



# Wood, Talc and Mr. J

*Chris Rose*

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### **Wood, Talc and Mr. J** Chris Rose

A look back. Without the rose-tinted spectacles, but with hindsight and humour, and with poignancy and affection.

1978. The North.

Phillip sees life in a simplistic if passionate way: up or down, us and them, black, white and nothing in-between. When not doing his 'thing' in Wigan's Casino Club – voted 'The Greatest Disco in the World' by Time Magazine – Phillip hates the world. Or at least he thinks he does. He longs for the weekend, or a greater, permanent escape from the daily grind of factory life in an industrial town.

With a little imagination, he might realise things midweek aren't that bad: there's the loving family, the secure job amid mass unemployment, a relationship with the perfect young woman... Or maybe he realises too late. And all he'd deemed important was only ever an illusion, his reflected image included.

Coming full circle by way of loss and more loss, you would hope lessons are learned...

The book progresses through myriad dream sequences, interwoven song-themes, a father's philosophical ramblings, ever blackening wit, leitmotif – or seemingly recurring scenes; is someone laughing at our hero? And Phillip's own, lyrical, strut-like, black or white manner.

Dancehall adventures via train rides to Heaven, scooter cruising almost coast to coast. Beneath the pier encounters with the opposite sex, et al... set against the birth of Scargill and Thatcher feuding...

### **Wood, Talc and Mr. J Details**

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## From Reader Review Wood, Talc and Mr. J for online ebook

### Stefania Mattana says

As an Italian expat in the UK, I have this morbid need of getting the British culture at my best, maybe to feel myself more comfortable in the British society. Wood, Talc and Mr. J is a very interesting book for people like me.

I've read the collection of blog posts by the same author to have a better insight about Mr Rose's prose and writing style, since I understood it was very 'British'. I liked it, I got everything he meant, so I went for this one.

Wood, Talk and Mr. J is a coming of age novel set in the '70. It should have been even harder for me to get all the references from a past I didn't even culturally belong, nevertheless I managed to get mostly everything (I had to admit it, sometimes I googled). Its connotation is quite political with a lot of irony and satire. A good book for all the British things lovers and for people like me who love knowing the deepest aspects of a close and glorious society.

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### Delinda McCann says

This very English coming-of-age tale is witty, droll and irreverent, everything that makes English humor so English. I'm certain that the young hero, Phill, was our taxi driver in Bristol.

As for the people who inhabit this tale, we have our hero who epitomizes total adolescent ennui except when he's hanging with his mates or hanging with a girl. Of course I missed many of the references, but I when his Grom (Gran) took Phill to the specialty market for tripe, I instantly bonded with the story. I've been there done that with my gran. Mr. Rose captured the crowd and grossness well. Phil's father is the perfect lead for many of the family jokes. He starts them off then the whole family has their role in the comedy. The youngest child, Sam, seems to fulfill the role of demonstrating how close and loving this family really is. Phill's down to earth mother stuck me as being the anchor of the lot.

Mr. Rose's style is half free verse and half prose. His juxtaposition of words evoke images reminiscent of Dickens and F. Scott Fitzgerald. He creates a story that the reader must feel as much as they read for content. It is in his playing with words that we find the humor. Of course there is angst and a whole array of emotions for the words to summon forth from the reader as is proper for a coming of age story. The words call us to realize this story is about more than beer, sex and rock and roll.

While Mr. Rose is definitely a skilled wordsmith, his virtuoso performance may not translate completely on my side of the Atlantic. I know I missed many of his references and puns. People who are used to reading for content only may have some problems letting themselves feel the poetry of the story. However, if you love England, English food, English music or Monty Python, you will definitely enjoy reading "Wood, Talc and Mr. J."

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### Gerry McCullough says

An amazing and highly original book which I really enjoyed. It deserves all the good things that have been

said about it.

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### **Chris-Jean Clarke says**

FACTION AT ITS BEST!

Take a young Northern lad, Philip, who loves dance ('Wood') soul music, especially Chuck Jackson ('Mr J') and then add in a mix of drugs ('Talc') and raging hormones, and you have the perfect recipe for a story.

