

Malcolm MacKenzie Ross
1911-2002



ROSS, Malcolm MacKenzie, OC, MA, PhD, DLitt, LLD, DSL, FRSC, Professor Emeritus of English at Dalhousie University, and a vital figure in 20th century Canadian culture, passed away suddenly but peacefully on November 4, 2002, in his 92nd year, surrounded by family and friends in QEII Health Sciences Centre, from complications due to pneumonia. He was born on January 2, 1911, to Charles Duff Ross and Cora Elizabeth Hewitson Ross in Fredericton, N.B. where his life-long sense of family, community, democracy, social justice, and wit had its roots, as did his early love of literature inspired by his father--a man of literary ability--and in a place well-known for literary giants such as Sir Charles G.D. Roberts and Bliss Carman.

After graduating from the University of New Brunswick in 1933, and encouraged by Professor Malcolm MacPherson (a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and later a Labour M.P. in the British House of Commons), Ross attended the University of Toronto where he received his M.A. under the tutelage of the eminent A.S.P. Woodhouse. He married Lois Natalie Hall on June 4, 1938, which began a remarkable 58 year partnership that lasted until her death in 1996. Ross taught at several universities--the University of New Brunswick, the University of Canton in China, the University of Alberta, and Cornell University--before receiving his Ph.D. from Cornell in 1941. A year later he returned to Canada from his post at the University of Indiana, prompted by a real desire to help the war effort. Rejected by all three services for medical reasons, he was hired by John Grierson as Director of Distribution at the National Film Board from 1942-45. During this period he criss-crossed Canada setting up screenings of NFB wartime propaganda films, his love and knowledge of Canada nurtured by Grierson's own.

In 1945, he joined the English Department at the University of Manitoba where he fostered an extraordinary group of students, including Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman. In 1950, after a year's study on a Guggenheim Fellowship, Ross became Professor of English at Queen's University and was Department Head from 1957-62. He was Editor of the Queen's Quarterly which he shaped and revitalized from 1953-56, and in 1960 he was appointed the first James Cappon Professor of English. During this period Ross decided that if Canadian literature was to be taught in full course format in Canadian universities out-of-print Canadian titles should be published in inexpensive paperback editions. Over a two-year period, he persuaded a former student, Jack McClelland, of this need, and the New Canadian Library was born in 1958. Ross retired as General Editor of the NCL in 1978 having brought 168 titles into the series.

In 1962, he went to Trinity College, University of Toronto as Professor of English, serving as Dean of Arts there from 1965-68 and as Acting-Provost from 1967-68. In 1968 Ross, in a very real sense, came home to Nova Scotia. His father had been stationed in Halifax at the Citadel with the Royal Canadian Regiment, and his father's sisters had married Nova Scotians from Cape Breton, Canning, and Lunenburg. Ross's middle name, MacKenzie, was that of his Cape Breton uncle, Jack MacKenzie. His uncle Colonel Albert Anderson from Lunenburg, who played an outstanding role in directing the military response to the 1917 Halifax Explosion, was a very great support to him during his lifetime. Albert's son, Douglas Anderson, had a long and important career with Nova Scotia Power.

As he had done elsewhere, from 1968-1982 Ross taught Renaissance, Victorian, and Canadian literature at Dalhousie University where he had acted as an outside consultant in the structuring of the new PhD program in English in 1967. At Dalhousie he became the Thomas McCulloch

Professor of English, supervised over 50 graduate theses, and was a constant colleague and friend to faculty and students alike. On different occasions he was President (Section II) of the Royal Society of Canada; Chair of the Nuffield Committee on Humanities and Social Sciences, the National Council of Canadian Colleges and Universities Committee in Teaching and Research, and the Committee for the Governor-General's Award for Literature; member of the National Executive of the Humanities Association of Canada, the Advisory Board of the National Library of Canada, the Arts Advisory Panel of the Canada Council; and member and then President of the Canada Council's Academic Panel. He was a founding member of the Association of Canadian Colleges and University Teachers of English, the Board of the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproduction, and the Board of the National Committee for Advanced Research chaired by Dr. Fraser Mustard.

During 1982-83 he was Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh; he travelled extensively throughout the British Isles and visited major European capitals to give lectures on Canada and Canadian literature. Through his efforts at sharing his expertise in Canadian literature and culture, both at home and abroad, in various lecture tours, Ross blazed the trail for the establishment of many international centres for Canadian Studies around the world. His advice given during his Edinburgh residence has led to the establishment of two different reprint series for out-of-print Scottish literature. His contributions to Halifax and Nova Scotia culture are many. As Chair of the Committee on Cultural Activities, Ross planned with his committee and John Crompton the opening ceremonies of the Dalhousie Arts Centre, as well as the programming of the Centre for a number of years. He also served on the boards of the Neptune Theatre, the Atlantic Symphony, and the Dalhousie Art Gallery. For his encouragement and mentoring of Nova Scotia writers he was made an Honorary Life Member of the Writers' Federation of Nova Scotia. In 2001, he received the Halifax Mayor's Award for Cultural Achievement in Literature. Ross's publications include *Milton's Royalism* (1943), *Our Sense of Identity* (1954), *Poetry and Dogma* (1954), *The Arts in Canada* (1958), and *The Impossible Sum of Our Traditions* (1986), and many notable articles and reviews in learned journals. With John Stevens, he co-edited *Man and His World* (1961) and a number of other high school English texts. Ross was also a regular contributor to CBC Radio's "Critically Speaking" Series with Robert Weaver and to CBC Television's "Fighting Words" with Nathan Cohen.

Ross was awarded the Order of Canada in 1976, the Lorne Pierce Medal of the Royal Society of Canada in 1981, the Northern Telecom International Award in Canadian Studies in 1985, the Diplome d'Honneur from the Canadian Conference of the Arts in 1990 for distinguished service to the arts in Canada, the Queen's Silver (1977) and Golden (2002) Jubilee Medals from the Office of the Governor-General, and eleven honorary degrees from universities in Canada and Scotland.

Ross is survived by his daughter, Julie Martha Ross, Halifax; nephews, Brian E. Purdy (Millie), Grimsby, Ont.; William A. Findlay (Laura), Willowdale, Ont.; Robert J. Findlay (Maureen), Essex, England; Douglas J. Findlay (Nancy), Shelburne, Ont.; Donald H. Findlay (Sheilla) Kingston; niece, Judy Lord Young (David), Sackville; many great and great great-nieces and nephews. A memorial service will be held Friday, November 29, at 7.00 p.m. in St. George's Church, "The Round Church", 2222 Brunswick St., Halifax, Canon Gary Thorne and The Reverend Douglas Chard officiating. A reception will follow in the church hall. In lieu of

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flowers, donations may be made to St. George's Anglican Church, Halifax or to Hope Cottage,
2435 Brunswick St., Halifax.

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