. Even in the submission strips, you can see the Calvin we would all read for the next 10 years. He may have a little different hairstyle, but it's him alright. This section is followed by a two page spread featuring the art supplies Watterson used drawing the strip. Tools I have to admit, I love to read about the tools artists use. Whether it be drawing or photography or writing or whatever, I like to talk tools. It is easy to fall back on the old cliche of "it is the artist, not the brush", but an artist's choice of tools can give precious insight into their process and their choice can drastically impact their final results. One especially interesting piece is the mechanical pencil Watterson's father bought him as a child that was used to pencil all of the Calvin and Hobbes strips. That is how far this book takes you into not just the world of C&H, but the creation of it as well. The remainder of the book is a look at different facets of the strip, devoting a chapter to each topic. The following is a quick overview. Characters If you've read Calvin and Hobbes, you know there's not a lot of characters to discuss. It's basically Calvin, Hobbes, Calvin and Hobbes (the book lists them together as a character), Calvin's parents, and then the "supporting cast" (Susie, Rosalyn, Moe, and Mrs. Wormwood). This section illustrates the power of the simplified approach Watterson took to his strip. While Peanuts is an excellent strip, one weakness often cited is the confusing, sometimes weak, sometimes redundant cast of characters. Of course Schulz had 50 years of strips to fill, but Peanuts sometimes felt as if it lost its way the farther the strip strayed from Charlie Brown and the elder Van Pelts. Watterson had the same basic cast, give or take (Uncle Max?), for 10 years. His material stands very strong to this day despite/because the limited array of characters Watterson employed. Seasons The seasons depicted in C&H may as well be another character. Watterson made the change of seasons in Calvin's world and iconic touchstone of the strip. The rainy freshness of spring, the unbridled release of summer, the leaves and school sessions of autumn, the snowmen and sled rides of winter- it's all

here. Devices This section covers recurring actions and motifs in Calvin's life. The most obvious and well known is the first listed- Attack of the Tiger. (Hobbes pounced Calvin so regularly, in one strip the joke is Hobbes didn't.) These vary from a simple one panel gag to a 16 panel slow motion reenactment. Then 8 pages are devoted to Calvin's spacefaring alter ego, Spaceman Spiff. Four full Sunday strips are featured. Also, there is an examination of landscapes of the American Southwest and their influence on the vistas Watterson created for Spaceman Spiff. Finally, a two page spread about dinosaurs gives the reader a look at Watterson's magnificent command of tyrannosaur anatomy. I love how he can so realistically illustrate a dinosaur doing such absurd things.

Brilliant. Storytelling Calvin and Hobbes has many memorable story arcs. Storytelling is one of many areas where C&H excelled. Many of these arcs capture the wonder of childhood fantasy (the transmogrifier, the duplicator, time travel, the snow goons, etc.) Many of my favorite arcs are the more serious and touching ones- the baby racoon, when Calvin's home is broken into, the Calvinball game with Rosalyn, when Hobbes is lost. It would be impossible to address even just a few of the most memorable ones in a book like this, so reprinted here are 11 dailies covering the transmogrifier story. This gives a nice feel of how Watterson executed a storyline. The transmogrifier is iconically Calvin, so this is a fitting representation for this chapter.

Social Commentary Watterson was never afraid to address social issues with Calvin and Hobbes. I must admit, I sometimes find Watterson's commentary a little preachy and heavy-handed- not all of the time, but sometimes. I don't dislike these types of strips by any means, but they can seem forced next to some of Watterson's more effortless work (see "The Meaning of Life" below). The strips reprinted here touch on the environment, animal treatment, talk radio, and television. The interplay between Calvin's blind self absorption and Hobbes's dry clarity is classic. I enjoy the parodied fanaticism Calvin has for his bizarre interests (i.e. Calvin's "Chewing" magazine) and Watterson's comments on advertising and consumerism, but those aren't included here. This book is not meant to be a comprehensive collection, though, and the chosen strips give a nice look at how social biting the strip could be, all while keeping the cast in character.

The Meaning of Life Calvin and Hobbes could be silly and playful but it could also be just as touching and profound. These strips strike a chord and Watterson is truly in his element here. These strips are a huge part of what elevates the strip from a momentary diversion to fine art.

Color This is a short chapter featuring Watterson's mastery of watercolors. Beautiful reproductions, but I am sure these were incredible to see at the actual exhibit.

