

## Atwood surfaces at York

## **Karen Tully**

"There seems to be a lot of debate as to what I really am," complains Margaret Atwood.

"She's really a poet and she writes novels," some say, while others argue that "she's really a novelist and she writes poetry." Certainly she is both.

On Tuesday, Margaret Atwood appeared at York to read from her new novel, Life Before Man. The reading was the second in a series sponsored by the York Women's Centre to raise money for the True Davidson Collection Fund. Introduced by June Callwood as "practical" and "common sensical", Margaret Atwood shyly addressed an audience of greater numbers than she might have anticipated.

The witty and perceptive text was affectionately received, as was Atwood. Life Before Man

differs from her previous novels in structure. Written from three viewpoints, rather than one, it prevents readers from assuming that it is an autobiographical account.

The question and answer period revealed Atwood's superior knowledge of English literature. A rather inane question from the audience prompted her to deliver a minilecture on the structuring of a novel.

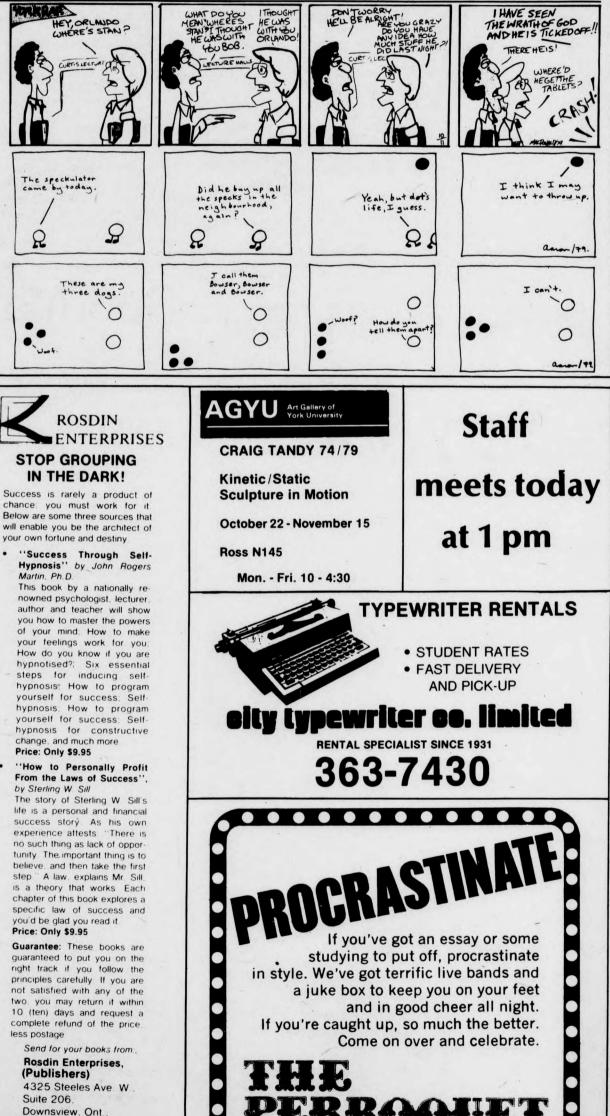
"Very basically, there are two kinds of novels. There is one in which John and Mary have problems and throughout the story they work them out, and one in which John and Mary are blissful and something comes from the outside to threaten them.'

When questioned about her reading style, Atwood retorted,

"I'm not an actor", and then went on to explain the differences between an author reading her own material and actors who feel they must enhance the text with their individual presence.

To the obvious question, "Do you hate men?", Atwood replied with a smile, "I'm not too keen on Hitler, but then I'm not mad about Margaret Thatcher either. The big secret about men," she revealed knowingly, "is that they are individuals, a fact we've been trying to get across about women for years.'

Soon, it was time to end, and a substantial crowd gathered at the bookstore to purchase autographed copies of Life Before Man, a work that will probably induce Atwood's public to regard her as a novelist first-that is, until they are bewildered once again with some future works of poetry, or criticsm, or ...



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