


a graphic novel by
CRAIG THOMPSON

Blankets

Craig Thompson

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Wrapped in the landscape of a blustery Wisconsin winter, Blankets explores the sibling rivalry of two brothers growing up in the isolated country, and the budding romance of two coming-of-age lovers. A tale of security and discovery, of playfulness and tragedy, of a fall from grace and the origins of faith.

Blankets Details

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From Reader Review Blankets for online ebook

Φαροφ?λακας says

Το "Blankets" το? Κραιγκ Τ?μπσον (Craig Thompson) ε?ναι μια αυτοβιογραφικ? ιστορ?α και συν?μα μια ιστορ?α αγ?πης.

Παρακολουθο?με τον ?ρωα παιδ? να μεγαλ?νει με τον μικρ? αδερφ? του σε μια θρησκ?ληπτη και αυταρχικ? οικογ?νεια που απ? την μ?α αδυνατε? να υπερασπιστε? τα δ?ο παιδι? και απ? την ?λλη τους εμφυτε?ει χριστιανικ?ς τ?ψεις για πρ?γματα που δεν θ? 'πρεπε.

?ρχεται λοιπ?ν η στιγμ? που ο ?φηβος Κραιγκ συναντ? σε μια κατασκ?νωση ?να ιδια?τερο κορ?τσι που γ?νεται η παρ?α του και που αργ?τερα θα καταφ?ρει να αποσπ?σει την ?δεια των γονι?ν του να την επισκεφτε? στην μακριν? της π?λη.

Δεν θα ?θελα να πω περισσ?τερα για την πλοκ? κι αυτ? τα λ?γα δεν τα θεωρ? αποκαλυπτικ? ?στε να τα αποκρ?ψω εδ? π?ρα.

Να πω μον?χα πως ε?ναι μια πολ? ανθρ?πινη και καλοφτιαγμ?νη ιστορ?α που ο καθ?νας θα διαβ?σει πολ? ευχ?ριστα. Πιστε?ω πως ε?ναι απ? τα εικονογραφηγ?ματα που θα το απολα?σουν κα? τα κορ?τσια, ?σως μ?λιστα περισσ?τερο αυτ?. Το προτε?νω ανεπιφ?λακτα.

Το σχ?διο ε?ναι ασπρ?μαυρο και το βιβλ?ο υπ?ρχει μεταφρασμ?νο κα? στα Ελληνικ? αν και νομ?ζω πως αφ?σαν αμετ?φραστο τον τ?τλο. (Γιατ? ?ραγε; Οι "κουβ?ρτες" δεν ακο?γονται καλ? στην γλ?σσα μας;)

[πρ?τη δημοσ?ευση στην Λ?σχη του Βιβλ?ου]

Oriana says

book #12 for Jugs & Capes!

review #8 for CCLaP!

I joke about this a lot, but it's true that in some ways, in the squishiest little corner of my mushy little heart, I am still a teenage girl. My favorite TV show, ever and still, is *My So-Called Life*. I have read Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* probably thirty times. I still listen to Fall Out Boy, for fuck's sake! I listen to other music too, obviously, hipster fabulous bands you've never heard of (I live in Brooklyn, after all), but something in Fall Out Boy's plaintive intensity just *twists* in me, just carves straight into my fluttering core and makes me reel—and plus OMGWTF Pete Wentz is *so fucking hot*, right?

Um, what I'm saying is that I am a complete sucker for the angst, the power, and the pain of all the firsts of teenagerdom, when everything is the most important goddamn thing ever, the most intense, the most devastating, the most harrowing, the most blissful. So there was every reason to think I was going to fall hard

for *Blankets*.

Except I didn't.

You probably know the story by now, since this book made Craig pretty damn famous, winning all kinds of Eisner and Harvey awards and making bestseller lists everywhere. But in case you don't, here it is: Boy meets girl at church camp and falls in love. They spend two heavenly (but mostly PG-rated) weeks together at her parents' house, escaping their messed-up families and teenage traumas and scholastic hurdles by building a little world into which they can both sink, together, forever (forever for two weeks, I mean, so *forever* in teenagerland). That's not the whole story, of course, but that two-week-long date takes up a full 400 pages of a book that doesn't quite make it to 600, so it's fair to say that's most of it.

Well, so why wasn't I sucked right in? Why wasn't this just exactly the kind of lush melodrama I love to revel in? I guess because it really wasn't that *interesting*. Craig Thomas's language of love, as it were, is really pretty hokey, pretty cliché. The illustrations are often beautiful and complex, but the story itself just doesn't measure up. Raina asks Craig to paint something on her wall. She teaches him how to do a butterfly kiss, and he teaches her an Eskimo kiss. They make snow angels. They take long meandering walks or long meandering drives and have long meandering conversations about love and their childhoods and their families and God. There's just no urgency, no frenzy, none of that sense of *if I don't kiss this girl right motherfucking now my insides will explode*.

And then there's God. That's the other main thing about this book; religion is nearly as main a character as Craig and Raina. I've come out as an atheist before, and I acknowledged back in my *Preacher* review that, growing up a pretty casual Jew, I missed out on all the Christian guilt and anxiety that was such a strong part of the background of that book, and I had the same trouble with this one. Craig is just in *agony* about his religious future, especially with the creeping carnal desires he has for Raina. And Jesus looms large—literally—in every aspect of the story. He's looking down at Craig from the wall of almost every room, and even when there's no physical manifestation, Craig is reading (or thinking about having read) Bible passages and anecdotes. I can see how this could be very affecting and evocative for someone who grew up in this tradition, or who has a strong faith, but it just doesn't stir anything in me, and I find it very hard to relate, or sometimes even take seriously.