Sundays The chapter devoted to Sunday strips is divided into two sections- 1985-1991 and 1992-1995. Why? During his 1991 sabbatical, Watterson proposed changes to the format of Sunday strips. The pre-1992 format called for strict formatting to allow editors the option of trimming

the strip to their paper's needs. This rendered the first row of Sunday panels to be basically "throwaway" panels. Since not all papers printed the entire strip, the first row needed to be an independent gag. Instead of being able to use the larger Sunday format to its maximum potential, Watterson felt the art and storytelling was compromised by this set of business decisions. Watterson flourished in the freedom of this new format. The difference is amazing as you compare the old format and new format Sundays with the flip of a page. *The One Thing I Wish the Publisher Had Done* **MAKE THE BOOK BIGGER**. I understand Exploring is not meant to be the definitive version of Calvin and Hobbes for casual reading. However, it would be my preference for original art to be reproduced at actual size (think IDW's Artist's Editions). So, I wish they had made this book larger. That way, it would be much closer to mirroring the experience of actually being at the exhibit. Or, better yet, release two versions. The smaller paperback version we have now and a huge \$200-\$250 edition with the artwork reprinted at **ACTUAL SIZE**. It is at actual size you can really see artifacts of the artist's process. Think of how invaluable that would be. Most people will never own an original Watterson strip to study. I have the *The Rocketeer* reproduced at actual size and the difference is huge. Don't let that deter you from buying this book, though. This book is the book Calvin fans have been waiting for and it does not disappoint.

This is a wonderful work for anyone interested in exploring Calvin and Hobbes. The Interview at the start of the book is worth the price of the book alone. It covers a lot of interesting topics in a very thoughtful way. Here are a few areas that I really enjoyed:<sup>\*</sup> the role of failure (from his initial work doing editorial cartoons)<sup>\*</sup> voice (especially for Calvin) and how the characters wrote their own material<sup>\*</sup> the role of experimentation and how the progress was not linear<sup>\*</sup> why he stopped the strip<sup>\*</sup> why he likes the book format for comics<sup>\*</sup> thoughts on the future of comics and webcomics My favorite part of the interview is seeing how Watterson pushed himself and wanted to achieve the best he could. Here is a great line: "I was eager to keep raising the bar and discover what else I might be able to do with the strip." There is a nice selection of strips from the 10 years that the comic ran that give the reader/viewer a taste of the strip. The selection of strips reminded me of how much I loved these comics and I plan to go back and look at some of the other Calvin and Hobbes collections that I have (I have been a fan since the days it was originally running in the newspapers). The printed version of the book is well done with thick pages and the comics come through crisp and clear. This is truly a must have for any fan of Calvin and Hobbes and I recommend it highly! This is a nice, high-quality work that I will enjoy pulling off the shelf for years to come.

It's never too late to get in touch with your inner whimsy. My mother used to clip and save strips and say, "Remember when you used to do this (or something similar)?". Calvin and Hobbes was my daily burst of sunlight. I often wondered where Mr. Watterson got his inspirations and this book never let me down. I am as ever a fan of Calvin and Hobbes as I was 30 years ago and I still re-read the strips. Exploring Calvin and Hobbes should be read by every C&H fan - old and new. The book is beautiful to say the least. The artwork is vivid and jumps off the pages; the stories behind the origin of Calvin and Hobbes as well as the daily cartoons is a heaven-send for any die hard fans. As heartbroken as I was when the strip ended, I understand better why Mr. Watterson walked away. And he did so with a beautiful ending, "It's a magical world, Hobbes, ol' buddy...let's go exploring!" I couldn't ask for more.

When I learned to read, one of the first books I picked up at the library was a Peanuts book. It didn't take long for me to discover a Calvin and Hobbes book sitting nearby. I would sit in the evenings and giggle my way through page after page. Before long I had introduced my siblings, parents, cousins, and friends to the magical world of Calvin and Hobbes. Though I've read the books over and over again, I never tire of them. So you can imagine my response when I discovered this book in the works. As soon as this book became available for pre-order, I did so. Then the long wait--I felt like Calvin waiting for his beanie to arrive in the mail...except that this wait ended up being worth it! When you admire a writer or an artist, it's a beautiful privilege when they let you peek inside their mind, their creative process, and their life. This book provided just such a privilege. I savored every page: from the interview to the comics I've already read a billion times, but appeared in a new light to me when I got to see his original drawings. What a delight!

This book is a delight. The information about author & stories, as well as the art, are great! This book is in great shape & arrived packed well & arrived in good time. Very happy with this purchase!

This is a birthday gift for a big fan. I know he will be surprised. Thru the years he has lost some of his collection and this will have everything in one. Being older, he will take good care of it.

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