THE SCOTS CANADIAN

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Top Canadian Writer to Receive Scot of the Year 2002 Award

Alistair MacLeod

The Scottish Studies Society is delighted to announce that Alistair MacLeod has been successfully nominated *Scot of the Year 2002*.

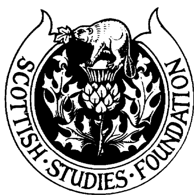
Presentation will take place at the Society's Annual Tartan Day Dinner which this year will take place at the Granite Club in Toronto on Wednesday, April 24th, with cocktails at 6:30pm followed by dinner at 7:30pm.

Alistair's popularity means that the event will be very well attended so please ensure that you reserve in plenty of time!

As usual, there will be an ample portion of the fine things associated with a grand Scottish evening. The skirl of the 48th Highlanders Pipes and Drums, the foot-stomping fiddling of Sandy MacIntyre's Band, and a fine selection of Scottish folksongs by Danielle Bourre, as well as the ever-popular *Address to the Haggis* by George Walker, plus the opportunity to dance.

Scots Wha Hae

a desire to nurture and preserve their heritage in Canada are invited to join



THE SCOTTISH STUDIES FOUNDATION

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Alistair MacLeod was born in North Battleford, Saskatchewan in 1936, and at the age of ten returned to the family farm in Cape Breton.

After completing high school, MacLeod attended teacher's college in Truro and then taught school. Deciding to further his education, he attended St. Francis Xavier University between 1957 and 1960 graduating with a B.A. and B.Ed. MacLeod then went on to receive his MA in 1961 from the University of New Brunswick and a Ph.D. in 1968 from the University of Notre Dame.

A specialist in British literature of the nineteenth century, MacLeod taught English for three years at the University of Indiana before accepting a post in 1969 at the University of Windsor where he is a Professor of English and Creative Writing.

He and his family return to Cape Breton every summer, where he spends part of his time... "writing in a cliff-top cabin looking west towards Prince Edward Island."

"No Great Mischief" gained Alistair MacLeod the 2001 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award -- the largest and most international prize of its kind. Involving libraries from all corners of the globe, it is open to books written in any language. The Award is a joint initiative of Dublin Corporation, the Municipal Government of Dublin City, and the productivity improvement company IMPAC. The Award is administered by Dublin Corporation Public Libraries.

Alistair 's work includes fourteen short stories, collected in *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (1976) and *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* (1986). In 1999, he published his first novel, *No Great Mischief*, which follows the lives of several generations of a family that emigrates from Scotland to Cape Breton, the setting of many of MacLeod's short stories.

Written over the course of thirteen years, *No Great Mischief* achieved much critical acclaim and has been translated into many different languages. Nominated for all of Canada's major literary awards, the novel was awarded the Trillium Prize.

To quote from the *Celtic Review*..."Alistair MacLeod writes of lonely places and lonely people, in the far off reaches of Cape Breton Island and mainland Nova Scotia.

"His characters are the descendants of dislocated Scots, torn from their homes in Scotland during the Highland Clearances of the 19th century, when raising cattle and sheep was far more enticing and profitable to landlords than tenants who reared only children.

"They bear resemblance to the island peoples off the coasts of Scotland, who were – and in some cases still are - bound by the tactile circumference of their landscape as well as bound by generations of tradition."

For further information on the Tartan Day Dinner, please contact Robert Stewart at 905.294.4389 or by email at rstewart@pathcom.com.

Letter from the Chair

Dear Fellow Members,

I am pleased to advise you that, since my last letter, the Campaign for Scottish Studies, a joint effort between the Scottish Studies Foundation and the University of Guelph, has continued to attract significant donations from the private and corporate sector. If we combine the assets of the Foundation and the funds raised by the Campaign, we have now reached the $1.5 million mark bringing us ever closer to our goal of the $2 million needed to fund the Chair of Scottish Studies at Guelph.

This represents a magnificent effort on the part of everyone involved and I would like to especially acknowledge the wonderful team that we have working very hard behind the scenes for our cause. Many thanks to dedicated people like Red Wilson, Alistair Gillespie, Donald MacDonald, Roy MacLaren, Michael MacMillan, Kathie Macmillan, Ian Ronald, Ed Stewart, Alan McKenzie, Murray McEwan, William Fatt as well as Bruce Hill and Rudy Putns of the University of Guelph's Development Office and others who have succeeded in persuading many influential people of the importance of keeping the Scottish tradition alive and well in Canada.

