

# Atwood foresees the end

by Jenn MacLeod

The future of serious literature in Canada is threatened as long as it lacks the protection of an outspoken and critical audience, said Margaret Atwood, speaking at the Rebecca Cohn auditorium on Wednesday, October 8.

Commencing this year's Dorothy J. Killam Memorial Lecture Series with her talk entitled "An End to Audience?", Atwood discussed the various pressures she perceives to be exerted on the literary arts in Canada. Beginning with the unfavorable attitude of the general public, Atwood also cited such factors as the excessive drive to satisfy the mass audience, the inefficient distribution system for Canadian work and the restrictions that she said tend to suppress freedom of expression for the writer.

Atwood described the attitude of the public as one that does not accept the writer as a serious professional. Concerned with what she termed inverse snobbery, Atwood maintained that, contrary to other professionals, the writer who makes money is looked down upon. Writing, in the general mind, is merely a means of expressing the personal experience; it is the catharsis of a group of somewhat neurotic solipsists.

In fact, Atwood retorted, this attitude merely protects its holder from seeing the

image of the world being projected through literature and causes the intrinsic value of fiction to be lost. She spoke of poetry as being the heart of the language by which it is renewed and kept alive, and fiction the guard of the moral sense of the community by which we see and judge ourselves and others. Writing, she went on, is both a vocation and an art. As a vocation, it is a "lifetime pursuit to which the writer feels called". The writer, she said, is someone who is able to stand before a library's array of literature and yet have the arrogance and the humility to say, "yes, I have something to add".

Discussing further the pressures threatening the novel in Canadian society, Atwood said that fragmentation of the audience is the dangerous result of the business of bestsellers. Vast amounts of money are spent to accommodate this mass audience appetite whilst, she claimed, the smaller, serious literary works are squeezed out of the market. The extreme of such trends, she warned, is the so-called "entertainment packages" of the U.S.A. Essentially, a team puts together a plot and the film rights and a writer, known as an element, is hired to write the book. Not only are the appetites of the non-mass reader squelched, but the output of the would



be author severely influenced. The writer becomes a mere element in the literary equivalent of muzak.

Atwood said that since it is so much easier for bookstores to order through American computerized distribution channels than through Canadian means, the life of the Canadian work is at stake. She called for greater protection, through legislation and audience insistence of the writer's freedom of expres-

sion. She mentioned instances of school book censorship and court action against political comment that marked what she considered the suppression of this freedom.

Moreover, Atwood said there was a need for legislation establishing quotas in publishing and bookstore buying to protect the interests of the serious Canadian reader and writer.

Frequently throughout her speech, Atwood the lecturer

gave way to Atwood the writer as the wry humour that characterizes her novels shone through. Indeed, most of the questions that followed her speech were concerned with her experiences as a novelist. When asked her opinion about the relevance of a university education to the success of a writer, Atwood met with a round of applause when she responded, "It can't do any harm as long as you don't take it seriously".

# ISA planning social events

By Kevin Ellis

An updated constitution and some careful organization should help the International Students' Association achieve its goals, says new ISA President Dawn Russel.

The chief goals of the 400 member organization are to "foster international understanding between foreign and Canadian students", as well as "to promote welfare and unity among foreign students" and help them with their adjustment to Canadian student life," she says.

The ISA is the umbrella organization the African, Arab, Caribbean and Lebanese Societies, as well as for a number of students of various nationalities who do not belong to a specific member group. Throughout the year, the ISA will be organizing special events and evenings here at Dal that will enable Canadian students to meet students from other countries and gain some understanding of their cultures. Food unique to particular countries may be served at some events and entertainment may be featured.

The ISA also concentrates on helping foreign students at the time of their arrival in Canada. The Association sends out letters to new ar-

rivals with helpful information, and will often pick people up at the airport and/or put them up for a couple of nights until they get settled here.

Dawn Russel, 24, is a third year law student at Dalhousie. She says a summer spent teaching English to foreign students as a second language kindled her interest in the situations of foreign students.

Her involvement with the ISA began last year with her position as an *ex-officio* member of the Association, which was soon followed by her election as ISA vice-president. She was appointed as acting president after the departure of former President Dumasani Gwebu (See Gazette, No. 2, Sept, 25, 1980) and shortly after was given the position of President.

Although there was a modicum of initial concern as to the ability of a Canadian citizen to operate a foreign students' association, Russel, the first Canadian to hold this position, says she will be able to do the job.

"The ISA is not just a foreign students' society," she says, stressing her wish to create interaction among the member societies within the ISA, as well as with the Canadian students at Dal. She says she has no desire to see dif-

ferent societies stay in small, isolated groups.

Perhaps this situation will be avoided through amendments made to the ISA constitution on Jan. 16, 1980 at a general meeting of all ISA members. The changes focus on more centralized planning to prevent the scheduling of individual society events within too short a period of time. One significant change lies in the method of allocation of funds within the organization. Rather than presenting five budgets to the Students' Council, the ISA as a whole presents one budget, and a Grants Committee allocates the money to the individual member groups. There are no ISA membership dues, although the African and Caribbean societies do charge membership fees (a fact taken into account by the Grants Committee when allocating funds).

The ISA Executive consists of a President and Vice-President, a Secretary and Treasurer, and a representative from each of the four member societies. Seven nationalities are represented in the Executive and these eight people work to co-ordinate the rest of the organization.

Coming up in the near future from the ISA is the annual African Night, and tentative

## Designer diapers

(ZNS)—John Travolta move over, the playpen set are taking over the fashion scene.

Calvin Klein has come out with a line of denim diaper covers featuring the designer label on a hip pocket.

And a spokesperson for Saks Fifth Avenue says the diapers are selling like Van-

derbilt jeans, even though the price tag is \$15 for one diaper.

But one group is not crazy about the idea. Tony Schwartz, treasurer of the childrens wear manufacturers association, said "I think the idea is absolutely ridiculous. The designer deserves to be hit by a speeding car."



HAYDEN/DAL PHOTO

I.S.A. elected Dawn Russel president.

plans have been made for a Christmas Party, and International Night, a wine and cheese party, and various films and lectures. One night during the year has been reserved for the exclusive use

of each of the four member groups.

Russel says, "We will have a more definite schedule later," and will fill us in on details as soon as plans for these cultural activities become definite.