

= Ed the Happy Clown =

Ed the Happy Clown is a graphic novel by Canadian cartoonist Chester Brown . Its title character is a large @-@ headed , childlike children 's clown who undergoes one horrifying affliction after another . The story in is a dark , humorous mix of genres and features scatological humour , sex , body horror , extreme graphic violence , and blasphemous religious imagery . Central to the plot are a man who cannot stop defecating ; the head of a miniature , other @-@ dimensional Ronald Reagan attached to the head of Ed 's penis ; and a female vampire who seeks revenge on her adulterous lover who had murdered her to escape his sins .

The surreal , largely improvised story began with a series of unrelated short strips that Brown went on to tie into a single narrative . Brown first serialized it in his comic book Yummy Fur , and the first , incomplete collected edition in 1989 , titled Ed the Happy Clown : A Yummy Fur Book . Shortly after , Brown became unsatisfied with the direction of the serial ; he brought it to an abrupt end in the eighteenth issue of Yummy Fur and turned to autobiography . A second edition titled Ed the Happy Clown : The Definitive Ed Book appeared in 1992 with an altered ending and most of the later parts of the series eliminated . The contents of this edition were re @-@ serialized with extensive endnotes in 2005 ? 2006 as a nine @-@ issue Ed the Happy Clown series and collected as Ed the Happy Clown : A Graphic @-@ Novel in 2012 .

The story is seen by many critics as a highlight of the 1980s North American alternative comics scene . It has left an influence on contemporary alternative cartoonists such as Daniel Clowes , Seth , and Dave Sim , and has won a Harvey and other awards . Canadian film director Bruce McDonald has had the rights since 1991 to make an Ed movie , but the project has struggled to find financial backing .

= = Background = =

Brown grew up in Châteauguay , Quebec , a Montreal suburb with a large English @-@ speaking minority . He was an introverted youth attracted to comic books from a young age . He aimed at a career drawing superhero comics , but was unsuccessful in getting work with Marvel or DC Comics after graduating from high school . He moved to Toronto and discovered underground comix and the small @-@ press community .

By the early 1980s Marvel and DC had come to dominate comic @-@ book publishing in North America , and comic shops became the main places of purchase , with a clientele of dedicated comics fans . During this time , a trend towards greater ambition and expressiveness was developing on the fringes , such as Dave Sim 's long Cerebus series and the avant @-@ garde graphics magazine Raw in which the serialization of Art Spiegelman 's graphic novel Maus appeared . Brown was to find himself in the alternative comics scene that grew throughout the decade .

Brown was feeling himself in a creatively stagnant period when he came across a book on Surrealism : Wallace Fowley 's The Age of Surrealism (1950) . The book motivated Brown to work on an improvised minicomic series which he called Yummy Fur and self @-@ published from 1983 .

= = Content = =

Ed suffers one indignity after another as the plot gets grimmer and more surreal . His bizarre misfortunes include having the tip of his penis replaced by the head of a miniature , talking Ronald Reagan from another universe . Ed 's adventures featured encounters with penis @-@ worshipping pygmies , flesh @-@ eating rats , Martians , Frankenstein 's monster , and other characters from traditional genre fiction . The story unfolds with a black @-@ comedic sensibility topped with Christian symbolism . Despite his ordeals ? being imprisoned for a crime he did not commit , falling in love with a vampire ? Ed remains a gentle , childlike innocent , with a Candide @-@ like optimism . The story has had more than one ending and is a challenge to summarize .

= = = Summary = = =

The children 's hospital Ed is about to visit burns down with all the children in it . A number of apparently unrelated short gag strips appear before Brown begins to tie the narrative together into one plot .

Ed is imprisoned when he finds hospital janitor Chet Doodley 's severed hand and the police assume Ed had taken it . In the prison a man is unable stop defecating and his faeces fill the jail , engulfing all , including Ed . When Ed emerges he finds the head of his penis replaced with the head of a miniature Ronald Reagan from Dimension X ? a world much like Ed 's but whose people are tiny . Dimension X has dumped its waste into a trans @-@ dimensional portal , which turns out to be the anus of the man who could not stop defecating . Reagan 's body remains in Dimension X , and the professor who discovered the portal travels to Ed 's dimension to find the head , making contact with the authorities of Ed 's world .