Mr Rose sets this story in Britain in the 1970s, and 80s and sets great store in expressing the values and morals of the working class throughout. Philip and his family, especially Grom and Pete, along with his friend, Jed were typical characters of the era, but each had a unique blend of wit and charm.

Be prepared to laugh along or to feel the heartbreak of Philip and his family.

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### **Susan Day says**

I really enjoyed the quiet, narrative tone of this book. It is intelligently written and captures an inner monologue that echoes within us all. The story is about working class life in 1970s England. It's about families, love and just getting by. Told in first person our narrator has a whimsical sense of humour and a down-to-earth quality I found really appealing. If you like well-written prose crafted around a great story, you'll love this book.

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### **Barbie Herrera says**

A Storyteller's Eyes Burned Hot With This Intoxicating Tale

The more I read of Wood, Talc and Mr. J, the more engrossed I became in the life of Philip and his story. The author, Chris Rose, takes you into the witty world of British humor with scenery and prose. Philip, despite all his partying ultimately learns from family bantering, discussions of pride, trusting not by actions but by reactions to what keeping the faith means. While reading this well scripted story, I often felt as if I were standing on the outside looking in. The reader learns that common place events for families extend beyond cultural boundaries and time. Such as yearning for that great vacation and instead finding all that can go wrong will go wrong, worrying if you're a total bore, handling poppycock warnings from your mum, dealing with desires, to feeling stuck in a "Fagin-like underworld".

I totally enjoyed the array of music, bands, singers, books, cars, hair styles, and fashion, that played out through the years of this story. It was in this time when the words of songs had listeners searching for magical meanings, and people searched for a way to connect under the influence of drink or drugs.

You will witness an adolescent who wants to escape his bleak world in bars change into a man who loves his family and takes responsibility.

There are parts in this story that may reach out and grab you with a bit of deja vu :)

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## **Christoph Fischer says**

“Wood, Talc and Mr. J” by Chris Rose is a marvel of recent British literature. It focuses on the early life of our young hero Phillip with his ‘interrupted dream on the 49 bus’ and some of his other dreams, his hopes, his crushes, the music of the times – all is captured wonderfully with beautiful details and ornamental language and style.

Although I know the Britain of those days from film and literature only I found the scene setting marvellous and was amazed at the odd similarities with the 70ies in Germany, which was the setting of my own youth and playgrounds. Northern Britain, or that of the 70ies in general comes alive with all that it’s famous for, politically and culturally. Phillip is a great character – as are his family, friends and girls.

Much of the insider jokes and references might be lost for those too young or foreign but it doesn’t really matter, the writing style is eloquent, witty and sophisticated with plenty of references to music and literature and will take you on the journey with you.

The book has the feel of a nostalgic memoir, sentimental, reflective and humorous. A real treat.

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## **Tmfyorkist2@hotmail.Com says**

Congratulations Chris. Laughter, tears, well developed characters. Jenny I can completely relate to, Grom I adore, Sam is beautiful. God bless our Phil. Will there be a sequel? Well deserved praise. Ps) Rambo lives on.

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## **L Powell says**

Outstanding stuff!

Wood, Talc and Mr. J is a fascinating book. I would go further to say that I am not sure I have ever read anything quite like it.

Looking at other reviews I have read the words ‘satire’, ‘parody’, ‘original’, and more. And while I have to agree we can talk about those elements – and a lot more – but what really peaked my interest is that I think there is something going on that the reviewers haven’t yet touched. And that is its political slant.

I don’t claim to know much about 70/80s Britain (and I don’t claim to get all the allusions the narrator refers to in this book) but I know there is so much more going on than what lies on the surface.

What does lie on the surface can be very witty and you can’t help but go with it. You might also want to classify the novel as a coming of age book.

But there’s a whole lot more going on and I’m sure you could read it on a number of levels.

As someone has already suggested, to get the most from it you really ought to read it more than once.

I do hope there’ll be a sequel. We can’t just leave Phillip there!

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## **D.K. Cassidy says**

Mind-blowing Prose!

