# Convocation 2016 - Citation by Dr. Gordon Johnston: Morning Ceremony June 8, 2016

## 5 minutes 02 seconds in length

[Trent University logo]

[Applause]

>> GORDON JOHNSTON: Mr. Chancellor, Linwood Barclay first came to Trent as a student in 1973. While he was here he was a student of mine and since then he's been a very dear friend. I mention that in order to explain to you that because we know each other so well he will not expect me to be entirely solemn or serious in my presentation of him.

So this is a kind of homecoming for him. Back to the place where he met one of his heroes, Margaret Laurence, when she was writer in residence. And perhaps more significantly back to the place where he met Neetha, whom he married and with whom he has lived happily ever after.

[Applause]

Although you may want to check with Neetha about that.

He had already written a few crime novels set in Bobcaygeon when he arrived here. He always wanted to be a crime suspense thriller writer when he grew up. The problem is that he never grew up.

[Laughter]

From some angles he looks like a case of arrested development.

[Laughter]

He has for example a huge room in his basement filled with a vast, detailed, model train set which he loves to show off to visitors. I sometimes wonder if he became a successful writer in order to afford his expensive hobbies.

His success as a writer was not immediate. He had to work at other careers in order to be able to write, first as a reporter for The Peterborough Examiner and later as various kinds of editor at The Toronto Star, and then as a columnist for The Star. All of these careers gave him raw material for his plots and settings, and insights into the workings of people and small communities. Writing the column particularly set him up for what we know now as a Barclay thriller. They were often about family, the domestic mischances and comedies that we recognize in the novels, we all recognize from our lives. In the novels he's taken those family situations and twisted them to make them terrifying. This is surely the basis of his global appeal. Presenting to us familiar circumstances fused with our deepest anxieties. Presenting us with ordinary people who fear the worst with good reason.

The other kind of column he wrote was political. He’s always been fiercely funny about the foibles and failings of politicians, civic leaders, of anyone – self-serving, and that side of him bleeds into the novels as well – bleeds is unfortunate –

[Laughter]

with their wickedly amusing and sharp comments about our times, about authority, and pretense, and injustice. In 2007 his first stand-alone thriller No Time for Goodbye was published to critical acclaim and great international success. Its been followed by 10 or 12 more including Trust Your Eyes and A Tap on the Window and now we are two-thirds of the way through a trilogy set in Promise Falls. They are always on all the lists of bestsellers and very often at the top of those lists. They've been translated into about 40 languages. They have been described as Canada's leading fictional export. I'm not sure what that means exactly though.

[Laughter]

He's a headliner on panels and at writing festivals around the world, sharing the stage with among many others, Ian Rankin, Harlan Coban, and another of his heroes, Stephen King, who is himself a great admirer of Linwood's writing.

This is not the first time that he's returned to Trent. He's been a good friend to the University, serving it as a guest at our open house, as a writer in residence at Lady Eaton College, thus paying forward his debt to Margaret Laurence. Last year he acted as the Master of Ceremonies at the 50th Anniversary Gala Dinner and even agreed to read from Laurence's The Diviners during a gala performance and was then asked to sit on stage as a kind of prop for the rest of the show.

[Laughter]

Not unlike what we are asking him to do today.

[Laughter]

So for a case of arrested development, compounded by some kind of anxiety disorder, he's made for himself a brilliant career and his university is very proud of him. Mr. Chancellor it is my distinct honour and great pleasure to present to you for the degree of Doctor of Letters honoris causa, Linwood Barclay.

[Applause]

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