Chet believes the loss of his hand is due to his unfaithfulness to his wife ; as a child his mother read Chet the story of a Saint Justin who cuts off his right hand to avoid sinning , and Chet assumes his lost hand is a like punishment from God . He tries to atone for it by killing his girlfriend , Josie , in the woods . Penis @-@ worshipping , rat @-@ eating pygmy cannibals drag the bodies of both Josie and Ed into the sewers . As they are about to sever Ed 's penis Josie reanimates in time to save him . The two attempt to escape from the sewers when they are accidentally shot by a mother ? daughter team of pygmy hunters . Josie dies again , and her disembodied spirit learns from the ghost of Chet 's sister that she has become a vampire .

The professor from Dimension X and members of the staff of the Adventures in Science TV show find Ed and the President and bring them to the TV studio . The discovery is big news , and the professor and the President make a TV appearance . When it is discovered that the people of Dimension X are homosexual or bisexual the professor is put to a violent death , and Ed and the body of Josie are put in confinement . The studio is invaded by the pygmies when they recognize their " Penis God " on television . Josie 's spirit returns to her body , and she and Ed escape and make their way to the hospital where Chet works . Josie gets her revenge by seducing Chet and killing him before he is able to repent , thus sending him to Hell .

Ed is one of a number of men secretly kidnapped to provide another , Bick Backman , with a penis transplant ? a larger one to please his wife . Out of the lineup of unconscious men , Ed 's penis with the President 's head on it stands out and is chosen for Backman . After the operation , Mounties raid the hospital and , finding Reagan , take Backman and leave Ed , who has had a larger penis sewn on in the President 's place . The hospital hands Ed over to Mrs Backman , claiming he is her husband . Though suspicious , she accepts Ed ? and his newly transplanted penis .

= = = = Endings = = = =

The ending that appeared in Yummy Fur has not appeared in book editions . In it , Mrs Backman takes Ed home , but her children are not convinced he is their father . After he spends some time in the house they decide " he 's way better than the other one " . There is a resemblance between Ed and Mrs Backman , and it is revealed they were twins separated at birth . While at church , the Backman children are kidnapped by stone aliens and are saved by Frankenstein 's monster , who brings them to Washington , D.C. where they find their kidnapped real father . Josie and Ed 's zombie friend rescues the Backmans . Ed has his clown makeup restored and reverts to his cheerful self . When he goes to visit Josie , he learns her apartment building has burned down , and she was the only casualty . Her charred skeleton is brought out , clutching an unburnt severed hand .

The alternate ending from the 1992 and later versions drops most of the story that follows Chet 's death , replacing it with 17 new pages . In this version , Chet 's severed hand visits Josie 's apartment at night and rolls up her window shade . As she is a vampire , the sunlight in the morning burns her to death while she sleeps , and she and Chet are reunited in the flames of Hell .

= = = Primary characters = = =

Ed

A big @-@ headed , childlike clown with Candide @-@ like optimism , despite the hardships his creator puts him through . He is a passive protagonist to and around whom events occur . He spends much of the story with the head of a miniature Ronald Reagan from another dimension for a penishead . He later discovers , after having the president severed from his penis and having a new one attached , that he has a long @-@ lost twin sister in Becky Backman . Brown considers Ed to be an " adult who 's pre @-@ adolescent " , whose sexuality is not fully formed .

Chet Doodley

A janitor working at a hospital , he is plagued with guilt over cheating on his wife after his hand falls off for no apparent reason . After having a dream in which a statue of the Virgin Mary turns into his girlfriend , Josie , and has sex with him , he murders Josie while having sex with her by stabbing her in the back in the woods . Josie , who becomes a vampire afterwards , hunts him down and eventually breaks his neck , sending him to Hell . " Chet " is short for " Chester " , and Douglas Wolk sees Chet as perhaps a stand @-@ in for Brown himself , though Brown denies any autobiographical elements in the story . Brown has stated he had a phobia of losing his hand , as it would end his ability to draw , and so named the character " Chet " .