This is a unique, brilliant, and intricate novel. Don't let my description scare you. It is also a fun read! The story takes place in the late '70s in the north of England, during the time of the Iron Lady (Margaret Thatcher), and Monty Python. This is not a tale of a posh Londoner with piles of money and titles. Instead it's the story of Phillip and his dreams, his hopes, and his opinions. Don't attempt to read this book while waiting for the bus, or if you have only a moment. Take the time to get into the amazing prose, and the cultural references.

This quote is a good example of author Chris Rose's style: "Had I been in his place, I'd have spent most of my day in this seat, faking reads of the pseudo-journalistic refuse, peeping over its pages at the latest angelic apprentice, as I did as a customer--- weren't barbershops supposed to be a male thing?"

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## **Susan Tarr says**

Ah, the immediate taste of salt and tang of vinegar on fish and chips wrapped in newspaper! What an introduction to Grom, little Sam and Phillip, and the rest of his family.

The songs, the hairdos, the clothes – all retro now – tweaking my memories with nostalgic longing. The Hillman Imp raced me back to my first car.

A lot of what was going on in England was reflected right down here in New Zealand, where shiploads of Brits were arriving in search of 'the better life'. But did they find it? Some stayed 2 years then caught the next ship back to their homeland.

Perhaps they introduced the vinegar addition to every café and kitchen table? We grew up on tripe, (with vinegar!) mashed potatoes and overcooked peas and cabbage.

We also absorbed the English ways and accents. I recall one family of 8 arriving home from the air force with my dad, and living with us until they found a home for themselves. One lanky lad slept in our bathtub. Goodness, our house was barely large enough for our family of five, but that's what everyone did back then. So I get Phillip and I get his family. They were our neighbours and childhood friends. They became our family.

The author clearly has a great affection for the era, and it shines on each page. It is almost clear, I think, that the author has a deeper understanding of life during that time than young Phillip might have us believe.

But please do take the time to read this book slowly and savour this glorious chunk of the 70s. Rock and hair gel and pub life. Music with Soul!

But I need to read this classic once more, and then perhaps once more again.

Glorious book!

### **Deborah McClatchey says**

I found 'Wood, Talc and Mr. J' quite entertaining! British humor at it's best. The main character takes us through his traumatic and bizarre journey towards adulthood circa 1970's. I love author Chris Rose's style of writing, it's filled with bits of humor and unique sayings that cracked me up. Though it has some unhappy moments, you will find yourself pondering on it well after reading. I highly recommend!!

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### **Sahara Foley says**

Being an American, I have to confess some of the witty, tongue-in-cheek repartees went over my head, but I still enjoyed the dry British humor. I chuckled over 'grom' and the mastication of fish without her teeth. A story chock full of wordsmithy and well-written. I give it 5 stars.

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### **Sarah Snaih says**

This book is a poetic, lyrical exploration of a boy's formative years - ultimately a story that anyone can relate to, it provides enjoyable nostalgia for anyone who actually knows or remembers Northern England and the 1970s, but this is not a requirement if you are going to enjoy what is by turns a funny, warm and touching account of a young man's struggle with family, girls, work and peer-pressure - in short, finding himself and growing up!

The writing style is completely original and intelligent, with the author playfully including excerpts from Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, William Blake, John Milton etc. A thoroughly engaging and enjoyable read.

I'm looking forward to the sequel and would highly recommend this book! Fantastic!

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### **Janet E. says**

"Wood, Talc and Mr. J" is an unusual book both in the humble yet thought-provoking way it explores life, and the beauty of its writing. There are far few books of this quality published at any time. Don't miss this one, by a talented writer named Chris Rose whose work I had never previously explored.

The story is deceptively straight-forward on its surface: Phillip lives life simply, but with passion; he sees his world as a series of binary choices: up, down; yes, no; us,them; black or white. He does his disco his 'thing' in a club voted 'The Greatest Disco in the World' by Time Magazine. But disco is hardly enough, or rather his parody of the life he doesn't live. Living for the weekend is all he has: his workaday week in an industrial town is numbing.