The best parts of *Blankets*, in my opinion, actually center around Craig's and Raina's interactions with their respective siblings. There is so much more raw energy and passion and pain in those relationships than there is in the central one. Perhaps that's because the romance itself is so fleeting, and family—at least for these characters—sticks around. Craig and his brother were incredibly close as children, which Craig relates to Raina in a series of very poignant flashbacks, but lately they've drifted apart. And during his stay with her, Craig watches Raina interacting with her own family—parents in the midst of divorce, two mentally disabled younger sibs, and a cold, distant, materialistic older sister—and though he doesn't comment on it too much, the first thing he does when he gets home again is begin a slow process of reconnecting with his own brother. That, to me, was so much more beautiful and meaningful than watching the two teens clasp hands breathe each other's air and moon at one another. It redeemed the book for me to a good degree.

One of the ladies in my Jugs & Capes group felt that the main problem was that Craig, who is about thirty-five, is just too young and inexperienced and self-absorbed to be writing a memoir. And maybe that's true, maybe at thirty-five there really isn't much more than that one intense romance, the enduring heartache of not having been a good enough big brother, the struggle with one's faith. But much better books were built on much less, so I don't think I can let it off the hook that easily. It's not a *bad* book, certainly, and I'd definitely read more of Craig's stuff later, but this one just didn't dazzle me like I'd hoped it would.

See what I mean? No contest.

Dave Russell says

"Desire is sad."

--W. Somerset Maugham, "Rain"

When I was a kid one of my friends invited to go to some church event retreat thingy. My dad, a mildly avowed, atheist wouldn't let me go. I've often wondered what he thought would have happened and what would have actually happened had I gone. Would it have been the opposite of one of those memoirs that get published with alarming frequency, about the person who suffers under the pressure of a strict religious upbringing and later discovers atheism or at least liberalism? In my case would it have turned into the story of a person who escapes a pretty good tolerant childhood into the world of a restrictive and overbearing church?

Anyway this graphic novel starts off as another retelling of that first kind of story. It almost felt cliché to me. The only thing that held my interest was the artwork which is beautifully lively and yet subtle, throughout the book.

It's during the middle part that this book earns its stars. It's so wildly romantic and melancholy and beautiful. The Maugham quote above would be a perfect title for that part of this book. The way Craig falls so in love with Raina who loves him back, and yet it never quite satisfies him. He longs for her even when he's with her. Perhaps true desire can never be satisfied because it only exists in the future tense, never in the perfect.

Given that, I'm kind of ambivalent about the ending. Craig's attitude at the end wasn't what I was expecting, and I was left with a slight sense of being cheated. Although maybe that's because the middle part was so strong. I so identified with him, that the fact that he didn't feel what I would have felt, kind of unsettled me.

Catriona (LittleBookOwl) says

Rating: 3.5/5 stars

Orsodimondo says

NON RIUSCIVO A CAPIRE...

...come l'anima racchiusa nel mio corpo da bambino potesse essere trapiantata nella sua grottesca controparte adolescente

Raccontare il crescere, da bambino diventare adolescente, raccontare il diventare.

E raccontare il silenzio.

Silenzio pieno di pensieri, ma forse anche più di emozioni.

Che diventano mie, che sono mie, le mie che avevo a quell'epoca della vita, che in verità è uno stato dell'essere.

Bello.

Molto bello.

Molto molto.

Tenero, struggente, divertente, romantico, profondo, acuto, geniale...

L'educazione sentimentale di Craig andrebbe letta più volte a età diverse, dovrebbe accompagnarci nel cammino.

Un grande Bildungsroman per tutte le età.

Grazie Mr Thompson.

Trish says

Wow. Every bit as earthshaking and meaningful as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, this graphic novel by Craig Thompson published in 2003 by Top Shelf is one thoughtful Americans *do not want to miss*. Christian evangelical notions of life on earth and what comes after are a huge part of the narrative of our nation. Even today when our population is more diverse than ever, the history of these core beliefs within our citizenry continue to affect the direction of our politics.

Teenagers instilled with these notions rarely have the intellectual wherewithal to question those received ideas. Paradoxically, perhaps *because of* those early teachings and the constraints of his upbringing, the author--the main character in this memoir-- has the discipline and strength to look squarely at his life, the beliefs of his parents, and think again.

This graphic novel won two Eisner Awards, three Harvey Awards, and two Ignatz Awards in 2004 and a Prix de la critique for the French edition a year later. A strict Christian evangelical family raises two sons in rural Wisconsin; we watch the boys grow up, from sleeping together in the same room/same bed they move to their own rooms, go to summer camp, get harassed at school, romance a girl.

Sometimes graphic novels get a few things right, like the artwork, or the pacing. In this case, Thompson seemed to get everything right. The growing up story is poignant and real and revealing about farm life in Wisconsin in a close-knit religious family. Craig goes to visit his girlfriend Raina who lives in the snowiest city in the contiguous United States, in the Upper Peninsula of far north Michigan....in winter. We are treated to Raina's home life as well, another Christian family who struggles under enormous pressures.

Graphic novels are especially impressive because they must portray characters from an endless array of

angles, and in this case, we recognize a character as he grows over a period of years. Moreover, we are feeling that character struggle with the promises and constraints of his religion and the actual manifestation of those teachings that he can see. When Craig's pastor suggests he consider a religious calling, Craig seriously contemplates the idea.

