

Me-You

THE POEMS

of

Chad Penderson

EDITED BY Devin Becker

The Editor
Fremont, Indiana
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Introduction

Meeting Chad Penderson was inconvenient, almost as inconvenient as his poetry is to the world's staid notions of what poetry "is."

I almost killed Chad the first time we met. It was a clear day, summery. I was in my pontoon boat breezily eating some mustard-egg potato salad when I saw what I took at first glance to be a snapping turtle and accordingly, aimed one of my pontoons at the creature and gunned it. Just before impact, however, I realized that what I thought to be turtle was actually human (and, no less, a poet!), so I reversed the throttle and veered, narrowly avoiding the floater — a floater whom it would later become clear was the greatest living poet in North America — who watched helplessly as I glided the middle of the pontoon boat over him and cut the motor.

I can assure you that almost running over Chad's round face that day troubled me not a little, although later I will admit his poetry would so confound my understanding of "writing" and "the world" that I wonder now if I should have simply rotored his head clean off and pattered back home. Being, however, that I don't kill strangers, I yelled under my boat to apologize, explaining the snapping turtle gaffe and offering to help Chad back to dry land.

Chad accepted my offer gladly, saying he understood about the turtle. From the water, he explained that he'd been floating since about 3 AM the previous night when, on a booze cruise with some friends, he'd fallen unnoticed off the back of their boat while taking a piss and drifted in his life jacket to the spot where I tried to murder him.

Why, I asked upon hearing the story, hadn't he just swum to shore, seeing as the it wasn't more than a few hundred yards from where he was? To which he replied — referring to himself, not untypically for him, grammatically incorrectly in the third person — "Chad don't swim," thereby introducing and explaining himself in one succinct, but resonant sentence, whose repetition at my next question — "Don't swim or can't?" — only served to reiterate (although unbeknownst to me at the time) his mastery of the blunt, reticent dialect of those Hoosiers indigenous to Steuben County, land of 107 lakes.

Thus began a reluctant friendship of short duration by whose fruits you are about to be astounded.

After helping Chad awkwardly flop/climb into my boat, I took him back to my place to clean up. On our arrival, I offered him a beer and some potato salad — hiding in a cupboard my Doritos, which I liked to eat dipped in salsa each afternoon. Chad took the beer and the food, and as men will, I am told, when forming new relationships, we ended up having not one but several beers together, while sitting.

We spoke in some depth that afternoon, about me, mostly, although Chad did begin to tell me more about his own life, and about Fremont, Indiana where he was from. But just as he began describing Sue, his on-again, off-again girlfriend/interrogator/lover, I subtly interrupted him so as to steer the conversation back to my favorite subject, writing—and more specifically, my writing—which ended up being a very fruitful topic for the both of us.

You see, I was working on my first book that summer—a Bildungsroman in verse I was calling *The Hell I AM*—and on hearing that I wrote poetry, Chad mentioned that he liked to make up little poems as well. I skipped right past this admission—I have learned that other people’s poetry and interests in poetry are to be discouraged at all costs—and instead began explaining my difficulties at writing narratively from the atavistic subaltern position until, due perhaps to his being overwhelmed by the scope of my work (and who can blame him), Chad excused himself to take a piss outside, then simply walked off south through the darkening field that marks the border between Michigan and Indiana.

Some weeks later, in what would prove a momentarily banal occasion, I looked in my mailbox one afternoon to find a manila envelope stuffed with notebook pages full of scribbling. On the back of the envelope was written “Chad’s Book” in large block letters, and on the front, this greeting from Chad:

Hello Dickhead,

Here. Do with these whatever. I’m done with Indiana and poetry and am moving west. Hopefully to where there are hills and larger bodies of water.

Sin-fucking-cerely, Chad Penderson

P.S. I know where you hide your Doritos.

I didn't pick up the manuscript for several days. I was in the midst of an intense revision of *The Hell I AM* and spent most of my waking hours reading it out loud to myself, so it took me awhile to find the time. However when I finally did look at the poems, like a summer morning, the beauty of Chad's poetry slowly dawned on me.

Each page possessed its own personal/spiritual gastrotempography: poems were often written on top of other poems, food items were usually listed towards the bottom left, and each page was dated and time-stamped at the top, like a time card. Hard to comprehend, yes, for the common reader, but as I began to decipher the script, the structural aspects of each page became more familiar to me and finally I understood what I was deciphering/reading . . . i.e. nothing less than some of the finest poetry yet written on the North American continent.

