



UNIVERSITY OF
LEICESTER



Adrian Mole

50th Birthday Bash

Sunday 2 April 2017



Programme for the day

- 10.30 - 11.30am** **The Art of Adrian Mole**
Attenborough Arts Centre
A family workshop with illustrator Caroline Holden Hotopf.
- 1.15 - 2.15pm** **Sue Townsend: Playwright with Carole Hayman and Janette Legge**
Peter Williams Lecture Theatre
Reflections and reminiscences on Sue Townsend's contribution to British Theatre and television.
- 2.45 - 3.45pm** **Reunion: The Birth of Adrian Mole with Colin Broadway, John Tydeman, Geoffrey Strachan and Caroline Holden Hotopf**
Peter Williams Lecture Theatre
This unique event reunites key figures in the Adrian Mole story with lively and entertaining discussion of Adrian's early years.
- 4.15 - 5.45pm** **Adrian Mole's 50th Birthday Bash**
Peter Williams Lecture Theatre
Hear from Simon Schatzberger, the original Adrian Mole on stage, and also enjoy the world premiere of three short new monologues specially commissioned for the occasion.



Introduction

The East Midlands region has never been short of literary talent. Julian Barnes was born here, Alison Light was shortlisted for the Booker, Jean Binta Breeze mentored many Leicester writers while she lived here, and Jacob Ross won the 2017 Jhalak Prize for black, Asian and minority ethnic writers. Sue Townsend had a lifelong commitment to artistic talent in the region. This extended to actors: she insisted that her stage version of Mole would not play to the West End without Leicester actors. She got her way.

The Centre for New Writing has commissioned three new monologues to commemorate Adrian Mole's 50th birthday. Sue Townsend's legacy is clear to see in the commissioned pieces by Heide Goody and Ian Grant, Marilyn Ricci and Maria Taylor. The monologues are published here for the first time and will be performed at today's event. The three commissioned pieces evoke Mole's voice but transport him to the world of Lidl, Farage and Brexit. During the day, we will also be hearing from some teenage writers, who have been mentored by the Leicester-born Bali Rai – one of Britain's most successful Young Adult fiction writers - to produce their own creative responses to Mole.

Today's event supports a host of exciting publishing from Penguin to mark Adrian's 50th birthday. Michael Joseph has launched Mole Press, their very first poetry list, which consists of just one title: Adrian Mole: The Collected Poems. All eight diaries are being re-published to mark the occasion, with new anniversary covers, and the first two books in the series, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13¾*, and *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*, brought together in a single edition for the first time and given away free to attendees at this afternoon's birthday bash.

Sue Townsend was awarded an Honorary MA by the University of Leicester in 1991, and in 2008 became a Distinguished Honorary Fellow, the highest honour that the University can bestow.

In 2005, she entrusted the University Library with the care of her literary archive, containing original draft manuscripts, correspondence, notebooks, and research material for her books, plays and screenplays. Treasures of the collection include handwritten drafts of the first two Mole diaries and correspondence to Sue from Geoffrey Strachan, John Tydeman and many others. A related collection contains original artwork and working drawings for the early Mole books by Caroline Holden Hotopf. These fascinating materials can be viewed by appointment with the David Wilson Library's Archives and Special Collections.

As well as 2 April marking Adrian's 50th birthday, today would have seen Sue turn 71. Her unique voice and acute observations on British society are sorely missed. Today provides an opportunity to reflect on her legacy as a writer, in the company of those who knew and collaborated with her. The University of Leicester and Penguin would like to thank all of today's speakers and participants for taking part, and the family of Sue Townsend for their ongoing support. We are especially grateful to Colin Broadway for judging the writing commissions. We hope you enjoy the day.

