

Maja Ćuk*
Alfa BK Univerzitet
Fakultet za strane jezike

УДК: 811.111(71)-313.2.09 Atwood M.
DOI: 10.19090/gff.v49i1.2526
orcid.org/0000-0003-2873-907X
orcid.org/0000-0003-4352-5571
Original scientific paper

Tijana V. Parezanović
Alfa BK Univerzitet
Fakultet za strane jezike

WILL THE HEART “GO LAST” IN THE FUTURE? ALIENATING SPACES IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S DYSTOPIAN FICTION

The aim of this paper is to analyse how the disturbing social forces affect individuals in Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel *The Heart Goes Last*, by relying on Michel Foucault’s system of ideas on imprisonment in *Discipline and Punish* and Erich Fromm’s views on disintegration of love and faith in Western society in *The Art of Loving*. At the beginning of the book, it seems that the Positron Project, a futuristic prison, will offer an escape from post-apocalyptic misery to Stan and Charmaine, a young couple, hit by an economic collapse. However, the suburban paradise, at first glance, has gradually been exposed as a bleak and threatening place where people are kept in cramped conditions under constant monitoring and registration of data. As our analysis will reveal, the town of Consilience is the morbid urban realm where control is enforced through various mechanisms used to create “productive” and “subjected” bodies. In such a system, where the management has enticed the participants to take part in the project by offering material comforts, love has no (economic) value. The circumstances in the alienating location in the mentioned novel might be interpreted as a cautionary tale about relations of power in the current society and the world in the near future. In a metaphorical way, the author of *The Heart Goes Last* alerts to the problems by which mankind as a whole might be afflicted - the potential for abuses of power, treating people as commodities and the disintegration of real values.

Key words: dystopian fiction, the panopticon, human values, love, *The Heart Goes Last*, Margaret Atwood

INTRODUCTION

The setting of *The Heart Goes Last* echoes dystopian tones, although the novel might be interpreted as a real-world cautionary tale about the near future that “examines self-deception and corporate control”, as John Harrison argues in *The*

* maja.cuk@alfa.edu.rs

Guardian (Harrison, Headline, 2015). The major protagonists are Stan and Charmaine who live in a desperate state in their car, scavenging for food and constantly on guard. They are among those who experience negative consequences of an economic collapse in the future. The husband, once a promising engineer, has lost his job and his wife is working in a squalid bar. The advertisement for Consilience and the Positron Project, “a social experiment” offering homes, decent jobs and secure lives seems to be a glimmer of hope for a better life. All they have to do is give up their freedom every second month. Everyone who is taking part in the project is supposed to serve a month as an inmate and a month as staff. Although Stan’s brother warns them against the idea, they sign up and start living a quiet and seemingly satisfying life in the beginning. Then, a lot of unforeseeable consequences arise from their wrong decisions and reckless attempts to find refuge from a sense of loneliness.

First, unknown to each other, they develop a strange obsession (and one of them gets involved in an affair) with their “Alternates”, the couple that lives in their house while they are in prison. Then they are blackmailed by the members of the management to take part in the initiatives that will reveal the secrets behind The Positron Project and paint a sordid picture of maltreatment and abuse. One of the curiosities about the concept is that once a couple signs the contract, they can never back out or have any contact with the outside world, so the whole arrangement seems like going to prison voluntarily. In Consilience prohibitions abound and inhabitants are monitored all the time at every corner. In a metaphorical way, the system exhibits the traits of panopticon, elaborated in Foucault’s work *Discipline and Punish*. The novel describes the system of surveillance imposed by a totalitarian social organisation that can supposedly guarantee order, but which in fact traps individuals who find themselves alienated and constricted. Furthermore, Atwood’s fifth dystopian tale also conjures up the condition of living of modern man, explained in Erich Fromm’s *The Art of Loving* where “human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons” and “everybody remains utterly alone” (Fromm, 1976: 74). The social structure of the organization and the spirit resulting from it are not conducive to creating a deep emotional bond. As our analysis will reveal, a few relationships in the novel might be interpreted as forms of pseudo-love. Does Atwood alert the readers to the disintegration of love in the current society where “the heart” might “go” forever? The aim of the paper is to analyse power relations and their effects on individuals in the twin town of Consilience/Positron in *The Heart Goes Last*, which might bear a certain resemblance to the world of (post)modern people in the near future.