We see his world through his eyes, and suffer quietly with this man embarked upon an empty life full of loss and more loss of everything that makes us human -- not only loved ones, but love of self, self respect, and accomplishment. Strutting in a dance floor is making things worse, not better... And his dreams... his dreams are where the magic of his life hides.

This book reminds me of the best fiction of the 1950s and early sixties, when the meaning of life was the

only quest that mattered. In it, you'll see and experience things you never thought about, things you should think about.

Read this book about honesty and compassion and misery and transcendence.

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### **Anna Burke says**

You never know where Phillip [aka Chris Rose] will take you next in this fascinating book. An original voice expressed through the main character, Phillip, takes us through the harrowing, surreal world of a young man on the cusp of adulthood. Poignant, dark and disjointed one minute, hilarious the next, this book is filled with one surprise after another. The best bits play ruthlessly with words, images, places, people and events in the most unexpected ways. The simplest everyday things like eating, riding the bus, and hanging with grandma are reinvented once they've passed through Phillip's mind and are spat upon the page in wonderfully written snippets. At times I feared for Phillip, other times rooted him on in his unabashed deconstruction of taken for granted moments in the mass culture of his day. Not all of those moments are familiar to me, btw, as a non-Brit, so I'm sure there are even more witticisms to be enjoyed by those who grew up in a time and place similar to the one inhabited by Phillip. I hope the lad finds his way in the 1970s-British-world-gone-mad universe the author has dumped him, as Phillip comes of age. I also wish I could categorize this book but that's not easy. Part of me wonders if *A Clockwork Orange* had been written by Monty Python it might have looked more like this... I don't know. Just read the book. The experience is well-worth it.

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### **Joss Landry says**

Well, I would categorize author Chris Rose's novel as a satire, a cross between a parody and intelligent poetry. You have to admire an author who can pour this much of his brain and guts on a page and make a coherent collage or pictures depicting multiple meanings. Now, the author did warn me that I might not get all the cultural references, and he was right. Some, I'm sorry to say, did zip right over my head. Yet, as a diehard fan of Monty Python, and deadpan British humour, I understood the irony and laughed out loud at many of the clever quips. Remember Terry Jones and John Cleese? Geniuses all of them especially John Cleese. His modern day portrayal of Lyle Finster in *Will & Grace*, one of my favorites, was reminiscent of the Python's *Flying Circus*.

I gave *Wood Talc and Mr. J*, and my good friend Phillip a 5 because of the richness of such passages, "Unlike my dad, I disliked Jed's hair. Only because I'd have died for it. Where his grew biologically into an early Rod Stewart piece, mine, left un-flattered for more than five minutes, had me looking crossbred between Nana Mouskouri and Mary Hopkins." I laughed. Of course, my hair was the same. I enjoyed also, "One minute baby Loretta would be butting Granny's nose for lack of headcontrol, the next both would be sobbing for England—she'd just be hungry." I believe our friend Phillip loves life a lot more than he thinks he does.

Witticisms able to paint vivid pictures are too many to quote. You'll have to read the book. My favorite: Phillip indulging in the recurring dream off bus 49. First time I've heard someone else doing this on a bus—imagining other people and giving them a life. Mine also had nicknames.

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## Stephen Douglass says

“A GROUND-BREAKING NOVEL WITH AN INTRIGUING TITLE!”

Hats off to the author for delivering a story in a writing style so unorthodox that it is immensely appealing. Far from the vanilla norm, the style, in a gentle and compelling fashion, urges the reader to imagine between the lines, to diagnose and examine the motives of Phillip, the hero, for behaving the way he did to a vast array of Northern England events.

Arguably a factional autobiography, Wood, Talc and Mr. J grasps the reader’s mind and treats it to a bouquet of Phillip’s delightful, and not so delightful, experiences and emotions. Like several other reviewers of this exceptional novel, I did not “get” some of the author’s British witticisms. I am, after all, merely a Canadian colonist. I did, however, relate, in a visceral way to Phillip’s conquests, failures, passions and desires, all the way from peach fuzz to adulthood. Clearly, his youth was as crazy and hormone driven as my own.

