

# The Mischievous Mr. Alistair McLeod

by Mariève MacGregor

"It was fun," said writer Alistair McLeod of his experience giving a reading of his latest book *No Great Mischief* at the UPEI Duffy Amphitheatre. A crowd of 300 + attendees showed up for the chance to hear the author on Saturday, September 13.

After a lengthy introduction by island writer Hugh MacDonald, McLeod sauntered to the platform where he was embellished with applause. When the ovation died down, he muttered wittily, "I feel like a lazy rock star."

The evening was hosted by the PEI Writer's Guild (PEIWG), who had been attempting to lure McLeod to the island for several years now.

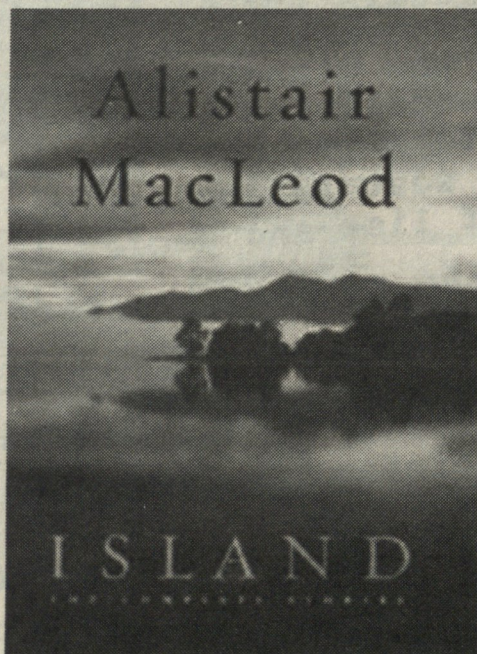
"It was difficult to get him because of his busy schedule," commented Yvette Doucette, Director of Red Clay Productions and an affiliate with PEIWG. With the arrival of his new book, along with a few phone calls at the right time, McLeod found the time to grace the island with his presence after such a long absence.

McLeod used to spend summers in a cottage in his beloved Cape Breton which possessed a view of PEI. Though his works are abundantly focussed on Cape Breton, his ties with PEI, especially its writing community, were strong enough to pull him in for an evening.

The hour and a half long reading was an emotional

experience for many. McLeod read a passage detailing a typical winter in a Maritime setting in the 1940's, where perhaps the ice was a little too thin that night and perhaps a new lighthouse attendant will have to be sought. Such scenes struck home to several members of his captive audience. Though some eyes were closed and some heads were tilted during the reading, this optimist believes that most were merely enjoying the visual stimulation at a deeper level. Other members of the audience had tears in their eyes as the vivid realism of McLeod's stories rekindled memories from their past.

Sylvia Hamilton and Nettie Tidd, two ladies of gracious years, commented that they attended the reading because, "He's a very intelligent writer. You don't always get to hear a writer read their works... I had heard him read before, probably about ten years ago, and I was very impressed...then I saw the ads that he was giving another reading..."



Though most of the younger crowd were less attune to the personal association which most of the older crowd possess when reading McLeod's stories, there was still a large number of them present.

Maria O'Brien, a 3rd year English Student, explained, "When you read McLeod's stories, you can hear Cape Breton and the music and the history in it. It takes amazing prose to be able to do that."

McLeod's tales are reaped and sown from Cape Breton soil. He captures the blood, sweat, tears, and pulse of everything that makes Cape Breton what it is. Though McLeod claims he never uses actual people as inspiration, many people who attended that night were able to revisit their grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and even their childhoods through the intricate details and the familiar 'Maritime' characteristics which McLeod so perfectly portrays.

In discussing his writing habits, McLeod admits that he writes one paragraph at a time, and will not continue until each paragraph has been perfected. He will read the sentences aloud and continue to rewrite until the spoken words are just as stunning as the written words. He often attempts 2 hours of writing every morning, but life sometimes gets in the way.

*No Great Mischief* was a 16 year trek, as is natural in all his writings. How did McLeod express his joy at the completion of this novel?

"Woof, finished before death."

## Norton's 25th Hour Compelling Drama

by Mark Cameron

What would you do if you only had one day left to live?

That is the question Spike Lee's *25th Hour* asks. Edward Norton plays Monty Brogan, a small-time New York drug dealer with ties to the local Russian Mafia. The last number of years have been good to him. He has a thriving (if some what illegal) business and a beautiful girlfriend, Naturelle, (Rosario Dawson) by his side.

Everything changes, however when someone rats him out, and the DEA comes knocking down his door to find "his stash." Faced with a seven-year jail sentence, Monty tries to go about his last day of freedom--- tying up loose ends with his girlfriend, his father, (Brian Cox) and his estranged childhood friends, Jacob (Phillip Seymour Hoffman) and Frank (Barry Pepper). One thing is for sure his life will never be the same. His options are few, even if he makes it out of prison as Frank points to Jacob:

"You think we're still going to be friends? You think we'll kick back with a couple beers and reminisce? Forget it, Jake. It's all over after tonight."

While his friends try to put up a good front, Monty is racked with questions: Did his girlfriend, Naturelle turn him in? How will he survive in prison with murderers and rapists? Would he be better off to kill himself? Or should he go on the lam and be forced to live in seclusion without his friends or family?

Norton is as good as always; to paraphrase Banion from *Seinfeld*, "He's gold, Jerry... GOLD!" As the protagonist, he's not sorry for his crime; he's only remorseful he was caught and feels guilty his line of work made him loose touch with his family and friends. And as his *25th Hour* approaches, it's up to the viewer to decide where his destiny lies, which makes for a much more compelling ending.

*25th Hour* was lost in the shuffle of all the big-budget films that came out this year, but if you're looking for a good flick, on video or DVD this is the one to see.