Simon Dixon
(Archives & Special Collections Manager)

Corinne Fowler
(Director of the Centre for New Writing)

The Age of Convenience

Maria Taylor

(voice of Adrian Mole, Leicestershire accent)

Saturday April 1st 2017

11.45pm

Can't sleep. In a matter of minutes, I, Adrian Albert Mole will turn fifty. I am now officially an old man. There are people much younger than me who are already dead. I suppose by lunchtime all my teeth and hair will have fallen out. I spoke to mum at dinner and asked how she felt about her only son reaching half a century. Her face fell the way Theresa May's does whenever someone on the news mentions Nicola Sturgeon. Mum muttered something about it being 'an April Fool's joke.' I noticed she was teary at dinner and drinking too much Pinot Grigot than is appropriate for a septuagenarian. I pointed this out, and dad said, 'she's not a septuagenarian, she's a Virgin! The virgin, Adrian!' I coughed so much I nearly ended up choking to death on mum's microwave toad in the hole. Mum left the table and tottered straight to the fridge for more wine.

Mum is a great-grandma now, but she has taken up social protest as a hobby. Other seventy-two year old women would've taken up crochet. In March she chained herself to a bollard outside Fenwicks in Leicester. She was campaigning against Fenwicks being shut down. Mum told a BBC East Midlands Today reporter, 'someone has to protect our

Leicester heritage! It's not all selfies and duck faces!'

I really must get to sleep.

Goodbye sweet youth! May angels sing you to your rest!

(pause)

Sunday April 2nd 2017

12:03am

It's official. I, Adrian Albert Mole, am now fifty. I still live next to my parents in a converted pigsty. I will forever be confined to the provinces. Time has forced me to compromise my intellectual status and find a menial occupation. According to HR, I am a customer experience enhancement consultant, which means a shop assistant at Tesco Express. My boss Tahir is already store manager and he's only twenty-eight. My job mainly involves showing alcoholics to the aisle where we keep the Blue Nun.

Having fewer responsibilities has given me more time to write. My proudest achievement was penning my very own political play, 'Trump on the Dole,' in which Donald Trump is sacked by humanity with celebrity Judge Rinder presiding. He is forced to live off Job Seeker's Allowance and can no longer afford fake tan. It has been a runaway success throughout the entirety of South

Leicestershire. The Melton Times gave it a whole five line review and said, 'Never seen anything like this, especially the scene where Trump begs Job Centre advisor Beyonce for a job as a sandwich packer.'

I am no stranger to political fame. Last June I joined Twitter and tweeted 'It's time for change' to mark my first trip to Aldi. It was retweeted over two thousand times by UKIP and Brexit supporters, which was certainly NOT my intention. Nigel Farage said I was 'the ignored voice of middle-aged Britain.' Dad said, 'Adrian's got the face of middle-aged Britain to boot' and cackled like a maniac. I think he's going senile. He is the only old man I've ever seen in a mobility scooter with a pony tail and a leather jacket.

In spite of my innocent intentions, Pandora was not pleased with my infamous Brexit tweet. Pandora Braithwaite will always be the love of my life. Pandora was fired last year from her shadow cabinet job by Jeremy Corbyn, for not being commie enough. She is still Labour MP for Ashby-de-la-Zouche. She has her heart set on becoming the first woman Labour Prime Minister. She has definitely got better dress sense than Theresa May. She is currently having a secret on-off fling with a toy boy! He's a Socialist Remain campaigner called Giles, who went to Oxford and drives a Porsche. What's a wealthy, hunky twenty-seven year old gym enthusiast got that I haven't?

I definitely need to get to sleep. I am having a surprise birthday party at four. I read it in Gracie's secret diary which has 'Keep out, Dad!' emblazoned on the front in glitter nail varnish.

(pause)

3:50 am

Can't sleep. Flicking through my old diaries. It is no mean feat storing precious possessions in a converted pigsty. My diaries are a tale of existentialist angst, marriages, divorces, cancer, reality TV shows, kids, grandkids, war and red socks. They are also a love story about me and Pandora.

(pause)

(voice of younger Adrian)

Monday February 9th 1981

Pandora! The memory of you is a constant torment!

(pause)

I wrote that over thirty five years ago when I fell in love with Pandora as a lovelorn adolescent. I am still tormented! But with less hair.