The graphic novel drops into lower gear here and we see the quality of the intellect behind the work. Craig's thinking and research into the Bible is Jesuitical, deep and challenging, and he is left with too many unanswered questions and lingering doubts. Different mentorship probably would have produced a different result. This portion of the book is careful, allowing Craig to slip away, leaving the door to his family open, and conflict at bay.

Thompson's drawing skill is exceptional and smart, unmistakably capturing movement from life. The group scenes are especially exciting; for example, he might draw a high school cafeteria with many tables of students doing all manner of shenanigans. It is Bruegel, in ink. Thompson didn't hold back on this book: it is 582 pages, not including the credits. He took the time to draw out his religious questioning and didn't rush us through his moments of insight and revelation.

I especially appreciated the belly laughs he led us to near the end of the memoir when some of the church elders in his hometown warned Craig not to consider going to art school, lest it lead him to sin. Our hearts nearly break with what the teen will miss if he doesn't follow his passion, but again he manages to avoid confrontation while following his dreams.

Thompson has continued his remarkable success, and in 2011 Pantheon Books published *Habibi*, a book Thompson had begun working on in 2004 after traveling in Europe for a time. Influenced by Arabic calligraphy and Islamic mythology, Thompson tells us "I'm playing with Islam in the same way I was playing with Christianity in *Blankets*." [Wiki].

On my blog I have posted two videos of Thompson demonstrating and discussing his work. The first is short and covers his childhood and all books. The second is a 56 minute interview, with slides, of Thompson discussing *Habibi*. I am completely wowed by this man, his work, and the depth and scope of his intellect. Highly recommended.

Rauf says

Here are seven lines from *Blankets* that pretty much sums up the story:

1. I couldn't fathom that the soul trapped in my child body would be transplanted to its grotesque adolescent counterpart.
2. But in that little pathetic clump of blankets there was comfort.
3. We both knew that nothing existed for us outside of the moment.
4. Maybe I'm sad about wanting you. I'm not too comfortable with wanting someone.
5. Shame is always easier to handle if you have someone to share it with.
6. How satisfying it is to leave a mark on a blank surface. To make a map of my movement--no matter how temporary.

7. Even a mistake is better than nothing.

The Fizza says

A few years ago I was lent a book called "Blankets" which I read on the 5 hour trip back from New York City on a Sunday. Now to say the 600 pages just flew by would not be an exaggeration. I was done with the book before we hit the Massachusetts border. I knew very little about the book, save for the blurbs on the cover, nor had I heard of its writer/artist, Craig Thompson, before. But my friend, a struggling journalist living in Queens, told me that 'Blankets' was a semi-autobiographical graphic novel well worth the read.

And so being a bit of a junkie when it comes to reading (especially on these long trips) and impressed by some of the supposed 'comic books' that I have run across in my time (Mister X, From Hell, Maus, Blue Monday, etc...) reading something like this seemed an interesting diversion. Little did I know that before long I would be entangled in a fluid and focused work tracing the path of three of the author's closest relationships; his brother Phil, first love Raina, and Christianity.

What I found within these pages was a lonely and isolated young man groping around, trying to find an identity. It was clear and yet emotional. It was a whirlwind, and yet structured. Like thoughts, or growing up, can be. But most importantly it was honest.

Craig's struggles with identity, love and religion are shown with no malice or mocking. The characters that populate "Blankets" reflect the emotional realities of Craig's world, while his art lets us move through his life with an intimacy that reminds us how it was, or can be, growing up. We join Craig as he begins to discover the world outside his everyday life in rural Wisconsin and how his relationships sharpen his reality and thereby his identity.

Craig was born in the mid 70's into a very Christian central Wisconsin family, and the events covered here deal with the emotional shrapnel, which results from his emerging adulthood. It's a strong work, by a new talent. In an interview for the Portland Tribune, Craig tells of his influences and goes on to tell how he drew the book on Vellum Bristol Board using a number two watercolor brush and Speedball Super Black India Ink.

But it seems to me that the best part of the interview is when he bared a bit of his soul regarding his conclusions to the questions he struggled with as a young man (and shared with us in the pages of "Blankets") by saying, "There's a bitter cynicism, a nihilist attitude, about (Art) Spiegelman and (Dan) Clowes (work). I think my generation is a bit sweeter, but the sweetness is not ironic; it's sincere. I just think our attitude toward some things is more optimistic."

"Blankets" was written and drawn at night while Craig worked a full-time day job, this weighty work took nearly four years to complete. Craig has illustrated for Nickelodeon and Owl magazine, DC and Dark Horse comics. His debut graphic novel 'Goodbye, Chunky Rice' won the comics industry's esteemed Harvey award for Best New Talent, and was named by The Comics Journal as one of the Top Five Comics of 1999.

-The Following are BLURBS for "Blankets"-

The New York Times Book Review "beautifully rendered memories of small brutalities"

Publishers Weekly "sincerity, pictorial lyricism, and taste"

Time magazine "best comic of 2003"

and the Library Journal has "Blankets" on their year-end "best of list" for 2003

Algernon says

It's beautiful!