MARGARET ATWOOD’S DYSTOPIAN NOVELS AND DANGER SIGNALS
TO THE READERS

In Coral Anne Howells’ view, Margaret Atwood’s aim in dystopian works is to “send out danger signals to its readers” about “contemporary situations of cultural crisis as they suppose what *may* happen” (Howells, 2006: 161). Her first dystopian novel, published in 1985, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, has been inspiring and intriguing for artists and scholars, although it was written almost forty years ago. It contains “common generic features” which also appear in her later dystopian novels - “failed utopian visions, counter-narratives of resistance to a new prevailing order, survivors’ stories and open endings” (Howells, 2006: 162). In an era of environmental pollution and severe limitation of people’s rights, the major protagonist Offred in *The Handmaid’s Tale* is deprived of control of her own reproductive function and forcibly assigned to produce children for Commander Fred and his wife. As Coral Ann Howells points out: “Offred is a virtual prisoner in her Commander’s house, and even when she goes outside on her regular shopping trips or on the rare Handmaid’s group excursions, she is under constant surveillance” (Howells, 2006: 166). J. Brooks Bouson asserts that the Handmaids “are forced to a life of utter passivity and submissiveness”, since those who do not yield to the new regime “are severely punished or executed” (Bouson, 1993: 139). The disobedient members of the system who do not capitulate to the ideology of the regime suffer a penalty or “disappear”. As our analysis will reveal, that is not an exception in *The Heart Goes Last*.

In *Oryx and Crake*, the first book in *The MaddAddam Trilogy*, published in 2003, the narrator and protagonist Jimmy the Snowman, whom the readers believe to be the only survivor of mankind after a biological catastrophe, assumes the role of a guardian and a preacher of young Crakers, genetically engineered beings created in the laboratory of his friend Crake:

Disgusted and disappointed by the society which had become too pragmatic about the morality of genetic engineering, blinded by consumerism, indifferent to child abuse and too cruel to the suspected enemies of the system, Crake developed a new form of Homo Sapiens to replace the corrupted humans (Ćuk–Panajotovic, 2020: 197).

While the mentioned scientist, whose drug wiped out the majority of the human race, decided to improve mankind by designing humanoids without physical anomalies and by eradicating negative characteristics from genes in a scientific way (hatred, jealousy, etc.), Jimmy the Snowman seems “to test another approach as a corrective measure for the fallen state of people – mending the spiritual instead of physical aspect, by creating a new story about the past for the Crakers” (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 197). Before the apocalypse, “the imaginative arts have suffered from neglect and abuse” (Osbourne, 2008: 37) and language was used as a tool of manipulation by the media for not particularly good causes. All activities and pieces of information were controlled by CorpSeCorps security services.

The same society, governed by materialistic goals, where the members of the lower class are treated as commodities and influential persons live in abundance is depicted in the second book of *The MaddAddam Trilogy – The Year of the Flood*, released in 2009. While the story about a world ruined by the abuse of scientific knowledge was told in a Last Man narrative in *Oryx and Crake*, in its sequel the same urban landscape and the disturbing social forces are described from the perspective of three narrators:

The muted protagonists and ‘the victims’ of ideological bias, Toby, Ren and Adam One conceive a different view of the world in their accounts. While, as we have seen in *Oryx and Crake*, employees of the multinational corporations which wield a dangerous amount of power live in luxurious compounds with a range of facilities and a vast amount of money is invested in the scientific advancement and new forms of transgenic research, the unprivileged people live in poor circumstances in neighborhoods called ‘pleeblands’“ (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 200).

In the third book, published in 2013, *MaddAddam*, whose title is in fact the name of the trilogy, a ray of hope for the planet and a path out of the “nightmares” of the old world have been presented after the biological catastrophe:

After Jimmy the Snowman’s illness and death, Toby takes on the role of a spirit guide and a teller of stories from the old world, and her personality and speech make a huge impact on the little Craker called Blackbeard, influencing the formation of his identity as a spiritual leader and a historian of his community (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 205).