Josie

Chet 's beautiful former girlfriend , who becomes a vampire " for actively engaging in a grievous sin " for committing adultery with her boyfriend Chet , when he murders her by stabbing her in the back . Her vampire self ends up saving Ed from having his penis decapitated by pygmy cannibals , and eventually tracks down Chet and kills him , sending him to Hell . In an alternate ending , she finds herself in Hell as well , eternally embracing Chet while being consumed by fire .

Ronald Reagan

Though bearing the American president 's name and position , the diminutive Reagan bears no resemblance to his namesake . He comes from Dimension X , and his head becomes attached to the end of Ed 's penis after falling into an interdimensional portal . The president 's body remains in Dimension X , where people are much smaller than in Ed 's , and are homosexual .

Brown had intended to use Ed Broadbent , a left @-@ wing politician of the Canadian New Democratic Party (NDP) , but changed it to the right @-@ wing Reagan as he believed Broadbent would have been too obscure to his American readers . He later regretted the decision and said he could have included an explanation . The idea of a talking penis has appeared in a number of other comics , such as The Talking Head (1990) by Paolo Baciliero and Pete Sickman @-@ Garner 's Young Tim .

= = Analysis = =

Ed spans a range of Brown 's interests , from political skepticism to scatological humour to vampires and werewolves . The story is dark and surreal , desperate and humorous .

Christian elements especially ? largely sacrilegious ? are prominent in the book . They are at first innocuous and unimportant : a zombie named Christian , another character who believes he has found Christ 's face on a piece of adhesive tape . With the fourth issue of Yummy Fur , Brown 's surreal take on Christianity becomes central : the cover depicts the Virgin Mary holding not just the infant Christ , but also a severed hand . Within is the story of Saint Justin , whose amputation becomes a key motif : Chet loses his own hand and finds another ; his own appears mysteriously under Ed 's pillow . Only by praying for forgiveness for his adultery and by murdering his lover is Chet 's hand miraculously restored . According to the Lives of the Saints , the fictional Saint Justin severed his own hand , but in another version Brown presents , Justin 's wife cuts it off with a woodaxe when she catches her husband masturbating after rejecting her advances . The altered ending from 1992 has both Josie and Chet reunited in Hell , and the ghost of Chet 's sister becomes a devil . As Brown mixes surreal sacrilege with the sort of moralism that compels him to condemn Josie for her bloody revenge , Brian Evenson calls Brown " deft at muddying the waters in a way

that makes it very hard to pin him down as either believer or satirist , as either anti @-@ religionist or apologist " .

While not part of the Ed story , Brown had been serializing straight adaptations in Yummy Fur of the Gospels of Mark and of Matthew during most of Ed 's run . R. Fiore called these adaptations " the best exploration of Christian mythology since Justin Green 's Binky Brown " , comparing Chet 's excessive Christian guilt with the " almost childlike retelling " of Mark . Yummy Fur readers also found " I Live in the Bottomless Pit " , a short strip in which a man discovers the Antichrist , who after millennia underground has forgotten his mission ? a paradoxical one , as he states his orders were from God .

Ed prominently features transgressive content including nudity , graphic violence , racist imagery , blasphemy , and profanity . Brown grew up in a strictly Baptist household in which he was not allowed to swear , as depicted in Brown 's graphic novel I Never Liked You (1994) . Brown challenged his own anxieties by tackling subjects such as scatological humour . Imagery such as the recurring Pygmy characters and their " ooga booga " language , Chris Lanier asserted , reinforce " old colonial imaging of ' third world natives ' " .

= = Style = =

According to comics historian John Bell , " Brown arrived in print almost fully formed as an artist " . His style , while showing the influence of artists such as Robert Crumb , Harold Gray , and Jack Kirby , was distinct from his predecessors . He continued to mature as an artist and draughtsman throughout the run of Ed , showing enormous growth from the beginning to end of the graphic novel .

Unlike most cartoonists , Brown does not compose his pages , but draws each panel on separate sheets of paper and assembles them into pages afterwards . The panels in Ed were on 5 @-@ by @-@ 5 @-@ inch (13 cm × 13 cm) squares of cheap typewriter paper , which he placed on a block of wood on his lap in lieu of a drawing board . He used a number of different drawing tools , including Rapidograph technical pens , markers , crowquill pens and ink brushes . He had some photocopies printed from his pencilled work , which he found both faster to produce and more spontaneous in feel .

