

= I Never Liked You =

I Never Liked You is a graphic novel by Canadian cartoonist Chester Brown . The story first ran between 1991 and 1993 under the title Fuck , in issues # 26 ? 30 of Brown 's comic book Yummy Fur ; published in book form by Drawn and Quarterly in 1994 . It deals with the teenage Brown 's introversion and difficulty talking to others , especially members of the opposite sex ? including his mother , to whom he is unable to express affection even as she lies dying in the hospital . The story has minimal dialogue and is sparsely narrated . The artwork is amongst the simplest in Brown 's body of work ? some pages consist only of a single small panel .

Brown established his reputation in the early alternative comics scene of the 1980s with the surreal , taboo @-@ breaking Ed the Happy Clown . He brought that story to an abrupt end in 1989 when , excited by the autobiographical comics of Joe Matt and Julie Doucet , he turned towards personal stories . The uncomplicated artwork of his friend and fellow Toronto cartoonist Seth inspired him to simplify his own . Brown intended I Never Liked You as part of a longer work with what became his previous book , The Playboy (1992) , but found the larger story too complex to handle at once . I Never Liked You was the last work of Brown 's early autobiographical period .

I Never Liked You was well received , and its influence can be found in the work of cartoonists such as Jeffrey Brown , Ariel Schrag and Anders Nilsen . The book appeared amid the early 1990s trend in autobiographical alternative comics , and Brown was one of a prominent trio of Toronto @-@ based autobiographical cartoonists , with Seth and Joe Matt . Brown originally set the panels against black page backgrounds , which he replaced with white for an annotated " New Definitive Edition " in 2002 .

= = Background = =

Brown grew up in Châteauguay , a Montreal suburb with a large English @-@ speaking minority ; he does not speak French . He described himself as a " nerdy teenager " attracted to comic books from a young age , and sought a career in superhero comics , but was unsuccessful in finding work with Marvel or DC after graduating from high school . He moved to Toronto and discovered underground comix and the small @-@ press community . From 1983 he self @-@ published a minicomic titled Yummy Fur .

From 1986 Toronto @-@ based Vortex Comics began publishing Yummy Fur . After making a name for himself in alternative comics with the surreal serial Ed the Happy Clown , Brown turned to autobiography under the influence of the work of Julie Doucet and Joe Matt . During his autobiographical period , Brown gradually simplified his style , inspired by the example of his friend and fellow Toronto cartoonist Seth . He began tentatively with a pair of short tales , and gradually became freer with his panel layouts and simpler in his artwork .

Brown had switched publishers to the Montreal @-@ based Drawn and Quarterly by the time he completed his first autobiographical graphic novel , The Playboy , in 1992 . At first , he intended The Playboy and I Never Liked You to form one story , but found it too complex to handle when he started to plan it out . The Playboy deals with Brown 's guilt over his teenage obsession with masturbating over pornography . The book gained praise from fans , critics , and other cartoonists , and won a Harvey Award . It received criticism from those who saw it as objectifying women and glorifying pornography ; Playboy publisher Hugh Hefner wrote to Brown voicing concern that Brown would feel such guilt in a post @-@ sexual revolution world .

= = Synopsis = =

The story is set during Brown 's 1970s adolescence in Châteauguay , a suburb of Montreal . Chester ? " Chet " for short ? is a thin , long @-@ haired teenager who is awkward , introverted , and better able to express himself through drawing than speaking . He constantly and inexplicably turns away girls , even though he is interested in them and they in him . Except in his imagination , Chet has difficulty expressing affection even for his mother . She talks to Chet and his younger

brother Gord about issues that embarrass them , and the religious teaching she has instilled in them has rendered Chet unable to bring himself to swear , for which he is teased and goaded at school .

Chet plays games such as hide @-@ and @-@ seek with the neighbourhood children . One girl , Carrie , has a crush on Chet and invites him to her house each day to wash the dishes . He and Carrie 's older sister Connie , a bossy blonde a year his senior , often hide during hide @-@ and @-@ seek games in tall grass where they spend the time talking with each other , though they have little in common . Connie asks him to the movies , but he sits away from her when he spots boys from his school ; he fears he will be teased for being on a date . When the film ends , they walk home in silence .