The protagonist has succeeded in rescuing the accounts of the past from oblivion and carrying on the stories of his “mentors” into the new dystopian space.

Blackbeard resorts to telling Jimmy the Snowman’s and Toby’s stories within his own creating the impression of multi-voiced narrative which serves as a spiritual stronghold in the new system.

Similar to the initiatives in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The MaddAddam Trilogy*, the Positron Project in *The Heart Goes Last* has been considered by the creators of the concept to be a remedial intervention with offenders that is going to improve the society. At first glance, Consilience is a suburban paradise that was supposed “to relieve the pressure inside the social pressure cooker” (Atwood, 2015: 51). Guided by the notion that “you can’t eat your so-called individual liberties, and the human spirit pays no bills” (Atwood, 2015: 51), the creators of the concept were trying to make the participants believe that they contribute to a magnificent plan, that would provide “cornucopia of jobs” (Atwood, 2015: 54) and solve the nations’s problems of joblessness and crime:

Ed opens his arms like a TV preacher; his voice gets louder. Then it occurred to the planners of Positron, he says – and this was brilliant – that if prisons were scaled out and handled rationally, they could be win-win viable economic units. So many jobs could be spawned by them: construction jobs, maintenance jobs, cleaning jobs, guard jobs (Atwood, 2015: 54).

Although Ed, with his “welcoming, open, inclusive smile of a born salesman” could easily persuade people to become “such an important part” of the project (Atwood, 2015: 54), the other side of the coin has been revealed. The enchanting city is gradually exposed as a dreadful place where the inhabitants, “subjects”, are controlled through the constructed places of threat and tension. Similar to the major protagonist in *The Handmaid’s Tale* who “finds herself in the familiar dystopian predicament of being trapped inside a space and narrative where she is denied any possibility of agency” (Howells, 2006: 165), Stan and Charmaine have no rights as individuals but instead have been conscripted into the particular service of the Positron Project. In such a system, individuals are treated as “productive” and “subjected” bodies who take part in “political economy” – the concept which Michel Foucault develops in his work *Discipline and Punish*, one of the theories on which we rely in our analysis.

“PRODUCTIVE” AND “SUBJECTED” BODIES
IN THE ALIENATING SPACES

Delineating the concept of the “political economy” of the body, Foucault notices that “power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, 1995: 25). As the French philosopher further elaborates:

This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used); the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 1995: 26).

This subjection “may be subtle”, it “can also be direct”, and it is “not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology” (Foucault, 1995: 26). It is remarkable that the complex process of organization within the Positron Project in *The Heart Goes Last* based on the identical principles and the town of Consilience, actually bears an uncanny resemblance to the Panopticon.

Foucault explains the concept as an “enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded” and in which “each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed” (Foucault, 1995: 197). In a similar way, the society in Consilience is built upon perplexing social norms and distorted moral ideas where “subjects” are classified, regulated and treated as commodities. At the very beginning, Stan and Charmaine were excited to be a part of the project and “chosen” to be the inhabitants of a Disneyworld-esque town, while so many people “have been rejected” (Atwood, 2015: 48). Charmaine was enchanted by the advertisement for the Positron Project, because she was tired of living in their car and doing a lousy job. She was trying to feel happy and privileged about the change in their daily routine and she was not willing to acknowledge the fact that every move had been monitored and controlled in Consilience:

Charmaine finds switchover days almost festive: when it's not raining, the streets are full of people, smiling, greeting one another, some walking, some on their colour-coded scooters, the odd one in a golf cart. Now and then one of the dark Surveillance cars glides through them: there are more of those cars on switchover days. Everyone seems quite happy: having two lives means there's always something different to look forward to. It's like having a vacation every month. But which life is the vacation and which is the work? Charmaine hardly knows (Atwood, 2015: 68).

