

## Aber Mon Amour

Last updated: 24 November 2005

**Malcolm Pryce** grew up in Aberystwyth and has set his first three noir pastiche novels in the town. BBC News Online reporter **Carl Yapp** made his rendezvous with Malcolm in one of Aber's famous tearooms.



### • **Profile of Malcolm Pryce**

**Carl: How did you come up with the idea for the character of Louie Knight ('Aberystwyth's only private eye')?**

Malcolm: I think it probably started a long time ago with an idea I had for a radio play in which a disaster happens in a library and all the characters from the books interact. That's probably how it started but it's obviously progressed a long way from that.

**Carl: Have you always been interested in gumshoe type characters?**

Malcolm: I love the Raymond Chandler 'Philip Marlowe' books and have read them a few times but I'm not a very intense crime genre reader. To me, it's more of a vehicle. The private eye in Aberystwyth is more of a vehicle to do something else rather than to set out to write a crime thriller.

**Carl: Where do you get your inspiration from?**

Malcolm: The truthful answer is I just potter about in the rag and bone shop inside my head and combine that with an awful lot of time doing it. I spend hours every day, for days on end, for a year basically thinking about things and most of them get rejected. So the magic ingredient is time really and long hours - and it doesn't come easily.

**Carl: Is it easy to remember what Aberystwyth is like?**

Malcolm: It is but I quite often get it wrong, minor things wrong. For example, I got the mosaic on the Old College wrong so there are little inaccuracies but in the main, I can remember the substance of it, in the way that it's not hard for you to remember what your primary school was like. Some things you never lose.

**Carl: Why did you choose to focus on Aberystwyth?**

Malcolm: Bringing a hardboiled private eye to Aberystwyth was the idea basically, and it worked and I'm very well qualified to exploit the quirky result of that confrontation.

**Carl: Where is Louie Knight from originally? Is he from Aberystwyth?**

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Malcolm: Sort of around Mid Wales but the thing about private eyes is, you never really know their history. Their past is a mystery. You're not supposed to know much about where they come from because you don't want to understand too much about them.

**Carl: Do you observe people a lot more now you're a full time writer?**

Malcolm: I don't actually. To return to the image of the rag and bone shop in your head, everything you see do touch or smell in life goes in and gets broken up and reused later and it comes out but it's not a process I do in a deliberate way. Obviously people I meet may become paradigms for characters or parts of them. A lot of authors do sit and jot notes but I don't do that. It seems too much like hard work!

**Carl: Are you writing another novel now?**

Malcolm: I'm working on the fourth in the series. I'll deliver the manuscript early 2006 which means it will hopefully be available in 2007.

**Carl: Were you surprised by the success of your first novel?**

Malcolm: Astounded! Because anybody who writes a first novel and expects anything more than total oblivion is being totally naïve in my book so I expected absolutely nothing. I'm constantly surprised by the reception.

**Carl: Did you know there would be sequels to it?**

Malcolm: It was written as a one-off but it was quite apparent that once I'd written it at the same time I'd created a world and a universe that could lead to further stories a world of characters and the special world of Aberystwyth...It's not something I'd intended but it was pretty clear once I'd done it that it could in the same way that if you'd written Sherlock Holmes after you'd done it you might realise well he could do a load more cases.

**Carl: What are your personal memories of Aberystwyth?**

Malcolm: Everybody has vivid memories of where they grew up and they don't have a control experiment of another town to compare it with. It's impossible to say whether growing up in Aberystwyth was in any way different or better than anywhere else. I imagine that wherever you live your most intense experiences happen when you are a child and as an adolescent and I imagine that wherever you have those it will make a deep impression on you which will stay...certainly it's a great place and a very very nice place to grow up, with the sea and the prom.

**Carl: Do you have any plans to return to Aber?**

Malcolm: I don't have any plans to return here but then I don't have any plans to return to the UK. I've always been a bit of an exile in a way. At the age of 18, I left home and went to Germany. I do like Aberystwyth, it's a charming place and it's nice to come back. I'm not sure I'd want to live here now but maybe when I'm nearer retiring perhaps.  
I

## **Carl: Do you feel like you're putting Aberystwyth on the map?**

Malcolm: I did hear a story about some people who'd met a German couple who were travelling to Aberystwyth purely on the basis of having read the novels...I don't think I need to put Aberystwyth on the map because it's already ridiculously well known, disproportionately well known. Everywhere you go you meet people who know Aberystwyth in a way which is not really justified by the size or importance of the town.

### • **Profile of Malcolm Pryce**

#### your comments

##### **Caroline Ham from Somerset**

Did Malcolm go to Alexandra Road primary School and have a brother Martyn? If so then I went to primary school with him. Have read one of the books. Must get hold of the rest.  
Mon Nov 30 09:26:33 2009

##### **Steve Johnston**

Probably unorthodox but Hi jane! Yes I was Malcolm Pryce's best friend for a long time til geography separated us. delighted he is doing so well. We used to write stories together when we were kids. Amazing to see your name Jane on the comments board. I am in Swansea with 2 kids 2 dogs and one wife!  
Mon May 18 16:21:08 2009

##### **Kevin Newton, Abergavenny**

Reading the previous, unanimously positive comments, there are few clues to the reality of Aberystwyth's incredible underworld of gangster Druids, supergrass ice-cream vendors, tough and capable schoolgirl sidekicks, twisted genius schoolboys, Dietrich-esque chanteuses and evil mastermind ex-teachers that exist in Pryce's books. The heart-rending accounts of the Welsh veterans of the Patagonian conflicts and the disastrous consequences of the climactic ad-hoc Dambuster raid on the local reservoir brings a tear to the eye of the most sane reader. It's a damn shame the local council saw fit to hush it all up, I say well done for telling it how it really is, Malcolm!!  
Thu Feb 26 14:41:07 2009