I was wondering who would be first to wish me a happy birthday. Then at 3:20am my phone beeped with a text:

Happy birthday, Aidy!

I am in a hellish nightclub with Giles. Exhausted. He's infuriating me because I won't dance to the Spice Girls. He thinks they are retro. We may both be older but I still burn with love and deep affection for you, Aidy. I will be seeing constituents in Ashby on Monday, please let me see you. With love forever, Pan xxx

I nearly cried. Whatever the next fifty years holds, at least I have Pandora's love...

Let Them Eat Custard Creams

Heide Goody and Ian Grant

To Ms Lampwick, Arts Council,

I must express grave concern at the Arts Council's refusal of my request for six thousand pounds to support our readers' group. I understand that times are hard. I imagine your role is that of an intellectual nurse, carrying out triage on art projects, offering a tot of rum to some and only comforting words to others. I want to cry out to you, "I am not dead! There is life in this body yet!" (and by body I mean the Westcotes Library Literature Group).

You raise a number of points in your letter. It is true that Westcotes Library already has another book group. Mrs Chapel's Wednesday Book Club is, as you say, thriving. Indeed, this Japanese knotweed of a book group, is nothing short of rampant. Sometimes there's only standing room available. But is this a good thing? Is it? Your letter makes frequent mention of the need for 'audience engagement' but, I ask, what audience? And what should they be engaged with?

Let me paint a picture for you. On the one hand, we have a room stuffed with pensioners, fighting over the tea urn and a plate of hobnobs as Mrs Chapel leads them through a discussion of *The Time Traveller's Wife* or some *Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* nonsense. And, on the other hand, in the much more modest meeting room that used to be the cleaner's cupboard (which, until the gefilte fish incident, smelled mainly of chemicals) we have the Westcotes Library Literature Group where a

select few – I attached a copy of our entrance exam. Did you have a go? – discuss the latest Kazuo Ishiguro, Haruki Murakami or Khaled Hosseini over grissini and poppy thins.

The difference between the two should be obvious. Our group is a hardy band of intrepid literary explorers and intrepid explorers do need provisions, Ms Lampwick.

You made no mention of the graphs I attached to my original application. I can send fresh copies if you have lost them. My accountant friend, Parvez, checked their accuracy. My research into the correlation between favourite snacks and literary predilections has produced some clear and undeniable results (I have submitted a short piece to the *New Scientist*). Digestives, rich teas and custard creams will attract fans of Harry Potter and Andy McNab. A garibaldi or a bourbon might indicate someone who will try a little Mark Haddon or at least attempt the first page of a Hilary Mantel. But if one is to give nourishment and succour to the mind of a true intellectual then it must be biscotti, florentines and perhaps even stroopwafels. Don't dismiss this as a simple matter of biscuits; it underpins the literary education of a whole city. Please do not look down on us and cry, "Let them eat custard creams!"

You suggested that the amount we requested for refreshments was unrealistically high. I am surprised that you, a Londoner, would say

this. I've eaten out in London and a sandwich alone can cost upwards of five pounds. Our book group's requirements are met from the delicatessens and bakeries along the Narborough Road, but times have become hard. The pound is falling and the price of imported goods is rising. We used to buy baklava from Mr Rahman's shop but he's sold up and returned to Libya where there is less religious persecution (thank you, Brexit Britain).

I sense from the tone of your letter that you have perhaps spoken to our librarian and that young Mr Tiptree has expressed doubt over the value that our group brings. He insists that the library cannot afford to maintain two book groups, even though he lets the U3A craft group have free use of our meeting room for much of the week and doesn't bat an eyelid when they turn the radiators up to maximum in June.

I have observed that the local library service seems to be more interested in being popular than anything to do with books. Craft groups! Free newspapers so the old blokes can pick their horses. Even a Wednesday book club that doesn't even appoint a literary expert, such as myself, to guide their reading; they actually pick their next book by a show of hands. I would have thought that, on both sides of the pond, we would have learned the hard lessons that come from populism and wanton democracy! Down that road lies madness, or even worse, Barry Kent novels. You might know Barry Kent's work. He wrote *Dork's Diary* based on a character called Aidan Vole. A shallow and foolish piece of nonsense that has gained him much undeserved popularity.