The participants in the project were not aware of the fact that an individual in Consilience “is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault, 1995: 200). Although there aren't any black cars in view, “it's rumoured that Surveillance can see around corners” (Atwood, 2015: 70). The spyware cameras are overlooking the poultry facility where Stan works and occasionally comes to some interesting conclusions:

After surveillance was tightened, the worst troublemakers vanished. Consilience was a closed system – once inside, nobody went out – so where had they gone. ‘Transferred to another wing’ was the official version. Or else ‘health problems.’ Rumours as to their actual fates began to circulate, in furtive hints and nods. Behavior improved dramatically (Atwood, 2015: 88).

In the town of Consilience, everyone has somehow been rendered guilty, although they might have never committed a crime.

The major protagonists in *The Heart Goes Last* delusionally see The Positron Project as a deliberate escape and not a form of captivity. They actually choose to be incarcerated believing that safety and security are primary conditions of life.

THE ART OF LOVE, DYSTOPIAN FICTION AND (POST)MODERN MAN: WILL THE HEART “GO LAST”?

At the beginning of his book *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm notes that people in our culture try so rarely to learn the art of love – “in spite of the deep-seated craving for love, almost everything else is considered to be more important than love: success, prestige, money, power – almost all our energy is used for the learning of how to achieve these aims, and almost none to learn the art of loving” (Fromm, 1976: 73). In the second chapter “The Theory of Love”, the scholar reminds readers that it's not good to shut yourself off in a system of defence,

where distance and possession are your means of security. According to Fromm, “man is gifted with reason” and he is aware of “his aloneness and separateness, of his helplessness before the forces of nature and society”, so he would become insane “could he not liberate himself from this prison and reach out, unite himself in some form or other with men, with the world outside” (Fromm, 1976: 15).

In the third chapter “Love and Its Disintegration in Contemporary Western Society”, Erich Fromm concludes that love has become “a relatively rare phenomenon” (Fromm, 1976: 73) as a result of the basic structure of capitalism: “Modern capitalism needs men who co-operate smoothly and in large numbers; who want to consume more and more; and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated” (Fromm, 1976: 74). Modern man has been transformed “into a commodity, experiences his life forces as an investment which must bring him the maximum profit obtainable under existing market conditions” (Fromm, 1976: 74). There is no demand for love among people who have become “alienated automatons”: “Modern man is actually close to the picture Huxley describes in his *Brave New World*: well fed, well clad, satisfied sexually, yet without any except the most superficial contact with his fellow men” (Fromm, 1976: 75).

Stan and Charmaine have been chosen to do their part in a system which offers material comforts and emanates the basic principles of modern capitalism. They have put their lives at stake in exchange for long-desired commodities which they couldn't afford in the past, thinking that happiness consists of buying new things. Their marriage might seem as a resting place, but it does not satisfy their instinctual needs. They are trying to make each other feel better and they treat each other with courtesy, but they are strangers to one another when it comes to the deepest feelings and urges. For them, it seems that it is more comfortable to remain in the prison of the self than experience the process of transformation through real love. Charmaine doesn't give herself completely when they make love and Stan doesn't act spontaneously: “It's not that they don't have sex. They certainly have more of it than they had in the car; but it's sex that Charmaine enacts, like yoga, with careful breath control” (Atwood: 2015, 61).

Their home is not a haven from loneliness, but a place where Stan fantasies about an imaginary woman – their female Alternate. Stan's obsession with “Jasmine” is a form of pseudo-love, “sentimental love”, which “is experienced only in phantasy and not in the here-and-now relationship to another person who is real” (Fromm, 1976: 85). His “love” becomes a day-dream:

Stan can't stop thinking about that: about her mouth. It's bad enough here at the house, even with Charmaine breathing beside him, lightly or heavily depending on what they're doing, or rather on what he's doing – Charmaine has never been much of a joiner, more of a sidelines woman, cheering him on from a distance (Atwood, 2015: 63).

There's an atmosphere of “correctness”, but they don't seem to have arrived “at a ‘central relationship’ “ (Fromm, 1976: 75), overcome their separateness and fulfilled the longing for union. They have other “objects of love” towards whom they show erotic tendencies.