Penderson’s poems, I realized then and proclaim now, defy the niceties of poetic tradition in such a way as to complicate the idea (T.S. Eliot’s, among others) of tradition in general. Here were true sonnets, anti-sonnets, sonnets masquerading

as anti-sonnets, anti-sonnets masquerading as true sonnets, and poems about dogs and people, the latter subject being Chad's most important, as the poems of Chad Penderson teach us nothing if not how to be people experiencing the world of Chad Penderson ... a world that becomes, increasingly, the reader's own until he/she must also begin to call home that small swath of land in the northeast corner of Indiana from which escape is both necessary and impossible.

True to his word, Chad disappeared (save for his constant emails) after leaving the envelope in my mailbox. Perhaps, like Rimbaud, he had given all he could to poetry and so left to pursue a dark solitude in the depths of a strange vocation. Or perhaps he is in a bar somewhere in Illinois eating fried mushrooms dipped in ketchup. Wherever he is, and whatever he decides to do with his life and talent from here on out matters little, as, like few poets before him, what he has left us changes everything.

Here is the first true collection of the 21st Century.

You have not had for a hundred years any book that comes more direct and flamingly from the heart of a living man.

Chad's First Poem

The Kama Sutra,
I don't have time for that bullshit
and I don't need a fortune teller to tell me
I'm going to get drunk and do something mean.
I'll tell you what: God
is way fond of the buddy-system,
your mother looks at me like I'm a cat,
and we won't be back, so let's be unrealistic.
Last night, a woman said to me, Chad,
I feel a restraining order coming on.
I deleted the idea.
Secretly, I was an olive.

An Epistolary Poem of Chad's

Dear Sue,
seeing as I have the largest antenna this side of Fremont,
you shouldn't be surprised when I tell you that
yesterday I saw you interviewed on the South Bend evening news
or that I got mad when I heard you say
you'd never felt anything like the heat we're having.
Remember that night you wore your nurse's outfit for me—
I had to cool you with a fan and some cold Pepsi bottles after.
It was good anyway, remembering, and seeing you, if only on the screen,
though I sure as hell didn't like the looks of that guy next to you.
I'm writing this on a Tuesday.
Tomorrow I move west.
If you ever come home, you can have the microwave, the toaster oven,
and my new radio. I leave this note to that effect.

A Poem of Chad's Translated into Chinese and Then
Back into English By My Friend Bryce, Who Took
Two Years of Chinese in College

Low red star
above
parking lot

Patio-seated
Chad, sad

as Chad's been
ages and ages
wants bad

blue skirted
waitress Probably

not going to happen

Moon pale jade

In wind
howls

Chad's Poem about his Dad and America

Dad tells the story about how
when he was my age he was so poor
he had to eat soup, only soup.
That's most of the story. This is the moral of it:
now he roasts his own peppers
to make a special mayonnaise.
That's what's great about America, he says,
mayo and capitalism. I think it's bullshit,
the hardship myth; I'd be happy
never having to worry a nickel
my whole life. Dad says I'm lazy,
says I'll have to get a paying job soon.
Says look at the sixties, in the long run
almost every goddamn hippie went bourge—

Chad's Poem about the Refrigerator

The old Super Deluxe Excellence refrigerator
makes metal breathing whirrs
every 12 to 15 minutes on the porch.
It's a mini fridge; been out here
25 years, landlady says, still works.
Inside 10 cans of an old, strange beer
wait cold and shut, and so I ask, how many hands,
would you guess have been in that fridge
besides mine and his and
what's happened to them since?
Landlady says she doesn't know, won't
guess. Says someone left it, and I can have it,
if I want, when I leave, but I don't.
It's breathing again as I try not thinking of it.

Chad's Poem Nasally Imitating What Sue Tells Him on the Phone

"I like raspberry martinis.
I like peanut-butter chocolate martinis.
I don't like straight martinis.
I don't like gin martinis.
I like pumpkin martinis. I like citrus martinis.
I don't like apple martinis. I don't
like to drink blue or green things.
But I'll probably drink a blueberry martini.
Do they make those? Probably.
I called to say I like you, Chad,
like I like martinis sometimes.
Manhattans, though, are my like
new favorite drink. Nicole
says I've been a bitch ever since."

