

problematic as long as it is *Canadian*. Similarly, a reading of *The Edible Woman* which focuses solely on Marian's 'problems' in relation to men ignores the fact that it is also a novel about consumerism and the alienation of intellectual labour. Atwood's novels are not just about women or Canadians, but about 'new class' women whose lives are shaped by the structures of corporate capitalism and its postmodern culture.

The articulation of the problems and contradictions confronted by the 'new class' as it attempts to balance commitment to the 'culture of critical discourse' against the contradictory logic of the consumer capitalist 'life-world' is one of Atwood's major strengths as a writer. It is also arguably the basis of her popularity, in that it constructs an audience which is defined as much by class position as by gender or nationality. As Eco (1979, p.7) argues, 'at a minimal level, every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader through (i) choice of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of specific specializations'. Similarly, Eagleton (1976, p.48) notes that 'every text obliquely posits a putative reader, defining its producibility in terms of a certain capacity for consumption'. The 'putative reader' of Atwood's novels is not necessarily female, nor Canadian, but is almost certainly 'new class', located in the angst-ridden corridors of corporate capital or the state (including the universities), where lived experience is chronically at odds with critical consciousness. The appeal of Atwood's work to feminist and nationalist readers is entirely consistent with this analysis, for while feminism and nationalism are universalist as ideology, as historical movements each has its base in the 'new middle class'.

## Notes

1. The Waffle movement emerged within the NDP, organising the left wing of the party around issues of American imperialism and public ownership. See Resnick (1977, pp.229-32).
2. In terms of Atwood's fictional world, 'William Wasp', the environmental engineer in *Life Before Man*, and Peter, Marian's rising corporate lawyer fiancé in *The Edible Woman* belong to the technical fraction of the 'new class'. From this point of view, the negative qualities embodied in these two characters - insensitivity, humourlessness, conformism, banality, and potential for violence - might be seen as deriving not just from their maleness, as a feminist reading would suggest, but from their membership of that fraction of the 'new class' which is prepared to make an uncritical commitment to the service of corporate capital. There are of course other male characters, such as David and Joe in *Surfacing* and Joan Delacourte's Marxist husband, Arthur, in *Lady Oracle*, whose insensitivity and humourlessness are clearly linked to gender.
3. There are of course positions within feminism which attribute *all* social ills to the domination of women by men, and from that point of view nothing *could* be broader than a 'feminist reading'. I see this position as problematic, and so too is that version of Marxism which attributes all social ills to class exploitation and oppression and takes no account of gender. Clearly the structures of class and gender intersect. One of Atwood's

strengths as a writer is that she does not reduce the problems she explores to one or the other.

4. The term 'life-world' is drawn from Schutz's phenomenological analysis of the structure of everyday life. It refers to 'that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense, and attitude which designates 'everything which we experience as unquestionable' and every state of affairs 'unproblematic until further notice' (Schutz, 1974, p.4). The 'life-world' rests on 'the deeprooted assumption that until further notice the world will go on substantially in the same manner as it has so far' (Schutz, 1970, p. 80). The cultural logic of advanced capitalism (Jameson, 1984), however, is one which continuously problematises this assumption and the relationships which rest upon it. The 'postmodern life-world' might thus be seen as an existential nightmare in which the only thing that can be taken for granted is that nothing can be taken for granted.
5. In Marian's case, for example (Atwood, 1973, p.169): 'The town and the people waited for her on some horizon, somewhere, unchanging, monolithic and grey, like the weathered stone ruins of an extinct civilization'.
6. It is arguable that this contradiction between the aspirations encouraged by the universalistic principles of the 'culture of critical discourse', and the reality of an institutional world structured hierarchically on the basis of gender, provides the impetus for the second wave of feminism, which is primarily a 'new class' movement. As Gouldner (1979, p.17) observes: 'some important part of Women's Liberation is not only an expression of resistance to the oppression of women-in-general but a demand by educated, middle-class women for full membership rights in the New Class'.
7. Women face a more extreme version of the 'alienation' of the intellectual in bureaucratic employment, for they are less likely to be able to substitute the pleasures of hierarchical power for the pleasures of intellectual life.
8. In keeping with a gender reversal of the male 'road story', Rennie does not communicate her whereabouts to the lovers she has left behind. She addresses a postcard to Jake, 'but doesn't write anything on it because she can't think of anything she wants to say to him', and while she buys one for Daniel 'she decides not to send it' (Atwood, 1982, p.85). Unexplained departures are conventionally a male prerogative and waiting for letters that don't usually come is 'women's lot'.
9. That papers such as this one perform exactly the same function in relation to Atwood's novels is entirely consistent with the ironic logic of the 'world view' on which these novels are premised. As Duncan observes in his gloomy reflection on the academic study of literature, in *The Edible Woman* (Atwood, 1973, p.96): 'it all collapses in a welter of commas and shredded footnotes, and after a while it's like any thing else'.

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