

# Scottish Catholic Literature And the “transfiguration of the commonplace”

The 2024 Pluscarden Pentecost Lectures  
given by Dr Linden Bicket, University of Edinburgh

21st – 23rd May 2024 at Pluscarden Abbey, near Elgin

1. Tuesday 21st May at 3.00 pm  
Faithful Fictions: What is Catholic Literature?
2. Wednesday 22nd May at 10.30 am  
George and Ann Scott—Moncrieff
3. Wednesday 22nd May at 3.00 pm  
George Friel and Muriel Spark
4. Thursday 23rd May at 10.30 am  
George Mackay Brown

Each year the Abbot and Community of Pluscarden Abbey sponsor a series of four lectures by an invited Theologian on an aspect of Catholic Theology. Previous Lecturers have included Fr Aidan Nichols OP, Fr Martin Boland, Fr Anthony Meredith SJ, Fr Paul McPartlan, Prof. Carol Zaleski, and Fr Ian Kerr. The Lectures are held on the Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday after Pentecost in St Scholastica’s Retreat House at the Abbey. They are open to all who wish to attend and are free (donations are always welcome). Limited accommodation is available at the Abbey and those who wish to stay should book as soon as possible. There are also many places to stay in the Elgin area: contact the local tourist office: 01343 542666.

## The Lecturer



Linden Bicket is Lecturer in Literature and Religion in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. The author of *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), her research focuses on Catholic literature, and on patterns of faith and scepticism in modern writing. She is co-editor (with Professor Kirsteen McCue) of George Mackay Brown's *An Orkney Tapestry* (Birlinn, 2021), and also co-editor (with Professor Alison Jack and Dr Emma Dymock) of *Scottish Religious Poetry: An Anthology*, which will be published by Hymns Ancient and Modern in 2024. She is a frequent contributor to radio programming and regularly delivers the “Thought for the Day” on BBC Radio Scotland.

## The Lectures

## Scottish Catholic literature and the “transfiguration of the commonplace”



### Overall theme:

While the “golden age” of the English Catholic novel is frequently documented by scholars, and new studies of Graham Greene’s and Evelyn Waugh’s literary Catholicism continue to be published, the story of Scottish Catholic literature in the twentieth century is only beginning to be told. This series of lectures will chart the lives and work of a select group of Scottish Catholic writers in the modern era. Lectures will consider the ways in which Scottish Catholic poetry and prose interacts with and departs

from the conventions of the most canonical examples of Catholic creative writing. This survey will explore the rich sacramental and incarnational heart of works informed by the literary imaginaries of some of Scotland’s most famous, and critically neglected Catholic writers over the last hundred years.

### Lecture 1: Faithful Fictions: what is Catholic Literature?

How might we begin to understand and define Catholic creative writing? This lecture will explore the many contrasting definitions of Catholic fiction, using examples from works by writers including Flannery O’Connor, Graham Greene, and Evelyn Waugh.

### Lecture 2: George and Ann Scott-Moncrieff

The literary converts George and Ann Scott-Moncrieff were both successful, much-read writers of the twentieth century “Scottish Literary Renaissance”, though they are less well known today. This lecture will explore their lives, writing, and rich literary legacy.

### Lecture 3: George Friel and Muriel Spark

While Muriel Spark is one of the best-known Catholic writers of the twentieth century, and with Greene and Waugh forms what Martin Stannard calls “a grand triumvirate of Catholic-convert novelists”, the work of her cradle Catholic contemporary, George Friel, is much less discussed. This lecture will focus specifically on a comparison of their novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and *Mr Alfred M.A.*

### Lecture 4: George Mackay Brown

Sometimes called “the bard of Orkney” George Mackay Brown is now known as one of twentieth-century Scotland's finest writers of poetry, short fiction, and the novel. This lecture will explore the landscape of grace in his work, which passed everything, as Seamus Heaney put it, “through the eye of the needle of Orkney”.

For further information contact the Abbey at [monks@pluscardenabbey.org](mailto:monks@pluscardenabbey.org)  
and to book accommodation at the Abbey contact the Guestmaster at  
[guestmaster@pluscardenabbey.org](mailto:guestmaster@pluscardenabbey.org).