Brown worked freely , without ruling lines or lettering . Usually he roughly sketched the artwork with a light blue pencil , then elaborated it with an HB pencil , at which stage he has said " most of the work [was] done " . Brown inked the pre @-@ Vortex stories with a brush ; when he committed himself to a regular schedule , he felt inking with a brush would be too slow , and switched to cheap markers or pencils to increase his productivity . He continued to use a brush to fill in blacks and to letter his dialogue balloons . Brown came to favour the quality of the brush again toward the end of the story 's run , but found it slow to work with and thus used it less than he would have preferred . By photocopying before sending the artwork to the printer , Brown could ensure that the copy printed from was sufficiently black .

While he occasionally scripted certain pages or scenes , more frequently he did not , and often wrote dialogue only after having drawn the artwork . Brown did not plan out the stories , though he might have certain ideas prepared . Some ideas he found carried him for up to two to three issues of Yummy Fur . Brown used of flashback scenes different perspectives to alter the story to his needs ? for example , when Brown revisited the scene of Josie 's murder , he placed Ed behind a bush , linking the two characters ' fates . When he had originally done the murder scene , he says he did not " know that Ed was over in the bushes a couple feet away " .

Brown found himself dissatisfied with much of the work , and later abandoning about a hundred printed pages which he intends not to have reprinted . He found that the improvisational method did not work well with Underwater in the 1990s ; after cancelling that series he turned to carefully scripting out his stories , beginning with Louis Riel .

= = Influences = =

When Brown started Ed , he was largely influenced by the comics he had grown up with , especially monster stories from Marvel Comics such as Werewolf by Night and Frankenstein 's Monster by artists such as Mike Ploog , and from DC Comics such as Swamp Thing by artists such as Bernie Wrightson and Jim Aparo .

Since graduating from high school , Brown had been inching towards underground comix , starting with the work of Richard Corben and especially Moebius in Heavy Metal , and eventually getting over his disgust over Robert Crumb 's sex @-@ laden comics to become a huge fan of the Zap and Weirdo artist . He says the book that finally pulled him over into the underground was The Apex Treasury of Underground Comics , which included Crumb as well as Art Spiegelman 's original short " Maus " story . He was also affected by Will Eisner 's graphic novel , A Contract with God . Brown had already been an Eisner fan , but this book was different , " something that wasn 't about a character with a mask on his face " . He started drawing in a more underground style , and submitting work to Raw , Last Gasp and Fantagraphics . The work was rejected from these publishers for one reason or another , and Brown was eventually convinced by his friend Kris Nakamura , who was active in the Toronto small press scene , to take it and self @-@ publish it . His minicomic , Yummy Fur , was the result , and included the earliest instalments of the Ed the Happy Clown story .

The book also drew inspiration from pulp science fiction , religious literature and television clichés . Harold Gray 's comic strip Little Orphan Annie had an effect on Brown after he discovered some Annie reprint books in the early 1980s . This was to be a primary influence on later work of Brown 's such as Louis Riel .

= = Publication = =

The story began in July 1983 in the second issue of Brown 's original Yummy Fur minicomic , the seven issues of which were reprinted in 1986 ? 87 in the first three issues of the Vortex Comics @-@ published Yummy Fur . Ed ran in the first eighteen issues of Yummy Fur , along other features , such as Brown 's Gospel adaptations . Brown envisioned Ed as an ongoing character in the vein of Marvel and DC comic @-@ book characters . In the late 1980s he came to feel restricted by the character ; inspired by the revealing autobiographical work of Julie Doucet and Joe Matt and the simple cartooning of fellow Toronto cartoonist Seth , Brown turned to autobiography .

While Ed was the main feature of Yummy Fur until Brown switched to autobiographical comics in 1990 , it was juxtaposed against straight adaptations of the gospels of Mark and Matthew , which filled up the rest of the Yummy Fur issues starting with issue # 4 .

