

= The Playboy =

The Playboy is a graphic novel by Canadian cartoonist Chester Brown , serialized in 1990 in Brown 's comic book Yummy Fur and collected in different revised book editions in 1992 and 2013 . It deals with Brown 's guilt and anxiety over his obsessive masturbation to Playboy Playmate models .

The story begins with Brown 's first purchase of an issue of Playboy as a teenager . His obsessive masturbating gives him great guilt and anxiety , and out of fear of being caught he repeatedly rids himself of copies of the magazine , only to retrieve them later . His conflicting emotions follow him into adulthood until he purges them by revealing himself through his comics . The free , organic arrangement of odd @-@ shaped panels of simple , expressive artwork contrasts with Brown 's more detailed grid @-@ like pages in his 1980s work , such as Ed the Happy Clown .

The Playboy forms part of Brown 's early @-@ 1990s autobiographical period , and was the first book @-@ length work he planned as a complete story . Brown conceived it as a longer work with what became his next graphic novel , I Never Liked You (1994) , but found the larger story too complex to handle at once . The story has attracted praise for its revealing honesty and criticism from those who saw it as glorifying pornography . Playboy publisher Hugh Hefner wrote Brown to express concern over Brown 's sexual anxieties in a post @-@ sexual revolution world .

= = Background = =

Chester 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 . He sought a career drawing 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 . He began to self @-@ publish a minicomic in 1983 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 after reading such work by Julie Doucet and Joe Matt . The work of his friend and fellow Toronto cartoonist Seth inspired Brown to pare down his drawing style during the early 1990s . He tentatively began his autobiographical period with a pair of short tales , and gradually became freer with his panel layouts and simpler in his artwork .

= = Content = =

The autobiographical story takes place in Chester " Chet " Brown 's hometown of Châteauguay in 1975 , when Brown was 15 . It details his obsession with the Playmates in Playboy magazine . Brown 's character obsessively masturbates in secret , terrified of being found out , but unable to resist the urge . Afterwards he feels guilty and sometimes rids himself of the magazines , only to retrieve them . As an adult , he sometimes repurchases copies of issues he had discarded .

The story takes place primarily during Brown 's adolescence and finishes at the time of the book 's creation . Brown uses a bat @-@ winged figure with his own face to narrate the story and goad Chet in a way similar to the trope of the angel and devil on the shoulders . Chet never acknowledges the narrator , who appears to be visible only to the reader . The narrator talks about Brown in the third person in the adolescent parts of the story , but in the first person in Brown 's adult years .

= = = Synopsis = = =

The story opens in church , where the winged narrator cajoles the adolescent Chet to buy a Playboy magazine he had seen for sale . Chet works up the courage to buy it at a convenience store a considerable distance from his house , in the hope that no one will see him there .

After bringing it home and masturbating to it , he disposes of the magazine by hiding it under a plank of wood in the woods near his house . His building obsession battles his guilt , and eventually

he returns for it , a situation which repeats itself throughout the story . His obsession so overcomes him that , even when his mother dies while he is at camp , his first thought at returning home is to retrieve the Playboy he has hidden in the woods . As an adult , he hunts down back issues and memorizes dates and names of Playmate models , and disposes of them over the guilt he feels or his fear of being found out by a girlfriend . His obsession interferes with his relations with women : he relates that , while seeing one girlfriend , he could only maintain an erection for her by fantasizing about his favourite Playmates , and that he preferred masturbation to having sex with her .

The Playboy finishes with Brown drawing the story in progress . Though he knows his friends shortly will read it , he still feels uncomfortable discussing it with them .

= = Style and analysis = =

By the end of the 1980s Brown had grown dissatisfied with his drawing style . He began simplifying it after bringing Ed the Happy Clown to an end , as he had been reading work by cartoonists with simpler styles such as John Stanley and Brown 's friend Seth . He abandoned the grid layout that he had used and arranged panels on the page in a varied , organic manner . He made the drawings first and only afterwards laid down panel borders , which conform to the shapes of the pictures they enclose and are in a wobbly free @-@ hand ? much like those of the Hernandez brothers or Robert Crumb . Brown distorted his images to convey emotion , but not in traditional cartoonish ways . For example , when the adolescent Brown encounters friends of his parents , he does not physically shrink with embarrassment , but does so through distortion of perspective .

Brown depicts Chet 's obsessive masturbation , and his uncommon masturbation style has drawn notice : he faces down and rubs his penis between the palms of both hands , a style which has come to be known as doing " the Chester " , after a cartoon of it by Peter Bagge . He feels terrified of being caught masturbating and his regret afterwards drives him continually to rid himself of the magazines , such as by hiding them in the woods near his house , but always returns for them . Brown 's mother dies while he is at camp , which is mentioned only briefly , as when he returns from camp he immediately heads to the woods to dig up the Playboy he had buried there . Comics critic Darcy Sullivan sees Brown in this scene having " shunted aside his painful feelings for her , and for other women , in favor of this tatty fetish " . Chet is introverted and self @-@ isolating , preferring pornography to communicating with others , such as his brother .