Chet is interested in Sky , a large @-@ breasted dark @-@ haired girl two years younger who lives next door , about whom he has masturbatory fantasies . He confesses his love but immediately regrets it , unable to express his feelings . She connects with Chet and tries to develop a relationship , but he is unable to deal with his emotions and avoids spending time with her . He draws her a picture of a skeleton symbolizing himself reaching for a bird signifying Sky herself . When Carrie deciphers it correctly he denies that he uses symbolism in his drawings , and the confrontation escalates to minor violence when Carrie proclaims to him , " I never liked you ! "

Chet and his brother rarely visit their mother after she checks into hospital , and when they do Chet cannot bring himself to tell her he loves her . She suffers a fall down a flight of stairs there when confusedly wandering around and dies after being bedridden and incoherent for a short time . Chet makes excuse after excuse to turn Sky away when she tries to spend time with him . The story ends with Chet refusing to accompany Sky to the fair because he says he would rather listen to his new Kiss album .

= = Publication = =

I Never Liked You was originally serialized under the title Fuck , in issues # 26 ? 30 of Yummy Fur , between October 1991 and April 1993 . Unlike his earlier works , according to Brown there was " very little improvisation in I Never Liked You . It was quite planned out , even if I didn 't write a full script . "

Drawn and Quarterly issued a collected edition in 1994 , changing the title from Fuck to I Never Liked You . Brown rearranged the page layouts , removing panels , most significantly those in the prologue where Chet explains his motivations .

A " New Definitive Edition " appeared in 2002 , with two added pages of contextual endnotes , something he had been increasingly doing from 1995 with his cartoon essay " My Mom Was a Schizophrenic " . In the 1994 collection the backgrounds were black ; he changed them to white and rearranged the panels for the " New Definitive Edition " . He explained : " I like austerity . The white background looks more austere to me . " The edition included a short appendix for readers " wondering when and where things happened " .

Brown announced in Louis Riel # 7 a recall of the first 600 copies of the edition , citing that the paper it was printed on was too transparent . The recalled copies also had a panel captioned " I decide to say nothing " ; the caption did not appear in copies that were not recalled .

= = Style and analysis = =

Academic Charles Hatfield finds " an abiding interest in the ways people are shaped by their environment " in Brown 's autobiographical work , and believes the stories demonstrate " the urgency of Justin Green and the mundane particularity of Harvey Pekar " , two influential creators known for their revealing autobiographical comics . Brown is unsparing in his depictions of social awkwardness of his teenage years . Despite the 1970s adolescent backdrop , sex and drugs are absent ; his life is shaped by his strictly religious parents and introversion .

Brown 's mother (1923 ? 76) suffered from schizophrenia . This is not made explicit , but hinted at in scenes where she approaches awkward subjects with Chet and his brother Gord ; the boys ' unsupportive responses feed the discomfort . Brown addresses his mother 's mental health in his

1995 cartoon essay " My Mom Was a Schizophrenic " , in which he takes an anti @-@ psychiatric stance .

Chet 's face is near expressionless throughout . The characters are distanced from the reader , inviting neither empathy nor identification . To cartoonist and critic Pepo Pérez , this is a challenge to readers to understand the characters . In the appendix to the " New Definitive Edition " , Brown declares the dialogue is filtered through his memory and likely did not occur as recorded , and that locations and other details are also subject to lapses of memory . To academic Elisabeth El Refaie this transparency on Brown 's part is " a deeper and more sincere form of authenticity " . Reviewer C. Max Magee found the tone of awkwardness and emotional emptiness comparable to works by contemporaries such as Daniel Clowes and Chris Ware .

The story unfolds in vignettes , with little setup or context given to any scene . To Hatfield , they " [pop] out of nowhere as a dreamlike series of pulses ... The effect is sometimes eerie ... despite the grounding of the story in mundane everyday stuff . " Unlike in his previous graphic novel , *The Playboy* , Brown makes limited use of a narrator in *I Never Liked You* . The story is told almost entirely through its pictures and sparse dialogue . The page layouts are also sparse , sometimes limited to a single , small panel on a page , sometimes up to seven or eight . The layout and repetition of panels affects pacing , slowing or quickening scene .