Being unable to penetrate the wall of separateness with her spouse, Charmaine finds passion and closeness in the affair with their male Alternate. She made detours on the switchover days and spent time with Max in the disreputable part of town where the unreclaimed houses are located. At the particular moment, she seems to have realized that it might be wrong:

Stan maybe isn't the most... well, the most. The most of whatever you'd call Max. But Stan loves her, and she loves him.

She does really. The thing with Max was only a blip, it was an animal episode. She'll have to stay away from Max in the future (Atwood, 2015: 198).

A long time, her husband didn't know what her job was in Medications Administration: “So that's what Charmaine's been doing at her confidential job. She's been... He can't believe this. Fluffy, upbeat Charmaine? Fuck. She's a murderess” (Atwood, 2015: 179). Stan found out the details about Charmaine's profession in Consilience and her affair with Max/Phil from Jocelyn, their female Alternate whom he was idealizing and was waiting to finally meet. However, instead of an attractive woman who leaves seductive notes like “I'm starving for you! I need you so much. XXOO and you know what more – Jasmine” (Atwood, 2015: 140), Stan faced “a lady wrestler” (Atwood, 2015: 115). Jocelyn is high up on the status ladder and Surveillance – part of the senior management of Positron and Ed's founding partner. She has access to all data (including footage of Max's and Charmaine's rendezvous) and privileges that the other inhabitants of Consilience don't have (for example, a car, a pass in the outside, and so forth).

Stan's fantasies about Jasmine have become a living nightmare. She keeps him in the house, makes him watch “video-porn saga featuring their two energetic spouses” (Atwood, 2015: 147) and have sex with her. First, he can't figure out why she is insisting on having intercourse with him, while he's been detained in the house and he wonders: “Why doesn't she just order herself a robot?” (Atwood,

2015: 147). She does not inform him right away about the plan to expose the project and use him as a messenger who would be smuggled to the outside. No one is what they seem inside the prison management and in the picture-perfect and picket-fenced town of Consilience, in general.

It is interesting that Ed didn't mention in the introducing speech for the new inhabitants that particular goods in the Positron prison factories are being manufactured. Somewhere in the depths of Positron "the new and improved sexbots that are in the trial stage" have been produced and they are "supposed to be really life-like, with body heat and touch-sensitive plastic fibre skin that actually quivers, and several different voice modes, and flushable interiors for sanitary purposes" (Atwood, 2015: 147). The most frivolous and bizarre demands of the customers are being fulfilled. Producing sex dolls and robots has turned into a large enterprise that has been growing in size exponentially. The great economic empire is owned by the management.

Jocelyn, who has been cooperating with his brother Conor, has recognized the potential in Stan and decided to include him in the project that would destabilize the system which "isn't the beginning any more" (Atwood, 2015: 173), when people were a lot happier. Ed brought in a new group of investors and planned to set up the transplant clinics and ship in body parts from outside, since "There's big market for transplant material among aging millionaires, no?" (Atwood, 2015: 173). Jocelyn's founding partner is willing to include all aspects that will bring profit: "Ed says the next hot thing is going to be babies's blood, by the way. It's been talked up as very rejuvenating for the elderly, and the margin on that is going to be astronomical" (Atwood, 2015: 174). Ed's projects resemble the bio-corporations' business, controlled by CorpSeCorps, in the dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* – "genetic splicing of animals and engineering 'products', such as rakunk (a genetic splice between a raccoon and a skunk) or a pigoon, genetically engineered pig which produces organs for human transplants" (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 196).

An artificial pheromone and an additional choice of scent are added to the bodies of the prostibots, which are produced in various shapes:

All good clean fun until you get to the "kiddybot" model, packaged in "white nighties and flannelette sheets", with blue knitted teddy bear "for extra-realistic effect". Even Stan's co-workers – used to rationalising their own behaviour in accord with their needs – find this a bit close to the bone. But they don't complain, and they certainly don't refuse to manufacture the goods (Harrison, 2015, para. 5).