A quilt made of memories, bad and good, side by side sketches about growing up in a small town in Wisconsin; about sharing a room with a younger brother; about surviving school days with merciless bullying; about finding solace in religion; about a boy who meets a girl; about dysfunctional families and people with disabilities; about being an artist and about the power of imagination, about the purity of first love reflected in the purity of snow; about losing your religion and losing your innocence ... about beauty and sadness and time turning the pure white snow into a sea of dirty slush; and about the precious few things you can salvage, like a quilt of many shapes and colours

I am such a big fan of Craig Thompson's second graphic novel ("Habibi") that I was actually afraid to start on his first one, lest I be disappointed. I should have had more faith in the artist and in his talent to capture emotions and existential angst in his images and in his confessional words, because this debut is just as good. The artwork may seem naive and unsophisticated at first glance, especially if it is compared with the carefully rendered arabesques of his Arabian Tales in Habibi, but I believe this style suits the story in Blankets better : it reflects on the beginnings of the artist, with the first childhood primitive drawings and the later jagged edges and raw passion of adolescence. Same goes for the decision to use black and white panels - with the white empty spaces of snow and the dark corners of trauma. The only time Thompson is really careful with his artwork is in the portrayal of his muse Raina, always beautiful and dreamy like an angel fallen among mortals. I could detect some homage paid to Bill Waterson and some echoes of Henry Rousseau, but Craig Thompson is an authentic and powerful voice in the adult comic market, well worth a try for anybody who still believes that comics are all about superheroes in spandex.

"Blankets is my first graphic novel of 2016, and I feel I am on the right path. I hope the next albums I try will be equal to the high expectations set by Craig Thompson. And I hope he will write more of these wonderful tales.

Maciek says

I first read about *Blankets* in an article on the history of graphic novels, where it was mentioned as one of the signature examples of the form - along famous works such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (Interestingly, Spiegelman liked the book, and sent the author a congratulatory letter after publication). *Blankets* was offered as an example of a serious and important work, which helped define the term and give it meaning

and significance - by telling a mature and largely autobiographical story it helped distance the graphic novel from a stereotype of a comic book for children. I've never read anything by Craig Thomson before, so when the opportunity presented itself I chose to take it and dove right in.

I started reading *Blankets* in the evening of one day, and finished in the morning of the next one, taking a break only because I had to go to sleep. Because of the nature of its form, this 600 page book can be finished in one sitting - inspired by the title; in a favorite, comfortable chair, with a big cup of warm tea or cocoa nearby, allowing the book to wrap itself around you like a warm blanket.

As mentioned, Thomson's work is almost 600 pages long, but never feels like it because of the fluidity of his storytelling and his skills as an artist. Never does *Blankets* feel slow or uninspired; never does it feel boring. Thomson managed to take his own growing up in small town, rural Wisconsin in a conservative, evangelical Christian family and make it interesting to the reader - I do not know where the book exceeds the limits of autobiography (or if it does it at all), but I was engaged all the way throughout it and was simply interested in learning what will happen next.

Blankets chronicles the childhood and adolescence of the author/protagonist Craig, and all the struggles that come with it: having to share a room with his younger brother, his devotion and struggle to live according to Biblical principles in a complicated world, and eventually his first love, Raina. This is a very sentimental story of personal origins, to which many of us will be able to relate in one way or another - who has never experienced confusion in a complicated world, or fallen intensely in love at a young age? The author captures these feelings very well, even though he undoubtedly looks at parts of his own youth with rose-tinted glasses and romanticizes the heck out of it - some of the situations and conversations that his protagonist have are just way too convenient and dramatic. Still, it *is* a very engaging and genuinely heartwarming story where we like the protagonists and want the best for them.

However, this is not a perfect book; unfortunately it has flaws, and even major ones. While it is very well written and drawn, it is not as perfect as the enthusiastic reviews made it out to be; some of its flaws are just too major and obvious to ignore. Thomson published *Blankets* when he was just 28 years old; it can be argued that at this age an author simply does not have a reason to publish a *memoir*, unless his experience was truly unique and memoir-worthy, and a book can help analyze it in depth and provide readers with valuable lessons and insights. The problem with *Blankets* lies in the fact that it does not do that - the religious aspect of the book is very skin-deep; late in the book Craig has to confront his religious beliefs as a new adult, and the matter is simply left unresolved; the entire struggle that he has experienced throughout the book is left alone and abandoned. In fact, this is my entire problem with the book - as much as I enjoyed it, it does not say anything *new* or particularly insightful; stripped of its beautiful illustrations, its content simply would not hold up to close scrutiny. This sudden ending to Craig's story was so unexpected, it literally shocked me - I wanted to know more about him as a person, and at the end I was left with the impression that I hardly knew him at all - that throughout these 600 pages I did not get to really know him or see him develop, and as much as I enjoyed his story I felt no sadness that he was gone and that it ended.

I would still recommend reading the book as it contains genuinely touching moments - mostly in the background, such as Craig's relationship with his brother and Raina's disabled siblings, which for me really shone in the book - though sadly it is not the masterpiece that it was hailed as, and I very much wished that I had been.

Jace says

Having produced this illustrated autobiography of his formative years, Thompson certainly deserves credit for an ambitious undertaking. His illustrations are the shining accomplishment of this book; cartoony, yet humanly realistic, they exude a youthful enthusiasm. Definitely a memorable drawing style, it almost makes *Blankets* worth a read in-and-of-itself.

Though well intentioned, I felt that the "plot" of *Blankets* fell short of what it promised. The bulk of the story revolves around the author's hokey two-week-long love affair with a girl he met at church camp. Though his first encounter with love may have been earth-shaking for the author, he fails to convey this. It reads more like 400 [illustrated] pages of masturbatory teen-angst. At times I had to check the title page to make sure I wasn't accidentally reading *Dawson's Creek: The Graphic Novel*. To make matters even more cliché, he has one character invoke the lines from The Cure's "Just Like Heaven". Yes, it's a great song, but it feeds right into the sappiness I felt mired in for most of the story. I also felt assaulted by the religious overtones in the book. For 500-some pages of his childhood, Thompson is a Jesus-freak, but in the last 5 pages we learn that by his early twenties he has abandoned Christianity. It would have been nice if the author would have shared more of his transformation with the reader. I'm sure it was a momentous change for the author, but the lack of explanation makes it seem almost arbitrary.