Our group prides itself on being focussed and innovative. Knowing that quality foodstuffs

nourish the mind as well as the body, the four of us (three if Mr Aheer is on call) have taken to having themed snacks to accompany our books. We've had rollmops with Moby Dick, gefilte fish with Zusak's *The Book Thief* and haggis with Robert Burns. We also have strict rules on books that are suitable for the group. Books with "The Girl..." in the title are passed over without further consideration. Anything with a Richard & Judy Book Club sticker isn't allowed across the threshold. And anything that has been made into a tawdry Hollywood blockbuster is given short shrift. Such is our passion for finding the right book that Mr Aheer and I nearly came to blows over *The Life of Pi*; but I argued strongly that using a CGI tiger showed a lack of integrity. If they can't make the effort to train up a real tiger then what does that say about the quality of the source material?

In short, I know that the Arts Council has money enough to fund our little group. You might consider diverting some cash from the English National Ballet – their tiara budget would probably suffice.

If you do not support English arts and culture, who will? Without nourishment our rarified group will die, along with maypole dancing, cheese rolling and swan upping – or worse still, some bureaucrat will attempt to combine them in an ill-advised attempt at streamlining. I'm sure I don't need to tell you that a swan can break a man's arm, especially if you try to engage it in maypole dancing. Don't say you weren't warned.

**Yours in anticipation,
A Mole**

Rocking On

Marilyn Ricci

Adrian chops wood in the Piggeries yard.

How come when Bear Grylls chops wood it splits in exactly the right place? No doubt Rabid Dog Robson would make a better job too. 'Got muscles like Popeye after his spinach,' my father said as we watched Rabid and his agent pick their way through the mud to the front door yesterday. Why were my parents even there? Why would I invite them to a business meeting? Rabid's response to my question: 'Did you read my previous ghosted work: Niamh's My Life on Shit Row?' was unexpected: 'I thought you made a good enough fist of it. Bit OTT with the poverty porn.' *(Sighs)* I'm not sure I can work with him. Standing there wearing Versace. My mother said: 'That suit was sharp enough to fell a tree.' An obvious barb about me refusing to change my cardigan. I had to defend myself: 'My Life on Shit Row has at least made me a decent living.' 'And about time too,' she replied. 'Better than all that naff stuff you bombarded the BBC with for years.'

Sound of wood chopping

Phew. Got to take this balaclava off. Boiling. Things got a bit heated after Rabid had gone. I can't help feeling I'm selling out with this ghost-writing. 'That's like saying Andrew Lloyd Webber sold out,' my mother scoffed. 'He was always popular!' I shouted. 'I've compromised my principles and sold my integrity for a mess

of pottage.' Her retort was unforgiveable: 'Oh get over yourself, Adrian. It's hardly like Jeremy Corbyn agreeing to re-build Trident with his bare hands!' My father said: 'Corbyn looks like he struggled with Meccano.'

Gracie and her boyfriend Igor were furious to miss Rabid. Igor's in two minds about coming to the birthday bash tomorrow. He's not even sure he wants to be a boy anymore and might change his name to Ivanka. 'No granddaughter of mine is going out with an Ivanka,' my mother announced. 'Not while Donald Fart remains in the White House.'

Pandora seems to think I can drop everything at a moment's notice for a whole weekend. As Chair of the Parish Council I'm worried sick about leaving the Parish Centre unguarded. Ever since someone nicked the CCTV system. And with Fiona Wellsup on the prowl we've been on red alert since the Bring and Buy to raise funds for elderlies abandoned by the care system. Who would have thought an Amaryllis with a tiny fire bomb strapped to the bottom could do so much damage? And that was much more subtle than Fiona's attempt to drive over the concrete bollards we installed outside the Centre to deter suicide bombers. At least we know they work.