The graphic accounts of “the products” hold a mirror to the absurdities and abnormalities of a morbid world, unscrupulously governed by money-orientated values and goals. What is alarming is the fact that that space might be close to the picture of the world we are going to live in one day where people exhibit total self-deception and the lack of aspirations except those related to fulfilling materialistic desires. In the similar way she has done in her previous novels, “Atwood shows consumerism as permeating every aspect of life” (Palumbo, 2000: 74). As Mat Johnson wrote in his review of the novel: “This is not a different universe, just a slightly exaggerated version of our own” (Johnson, 2015, para. 1). That’s the decisive feature of all Atwood’s dystopian novels which are on the verge of speculative fiction.

FREE WILL AND TRUE VALUES IN CONSILIENCE AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD(S)

The inhabitants of Consilience only seem to care for themselves, being oblivious to the particular circumstances in the system and indifferent to the rest of the world. For example, Charmaine seems to have persuaded herself that she is a care giver who is giving palliative treatment to the individual in the “procedure”, although her prison employment is administering a lethal injection to those marked for the procedure:

“Off we go”, she says cheerfully. She finds the vein, slips the needle. *Uhuhuh*, he says. He strains upward. His eyes are horrified, but not for long. His face relaxes; he turns his gaze from her to ceiling, the white blank ceiling, which is no longer white and blank for him. He smiles. She takes the procedure: five minutes of ecstasy. It’s more than a lot of people get in their whole lifetime.

Then he’s unconscious. Then he stops breathing. The heart goes last. (Atwood, 2015: 62).

Charmaine behaves as if she remained “attached to the figure of a parent” (actually, in her case, a grandmother) and she feels like a child who wants her husband’s protection, love and care (Fromm, 1976: 81). Stan’s and Charmaine’s relationship might be interpreted as a form of “neurotic love”, where her aim is to be loved, not to love.

In the system depicted in *The Heart Goes Last* human relations “are essentially those of alienated automatons” who do not feel and show compassion, basing their security “on staying close to the herd, and not being different in

thought, feeling or action” (Fromm, 1976: 74). In a similar way she has done in her other dystopian novels, Margaret Atwood draws attention to the spiritual degeneration incited by consumerism. Love has no economic value. On the other hand, under the existing market conditions in the town of Consilience and the outside world, there is great demand for sex. An individual is heavily focused on needs and desires of self to the point of not being able to consider the unfavourable circumstances of the other and empathize.

Charmaine was reluctant to do the Procedure on Stan at first. She started crying and remembering their plans about a house and children, and how, despite the tensions and the unfavourable circumstances “they’d stayed together because they had each other and they loved each other” (Atwood, 2015: 208). Considering the fact that one of her friends, who refused to do the job, disappeared and “nobody knew where she went” (Atwood, 2015: 192), Charmaine realized that her defiance will not bring her any good: “The bad thing will happen to him anyway, and whoever it is will not do it in a considerate and respectful way, not the way she does. And what will become of her, Charmaine, if she fails the test?” (Atwood, 2015: 209).

The procedure was part of Jocelyn’s plan, because she wanted to assure everybody that Charmaine’s husband is not alive, so that he could take part in her mission in the outside. Stan and Charmaine both become pawns in Jocelyn’s game. Stan wasn’t happy about the whole idea and wondered “what would happen if he snitched on Jocelyn”, but he was aware of the fact that he was stuck (Atwood, 2015: 226). After Stan’s procedure and the peculiar encounter with Max, Charmaine soon realizes that there’s nobody on her side: “She will have to bury the truth about Stan, and the truth about Max too, as far down inside her own head as she can. Make sure she doesn’t blurt things out, ask the wrong questions the way Sandi did” (Atwood, 2015: 237).

Stan and Charmaine become the major protagonists in a “counter-narrative of resistance to a new prevailing order” – one of the characteristics of Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novels, according to Howells, as we have already mentioned. A lot of time passed before they reunited: while Stan is taking out the flashdrive to Las Vegas, masked in Elvis Presley costume at Possibilibots, Charmaine needs to put up with Ed’s obsession with her and spy on him as his personal assistant. Ed cannot restrain himself from making advances on her at her husband’s funeral and he behaves in a similar way to Toby’s psychopathic manager Blanco in the dystopian novel *The Year of the Flood*, “whose possession she becomes” (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 200). At the end of the novel, Charmaine is taken to Ed’s clinic

at Ruby Slippers where her memory of Stan is supposed to be obliterated and Ed would become the new object of love through special neurosurgery.

