It is with particular pleasure, Madam Chancellor, that I present to you Antonine Maillet, acclaimed Acadian novelist whose presence in Canadian letters gives voice to the people to whom she belongs. The Canadian tapestry is knit of distinct cultures and the work of Antonine Maillet sings out our diversity.

Born in Buctouche, New Brunswick, from a very young age Antonine Maillet’s sense of l’Acadie was a land to recover, tied to a notion of culture made present through the ancestral past. Her greatest teachers were the nuns of l’Academie Notre Dame Sacre Coeur through whom she learned to express herself fully. With their guidance she discovered both the world and the realm of learning, taking a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Collège Notre-Dame d’Acadie and a Master of Arts from Moncton University in the 1950s, followed by a Doctor of Laws from Université de Montréal in 1962 and Doctor of Philosophy from Université Laval eight years later. Continuing her close association with academe, Antonine Maillet is now Chancellor of the University of Moncton.

It has been said that one cannot create an art that speaks eloquently when one has nothing to say. Through Maillet’s storytelling the geography, history and people of Acadia are heard in all their desires, frustrations and joy in a new image of the original Acadia. As testament to Maillet’s creative insight and ability to grasp the richness of the Acadian mythology, in 1979 she became the first North American to win France’s prestigious Prix Goncourt - her book Pelagie-la-Charette, reaching sales in France of a million copies.

André Malraux observed that “culture is the sum of all the forms of art, of love and of thought which, in the course of centuries, have enabled man to be less enslaved.” As the voice of the Acadian revival, Antonine Maillet frees a culture from its bondage of quietude and sets its traditions free in the world for all to receive nourishment.

Her literary contributions were acknowledged in 1982 by her appointment as a Companion of the Order of Canada. For the past twenty years, further accolades have been hers in the receipt of literary prizes, election to scholarly societies and honorary degrees. Madam Chancellor, it is time to add our red gown and blue hood to her collection of honours. It is my very great privilege, on behalf of the Senate of this University, to present Antonine Maillet for the Degree of Doctor of Laws, honoris causa.