In 2004 Brown set to work on a revised Ed ; he pencilled a number of pages , but stopped when he came to believe the new version was no better than the original . Drawn and Quarterly ? Brown 's publisher since 1991 ? reissued the contents of the Definitive Ed collection in a nine issue series on smaller @-@ sized pages from 2005 to 2006 titled Ed the Happy Clown , with new covers , previously unpublished art and extensive commentary by Brown . The contents came mainly from issues two through twelve , and some from issue seventeen . About 80 pages ? a third of the original Ed material ? remains uncollected , including the entire 24 @-@ page ending that appeared in issue eighteen .

The first collection , Ed the Happy Clown : A Yummy Fur Book , appeared in 1989 from Vortex Comics before Brown decided to end the story . It collects the Ed stories up to the twelfth issue of Yummy Fur and includes a cartoon foreword scripted by Harvey Pekar and drawn by Brown . It was this edition that in 1990 won Brown one of his two Harvey Awards , for Best Graphic Album , and a UK Comic Art Award the same year for Best Graphic Novel / Collection .

The second edition came from Vortex in 1992 , after Brown had taken Yummy Fur to Drawn and Quarterly . Bill Marks had it labelled The Definitive Ed Book for marketing reasons . The edition reprinted what was in the first edition with an altered ending and some material from Yummy Fur # 17 , and excluded most of the material in the series from after Chet 's death .

In June 2012 , Drawn and Quarterly published a third edition , Ed the Happy Clown : A Graphic @-@ Novel , reprinting the contents of the Ed series of a few years earlier , including somewhat

modified endnotes and annotations . It had a new introduction by Brown , replacing those by Pekar and Solomos in the previous editions . Compared to those editions , it was printed on higher @-@ quality paper with higher contrast in the printing , and the artwork was reduced in size . Brown subtitled the book with a hyphen : " graphic @-@ novel " . This reflects Brown 's distaste yet reluctant acceptance of the term , as its usage had by then become widespread . Brian Evenson sees this as a Brown @-@ like eccentricity and a gesture emphasizing the equal importance Brown places on both word and image . The book was a bestseller .

The 2012 edition also included a ten @-@ page story called " The Door " , which Brown redrew from an anonymous public domain story from a horror comic book . In the story , a couple go through a door in a funhouse which leads through a passage in which they get lost for years . Their clothes disintegrate over that time , exposing their genitals , until they finally come across another door ? one that leads them to Hell . Brown wrote he found the original story truly horrifying , as the couple had done nothing apparent to deserve their fate . He had originally intended to incorporate it into the Ed story , but capriciously veered off in another narrative direction .

The artwork appeared at its largest in the Vortex Yummy Fur issues ; it was somewhat smaller in the minicomics and first two collected editions . The artwork was smallest in the 2012 Drawn and Quarterly edition , a size Brown considered ideal , stating , " The smaller the better , as long as the words are still legible . " The 2012 edition also had wider page margins and gutters between the images .

= = Reception and legacy = =

Ed was seen by many critics a high point of the early alternative comics scene in the 1980s , echoes of which can be seen in such later surrealistic graphics novels as *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* by Daniel Clowes and *Black Hole* by Charles Burns . The story won praise from *The Comics Journal* and mainstream publications such as *The Village Voice* and *Rolling Stone* , which placed Ed on an early @-@ 1990s " Hot " list . Time placed Ed at seventh on its list of " All Time Top Ten Graphic Novels " , while publisher and critic Kim Thompson placed Ed 27th on his top 100 comics of the 20th Century , and editor and critic Tom Spurgeon called Ed " one of the three best alt @-@ comix serials of all time " . The book appeared in Gene Kannenberg 's *500 Essential Graphic Novels* (2008) .

Ed had a large impact on a number of Brown 's contemporaries , including fellow Canadians Dave Sim and Seth , the latter of whom was taken in by the ambitiousness of Brown 's storytelling , saying " Those brilliant sequences where he would show a situation and then return to it later from a different perspective , like the death of Josie , really blew me away " ? and Dave Cooper , who called Ed " the most perfect book ever " . Others who cite Ed as an influence on their work include Daniel Clowes , Chris Ware , Craig Thompson , Matt Madden , Eric Reynolds and the Canadian cartoonists Alex Fellows , whose *Canvas* shows the influence of Ed , and Bryan Lee O 'Malley , who calls Brown " a Golden God " and whose *Lost at Sea* was heavily influenced by Ed . Anders Nilsen calls Ed " completely amazing and one of the best comics ever " , placing it in his top five comic books , and citing it as a major influence on his spontaneous *Big Questions* .

