

Review of *Pure* – Rose Bretécher

I struggled to know where to start with this review. I guess I finished the book a little gobsmacked. Not because of the content – how could I be shocked by something so similar to my own experience of OCD? But because of the sheer honesty that runs throughout Rose’s memoir. Never before have I read a book that opens up so much about this form of OCD. I always thought that ‘Pure-O’ was my shameful secret, not to be told to anyone. And here is someone – a young, attractive woman with a good career, a boyfriend, a loving family – airing her dirty laundry for everyone to see, or in this case read.

And, of course, there is nothing dirty whatsoever about her laundry. She is a funny, intelligent woman suffering from a mental health condition, obsessive compulsive disorder. In her own words, Rose guides us through her journey – the doubts around her sexual identity, the fears of being a paedophile, her near-suicide attempt. We’re there, with her, as she desperately tries to rid herself of these thoughts – throwing money at unsuccessful therapy treatments, travelling halfway around the world to find a new Rose. And we’re there too when she opens up to her boyfriend, Toby, when she finally gets the right treatment, and when she “comes out” to friends, family, everyone, via The Guardian.

The secret is out. Each of those deeply personal, scary, bullying thoughts are inked, permanently, onto paper. Many times, whilst reading *Pure*, I thought of writing a memoir of my own experience of OCD. And, each time, within me I felt my stomach recoil, I felt the panic and fear of doing so. But Rose did it anyway. And that takes great courage. She describes, in the book, how nervous she feels when her article is published in The Guardian, and she is awaiting the responses of her friends and family. But I had to take a step back to really grasp how brave she was to do something like that. And also how big that moment was – not just for Rose, but for ‘Pure O’ OCD as a whole. She has broken the silence, she has spoken up about a form of OCD that is still so unknown, so misunderstood. And, in doing so, she has started to educate people – both those with and without OCD – about the condition. Not only this, but she has made it ok for sufferers to speak up about their own battles. They no longer have to feel ashamed or alone.

This is not paedophilia, this is not a sexual identity crisis, the roof isn’t going to fall in. This is OCD.

I have no negatives to say about *Pure*, because to do so would be to fault something that is 100% genuine and real. The experience was, and always will be, Rose’s – and who am I to suggest she should have written it differently? She wrote it as it was for her. And for that I salute her. Rose, you have done what so many of us would have been too scared to. Thank you for being so brave. Thank you for sharing your story. And thank you, in advance, for teaching thousands of people about the bully that is obsessive compulsive disorder. You may have called Toby the star of the show, but you’re the real star.

By Natalie Robins