I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement of each and every one of our members. Your support is tangible evidence of the enthusiasm that exists in the country for protection of our heritage and the high level of donations over and above the basic membership fees that we receive from the membership is truly wonderful. Thank you all very much.

As I mentioned to you in the last issue of the newsletter, it was our intention to hold an Annual Meeting and this took place in December. Minutes of this meeting will be sent to you and will give you a sense of the issues at hand.

As a result of the Meeting, a new Board of Directors was elected and I am delighted to have the opportunity to work with this talented and dedicated team all of whom have volunteered their valuable time and skills to further our objectives.

I should point out that it was with some regret that we were unsuccessful in persuading women to serve on the Foundation Board this time around. To address this situation, Nola Crewe, one of our patrons, has suggested that a nomination committee be formed to identify and attract new board members in the future and we will act on this advice. Fortunately, we still have some vacancies on the Board of the Society, so if you know of anyone who might be interested in this please put them in touch.

Moving on to a more recent event, I would like to thank Gordon Hepburn and his team for organizing the Burns Night on January 26. The event was well attended and memorable for all who were able to be there. It also made a welcome profit which we are able to add to our funds.

Special thanks to Wm. Grant & Sons, Sandy MacIntyre and his Trio, the 48th Highlanders Pipes & Drums, the Tunnochbrae Dancers and the Colony Hotel. As well, a very big thank you to Hugh Heron for doing the *Toast to the Lassies* and to Daisy White for giving a very able *Reply*; and to George Walker for giving the *Address to the Haggis* and to Gordon Hepburn himself for a wonderful *Immortal Memory*.

And to all of you across the country and overseas, once again, on behalf of the Foundation, I thank you for all your wonderful encouragement and support.

David Hunter

The "Board" on parade

John B. McMillan , J.H. Iain MacMillan , Duncan Campbell, Dr. Paul Thomson, David Hunter, Gordon Hepburn, Alan McKenzie Dr. Edward E. Stewart, Bill Somerville (Past SSF Chair & Society Governor). Missing from the scene: William P. Shaw and Dr. Kevin James

Details of the Board on Page 8

Spring Colloquium to be held on March 16, 2002

The Scottish Studies Foundation and the Scottish Studies Program at the University of Guelph will be holding their annual Spring Open House and Student Colloquium March 16, 2002. (Room TBA)

The Scottish Studies Program at the University of Guelph is an interdepartmental group established to co-ordinate graduate studies in the history, literature and culture of Scotland and Scottish settlements in Canada.

As such, the Spring Colloquium offers a perfect opportunity to highlight areas of research undertaken by graduate students and faculty members at the University of Guelph.

This year we invite you to experience first-hand the work being done at Guelph in the areas of Scottish history. David Livingston-Lowe will offer an introductory Gaelic lesson, students will present their research and members of the Scottish Studies Program will be on hand to provide information on course offerings, areas of expertise, library holdings and Scottish history in general.

A full itinerary will be available on-line by the end of February at www.uoguelph.ca/history/scotstudy or for more information please contact:

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First Burns Night a great Success

The pipes and drums raised the roof of the Colony Hotel on January 26 as the Society's first Burns Night swung into action. Gordon Hepburn was MC for the night and also gave *The Immortal Memory*, George Walker recited his memorable *Ode tae a Haggis*, Hugh Heron toasted *The Lassies* and Daisie White gave a truly memorable reply. Sandy MacIntyre and his Trio had everyone up dancing and the Tunnochbrae Dancers gave a spectacular performance of Scottish Dancing. Thanks to Gordon, Duncan Campbell and Bill Somerville for organizing a great evening.

The Pipes and Drums of the 48th Highlanders

Hugh Heron giving the toast to *The Lassies*

Traditional Scottish dancing by the Tunnochbrae Dancers

Daisie White gives the *Reply from the Lassies.*

The following week, Daisie's cousin, Ian Fleming, appeared in *Every Blessed Thing* (see p.7)

The Arrival of the Haggis.