This is Chad's American Dream Itself

It's Tuesday. The trash has been collected,
and on television is every movie
he's ever wanted to see
except one, which he's rented.

And it's cloudy out, so there's no good reason why not
to watch them all. Maybe he'll stop around 2 AM,
maybe he won't stop.

This is Chad's dream and in Chad's dream
Chad doesn't have to get up tomorrow for anything.
So he stops recycling, takes control of the dream,
starts bending others' wills so they'll do whatever.
Even personal favors aren't too much to ask.
People, this is Chad's task:
He is his couch's chosen dreamer.

Chad's Prayer

Of
the various
poorly fastened
cylindrical objects that
could fly back off the bed of
a pick-up truck or eighteen-
wheeler I would
prefer to
die
by
tree.

Chad's Poem about Spring

I am in my apartment when I smell this
smell and it's not a
winter-in-Fremont
smell anymore; it's a
first-whiff-of-spring-
smell, which gives me a stomach-ache,
the one I usually get between
ends and starts.
Maybe I should get married.
Maybe then I'd stop
dreaming of other bodies,
stop waking to feel
where on my own body
her arm might rest.

Chad at the Johnny Appleseed Festival / Civil War Reenactment

Recreated, the Civil War seems wussier than Gandhi—
fat-ass Soldiers with their sculpted beards,
gun smoke mixed with whiffs of cotton candy.
Appleseed has a fenced-off gravestone here,
but I bet if he were alive today, we'd
throw him in a mental institution,
give him his hat-slash-pot to play with
and some courtyard lot to plant his seeds.
Dad even agrees with me on this—
America's been bureaucratized to piss.
There's no room left for future Johnnies
and no convincing these guys recreating war
to recreate what we really miss: orchards—
fat men, arms up, mimicking orderly trees.

Chad's Poem Set Late at Night in His Van

So what if I feel good for being quiet
as the road I barely notice
I'm so used to it
shuttles by in the same swath my
headlights make over and over. You,
in the West with your mountains, canyons, and gorges,
it must unnerve you to imagine driving hours without
stories made of curve and slope, but for me
and these sleepers with their
open-mouthed faces slack
taut like stretched cloth
sameness is preferable
as no one will be jolted
and the charge made by the bodies of these three people
makes my van's blue-lit interior
holy as a sauna
built above miles of ice.

Chad's Poem about Gabe, an Old Friend

The first night I held my liquor
better than he did, we were
among Sue's and my new church friends,
but where I had high hopes they'd
think as high of him as I did
he'd no notions of impressing them.

With spurted breath, his balls
hung purposely out his fly,
he told them they were the kind
MADE THIS COUNTRY GODLESS WITH LAWS
then stood back, dared them to look.
Gabe: a brilliant, unschooled fuck
he is. I looked at him.
His hung like any man's did.

Steuben County in Sunshine

Branch County is gray and you live there,
but to the south over the soy field you see
Steuben County's in sunshine.
You also see the line where gray meets sun and that
you come out on the wrong side.

It's like the one
where there's one, gray cloud above some poor guy's head
but actually above you is a storm system
spreading 600 miles north and into Canada.

You think it is, and it might be, but it's probably not
after you. When you live under the jet stream,
storms happen. But god,
if the straight edge-line you see of the storm
doesn't make you feel like you're a cocaine crumb
scraped across a mirror by someone's credit card.

Think of it, that crumb,
born far from his Cocoa brood,
alone, and worse, packed close with others like him
then sent away, ending up
prostrate on a dark surface below some human,

you are that cocaine. Everyone loves you,
the storm is pulling you to Canada or worse,
and when it turns red over your spot on the Doppler screen
a tornado will suck you up and drop you.

Steuben County's in sunshine. Where
is your lover, your warm food?
The line's invisible, but you feel it.
Branch County's hell because you're there.

Chad's Poem about His Good Mood

Life is good, Sue. I don't say that enough.
The carpet I installed last year hides every possible stain,
which includes: cigarette ash, marinara, the goop
from a lava lamp, blood, other secretions
I won't speak of, and of course
pomegranate juice. Right now this woman
is singing from my stereo
some low pitched song about a dog,
which must be working in the same way as the carpet
seeing as it makes me feel OK being totally alone.
Sue, everything flattens,
when I'm in this sort of mood. I flatten. I think
Who the hell am I? but in a good way.