Jocelyn and her team successfully carried out the plan where Stan is the first man whom Charmaine would see after the neurosurgery which Ed had planned. Stan and Charmaine fall in love with each other again, renew their vows and start to live a quiet life with their baby. However, their quest to regain their freedom gets a comic and ironic twist in the end. Charmaine finds out that she has never had the operation and the brain adjustment, and that she hasn't become more attracted to her husband because of the procedure. Jocelyn has proved that “the human mind is infinitely suggestible” and prone to manipulation of different kinds:

“But. But now I love Stan so much,” says Charmaine. “I *have* to love him, because of that thing they did! It's like an ant, or something. It's like a baby duck! That's what they said!”

“Maybe you loved Stan anyway,” says Jocelyn. “Maybe you just needed some help with it.” (Atwood, 2015: 415).

It is interesting that after all the challenges Stan and Charmaine have undergone, they don't stop believing that it's better to do something because you decided to than because you have to. Claiming that “everything was all settled”, Charmaine is not sure if she wants to take on responsibility for her own destiny and step out of her comfort zone. When Jocelyn tells her that she is free to go – “The world is all before you, where to choose”, the reply and the last sentence in the novel is Charmaine's “How do you mean?” (Atwood, 2015: 416). Jocelyn got the same reply from Stan, when she asked him if he believed “in free will” (Atwood, 2015: 163).

Stan and Charmaine have (un)consciously chosen to be imprisoned, but they didn't know that it would be even more complex and traumatic than they imagined. The Positron Project seemed to be a perfect utopian solution for a dystopian world, until the surreal scope of the concept was revealed. As Mat Johnson claims in his article, the world of *The Heart Goes Last* starts out feeling familiarly post-apocalyptic, but the novel's reality is even more disturbing as the story expands – “a world where the working class has been pushed off the edge of the economic cliff, and the middle-class dream is alive only as a living nightmare” (Johnson, 2015, para. 1). According to Lucy Sholes, the work “is set in a a terrifying but recognizable future” (Sholes, 2015, Headline). Similar to her first dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, as well as the works in *The MaddAddam*

Trilogy, *The Heart Goes Last* might be interpreted as “a moral outcry” and “a warning” to readers, which illustrates “Atwood’s double awareness of the moral and the literary” and “the politically engaged and a self-conscious postmodern aesthetic” (Howells, 2000: 143).

CONCLUSION

In *The MaddAddam Trilogy*, as well as in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood sensitizes readers to the various controversial issues and unpleasant circumstances – “the problems of polarization, social injustice, gender inequality and human trafficking, which are not only the disturbing social forces in a dystopian novel, but the reflexion of our reality” (Ćuk–Panajotović, 2020: 208). A few more predicaments of the (post)modern world “where the lines between consumer and consumed have blurred” have been added to the list in *The Heart Goes Last* (Palumbo, 2000: 74).

The Positron project has not become a long-term solution in the way it was advertised at the beginning. Well decorated houses, nice clothes and other promises in the town of Consilience are just a palliative for citizens who have alienated from themselves and each other. A specific type of setting within the city is created and the particular behavior among citizens has been enforced. Through the constructed places of surveillance and threat, “productive” and “subjected” bodies have been produced and controlled. The established disciplinary paradigm is being defined and imposed by the management who even benefit from the system of organization. The whole concept has degenerated into an inhuman social experiment where “subjects” are classified and regulated, treated as commodities, “colonized” and “devoured” by the system or influential people in the ruling class. On the other hand, it has become a profitable business for a few people. As Mat Johnson claims in his article, it’s difficult to read this kind of work “and not see metaphor and allegory in the shapes of its narrative landscape” (Johnson, 2015, para. 5). Thus, the subversive and boundary-pushing novel can be read as a literary “map” which represents the social spaces of our real world, “something just distant enough to justify being dystopian, but recognizable enough to send a shiver up any reader’s spine” (Sholes, 2015, Headline). Margaret Atwood makes readers think what might be the price for a piece of the lifestyle they have thought to desire and if people are supposed to be satisfied with the particular state of affairs or they should try to find a way to overcome the limitations. In a metaphorical way, the percipient author of *The Heart Goes Last* alerts to the troubles by which mankind as a whole might be (or has already been?) afflicted – the potential for abuses of

power, treating people as disposable in the materialistic world and the disintegration of real values.