Blankets has a few redeeming qualities, such as Thompson's flashbacks to his childhood in the room he shared with his little brother. They build forts, sail pirate ships, explore haunted caves, etc. These scenes really showcase his humor, creativity, and flair for storytelling. Though light and emotionally unburdened, they conveyed more personality than the love story he focused on for most of the book. Additionally, the author introduces a few "darker" moments, such as a babysitter who sexually abused him and his brother. It's a testament to the uncensored honesty in his storytelling.

Overall, it was a quick read and worth the time. It was nice change of pace from sci-fi and superhero graphic novels. But pick it up from the local library or borrow it from a friend. I wouldn't advise anyone to spend \$29.95 for this bible-sized comic book.

Carmine says

Fugaci impronte sulla neve

Cos'è l'amore? E come possiamo identificarlo e imprimerlo indelebilmente in qualcosa da ammirare e rimirare, finché la sua essenza non si dissipa con il passare del tempo?

L'amore non è solo la meraviglia del momento o la perfezione catturata in un attimo; non è Gesù che guida i fedeli e sorride al buio della tua cameretta; forse non è neanche la profondità che lega due persone nella condivisione di un frammento d'esistenza.

L'amore è consapevolezza del sentimento che muta nel tempo, si trasforma, corre lontano da noi; per poi comprendere che, forse, siamo noi a correre troppo rapidamente per realizzare l'importanza di quel miracolo e l'eredità che potrà lasciarci.

Le impronte sulla neve tendono a scomparire sotto la nevicata, ma non vuol dire che non siano mai esistite.

David Schaafsma says

Every year I teach this book in my YA course it comes up as one of the top three favorite texts in the course. I might go so far as to say it is one of the top five or ten graphic novels of all time. Powerful, gorgeous, touching, expressive, it's among other things a meditation on first or young love, with sweeping and /or anguished art accomplished in the romantic tradition, with all the emotional highs and lows of young love. Thompson's story might be described as autobiographical fiction; set in Wisconsin, where he grew up with his controlling parents and his brother Phil, art and fantasy (he calls it dreaming) are his escapes.

Craig can't choose what he reads or sees on television. His father is a tyrant. His primary escapes are his drawing, nature, and play/fantasy with his brother. He for a time turns to his parents' religion as a kind of escape from the world, with that promise of Heaven, and considers the encouragement from his pastor that he, a thoughtful, earnest boy, follow the ministerial calling. But it's a promise also filled with dark threats of Hell; at one point, led by a suggestion from his teachers that art is selfish, un-Christian, the darkly intense Craig burns all of his artwork.

16, at a Bible summer camp, Craig meets and falls in love with Raina, a kind of ethereal beauty whom he fancies is like him, a loner, into nature, increasingly less into organized religion. And he's physically attracted to her, which is something he struggles with against the backdrop of a religion that forbids this very attraction as the sin of lust. After camp they exchange letters and he visits her upper Michigan home for almost a week. She makes a quilt--a blanket--for him, that becomes an emblem of their relationship; in return he paints a tree on her wall with the two of them in it. They sleep together, they are in love.

I have now read *Blankets* a few times. In the last reading and review I had developed the idea—I am sure informed by others reading with me—that the girl, Raina, is never quite real for Craig, almost completely idealized, a creation by him of what it is he needs to escape from his oppressive circumstances, his conservative family, his being bullied at school. Throughout the book we increasingly see Raina with a halo, angelic, and I thought: This is an indication of his unrealistic view of her. While I think this escape theory is true in some sense, I have come back around to Seth Hahne's view of the book, that Craig's view of Raina—her individualism, her body/sexuality, her responsibility for her two special needs brothers and sisters—is part of the construction of his view of her as sacred. Craig really does love Raina, and she is part of his constructing a more positive, human, embodied spirituality. He still believes in God, he still knows the Bible, but he reads the sacred in the world increasingly as different than the fundamentalist upbringing he was limited to. His is a personal spirituality, not group-think religion. The sacred he sees in the world comes to re-include his art as meaning-making; thus the book. Art, like spirituality, emerges out of patterns, a patchwork quilt of personal characteristics and commitments.

The artwork in *Blankets* is also a patchwork quilt of gorgeous, sweeping, romantic images of the natural world (snow, trees, weather), likening it to patterns in Raina's dress and hair, open and free and spacious and lovely in contrast to the darker, more sinister patches of his oppressive house and Sunday school. There's also an emblem or mark that weaves its way through the book, present whenever Craig recognizes something as sacred. At one point that essentially Calvinist-raised Craig even forgives himself enough for his transgressions to even share a halo with Raina.

When they part, however, as most 16 year-old romances do, Craig is still darkly intense in, as with his art, earlier, burning all the artifacts and letters Raina as shared with him. He imagines erasing, white-washing, the very painting he has made for Raina. All memories gone, is his goal. Except the blanket, thank goodness, which becomes the basis for the book, and his embrace of the patchwork quilt of storytelling.