Chad's Poem about Sue's Little Shih Tzu Dog, Annie

Today I caught glints of predator
in Sue's little Shih Tzu's eyes
as it was barking at it's food,
the only thing in this world it's not afraid of.

Poor Annie, needy, smelly, nervous,
always shitting where you shouldn't,
you are a lesson
in how to make no one love you.

Today as I watched you take a mouthful of dog food,
drop it on the carpet, bark at the mound, then
gobble it up, I thought
you must be the most likely dog in this county

to be left deep in the woods.
Later though, when I saw Sue laugh,
then clean up the mush you left, it made more sense:
Sue loves things best that nobody else loves.

Chad's Ghazal

The green, leather, comfortable but hideous chair in front of my TV
reclines automatically when it's hit by the force of MY BUTT.

I've sat my butt on many chairs, people, and objects
and always— the equal return of the force of MY BUTT.

That they come up to meet me, these forces, and are rarely overcome,
means the world is shaped by the force of MY BUTT,

but not without casualties: 3 lawn chairs, one director's, one ironic
sculpture of a chair—each lost to the force of CHAD'S BUTT.

Chad's Poem about Canada

Canada is a shame, a weathered history
of weather and I
am its dubitable son-in-law,
its rippled waters of —
The message the birds
don't know they are sending
has been sent to me
by the sky they are sending it from —
the sky streaked by jet clouds, bordered
by horizons of gray, the color.
Canada, I see you are gathering your fowl again.
They keep shitting on my lawn.
Soon I'll knock on the windows really loud
and scare them back north where they belong.

Chad and Sue's Typical American Love Story

Secretly submissive Chad meets alcoholic
Sue who likes to diddle herself
in the movie theatre. The two fuck,
fall in love, move in together, start
hating each other privately, break up.
Sue goes to South Bend, gets citified.
Chad wants to gently rip all the heads
off the dolls she left, but instead
goes to the city, mortifies himself
enough to get Sue to come back home, which she does
on the condition Chad give her foot rubs
every night the rest of their god-damned lives.
Chad could give two shits; her back, he's happy
as a foot fetishist dog with a sock to play with.

Chad's Poem about Work

I'm looking forward to the future though it may require great change.
For instance, probably I won't be spending Sundays
out at the sand bar partying with Shane and Mike, and

not often will I be twenty feet from a speed boat full of teenagers
getting drunk in daylight for the first time, though, to be clear,
I see little wrong in either case except for some law-breaking.

All summer I've been convincing myself all businessmen
do is construct horoscopes and, like good psychics, the best
master early the difference between likely and probable.

Likely the teens remember this day by
combination cigarette and lake smell,
by warm Budweiser —

Like a horrible
synchronized children's choir, the reeds
lining the nearest shore sway and bop.

Chad's Poem about His Body

Sometimes
from a distance
when the shadow's right
my body in the mirror looks good.

Like the men in magazines,
I think: Cut;
ribs showing; abs
like a bar code —

But then each time I walk
closer to the mirror and light
that body
disappears to mine:

ribs slight hints
above my cylinder gut.

Chad's Ode

O! How fuckin' wonderful it is to sit
outdoors and smoke, spit
through my teeth onto the grass,
how fuckin' beautiful to flick my butt onto the path
then go inside, walk to the pot
to piss, listen and like listening
as the piss stream hits, rings
out from the toilet water, hissing hot.
If I'm gross in praising this and not some woman or the sun
so is God for making me love
spittin' and pissin' and cussin' and smokin'.
Last week I fought the wall and the wall won;
I thought my own strength was enough.
I type with my left cause my right hand's broken.

Chad's Ars Poetica in the Form of Anecdote

The other night my buddy Gabe belched
real loud after chugging his beer and said
put that in your book.

I told him I would, so here it is: EHHHGHGRHGKRHGKRRHRGHGRRK,
which is not really the burp, more a terrible transcription—
but one I think he'll be ok with. When the burp occurred,
we were playing my favorite drinking game, Me-You,
which you play with a friend right before going to the bars
by taking turns chugging a can of beer until it's gone.
It sounds stupid, I know, but the game has nuances—
Say Gabe's already had too much, I'll drink most of it.
Or if I had a bad week, and Gabe knows I need to get real,
real drunk, he'll take a sip, give it back and say 'you don't need her,'
though he knows I do, knows damn well.