Brown abandoned the grid layout he had used in earlier works for more varied , organic layouts . Backgrounds establish the mood of a scene , harmonizing or contrasting with the action ? as when Chet and Connie return from the movies amongst a romantic snow @-@ covered , starry landscape , against an awkward silence accentuated by panel that grow , making the figures appear ever more insignificant .

The cartooning is far looser than in Brown 's earlier work , and concerned more with gesture and expression than literal detail . They are rendered with a brush , and amongst the simplest and sparsest in his body of work . There is nonetheless a significant amount of hatching , and the backgrounds are naturalistic , in contrast to the thin , distorted figures . Brown had been paring his artwork since the *Playboy* stories , as he was not happy with his style and sought " to rebuild [his] style in a way that [he] would like " . He continued this with *I Never Liked You* , where he has said he was " trying to get even more pared down than *The Playboy* " . Certain inanimate objects receive a focus imbuing them with special significance , such as Chet 's habitual after @-@ school package of soda crackers or the Brown family home ? a house that , to reviewer Darcy Sullivan , " is as much a character [in *I Never Liked You*] as in *The Playboy* " .

Brown drew the pictures before laying down the panel borders , which conform to the shapes of the pictures they enclosed and are drawn in a wobbly free @-@ hand much like in the artwork of the Los Bros Hernandez or Robert Crumb . He drew each panel individually , assembling them into pages afterwards . In the original serialization and first collected edition , they were placed on black backgrounds . He changed to white backgrounds for the 2002 edition .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Brown 's autobiographical work developed from a scene that had been developing since the 1970s and which had reached a peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s . Brown 's open and self @-@ deprecating example left an impact on cartoonists such as Jeffrey Brown and Ariel Schrag , and his sparse layouts on the likes of Anders Nilsen . Upon the serial 's conclusion , reviewer Darcy Sullivan called it " a major step forward for the artist , a leading light in adult comics " . American cartoonist Gilbert Hernandez hailed *The Playboy* and *I Never Liked You* as " probably the best graphic novels next to *Maus* " ; British cartoonist Eddie Campbell called them " the most sensitive comics ever made " ; and American comics writer Heidi MacDonald called *I Never Liked You* " a masterpiece " that is " the equal of any ' coming of age ' movie " .

Charles Hatfield praised Brown 's honesty , keen observation , and narrative strength , and called the " hide with me " page as one of his favourites . Critic Óscar Palmer described the work as " an example of sobriety and restraint , and one of the harshest , most hopeless teenage portraits ... in any medium " . Scripter and critic Trajano Bermúdez wrote the book demonstrates Brown a master

of his medium . Norwegian cartoonist Jason calls *I Never Liked You* a favourite autobiographical work .

Alongside Seth 's *It 's a Good Life , If You Don 't Weaken* and Joe Matt 's *The Poor Bastard ?* works by Brown 's Toronto @-@ based friends and Drawn and Quarterly stablemates ? *I Never Liked You* is seen as a prominent example of the 1990s autobiographical comics trend . As one of " The Autobiographical Stories from *Yummy Fur* " , it ranked 38th on The Comics Journal 's list of the top 100 English @-@ language comics of the 20th century . In 2001 Stephen Weiner included *I Never Liked You* in his book *The 101 Best Graphic Novels* , recommending it to those who enjoy J. D. Salinger 's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* .

I Never Liked You was the last work from his autobiographical period that started in 1990 with *Helder* in *Yummy Fur* # 19 . *Yummy Fur* continued for two more issues before Drawn and Quarterly publisher Chris Oliveros convinced Brown to publish his next serial , *Underwater* , under its own title in 1994 . In 2011 Brown returned to autobiography and his relations with women with the graphic novel *Paying for It* , a polemic arguing for the decriminalization of prostitution .

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