Blankets is a gorgeously expressive, exquisitely drawn book about first love, religion, family, art, nature, memory, blankets. It's a dark book filled with angst and fears, and also a gorgeous, swirling romantic sweep of a book. He is one anguished dude, this young Craig, so complicated and messed up by religion and family, and yet he dedicates it to his family, with love, and also makes it clear that the sacred is important for him and others. A must read, and a beautiful work of art.

Craig Thompson interview:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oumak...>

Whitney Atkinson says

I just read this in one sitting. Incredible. First graphic novel i've given 5 full stars to.

Greg says

A few years ago when part of this book was in the McSweeney's Graphic Novel issue I really liked it. I remember it being on of the stories that made me want to go out and buy the book. I didn't go out and buy it though because it was just too damn expensive for me, sure the book looked nice but spending thirty bucks on a graphic novel that I'd read in an hour or so didn't seem worth it.

Now I have finally read it. If I had rated *Blankets* as soon as I finished it I would have given it four stars. Instead I went for a walk to go buy coffee, and thought about it on my short walk and realized that there are some big problems with the book. Coming home I decided to read other reviews of the book before writing this, something I don't usually do, but felt I'd see if other people had some of the problems I had. Some did, and some had some really weird problems with the book, like the guy who gave it one star because it believed it was a fundamentalist Christian comic book in disguise. I have a feeling this person didn't make it to the end of the book, or else is seeing something I didn't see in the book.

The book captures the confusion of being a teenager who is out of place with his surroundings. The main part of the story revolving around his short lived long distance relationship with a girl he meets at Church Camp is sort of on the heartbreaking side, and pushes all of the melancholy romantic buttons for me, maybe even a little unfairly. On my walk I couldn't help thinking that I have to stop identifying with my own doomed relationships of my younger days, and not just give it stars because it allows me to wallow in past where everything good always seemed to exist too far outside of the immediate surroundings to be feasible. Maybe if the book just stuck to doomed young love I'd be giving this a higher rating.

My big problem with the book is the sexual abuse part, which sort of comes out of left field, is used as a juxtaposition between the way the main character and the love interest show responsibility towards their siblings, but is then sort of just left sitting there. Maybe if it had only been alluded to I would be able to let it be passed off, but Thompson returns to it, gives no inkling of any kind of effects the abuse had but instead it just kind of hangs over the rest of the story doing nothing after it's second appearance. Now, if it had been a book dwelling on sexual abuse I probably would have disliked it, a part of me is tired of the survivor genre of memoirs, but I just don't understand why it is there in the story (except of course that it happened, which is ok, but lots of things I'm sure happened that aren't in the story, and I'm sure lots of things happened that have turned Thompson into the person he is today that aren't in the story). Now I'm feeling a little like a dick for attacking this point, I just think it should have been integrated into the story a little better.

I liked this book but more on my immediate feelings for it then when I think about it. I probably have more to say about it, but I'm feeling tired of working on this review. So this is all there is.

David Yoon says

It's the semi-autobiographical story that starts with Craig from his childhood, sharing a bed with his brother huddled against the cold of Wisconsin winters. It's a bed that is both a battleground and a life raft.

It mirrors his relationship growing up in the Christian faith, the child of devout parents. Christianity is a refuge against the small-town bullies but becomes something he has to wrestle with in the throes of young love when he meets Raina.

It's such a particular Western story. While nowhere nearly as devout I recognize both the strength and the torment growing up in the faith can have. I know that Jesus painting, I recognize the narrow confines of the church and it's almost desperate proselytization. How the raptures of faith can come up hard against the awareness of first love and how both can be utterly transporting and wildly confusing.

Thompson's brush work is perfect and clear and somehow manages to evoke the nervous awe of first love, the creative impulse, Christian guilt and the raw imagination of youth.

Carmen says

This book is an autobiographical account of Craig's coming to terms with his faith and reconciling it with his sexuality.

Being raised in a born-again family - which is well-portrayed in this book - is not a foreign concept to me. I've spoken before about how damaging the church's messages about sexuality are. We always think of women being oppressed, repressed, damaged, and unhappy as a result of this message, but as I wrote in my review of TAKE MY HAND, men and boys are very hurt and damaged as well.

As someone who loves Jesus and reads his Bible daily, Craig has developed a fear of sexuality, finely tuned by his parents, his teachers, and his church. For many, many years he is the perfect Christian boy - one who never ever masturbates because it's a sin and feels extreme guilt and shame for drawing one single picture of a naked woman. He really and truly feels like he is "making Jesus sad" when he thinks lustful thoughts.

Then he meets a girl. At Christian Camp. Her name is Raina. She is beautiful and obviously really likes Craig.

Can Craig kiss Raina? Can he sleep in the same bed next to her? Can he bring himself to make love to her? Or has his religion screwed his sexuality up so badly that he's beyond repair?

...

I really liked this book. The illustrations are pretty, which counts for a lot. The story is very relatable for anyone who has been or has dated a born-again Christian. I thought Craig and Raina's story was touching and (not surprisingly) realistic. I was rooting for Craig to make peace with his sexual feelings towards Raina during the whole book, and really cheering them on as a couple. It could have easily gone either way.

There were a lot of parts of the book that made me sad, or made me think. Craig goes through frantic periods where he literally burns everything he owns that he thinks is 'sinful' or a 'temptation.' Many born-again Christians do these purges. The results are almost never permanent. I was upset because some of the stuff he burns is very personal and valuable stuff that I knew he would regret burning later.

