

# Margaret Atwood winds up poetry reading series

The sixth and final in a series of readings by noted Canadian poets will take place at Grant MacEwan Community College on Thursday, December 2, at 8 p.m. with a reading by Margaret Atwood.

Miss Atwood, who will also give a reading at noon on Friday, December 3 in the SUB Art Gallery, currently makes her home in Toronto. A graduate of U. of T., she has lived in Vancouver and Montreal and was an instructor in the department of English at this university for a term two years ago.

I have often wondered what a woman thinks of Margaret Atwood's poetry: remembering what happened when I showed her latest collection of poems, *Power Politics*, to a friend who began reading a few of the poems, put down her beer, got her coat and left, taking the book with her. She gave me the book back a few days later with a look that said "Don't ask..."

So I presented the book to a friend who is a self-proclaimed male chauvinist. "Read these and tell me what you think of them." We often make the mistake of thinking that those who believe in some form of male supremacy are somehow not too intelligent, nor particularly perceptive, and my friend is both of these. He was delighted with the poems: reinforced his basic distrust of the opposite sex, he said. "But don't they upset you?" Not a bit; she thinks like a *man*, he answered, "hard and clean and mean."

Margaret Atwood is the author of five books of poetry, and of a novel, *The Edible Woman* — which is to be made into a movie. The poetry defines a world where the past and present seem at once completely separate and part of a

continuum; where a second glance at a commonplace situation reveals cracks in the concrete, bizarre patterns in the fabric of life; and where humans, if they move at all, do so out of some instinct which they do not fully understand. Something is going on, she seems to say, but the only way it makes any sense is if you don't try to figure it out; things *might* work out okay (maybe). Reading Atwood at her best is a bit like looking at a Vaughn-James cartoon: the effect is not really felt until you have been away from the actual poem for a while.

Her novel, *The Edible Woman*, is desperately funny; a lot of her poetry displays humour as well, not exactly gallows humour, but the sort you might find in, say, a terminal cancer patient winning a lifetime supply of cigarettes. *The Circle Game*, for which she was awarded the Governor General's Award, is a good starting place for those who are not familiar with Atwood's poetry, since it contains themes which reoccur often in her later books. *The Animals in that Country* represents a developing of these themes—as, does *Procedures for Underground*. In the *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, Miss Atwood uses her eye for the unusual phrase which perfectly describes a subject to examine the myth and fact surrounding a pioneer woman and writer, and with characteristic ambiguity she sees so both in the original frontier terms of Moodie's book, *Roughing it in the Bush*, and as she sees Moodie today in modern Ontario.

Margaret Atwood is easily the most interesting and challenging poet writing in this country. Some would argue that her poetry is not *Canadian* enough for a time of ultra-nationalism; however, that very nationalism is a response to the sort of schizophrenia which may be said to be a result of the Canadian experience, and Atwood

captures it in almost every line of her poetry. Her poetry is often amusing, often frightening, sometimes late in impact; it is never boring, and if you have

## Storming the Mind; well, maybe...

*The Storming of the Mind* Robert Hunter McClelland & Stewart (Toronto) 1971 price: \$3.95 paperback

There has been a lot of garbage written lately about the (1) coming (2) happening now, or (3) just finished (choose one or all) "revolutions" which are supposed to be behind the breakdown of old value systems, the LSD boom, hitch-hiking youth and the drop-out contribution to society. The ultimate statement was probably Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, an immediate best-seller because it offered an optimistic prognosis for the future, instead of the "it's too late anyway" analysis offered by other authors who have considered the various curves representing quality of life, pollution, The Bomb threat, etc., and have come up with books aimed at making them at least financially comfortable while the end approaches, probably on a tide of radioactive junkyards.

Hunter's book is another in this vein, of better quality than most to be sure, but essentially his message is the same: trust in youth, get rid of the old "operational mode", "get turned on", put technology in its place and there may be a future left for mankind after all. Hunter seems to realize that his audience will for the most part be willing to buy what he has to say, and his style and method of writing is attuned to the "old consciousness" and written in rational, step-by-step manner.

What he sees is this: that

missed all the other fine poets who have read in Edmonton this past few months, Margaret Atwood is one which you should not miss. She is, to use a phrase

western culture has gone through two "stages" of recent development, and is entering the third. The first two were cultural and political awakenings marked by the emergence of a non-materialistic "beat generation" and various "power" groups respectively, and the third or "environmental" stage will, because of the immediate threat posed to human existence by our continued pollution of the earth, serve to unite all of us, freaks, straights, little old ladies in tennis shoes and John Birchers in what he terms an "evolutionary leap" into a "holistic mode of consciousness" in which men, instead of being adapted to technology will adapt technology to themselves. Hunter feels that the leap has a good chance of occurring in Canada, since the resistance to the "new consciousness" in the States will make it difficult for any momentum to be gained there for some time; Canada will be able to benefit from the mistakes of the American experience and, he hopes, correct the faults in our society before the confrontation between the young and the powerful reaches the shooting stage.

As the author himself points out, the people who could profit most from his book are probably those who won't read it: the "new breed" of the young already know that things are rotten. And he does a creditable job insofar as the particular type of book he is writing goes. I wish it were all true.

But Hunter must know a different type of "counter-culture" than the one I see emerging. Young people, in

which she would probably dislike intensely, *where it's at* in Canadian poetry right now.

by Sid Stephen

their dress, their tastes in automobiles, their attitudes towards disposable (i.e. wasteful) tools and containers, the record industry (after all, even *Rolling Stone* is printed on paper and we all know where that comes from, don't we kiddies?) are probably the single largest consumer of the products of the "operational mode" society. If this seems absurd, take a look at the next A&W you pass; that's not Mr. and Mrs. Middle-aged Wasp in there littering the ground around those Mustang Mach 11's.

And where do women fit in Hunter's scheme? If there is one group at once oppressed enough and yet possessing the potential to demand change in our society, it must be the females of the species. Hunter doesn't see fit to even mention the place which they will hold in a "holistic" world.

All of this notwithstanding, *The Storming of the Mind* does represent an attempt to come to terms with what has to be the central problem facing mankind.

But it sounds, as does Charles Reich's book, as does Alvin Toffler in his more optimistic passages (in *Future Shock*), like so much whistling in the dark. Maybe it's time someone mentioned the possibility that perhaps the whole industrial-capitalistic-atomic pollution mess is the result of simple evolution, and man, having reached his apogee, is going the way of the dinosaur. Even a good all-out atomic war wouldn't kill off the last microbe — and the whole thing could get underway again without us. by Sid Stephen

by Sid Stephen

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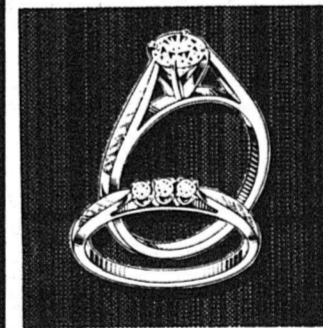


Application forms for teacher employment commencing August 1972 will be available in January 1972 from the Canada Manpower Centre, 4th floor, Students' Union Building.

Preference for employment offers for August 1972 will go to applicants possessing minimum qualifications of a B.Ed. or Professional Diploma after Degree.

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