But no, Pan's insisted on Skegness for the birthday bash. After her flirtation with Blairism she's now reverted to her parents' Trotskyism

including clichés like 'the will of the people'. But who are 'the people'? I asked. 'In this case, Aidy, your mad family who, unlike the real people, have to be pleased all the time otherwise Hell sets on fire.' 'Hell's always on fire, Pandora, if such a place exists.' Rude of her to hang up like that. Six caravans and a bungalow at Lower Lodge farm, Skegness at the beginning of April. Utter madness. I'm dreading it.

Coming up to midnight the following evening. Sound of the Rolling Stones' 'Satisfaction' playing and loud party.

Whatever happens I've got to stop my mother making a speech when the clock ticks past Midnight and it's officially my birthday. If she tells one more person about the agonies of getting my 'head the size of a football' out of her vagina fifty years ago I'll scream. Why can't she have dementia, or at least some memory loss like dad? Though sadly he can remember the distant past and keeps telling everyone about me throwing that sausage roll at the moon on my fourth birthday in a fit of pique because it hadn't come to my party. Then he droops with laughter in his wheelchair and people think he's had a stroke.

At least this punch is good. Takes the edge off having to watch the crumbling Fairfax-Lycett and Daisy bopping. I'll just have another glass to lubricate my throat aching from shouting inane things to people and to soothe the pain in my jaw from smiling back at Sharon Bott who seems to have developed a rictus standing over there staring at me. Though she's looking better than I've ever seen her. 'I've knocked the blokes on the

'ead, Adrian,' she said. 'Not literally I hope, Sharon,' I joshed. 'Some of 'em, obviously,' she said, 'but that's not what I mean.' 'She means she chucked the last tosser out three months ago and hasn't found another to replace him yet,' Glenn said. 'Don't let her know about your new found wealth, Aidy,' Pan whispered. But I've never read Sharon like that. This punch is very moreish. Whoops. Watch where I'm going.

Sound of a party countdown from 5 to zero followed by Death Thrash metal music.

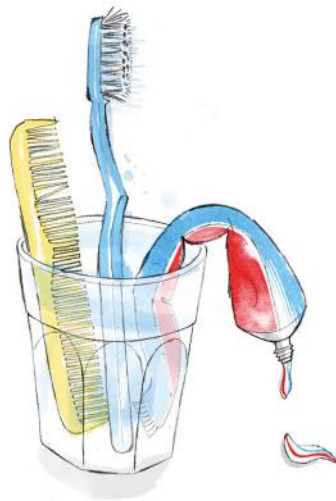
Oh no. Not Rabid's latest CD. This is my parents doing. Oh no. My father's headbanging to it – look at him – like a wrinkled, demented Dobby from Harry Potter. And presumably the wild-eyed, scarlet-haired creature flying towards me screaming: 'My baby's half a century old!!' is my mother. Yes, it is. More punch. Where's the punch?

Sound of the sea.

People squealing in the freezing water.

Adrian's gulping for air and thrashing about.

It must have been the punch. How else could I forget my lifelong morbid fear of deep water? What came over me? At least I've got my rubber shoes, though I can't remember packing them. Was all this planned – getting me to tear down to the beach, strip off and run headlong into the dark ocean? Is someone trying to kill me? My penis has all but disappeared in the cold. At least the moon's come out. *(hysterical)* Ha, ha. Ha, ha. The moon came to my birthday party. 'Look, Pan, the moon's come to my fiftieth party! Only forty six years late!' Ha. ha. Where's my shoe? I can't hop out of the sea. Sharon? Is that you?



On the beach early next morning.

Sound of Adrian's footsteps on shingle, gulls crying, waves lapping.

He stops to stare at the sea.