Another issue that touched me was Raina's two siblings - a brother and a sister - who both have Down Syndrome. She takes care of them daily (they are 25 and 19 and live with her and their parents) and it is a lot of responsibility for her. She even skips school a lot of times to care for them and to care for her (married) older sister's infant daughter. It's obvious that the burden of family care and 'keeping the family together' has fallen on her 17-year-old shoulders. She struggles between wanting to be there for her family and support her family - and wanting to have her own life and time to do her own things.

I thought the book was very thoughtful and handled a lot of things tastefully and beautifully when it would have been very easy to make the book hateful or angry or vengeful.

It's almost 600 pages but it goes very fast.

Jo says

“How satisfying it is to leave a mark on a blank surface. To make a map of my movement...no matter how temporary.”

and because I couldn't decide between the two....

“At night, lying on your back and staring at the falling snow, it's easy to imagine oneself soaring through the stars.”

Initial Final Page Thoughts.

Those last 3 pages, wow.

High Points.

Craig.Snow. Brothers. Church camp. Patchwork. Under the pool table. Cubby holes. Identity. Faith. The future. First loves. Doubt (“It's reassuring”).

And, of course, the illustrations.

How can people say they don't like graphic novels when they look like these ones?

On the back of my book, Entertainment Weekly described Blankets as “visual poetry” and I can't help but agree. It truly is wonderful.

Low Points.

This book won't be for everyone and, I don't mind admitting this, it wasn't for me for a good 100 pages in the middle. But don't worry because the other 400 pages I loved.

I'm not sure what it was but there was something about the feel of the story that I just wasn't getting.

I also didn't know that this book was going to be *so* focussed on religion and Craig's struggle with his faith.

I'm not religious but I find religion fascinating and a lot of my close friends are religious so I know how (hopefully) how to treat it with respect, even if I don't agree.

I loved how Mr Thompson portrayed the conflict and his own personal struggles after having such an intense Christian upbringing respectfully and intelligently.

I also loved that he didn't go down the whole “Uhh, yeah, religion is crap”... “But why is it ‘crap’?”... “Uh well, because it is” road.

He actually had a reasoning for his feelings and he portrayed them honestly and without an agenda.

The only problem with this is that, because I'm not completely familiar with Christianity, a lot of it went over my head. I can't help but think I would have enjoyed those 100 or so pages more if I'd known about the

subject.

Hero.

I feel a bit strange talking about this because obviously Blankets is a memoir and Craig is... uh, well real, but never mind.

It's safe to say that Craig broke my heart on every single page. His narration, or more appropriate, his feelings which were poured on each page, had such unflinching honesty were both parts incredibly brutal and beautiful.

I don't want to say much more because I kind of want you to meet him on your own. Reaaaad it.

Love Interest.

Oh Raina, you little dreamer. I can't help but feel you would be best friends with all of John Green's heroines.

I'm finding it quite difficult to talk about Raina and her role in her book because when you look at it from a distance it's easy to describe it as "Oh yeah, it's all about first love and flirting and snowball fights and snow frolicking".

And yeah, Craig's relationship with Raina and the accompanying emotions takes up about 300 pages of this book but the story really isn't anything about that.

To me, it's more about Craig's isolation, his struggle with his faith and his need to find his place in the world.

Also, there are no snowball fights but there *is* snow frolicking.

I loved how Mr Thompson used Raina illustrate how easily people can move on from things that were so amplified at a certain point in their life, almost to the extent that they gave them definition. But when you move past it and look back, you realise that it wasn't as shiny and important as you first thought.

"Sometimes, upon waking, the residual dream can be more appealing than reality, and one is reluctant to give it up."

But I wouldn't say that this was really a love story.

(The pictures in this section were my favourite though, so gorgeous and striking)

Also, Raina can make patchwork blankets.

Infinite Brownie points for her.

Illustrations.

I feel saying whether I loved these illustrations will be redundant because it's safe to say I love all illustrations.

I can think of three reasons why this could be:

- 1) The illustrations truly are beautiful.
- 2) I can't draw for toffee so I respect people who can.
- 3) I love everything, I'm boring and I'm predictable.

Combination of all three?

But I really did love these illustrations and they've brought me to come to the decision that I prefer graphic novels in black and white.

I adored how you could tell that each page was thought about carefully, where each panel would be placed on the page, where the dialogue bubble would go. Everything, even down to the swirls in the dream pages.

Theme Tune.

Keep Your Head Up by Ben Howard.

Sadness Scale.

8/10.

I really want to give certain authors this book to show them the meaning behind the phrase “show not tell”. You know in films where the best harrowing/emotional scenes are told with no dialogue, minimal background music and subtlety? That is what Blankets is like.

I can't describe it properly, and hopefully people who are familiar with graphic novels will understand what I'm trying to say, but emotional scenes in graphic novels seem to somehow create a sense of distance (minimal words *telling* you how you should feel) and intimacy (almost like you're looking through their living room window as their world falls apart) that other books can't seem to recreate.

I love books, whether they're written or graphic, that present all the pieces but leave the reader to put them together.

Recommended For.

People who have ever struggled to figure out where they fit in with it all. People who love stunning illustrations. People who have ever believed their bedroom was the sea and their bed was a boat (I actually used to pretend my floor was lava, I was a very strange kiddywink). People who enjoy making quilts. People who refuse to stand up for mediocrity. People who refuse to believe in static... it's *always* magic. People who would get ignored at Church Camp.