Sandy MacIntyre and his Trio

Anne and Ed Patrick, Daisie White, Bill Somerville, Gina Erichsen and Gordon Hepburn (MC and event organizer)

Photos by Paul Thomson and Bill Somerville

Remembering the Settlers

by David Hunter

You don't have to be in Canada very long to become aware of its strong Scottish traditions. Last September, I happened to be in Winnipeg and went for a walk down by the Red River. By accident I happened to come across the Scots Monument erected to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the Selkirk settlers from the Highlands of Scotland. Upon my return I put together the following information, gleaned from various sources.

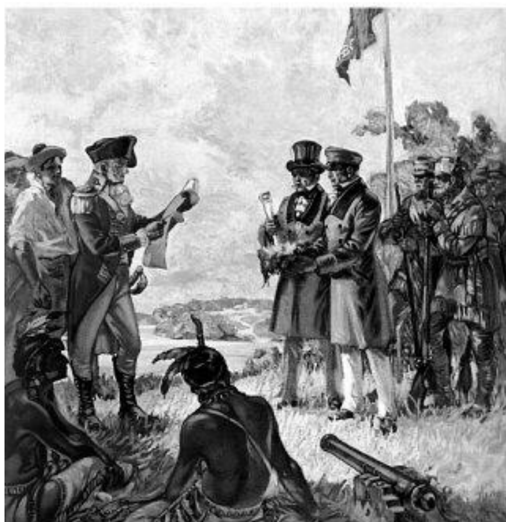
Anyone who has ever attended a Burns Supper is bound to be familiar with his famous Grace which usually precedes the serving of the haggis. The story is that Burns was once invited to dine with Thomas Douglas, the 5th Earl of Selkirk, and when asked to say grace, he quickly came up with this:

Some hae meat but cannae eat,
Some wid eat that want it:
But we hae meat and we can eat,
And sae the Lord be thankit.

From that point on, it became known as the "Selkirk Grace" and is now affectionately recited whenever Scots gather to feast.

In Canada it was the very same Lord Selkirk who would become known as the founder of Canada's west, the man who established the Red River Colony in 1812.

Strategically located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, the Colony came about as the result of a large land grant by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Earl of Selkirk in 1812. Conveniently, Selkirk's family had gained control of the company in 1811.



Settlers arriving at the Red River Colony
Hudson's Bay Company Archives / Provincial Archives of Manitoba

Establishing a base at the centre of what is now downtown Winnipeg, Selkirk sent out a small number of Scots settlers who, with much difficulty, began eking out a living producing grain and vegetable crops in the new colony (which Selkirk called Assiniboia). It is clear, however, that without the help, guidance and protection of the natives, in particular Chief Pegius and his people, the Scots would have perished.

Food supplies remained precarious and conflict soon developed between the colony's administrators and the rival Montreal-based North West Company -- fur traders who had long relied on provisions from the area to support their long-distance trade routes into the northwestern interior.

In the course of the ensuing contest for control, the main settlement at Red River was destroyed and in 1815 the inhabitants dispersed. But within a few years, Selkirk rebuilt and repopulated it, this time recruiting disbanded members of a regiment of Swiss mercenaries (the de Meurons) who had served with British forces in central Canada during the War of 1812.

In 1821, when the Hudson's Bay Company absorbed the North West Company, the old conflicts which had hindered the colony's development disappeared, but other difficulties arose. Adapting European-style farming to the short growing season of the region proved difficult and the uncertainties facing grain growers were exacerbated by attacks of locusts and difficult-to-control plant diseases. In 1826, the settlement was washed away in the first of what were to become routine, but seemingly always unanticipated, Red River floods.

By the middle of the 19th Century threats to the colony's future stemmed from cultural conflicts built into its heritage. The Presbyterian Scots settlers had little in common with the substantial and growing Metis population made up of French-speaking Roman Catholics. As the Hudson's Bay Company lost interest in subsidizing immigration from Scotland the Metis population of Red River came to outnumber the Europeans there.

The Scots Monument

Erected 1993, it depicts a Scots thistle, dedicated to Thomas Douglas, 5th Earl of Selkirk, and marks the historical origins of Manitoba as a European settled territory.

By the 1860s the stage was set for a more serious clash of interests in the region between what was by then a largely French-speaking, Roman Catholic community and another wave of newcomers to the west from central Canada.