Critic Chris Lanier placed Ed in a tradition that included *Like a Velvet Glove Cast in Iron* , Max Andersson 's *Pixy* , and Eric Drooker 's *Flood* ! ; he wrote that symbols appear with such frequency and importance in these works as to suggest significance , while remaining symbolically empty . He finds predecessors for these works in German Dada and the Theatre of the Absurd . Reviewer Brad McKay found Ed " both hopeless and funny , a trick moviemakers like Tim Burton and Todd Solondz wish they could pull off more regularly " .

D. Aviva Rothschild likened the story to " staring at six @-@ day @-@ old roadkill " . Brown 's father was too offended to keep reading after the fifth minicomic issue , " Ed and the Beanstalk " .

In *Yummy Fur* # 4 , there was a scene in which a fictional " Saint Justin " masturbates after putting off his wife 's advances . In one panel " Saint Justin " had just ejaculated all over his hand , his penis in full view and his semen @-@ covered hand clearly visible behind it . Vortex publisher Bill Marks had the panel covered up with another illustration after discussing it with Brown . Brown agreed to

this censorship , but was " annoyed " by it . Marks later called it a mistake that he would not make again , and when Brown included a scene in the following issue of the Ronald Reagan penishead vomiting Marks made no objection , and all future collections of Ed have the original uncensored panel . The censored portion of the panel was covered with a note delivered by a rabbit that Brown often used as a surrogate self ; the message read :

" Sorry folks but this picture of a penis ejaculating onto a hand has been censored . If any of you want to see this page as I originally drew it send me a self addressed envelope (and an age statement) care of Vortex Comics and I 'll send you a photocopy . "

Brown has said that perhaps 100 to 200 readers sent requests for the uncensored panel .

In stores , Yummy Fur was often wrapped in plastic with " adults only " labels on it . It is not known if Ed or Yummy Fur were banned from any stores , but Diamond , the largest American comics distributor , stopped carrying it for a time in 1988 . A publisher discovered that boxes of its feminist publication were lined with discarded pages of Yummy Fur , included pages in which Chet stabs Josie while having sex with her . The publisher lodged a complaint with the Ontario @-@ based printer , which informed Vortex it would no longer handle Yummy Fur . The third issue of the Drawn and Quarterly Ed series was seized at the Canadian border , but was later deemed admissible .

Critic R. Fiore initially found the 1992 ending disappointing , but changed his mind 2012 , saying the sad ending gave Ed " an emotional punch that it wouldn 't otherwise have " . Cartoonists such as Craig Thompson at first found the story off @-@ putting , but later came to admire it . Critic Douglas Wolk wrote that it is not surprising that Brown had not settled on one conclusion to the story , as that " would mean some kind of narrative closure " , while Ed 's premise is that " everything makes sense as a big picture eventually , but nothing can be relied on from moment to moment " .

In 2014 , Uncivilized Books published Ed Vs . Yummy Fur Brian Evenson . The book details the differences between the various versions of the Ed narrative .

= = = Awards = = =

= = Other media = =

Canadian filmmaker Bruce McDonald has had the rights since 1991 to adapt Ed to film , for which he has planned to use Yummy Fur as the title . Such a film could use stop @-@ motion animation , but the project has yet to get off the ground . At one point McDonald hoped to have Macaulay Culkin star as Ed , Rip Torn as Ronald Reagan and Drew Barrymore as Nancy Reagan . In 2000 , it was reported that the movie would have a budget of \$ 6 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 , but it was unable to get the financial backing . A script was written by Don McKellar , and later with John Frizzell .

The City of Toronto commissioned Brown to do as part of their Live with Culture campaign ; the strip in Now magazine for six weeks in 2007 . In one episode a zombie and his human girlfriend attend a screening of McDonald 's still @-@ unmade adaptation of Ed . The same year , McDonald placed Brown 's graphic novel in scenes in his film The Tracey Fragments .

= = = Books = = =

= = = Journals and magazines = = =

= = = Other sources = = =