You can read this review and other exciting things on my blog here.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

Contrary jerkoff party of 1? I'm here I'm here! While a 3 Star rating is most definitely a perfectly *fine* rating – in this case I am one of a handful amongst my friends who dared to not give 4 or 5. Allow me a moment to 'splain myself. If I were judging solely on the artwork I would break the GR rating system and allot *Blankets* 10. I mean seriously it begins right at the cover . . .

Très belle! And for those of you who have developed a love for the grown-up coloring book? You could defile the crap out of Mr. Thompson's creation :)

The reason my rating is low is because I just didn't get it. I mean, I got it. Farts. This isn't going well. Okay, so *Blankets* was not difficult to understand. It was a coming-of-age story about a boy and went from his early childhood and superbadaful things (*sad face*) to his über religious adolescence and eventually finding a bit of who he wanted to be in early adulthood. The part I don't get is why an autobiography? Maybe it's just because I had never heard of Craig Thompson before (be gentle, I'm still a graphic novel noob), but this might have worked better for me if it was about a fictional character. I don't get the trend of *everyone* thinking their life story is something worth writing about and while Thompson did have a superbad happen, it was barely a blip on the over 600 pages contained in this book. **FOR ME** there just wasn't a whole lot of story (aside from an excuse to show readers more beautiful art) for it to be so voluminous.

Anyway, obviously it's just me and I read this wrong. Go read Carmen's review instead. She's good at words – even when those words are about a “pitcherbook” ;)

As for me? I'll be trying to track down a copy of *Habibi* because

Wow. This dude is seriously gooooooood at the black and white.

Seth T. says

Craig Thompson, for all the lack of works in his bibliography, is one of the best creators working in comics today. Apart from *Blankets*, he has only released one other major work of fiction. (His third, *Habibi*, will be released this Fall.)

[The cutest of meet-cutes.]

There are any number of reasons that Thompson's work should be lauded. His art is gorgeous and his brushline expressive. He treats personal topics with a sense of both whimsy and honesty. He writes true experiences, even when they're fictional. And as great as all those things are, there is one idea that stands out in his work that I've yet to see another creator tackle (let alone master) as Thompson has done.

His sense of the sacred and his ability to convey it in ink is breathtaking. He offers his readers these holy moments, these frozen, fluid, organic treasures. These sacramentals. Whether he intends to lead the reader into a religious experience or not, his work really is very spiritual. As spiritual as an atheistic holy experience can actually be at any rate. There may be moments in Miyazaki that approach the wonder of the sanctuaries that Thompson builds in *Blankets*. It's for this reason (among others) that Thompson's second book remains one of my favourites, even years after having first encountered it.

The sweetly disturbing sentimental journey that was seeded years earlier in Thompson's *Goodbye Chunky Rice* finds pregnant fruit in his nearly-600-page opus, *Blankets*. Semi-autobiographically chronicling (via chrono-thematic structuring) his early life—from his establishment in faith and his discovery of love to his abandonment of that love and his subsequent abandonment of faith—Thompson plays honestly at all times with his story elements, thereby lending his tale an uncanny credibility. And while flashbacks and tangents proliferate, the overarching chiasmic structure verifies the reader's intuition that Thompson knows well where he is headed and is going to take you there whether you like it or not.

[Kinda want to punch this lady right in the breadbox.]

Thompson's illustrated avatar acts, at all times, with striking realism and the chaos of his thoughts is entirely believable—if not exactly illustrative of the average meditative development. The Thompson that frets and plays in *Blankets*—we'll call him Craig—is highly introspective and acts often in the heat of his youthful emotional turmoil, rather than from a simple, sensible motivation. And though one may often wish to chastise him for such sillinesses, his youthful passion and pendular over-reactions will more than likely endear Craig to readers as they recognize more than a little of themselves in him.

This book is a masterpiece of form, symbol, and structure. Tokens bend and writhe and carry narrative

significance throughout. Thompson's art here is fluid and is of that less-polished variety found also in *Goodbye Chunky Rice* and serves well to establish the variety of moods described in his several vignettes.

From the perspective of one who grew up both in a faith-community that was friendlier to the arts and in a home whose high standards weren't as strictly enforced, I found his story particularly compelling and tragic. Surrounded by hypocrisy and a weak-kneed, moralistic fundamentalism, the source of his disillusionment is not difficult to see. Perhaps *Blankets*' greatest quality is the empathy it exerts from the reader. I pitied and cared for Craig. I felt the same for his brother, his parents. I mourned for Raina, Craig's love interest in the book. I grew despondent for her family. More than anything, I wanted to hug each of these characters and make it all right and sensible again.

[Man, how brutal to be Thompson's parents, years later to read this panel and think: "Oh crap. I did that to a child? I wanted to surprise him and all he could think about was whether he had sinned? And not even whether he was in trouble but whether he had sinned?"]

And the whole while, my anger kindled toward an institutionalization of faith whose expression was not compassion, not mercy, not love. That Craig lived in a locale whose cultural acumen was bent toward a fear and persecution of that which skewed from the status quo is a horror that can be understood (while still remaining a horror). That his subculture should behave identically, built on a foundation of fear when it ought to be built on joy, peace, and love is terrifying. Thompson's work engaged in me a fury for a people and place with which I have no experience. They may not even exist as he portrayed them, but at the least, it is a challenge for me to not hate these characters who actively tear down Craig's life even from a young age. And as someone who actively tries not to hate anyone, consider this a testament to the veracity with which Thompson draws out Craig's life and circumstance.

Blankets is an evocative work that should not be missed by any who would appreciate a serious, heartfelt, and magical telling of the tragedy and wonder of what it means to come of age.

[review courtesy of Good Ok Bad]