In 1993, thanks to the generous donations of members, corporations and friends of the St. Andrews Society of Winnipeg, a monument was built to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the Selkirk settlers from the highlands of Scotland.

The monument is located at the site of Fort Douglas at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in Winnipeg. The area is known as Kildonan, named after the place Selkirk came from in Scotland.

Selkirk's first settlers arrived there in 1812 after a hazardous 14-month journey from Scotland via Hudson's Bay and Manitoba's inland waterways. Construction of historic Fort Douglas began immediately.

Lord Selkirk was adamant that the native peoples were treated with justice and instructed his people accordingly. The Earl made a treaty with the five chiefs, Oukidoat, Muchiwikoab, Rayagierebmoa, Muchitoovkoonace, Chief Peguis in August 1817. Later, in a letter, Peguis wrote, "I still hold the colony under my care as an eagle keeps its prey in its talons - I shall hold sacred the promises I made."

The Scots Monument honours all Scots and their descendants who settled in the provinces, territories and districts of this vast and beautiful country and offers sincere thanks to our native people. ■

An Interview with Alistair MacLeod

by
Robert Jarovi

Robert Jarovi: You impress me as a writer who crafts strong stories apart from the literary trends of the day or personal fame. Has this always been so?
Alistair Macleod: Yes I think so. I try to craft strong stories, as you say. I try to make stories that will endure and that will stand the rain, so to say, and I try to do the best that I can. I write slowly and carefully and I hope that the end result is worthy of this so called dedication.
RJ: Have you ever been criticized for a perceived slower output, say by someone from the outside who merely reads your biography or the back-cover of your books?
AM: I think that I do do other things. I teach, and I have other aspects of my life. And I don't write eight hours a day. I don't know if anybody really does. You know there is always this idea that perhaps your book should be out pretty soon and so on, but again I just do the best that I can with what I've got.
RJ: You seem to have reconciled your career as a writer, and a professor of literature. When you teach creative writing is there a third self between those two poles?
AM: I think there is, but it's a very friendly third self, because you are dealing with literature in all three areas: as a writer of it, as a teacher of it, and as a midwife to help younger writers give birth to what is within. So I think the three merge quite satisfactorily. I like the Creative Writing because it is always fresh and always new and you are always dealing with new material. Hopefully you are making the process better for other people.

It's different in that the standard literature more or less stays the same, although there is room for interpretations. If you are taking a text say, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" you can have confidence in the stability of the text over a certain period of time. Whereas if you read a story written by a young person whose subject is how much she dislikes her mother, or a story that deals with the difficulties of love, the texts are always changing. So the night before, or the week before you discuss that kind of work, there is a heavy investment in time that is not the same in teaching literature. It is to use the term, labour intensive.
RJ: You have stressed in your creative writing classes the uniqueness of the writer's experience and to encourage that personal voice. How does one go about tracing a personal history?
AM: Well I start by telling the student, "Write what you care about". And if they really care about their subject then it will be the best for them. I think all great writers are like this, though certain subjects keep repeating themselves: The nature of love, the yearning to belong, and so on. I think what one tries to develop is the unique voice that is the individual, and stress that no one has your fingerprints, your insights or your vision of life. I think that one must remember that great writers are themselves first, and that they don't lust after each others material. W.O. Mitchell does not lust after Mordecai Richler's material, nor did D.H. Lawrence after Henry James'.