Addendum, or Chad's Poem about Laying on the Sofa

I lay on the sofa
and on the sofa
I was not dying,
nor was I earlier, or,
I am,
but only in the way Sue refers to
when I get all funereal —
her eyes rolling,
"We're all dying."

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Poems in this volume have appeared (in slightly different iterations) in *cream city review* and *Faultline*.

Notes on Editing

Although for the most part Chad's poems were of an exceedingly high and arresting quality, in regards to both form and content, several of the poems I discovered in his manuscript were of a quality incommensurate enough with the more outstanding pieces to warrant their exclusion from the present collection.

So that you might have an example of the type of poem I cut, consider "Chad's Poem about His Bad Mood," a poem whose pairing with the brilliant poem "Chad's Poem about His Good Mood" (included on page 17 of *Me-You*) seems to beg for its inclusion. The poem begins thusly:

I feel like
a piece of crap

and the piece of crap
I feel like

feels worse than usual,
which is pretty bad

given how much crap
crap's been given all these years.

I would submit that this is a fine beginning octave, and were Chad a lesser writer, these eight lines alone would warrant admission into a collection—the broken chiasmus reminds me of Milton, perhaps Pope as well, but the colloquial language usage is Chad's own, and speaks to his unique abilities as a versifier. The poem, however, ends less thusly:

Piece of crap,
I'm sorry

but now that you're here
you should know—

It's hard to be alone.
You'll miss the turd.

And though I see here how a scholar some day may claim this to be Chad's finest achievement, I decided to omit this particular poem due to its ending, which I find unnecessarily baffling.

What does "You'll miss the turd" *mean*, exactly?

And how does missing the turd contribute to or complicate the loneliness (as opposed to the solitude) of the speaker?

These questions are provocatively raised by the final stanza, but I did not feel they were explored in enough detail to warrant their being raised within *Me-You*, the book. I should also mention that though many of the pieces here were written in a shaky, and at times almost illegible, hand, this poem was written by a hand so shaky its very lines criss-crossed at their ends, making even this transcription difficult—for quite some time I thought the final stanza read "It's hard to be the turd. / You'll miss the alone." and was only moved to see the more authentic version by following the line of an ink smudge.

Few other poems were omitted, and for the most part, what you have in front of you as *Me-You* reproduces the contents of the manila envelope I received in the mail almost exactly. Some spellings were corrected; a few were not. And though some liberties were taken in my transcriptions, the voice, the syntax, the paratactic didacticisms, these are all Chad's.

Like any superb editor, I am simply the work's vehicle, or, perhaps more accurately, the work's director/producer — No. Reader, merely consider me the man whose luck (when combined with his fine eye and taste) makes the reading of these poems possible.

The Bio

Like most poetry writers, Chad Penderson is an avid weightlifter and wishes he were playing quarterback in the NFL. But a raw deal and a newly carpeted apartment in Fremont, Indiana seems fair compensation. In his poetry, he is dutifully following some of the longest-standing conventions of the genre ... so that he can tear them all down and catch a reader or two by surprise. If that doesn't work, he is on the verge of making a splash in South Bend — and he hopes that he does not die by drowning, no matter how peaceful drowned people seem. His screenplay adaptation of the career of Sha Na Na, "Sha Na Na: We Come From the Streets" is currently in development.

Praise for the Author

I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of "ME-YOU." I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. ... I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment, which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire. I greet CHAD at the beginning of a great career ...

R.W. Emerson

Praise for the Editor's latest book of verse, *The Hell I AM*

What Devin Becker lacks in generosity, he fails to make up for with imaginative, or even grammatical, writing. His is a book I put down often, a book from which I will distance myself after I'm compensated for this blurb.

-Robert Hoss, typically nicer

A boring, overwrought, whiner's chronicle, Becker's book reads like a bildungsroman written by a failed child actor on Xanax. Don't take this book anywhere you might be seen with it.

-The New York Observer of Books

Not good.

-Louise O'Glick, Author of The Wild Irish

I still can't believe this is what came out of all the time he spent during his twenties "writing." Christmas is going to be awkward.

-Dennis Becker, Dad

After reluctantly finishing Mr. Becker's severe and excruciating book, I now believe that beneath these stale lyrics, affected narratives, and effete experiments is a narcissistic asshole of such banal manners and breeding that the earth would do well to rid him from its surface. Earth Mother, if you are listening, please . . . Destroy Devin Becker.

-Harold Broom, Memorizer/Writer of Hamlet