##### **Jane Wood aka Evans**

Hi malcolm, don't know if you remeber me, I used to date your best friend Steven Johnson. Yep that's me, anyway I'm glad you're doing great by the sounds of things. I'm living the good life in california, actually going to India in a couple of weeks wanted to visit Thailand but don't have the time right now, would love to in the future. Bought your books, sad to say haven't got through them yet, hoping to do some reading this trip, but I have turned on a few Americans to life in Aberystwyth, my doctor is one of them.Loves Wales apparently. I hear Aber has changed immensley, would love to hear from you, if you get a chance. We all have crazy memorable experiences in ABER!  
Tue Aug 5 09:29:48 2008

##### **Jean Parker Cynwyd**

These books are crying out to be made into movies. Just read all four in the course of a week, they are now on route

to the Falklands. Not a quarter of the way through the first book and I took Waterstones by storm had to have the others at the ready. I can promise you the staff in Waterstones are now Louie knight's biggest fans. I sit at the back of the bus to read them, people are scared to turn around when I am laughing out loud all the way into town...just another day in Corwen. In the Falklands we have a horse called Seren. How long before number five ODFrom the bottom of my heart thank you!

Mon May 26 21:24:51 2008

### **Matthew in Indiana**

Unfortunately these books are little known in the States. There are rumours that the author's book tour was cancelled following pressure by the Twm Sion Cati Anti-Defamation League. However, there is one guest bedroom in the Midwest where "Aberystwyth Mon Amour" features prominently. When friends read it, I earn new respect. "Are you really from Aberystwyth? Is it really like that?" I can't let them down gently. Of course it isn't really like that. Obviously, Mr. Pryce had to tone things down for publication or no one would have believed him. But I do in the end admit that Simon Jenkins taught me everything I know about rugby.

Sun Sep 23 10:08:38 2007

### **John Dight, Phoenix, AZ**

I remember Malcolm Pryce, I think he was in my elder brother's year at Penglais and when a friend sent me 'Mon Amour' for Christmas it was a thoroughly unexpected treat. Not only did it take me back to my teenage years of boozing around Aber but so many of the characters were based on the school teachers I had. It was hilarious. Having read this post I am going straight to Amazon to buy the next two books!

Mon Jul 30 08:46:55 2007

### **Kevin Sharp**

Aberystwyth is on the map. It always has been. Otherwise there'd be a blank space in the middle of Cardigan Bay with nothing else to fill it.

Mon Jul 31 11:29:36 2006

### **Sue Mappedoram, now in Northants**

I was a student in Aber 77-81, living in Jasper House with landlord Eric Topley and his son, Nick, for some of this time. So what's with the dedication in The Unbearable Likeness? I nearly had heart failure when I saw it! I know loads of people came to the house (student parties etc) and it was the hub of a social wheel for many in Aber at the time - put me out of my misery - what's the connection? ps Love the books - I'm back there as soon as I open the page!

Tue Jan 17 18:42:34 2006

### **Dan Birkbeck, Manchester**

Have read all 3 - not in order, discovered by accident! I can't wait for the next one, it's really captured my imagination - I love the dark surreality of it all - brilliant!!

Wed Dec 28 22:08:04 2005

### **Amelia Davies Aberystwyth**

I've just finished reading 'Aberystwyth Mon Amour' - I was given 6 copies of it by well meaning friends for my first Christmas back here in 2002. It's absolutely hilarious, very clever and so off the wall I can't wait to read the rest of the series. It's not the sort of book I would normally read - but I couldn't put it down or stop laughing at the sheer unmitigated nerve he has when describing the less appealing

aspects of Welsh public life with wit and humour and an unexpected injection of sharp observation on the foibles of seaside town life. I love Aberystwyth but can still laugh at it. I was pleasantly surprised as I was more than a bit prepared to go on the defensive - i e how dare someone make fun of Aber - but he won me over. Humour rules !  
Tue Nov 1 14:01:00 2005

**Gwyn from Ruthin**

Comic genius, but more than that, some of the lyrical passages at least equal Chandler  
Fri Aug 12 16:46:09 2005

**Angela from Chepstow**

I have just had a reply from Malcolm Pryce himself (See Angela's original query below). Here is his reply. "Hi Angela. Yeah, Canticle Street. Sorry you couldn't find it – there are a number of errors & inaccuracies in the real Aberystwyth. I've written to the mayor but it's no use. I'd stick to the books if I were you. :) I'm hoping to deliver the manuscript of number four after Christmas which should mean it appearing sometime in 2007. Sorry about the wait, but you shouldn't read them so fast. Take care & thanks, Malcolm"  
Tue Jul 19 09:51:57 2005

**Angela from Chepstow**

I have just finished reading the third book by Malcolm Pryce. ( Aberystwyth Mon Amour, Last Tango in Aberystwyth, and The Unbearable Lightness...) What brilliant reads. However one thing is bugging me. He makes several references to actual street names - Eastgate, Pier Street, Bridge Street etc - but he also mentions on several occasions a street called Canticle Street. Has there ever been or is there in Aberystwyth a street by this name.  
Tue Jul 5 09:54:33 2005

**Malcolm Cambridge**

One of the few modern comic novels I haven't had to struggle finishing.  
Fri Jul 1 15:12:55 2005

**Hazel from Scotland**

"Aberystwyth Mon Amour" brilliant book. I've sat and read the book 3 times now. It's one of those books once you start you can't put down till the end..and it doesn't matter how many times you read it.  
Fri Jun 3 23:00:51 2005

**John from Cullompton**

I am just 14 but I finished "Aberystwyth Mon Amour" in 2 days. I absolutely loved it.  
Sun May 15 21:04:02 2005

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