What you try to do is make every student the best that he or she can be. We are not in the business of clone writing. I really don't like schools of writing where someone says "Oh, you come from such-and-such a college, and everybody there writes about masturbation". I think that if everybody who comes out of a program writing a certain way, and they have to do that to get an A, then a lot of those people are sublimating their own individuality to get through the program. They are all saying, "Well, if the boss instructor wants stories on sex with trees, then we'll write about sex with trees". But deep in their hearts they are probably saying, "Not my subject at all". I think that whenever you get programs that foster certain kinds of styles or subjects you are negating the personality of those who are in there.
RJ: But it must be hard for younger students who have role models and read biographies and have a different image of the process.
AM: It's very difficult for them because we all begin by reading the works of other people, and influence is very strong. What you have to do is use the influence to help you, but you have to kick free; eventually your own voice has to emerge.
RJ: You had your start in the small literary press. How important are they to the overall literary scene, especially in these economic times which have become quite hostile towards the artist?
AM: It's very had to know. Norman Levine has a story called, "We All Begin in a Little Magazine". So people have to begin somewhere. The university student has his faculty journal. I think there are more journals out there than there has ever been, and journalists and editors like yourself are hardworking individuals. In these harsh times we are encountering, and in the mindset of the present government, funding may be threatened, but I think stories will always go on, the way music, or art will always go on in spite of people who may not perceive its importance. These people are wrong.
RJ: My great-grandmother recently passed away. She was from Czechoslovakia and the last of her generation. A part of me feels I will not truly know her because I am separated by a language I will never speak, and a tradition I know little about. How important are oral histories to you as a writer?
AM: I think as I have said we all come from some place, and if you are in your place for some time, your place intensifies you. And if you move away, there may be some kind of alienation or some loss that takes place. And this is true if your ancestors came from another culture. If you are unable to speak the language, you lose some of the freedom that results from that kind of interchange.

One of the interesting things about this country is the intensity of Quebec literature. And that's because they have a culture where everyone can pretty well speak to their grandmothers or their great-grandmothers! Once you lose the language of a previous generation, you lose access to those people. What you have very often in this country is a kind of uniligual grandparents, and a middle generation who are bilingual, and a third generation who have to resort to a pidgin-Czechoslovakian.

Getting back to your idea of oral history, I think we should realise that "story" is much older than literacy, you know, and that all kinds of people tell stories who can't read or write. But I think that as a writer, and I'm quite interested in this, I like to give the impression that I am telling the story rather than writing the story. Because I have, in the back of my mind, the idea that some of these stories could be told by people who do not read or write. All culture has oral history, all culture has story. Some cultures are more literate than others, but they all have stories. It is interesting to think that what we do as writers comes from storytelling, which is I think as old as man.
RJ: Many of your stories contrast the integrity of small communities with the anxiety of the large metropolis, the strength of a close family with distance or ambivalence of the extended one.
AM: I think we must realize that the concept of home means different things to different people. So people can't stand their homes wherever their homes may be and want to get out of them as fast as they can. And other people wish to stay in their homes with their

families, with their landscape and so on. I think one of the tensions in a lot of my stories, and this relates back to the situation of Newfoundland today, is that, because of economic circumstances, people have to do what they do not want to do. You are economically driven to do what you emotionally do not want to do.

RJ: So then I wonder if the concept of the exile you had developed in your stories twenty or thirty years ago differs from now.

AM: I don't think so. The whole world is full of people on the move for economic reasons. If you look at the world, you see all these people migrating, moving, going to be the toilet-cleaners of other societies. I am interested in people doing things they do not like to do all of the time.

RJ: Those sentiments reminds me of the South Asian writers now living in Canada. Many find Canada home, but still long for their origins.

AM: Well those are very intense voices. Rohinton Mistry writes about different things than I do but we are both engaged in the same business. I could never do his work, because he goes so deep. He knows we are all the same in a macro-culture, but in a micro-culture his world is very different from mine.

When my students ask, "What should I write about?" I say, "Well write about what you think about, what worries you". I think your landscape dictates what you worry about. I think the literature that comes from a cold place, is a different kind of literature, because we worry about different things. My work is very popular in Scandinavia, and translated into Russian and so on, and I think its because we share that same landscape.

RJ: I think Glenn Gould wrote about that in his "Idea of North". Even his choice of repertoire shows this: Sibelius and Grieg instead of say, Chopin, Liszt or Debussy.

AM: Yes, I think if you live anywhere in Canada, and I'm talking to you now in February, you can freeze to death anywhere with maybe the exception of Victoria. Nobody in Miami in February will freeze to death. Other things might happen to them, but not freezing to death. So I think there's a whole body of worry and concerns inflicted upon us in the winter: antifreeze, the car starting, the mitts, and so on. I think there are certain worries which come from certain landscapes, and I think that if you live in Saskatchewan or Newfoundland your landscape is different. You worry about the tides, the drought, the rain or whether the cod fish will come or not. And landscape induced worries condition how you feel.

RJ: Rather than trying to put the ideas first.

AM: I think that all art comes from feeling first, then you discipline your feeling. If you feel like kicking your cat because you are grumpy, it's probably not art, but it is a feeling. What you try to do is impose the discipline on the feeling, so the feeling is able to flower as best as it can.