When finishing The Playboy , Brown felt guilt over still looking at Playmates and credits having come out in print with helping him overcome his shame . While many have interpreted the book as a condemnation of pornography , to Brown it is about the guilt he was made to feel for using the media . Some interpretations , such as those of Sullivan and Darrel Epp , see The Playboy demonstrating how the idealized images in pornography distort societal norms and expectations of beauty ; one example cited is a scene in which Brown says he could only maintain an erection with one girlfriend if he fantasized about his favourite Playmates . Brown has objected to this interpretation ? rather , he sees it as a flaw in the work , in that it does not provide enough context for what he intended to communicate : that he had gotten into a relationship with a woman whom he did not find sexually attractive , and that if Playboy did not exist he would have fantasized about other images of women .

Critic Darcy Sullivan saw the book as presenting how Brown 's Playboy obsession affects his ability to relate to women . Sullivan called The Playboy stories " [t] he most honest sex in comics " of the early 1990s , " and the most damning exposé of pornography " as it deals " with nothing more than Brown 's relationship with Playboy " . He praises how quickly Brown matured as a storyteller over the course of The Playboy , and for the believability of scenes which may or may not have happened as Brown depicted them . While seeming to acknowledge feminist concerns , Brown depicts himself as " a victim of his urges " , and that " Playboy has kept him mentally separate " . Sullivan asserts the book shows that pornography does not merely satisfy a need , but fosters an addiction . Brown 's comics raise questions , rather than trying to answer them , an approach Sullivan compared favourably to that of Joe Matt 's less subtle body of work , which also details a pornography obsession : he wrote that Matt 's comics analyze and rationalize his obsession , while

Brown 's reveal .

= = Publication = =

Brown had run into problems doing autobiographical stories of his contemporary life , as his story interconnected with the stories of those around him ? the friends he portrayed did not always agree with the way he pictured them . He portrays his friend Kris 's negative reaction in " Showing Helder " to his depiction of her in " Helder " . Brown turned to tales of his teenage years , as he had lost contact with most of those he knew from that time . Brown stated that he intended a longer story encompassing what ended up in *The Playboy* and the following graphic novel , *I Never Liked You* (1994) , but when planning it he found it was too complex . He said he had a clear idea of the stories from his life that he would use , and the general shape of the narrative , but he had a " sense of improvising " as he did not script it out beforehand .

The serialization appeared under the title *Disgust* in issues # 21 ? 23 of *Yummy Fur* , at the time published by Vortex Comics . With the twenty @-@ fifth issue of *Yummy Fur* in 1991 , Brown switched publishers to the Montreal @-@ based *Drawn and Quarterly* , who published a collected and revised edition of *The Playboy* in 1992 ; this was the first graphic novel from the publisher . Brown rescripted , relettered , and reformatted the book for an annotated edition in 2013 , also from *Drawn and Quarterly* .

= = Reception and legacy = =

The story gained praise from fans , critics , and other cartoonists , and earned a Harvey Award nomination in 1991 for Best Single Issue or Story . *The Playboy* , *I Never Liked You* , and several shorter pieces placed No. 38 on *The Comics Journal* 's list of the best 100 English @-@ language comics of the 20th century as " The autobiographical comics from *Yummy Fur* " . Cartoonist Gilbert Hernandez asserted , " *The Playboy* and *I Never Liked You* are probably the best graphic novels next to *Maus* " . Critic Frank Young called it a " pivotal work " in the autobiographical comics trend of the early 1990s . Critic Darcy Sullivan considered it required reading for those who are serious about comics and a " landmark look at an artist 's growth " , referring to the pace with which Brown 's work matured over the course of the three issues of its serialization .

Brown stated that several women took offense at the book , saying it glorified pornography . Hugh Hefner sent Brown a letter after *The Playboy* 's publication , showing concern that someone who grew up during the sexual revolution could still suffer such confusion and anxiety . Darcy Sullivan compared the pornography @-@ obsessed autobiographical work of Joe Matt in *Peepshow* unfavourably to *The Playboy* in an issue of *The Comics Journal* , to which Brown responded with a defence of Matt 's work in a later issue .

Brown 's attitudes towards pornography changed dramatically over time . When he made *The Playboy* he was struggling with his embarrassment over buying pornography ; two decades later he vocally advocated for the decriminalization of prostitution in *Paying for It* (2011) .