Calling out the coastguard wasn't strictly necessary last night. Sharon was perfectly safe once she'd reached the rocks. She's obviously a strong swimmer and, if all else failed, the tide would have brought her in. She did look quite magnificent, though, flying overhead in that harness. And to still be holding both my rubber shoes when they landed her was a miracle. There was really no need for some of the language used by the coastguard when he gave us his 'comprehensive safety briefing' on the beach afterwards. *(Sighs)*

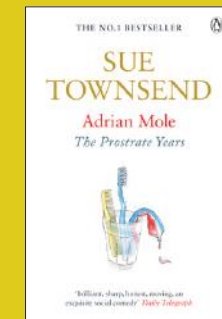
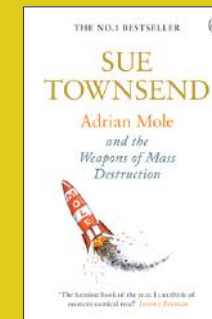
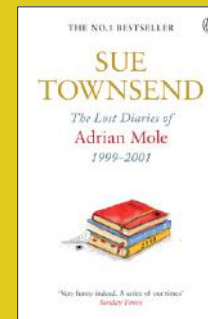
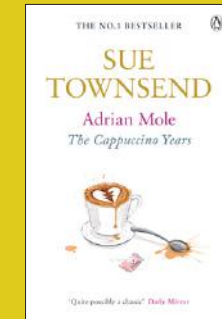
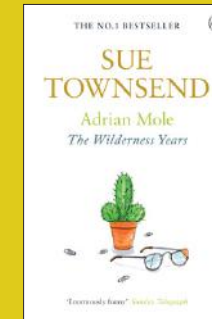
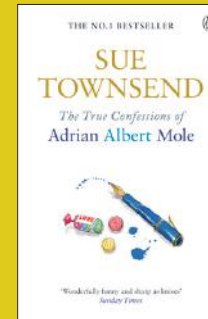
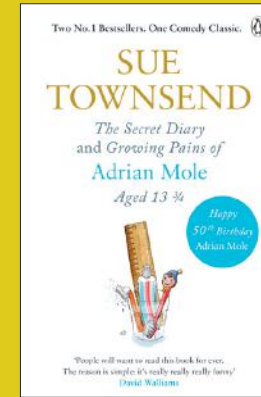
The new day dawns on my second half century. *(Takes some deep breaths)* Here in bracing Skegness with Rabid's Death Metal still playing on a loop in my sore head. My parents are obviously trying to brainwash me into signing the contract with Rabid's agent. Though I do seem to have a talent for ghost-writing. 'I know all I've ever wanted is to write full time, Mother,' I shouted after her as she

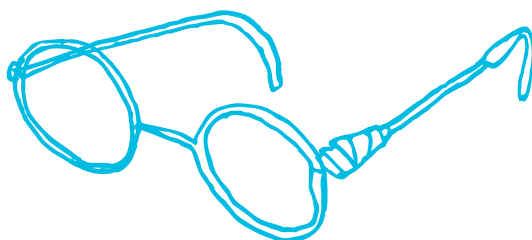
staggered back to her caravan in the early hours in those ridiculous heels nearly tipping my father into a feeding trough, 'but at what price?' 'Get yourself a girlfriend,' she slurred over her shoulder. I can see now that Lo! The Flat Hills of My Homeland would never have worked as a novel but it was all my own work. Part of me. *(Pause)* Though I didn't expect to be offered thirty thousand for ghosting Rabid, six times the normal fee. *(Pause)* Finlay-Rose looks as though she's expecting again and Glenn's post-traumatic stress lingers on. Wole still needs my help sometimes. And I have to think about Gracie's future.

Sun's breaking through now. I've always loved Pandora and I always will, but I have to let her go. My loins ached for Daisy as she clung to the decrepit shoulders of Fairfax-Lycett in the slow dances last night. But she's made her choice: to hitch her wagon to a dying breed. *(Takes more deep breaths)* Maybe good times are just around the corner. There was certainly a stirring down below when Sharon kissed me passionately in the sea last night before her ample rump went swimming off to rescue my rubber shoes.



The bestselling diaries of Adrian Mole





Happy 50th Birthday
Adrian Mole

#HappyBirthdayAdrianMole



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