

My Dog Gave Me The Clap Adam Morris

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About the book

My Dog Gave me the Clap is a tight, funny, semi-autobiographical novel in eighteen parts about masculine identity and narrowly missed epiphanies.

Saul is a 30 year old part-time musician who feels that life is passing him by. He has his feet in several camps – making a bit of a go at a music career, falling in and out of jobs, and off and on the dole. He is obsessive and anxious about things like whether he will ever get another girlfriend, what kinds of thoughts he should record in his negative-thought diary, and about making small talk during the compulsory office teabreak.

My Dog Gave me the Clap is an in-your-face, darkly humorous look at modern 'civilised man'. This book contains an abundance of earthy bodily functions, but more than that, it trembles with the pathos of one young man's quest for the meaning of life.

About the author

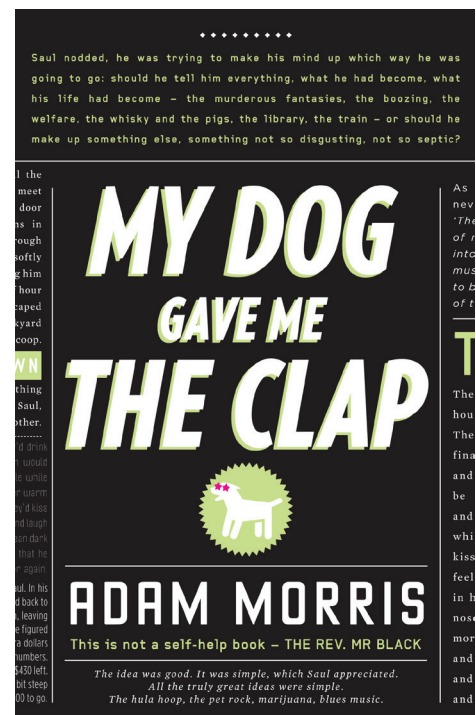
Adam Morris is an Irish-born, and Australian-raised musician, writer and artist, living and working in Perth, Western Australia.

Adam is the singer songwriter for the international award winning Murder Mouse Blues Band as well as an accomplished solo performer and freelance film reviewer.

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From the author

If I'm being honest, which artists are supposed to be, *My Dog Gave Me The Clap* was a book written out of complete despair and abject artistic failure. I was looking at my approaching thirtieth birthday and started to evaluate what I had done with my life artistically and the results were frightening to say the least. As I started on this path at the age of 16, my inspirations were people like Dylan who 'made it' at 22. As I went on trying to find my way, that changed to Orson Welles who made it by the time he was 25. A few years later I had to adjust again and now it was Brendan Behan who got his shot at 31 and the list just looked like it would keep on changing as the years rolled by, until I was beginning to imagine myself approaching my old age saying Frank McCourt was 67 and Seaman Dan was in his 70s, there's still a chance, there's still a chance.

And that's really what this book is about. It is a testament to long-term, no surrender, unrelenting failure. Self-imposed torture, trying to achieve something to make a little sense out of this howling mess we all scramble through called the world. I wrote it not suspecting anybody in their right mind would publish it but with that of course comes a great deal of freedom. A freedom which now has me trying to convince elderly women the title of book isn't meant to be taken literally, but they look at me with suspicion; they're not quite sure. And neither am I.

I guess the book will appeal to anyone who is out to get something or out to achieve something, something that may take a long time to get a hold of, or may take even longer to realise you're never going to get a hold of it at all. The reality of how it all ends up plays hard on the gift of experience and imagination.

Pete Seeger said, 'Take it, but take it easy'; Bukowski said, 'If you're going to try, go all the way, it's the only good fight there is.' And Dylan said, 'there's no success like failure'. Who better to trust than a folk singer, a writer and a lunatic?

Discussion questions

1. This book is divided into chapters with only loose links and connections between them. There are also very few references to Saul's past and his family. What effect is the author creating through this compartmentalisation of subject material?
2. What themes and refrains do the chapters have in common?
3. What does Saul's name mean? Why has the author chosen Saul as the name for his protagonist?
4. Narrative style in this book is simple, but the underlying ideas – and Saul's own emotional landscape – are often complex. For instance, what meaning might the opening chapter title 'Tell me the truth' give to Saul's story and the circumstances of his getting 'the clap'?

5. In what ways does Saul only have 'one leg in each camp' (p. 27) and what does this mean for him?
6. Saul often finds himself in spaces on the edge of society: in prison running the Indigenous dance class; at the unemployment benefit office; as the sole attendant at a men's group; visiting the library in the middle of the day for a wank; drinking in a pub alone. What insight does his isolation give us into the modern condition?
7. When Saul is employed and participates in 'normal' society, he still remains an observer and an outsider. See for example his experiences of the interview process, office culture, and seeking to participate in the suburban dream (owning a home in the suburbs). Suburban life or office culture are portrayed in some ways as grotesque. This is a book that crams people together, but leaves each singular in their loneliness. What is the point the author is making about proximity and isolation?
8. In the context of Saul's isolation, does the book offer any counterpoints of glimpses of human comfort, solace, or redemption? How should we see Saul in relation to the other characters in the book?
9. *The mind and physicality of man must be tortured into enlightenment, and music and narcotics are to be the chief instrument of this endeavour.* (p. 35) Who was Hunter S. Thompson? In what way does this book tip its hat at the New Journalists and at writers like Jack Kerouac and Gay Talese? What does the Hunter S. Thompson quote mean? What has the author chosen this quote to be on the board of the classroom in which Saul teaches? What do you make of the author's note at p. 187?
10. How does Saul's understanding of 'the true menace of thought' (p. 36) affect his – and our – perceptions of the way Saul sees the world? What is the reason for Saul's battle with the blackboard?
11. Discuss Saul's relationship with alcohol. How does it affect the way he sees the world and his connection to people in it?
12. What is the effect on the reader of their inhabiting Saul's world with him – with all its attendant drinking, vomiting, wanking – for the duration of the book?
13. What roles do the minister, the Medicine Man and the farmer play in Saul's life? What lost opportunities do they represent?
14. What solace is there to be found in music? Consider in particular Chapter 8 (Mysteries) and Chapter 18 (Nostalgia).
15. What glimpses of men in society do we get via Saul's interactions with his 'landlord' Ralph, his old high-school acquaintance Pat, and Steve, his Poo Juice venture buddy?
16. What image does the author leave us with at the conclusion of Chapter 10 (Library) and why?

BOOK CLUB NOTES

17. Throughout the novel, there are animal references: to Feathers the dog, the pig daddy, the chickens, the crippled dog Lucky, the gigantic spider in the outer suburbs, the unnamed dog in the final chapter. What role do these animals play in Saul's narrative? What observations do they allow the author to make indirectly about human society and human interaction?

18. The things that Saul yearns for are often simple – see the imaginary girl in the pub he would prostrate himself for (p. 148); the smiles possessed the minister and by Pat and the farmer (pp. 136 and 158) – but they continue to elude him. Why is this so?

19. Why does Saul ask 'Where have all the men gone?' (p. 57). What is the image (and perhaps also the crisis) of manhood that Adam Morris presents us with? What points of comfort or salvation are there to be found for Saul and for men in the modern world?

20. Why does the book end where it does? Has Saul learned or gained anything from beginning to end? What conclusions might we draw – based on Morris's vision of the world – about the meaning of life?