RJ: Your famous story, "The Boat" deals with a boy who came to realise -- and this is one of your big themes -- that "... it was very much braver to spend a life doing what you really do not want rather than selfishly following your dreams and inclinations."

AM: One of the things I was dealing with there was how you look at your parents when you are young. You kind of think that parents know everything, and later you think they know nothing, and still later you think they know a little bit. But it never entered in his mind that his father would want to do the same thing that he wanted to do, like go to university to read books. Because he thinks that everybody who fishes, fishes, and everybody who works in the car plant, works in the car plant. They are all interchangeable parts. But later he has that kind of moment where he sort of says, just because you do it does not necessarily mean that you like it, or you could not have done other things.

RJ: The mother had a contempt for the reading of books. It was not real work.

AM: I didn't mean to paint the mother harshly. What I was dealing with there, is that she knows how to live a life, you know, and it's a certain kind of life. Her view is so solid and it's been sustained for generations of people. I think of that woman as someone who really knows how to do it; to live a life. But then she says, well none of my girls are interested in the right things. Well, what's the right thing? The right thing for her is not the right thing for them.

RJ: The prospect of death weighs on many of your characters. Is it something about rural Nova Scotia and Cape Breton which creates an immediate awareness of mortality, or is it the vast Gaelic melancholy they inherited?

AM: I think it's a bit of both. I read an article the other day about equity in the workplace and so on and there were certain professions that weren't making much progress in terms of equity, and they were described as the killer professions. And the killer professions were mining, construction work, logging and fishing. I guess what I'm saying is that a lot of people are going to die doing the work, whereas I'm probably not going to die as a university professor. But there are professions where people lay their bodies on the line every day and which are very dangerous. Everybody talks about stress and anxiety in the work environment, but not everybody is engaged in work where you may lose your hand, or your eye or your life. So I think these people have different kinds of anxieties and different kinds of fears, and I think the families of these people share in that; because if your father or husband is swept overboard or killed by a log or killed in a rock fall, your life will be forever different.

There are a lot of children now without fathers, and parents without sons. I'm interested in people who use their bodies in the fulfillment of their destinies because they are doing something that other people are not doing. The Highland melancholy [laughs] or whatever it was you referred to, I think this comes from the same kind of people. This is what they were doing in the Highlands, you know, they were always worried about being swept overboard or killed in wars, frozen in snow drifts.

RJ: Now I ask the inevitable novel question.

AM: I'm working on the inevitable novel. And one of the differences between writing a novel and short stories is that it takes a long time. Most of those short stories I wrote when I was kind of consumed by a certain idea, and when you write a novel -- and I work mostly in the summers -- months can go by before I pick it up again, and I say, "Oh I'm not sure if I want to be saying this anymore". There is a time lag that takes place. So it is different and more of a spider-web effect; you touch something on this end and there are reverberations.

RJ: You probably could not have had that scope earlier in your career.

AM: I think you are probably right. I hope this will work out, that I have done the right thing by deciding to write this novel. The stories are to my own mind rather intense, and I don't know if you can sustain that intensity for three hundred pages. We'll see. I am not being coy, but you can't be finished until it is finished.

I'd like to say: "In twenty years time who will read this?" But that's the luxury maybe I have what a lot of 20-year-olds don't have, because they are working for the moment to pass their course for a job or whatever. But you really have to, if you can, have a long-range view of your work. Virginia Wolfe once said James Joyce's work when she first read it reminded her of an undergraduate scratching his pimples! History has proven her quite wrong in that judgment. But if Joyce upon reading that said "Well I guess I can't do this anymore, I'm going to quit and get a job in the dairy" or something like that then we would all be the poorer.

If you can believe that what you are doing is good enough you shouldn't be dissuaded by people from the other religion, or other political party.

Robert Jarovi was born in Windsor, Ontario where he completed his BA in English & Philosophy. In his first year in 1986 he took MacLeod's course on English Romanticism and was forever changed.

As others see us

This is an excerpt from an article written by Ron Ferguson while he was visiting Canada. It appeared in The [Glasgow] Herald on February 7th under the title "Count your Blessings, not Bonuses." Ron Ferguson recently retired as the minister of St. Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands of Scotland. His weekly columns and poetry appear in The Herald.