Brilliant job, Mr. Rose. I urge you to write a sequel. I’m anxious to learn what happened to Phillip.

Now I’m going to re-read your novel, between the lines.

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## Philippa says

‘You weren’t supposed to be clever where I came from...’

Readers who are used to Walkers Crisps in portioned packets will find opening this unfamiliar shrink wrapped alternative challenging. I certainly did. The first taste is of something indefinable; salty and lime flavoured, with more than a hint of sea, of vinegar, of jellied eels and certainly bracing. This book takes a willingness to be persuaded, but becomes increasingly addictive, as you bite into separate scenes, and ride a great many buses in pursuit of Sheffield United, the possibility of ‘gear’ or a good dust up with Skin heads or Rockers, and those who fail to appreciate the finer distinctions in Motown and Soul. This is not a world I know anything about, yet something in the self-effacing and evocative staccato began to mesmerize. It got better and better, once the idiom lodged, and more compelling.

I am not sure I can analyse why, or even that I garnered half of what its sharp language referred to, for it is a new language, and describes a world as unfamiliar as Bangladesh, although it only asks me to travel as far as Sheffield, Ilkley, Barnsley, Skegness and environs. Names and words encircle. Well that’s not all: it asks me to take on trust Sheffield in the seventies, through the eyes ears and nostrils of Phillip, its narrator and interpreter of the author’s sardonic, nostalgic and dismissive memory. Into Phillip he pours his unstated affection for his home but like a shirt tail that should not escape but does. If a reader is tempted to sympathy, it quickly disappears.

I feel I begin to get a little closer to its hooking summons to travel with it: Phillip is disarmingly devil-may-care on the surface. He refuses any self indulgence; his affectionate love of Grom (his grandmother-Edith) is epitomized by his refusal not only to take the same bus with her to work, (in Hell’s Satanic Mill) but a different bus route entirely. Her habit of torturing him by eating pungent and unsavoury food with gusto (and without teeth) and in public is politely avoided without resentment on either side.

This family understands one another. They are diffident, tolerant, undemonstrative, and loyal, and the influence of Grom permeates, even when she is absent. His father’s moral rectitude about the obligations of

work and discipline, however unrewarded (except in affording legitimacy to weekends letting rip) stem from Grom, almost everything retains integrity, below the surface of seeming chaos. Phillip is quintessentially English in his refusal to disclose more than is decent about his feelings, except about music and song titles for these are safe pegs on which to define himself. They were unfamiliar to me but that was unimportant in this rollicking ride through period, seaside arcades, scooter racing, police check points, imminent catastrophe dared to come out by jeering at it, and his friendship with Jed, JustAbout, Paul, Pete, Mick and Uncle James. His names are minimalist, (his girl friends loved and moving past and on) but as expressive of the time as they are of the character of Phillip, who takes all as it comes (and goes). As must the reader, for this is a ride through affectionate memory of those loved and lost and a world being unwrapped from its confines in maturity; from Batty with her purple hair and his brother Sam's gradual growth, closely observed.

There is little of 'story' in any external sense unless a rite of passage from adolescent to adulthood is story, and for most of us writers until it is told, other stories cannot get top billing or full attention. But it is the poetic vernacular that springs the surprises; they allow dandelions to bloom between the paving stones, tossed over the shoulder prolifically and without stopping; those 'wagged schooldays', 'Madame Shake 'n' Vac', 'heart-splintering honesty' and 'prematurely ripened humbug'. This is an extraordinarily original writer seemingly with an endless ability to dislocate the image until the cartilage gleams in the joints of small agonies. Because Phillip pities himself not at all, you feel for him and want to steady him with a hand before he trips on his shoelaces or cuts his feet. Poor Phillip. He will remain with you long after the book is closed. Open it and stay with it, for it is rich, and new. Then read it a second time.

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### **Thekelburrows says**

The prose was so laden-down with slang and 1976 British cultural references that I honestly struggled to follow even the basic plot of this book. From what I gathered, the story didn't really go and I didn't find myself compelled by any of the characters. Maybe the other 40% was brilliant, who can say?

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