It's as if George MacLeod is alive and well and living in Toronto. As I close my eyes, I hear the late founder of the Iona Community speak with his familiar inflections. He harangues the audience - as he always did - then produces gales of laughter with a witty aside. I open my eyes again, and there, on the stage, is not MacLeod, but one of Scotland's finest actors and directors.

Tom Fleming and I touched down at Pearson International airport in Toronto on a deceptively mild January evening. It was literally the calm before the storm. Now it is real winter.

Fleming is here to perform *Every Blessed Thing,* a one-man show about George MacLeod, and I am due to preach twice at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church. Until a couple of years or so ago, its minister was a Scot, the Rev T Kerr Spiers, father of sportswriting guru Graham Spiers of this very newspaper.

I scripted the play for Fleming after hearing him read some of MacLeod's prayers on BBC radio. *Every Blessed Thing* was first performed at the St Magnus Festival, where Fleming's electrifying performance earned him the first standing ovation in the festival's history.

Since then, MacLeod has played in venues in Scotland and England. These audiences included people who had once been maddened, exasperated, challenged, charmed, and inspired by George MacLeod, and found in a living theatre that it was impossible to keep even a dead good man down.

This is the first time the show has travelled abroad. How will it go down? Will Canadian audiences be interested in the story of a controversial Scottish cleric?

Our fears prove to be groundless. The shows are a sell-out. Tom Fleming is a truly remarkable actor. Without costume or make-up, he becomes old before your very eyes. The jokes are appreciated; then Toronto, feeling its own post-September 11 vulnerability, sits in uneasy silence as the theatrical MacLeod goes into rhetorical overdrive, inveighing eloquently against the nuclear-arms race.

Then a passionate MacLeod turns his theological searchlight on international finance.

I sit there, my mind turns from his words - first uttered in a sermon more than 50 years ago - to the contemporary protests against globalization, and to the current political scandal which is gripping North America.

The Enron story highlights the ugly face of global financial operations. The Canadian papers are full of it. US Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill says on television... "Part of the genius of capitalism is that people get to make good decisions or bad decisions. And they get to pay the consequences or to enjoy the fruits of their decisions."

But in the Enron case, the greedy company executives lied to their employees about the company's stability, encouraged workers to invest their pension funds in company stock, and then imposed rules against selling that stock - while, at the same time, arranging an executive bailout for themselves worth $1bn.

On stage in Toronto, George MacLeod is pleading that authentic religion must not separate the spiritual from the material, the financial from the moral, the soul from the body. For all his flaws, the tempestuous man is right. We need radically new ways of envisaging our fragile world. A spirituality which concentrates on deep breathing and lovely thoughts but leaves dehumanizing power structures unchallenged is a bastardized travesty. One of religion's primary tasks is to comfort the disturbed, and disturb the comfortable.

The Toronto audience, having experienced a bewildering two-hour encounter with a disturbing and inspiring Scottish prophet, rises to its feet to accord a standing ovation. And a drained Scottish actor slips out of a side door, into a dark and freezing North American night. ■

From the Mailbox

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Gathering of the Clans

Every four years, the International Gathering of the Clans is held in Nova Scotia and in 2003, we will again be hosting the event during the last week in June. People planning to attend the opening must get tickets by December or January. I thought your members might be interested in this.

Jean L. Watson (co-chair)
Lr. Sackville, Nova Scotia
(jean.watson2@sympatico.ca)

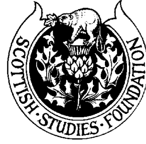
The need to know

I would like to see better notification about future events such as the Fall Colloquium, in the Newsletter and especially on the Website. A compilation of special events would encourage better participation. Details would be much appreciated.

Ruth Borthwick
Burlington, Ontario

Ed: I will be sure to pass this on to all concerned.

The Abbey on the Isle of Iona was founded by St. Columba in 563 AD, plundered numerous times by the Vikings and abandoned during the Reformation. Amidst much controversy, the Rev. George MacLeod commenced rebuilding of the site and established the ecumenical Iona Community in 1938. Many Canadians contributed to the project and during the war, Canadian timber jettisoned from a ship during a storm was used in the reconstruction. Photo: Jeanne Isley



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