Maja Ćuk

Tijana V. Parezanović

HOĆE LI U BUDUĆNOSTI „SRCE OTIĆI POSLEDNJE“: PROSTORI OTUĐENJA U
DISTOPIJSKOJ FIKCIJI MARGARET ATVUD

Rezime

Kao i u prethodnim distopijskim romanima, napisanim u prvim decenijama dvadeset prvog veka, Margaret Atvud u delu *The Heart Goes Last (Srce ode poslednje)* skreće pažnju čitaocima na zloupotrebu moći i problematiku klasnih podela, kao i zabrinjavajući uticaj konzumerizma i poremećaj moralnih vrednosti, što nisu samo uznemiravajući motivi u distopijskoj prozi, već bi mogli postati zabrinjavajuće okolnosti naše svakodnevice. Vešto reklamiran Projekat Pozitron, futuristički zatvor, čini se kao beg od postapokaliptične bede, na početku romana. Sten i Šarmejn, mladi par pogođenom ekonomskim kolapsom, isprva su srećni što učestvuju u projektu, dok ih ne zadesi niz nepredviđenih okolnosti. Zanimljivo je da se, kroz različite situacije, prostor koji na prvi pogled deluje kao prigradski raj postepeno razotkriva kao mračno i zastrašujuće mesto, na kojem su ljudi zatvoreni u skućenom prostoru pod stalnom prismotrom i izloženi prikupljanju podataka. Cilj ovog rada je da, oslanjajući se na sistem ideja o zatočeništvu koji Mišel Fuko izlaže u knjizi *Nadzor i kazna*, kao i na poglede Eriha Froma na urušavanje ljubavi i vere u zapadnom društvu, izložene u knjizi *Umeće ljubavi*, istraži kako kompleksne društvene sile utiču na pojedince i društvo u pomenutom petom distopijskom romanu Margaret Atvud. Kao što analiza u ovom radu pokazuje, gradić Konzilijens je morbidno osmišljen sistem u kojem se kontrola sprovodi pomoću različitih mehanizama koji stvaraju „produktivna“ i „potčinjena“ tela i ljudi eksploatišu. U takvom sistemu, u kojem je uprava podstakla ljude na učešće u projektu tako što im je ponudila materijalnu udobnost, ljubav nema (ekonomsku) vrednost. Otudjujući lokalitet u ovom romanu mogao bi se tumačiti kao narativni simbol za odnose moći u savremenom društvu i podsticaj za raznolika pitanja. Između ostalog, istaknuta kanadska književnica nas podstiče da se zapitamo da li bi trebalo prihvatiti okolnosti koje se kose sa osnovnim moralnim načelima i koja je cena koju smo spremni da platimo da bismo uživali u materijalnim lagodnostima.

Cljučne reči: distopijska fikcija, panoptikon, ljudske vrednosti, ljubav, roman *The Heart Goes Last (Srce ode poslednje)*, Margaret Atvud

REFERENCES

- Atwood, M. (2015). *The Heart Goes Last*. London: Virago.
- Bouson, J. B. (1993). *Brutal Choreographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Designs in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Ćuk, M. –Panajotović, A. (2020). “*MaddAddam Trilogy* as a Historical Chronicle of the Silenced in a (Dystopian) Society.” *Kosovska Mitrovica: Zbornik radova Filozofskog fakulteta u Prištini*, 193-210.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fromm, E. (1976). *The Art of Loving*. London: Unwin Paperbacks.
- Johnson, M. (2015, 23 September). “Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*”. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/27/books/review/margaret-atwoods-the-heart-goes-last.html> [13.2.2024.]
- Harrison, J. (2015, 23 September). “The Heart Goes Last by Margaret Atwood review – rewardingly strange.” *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/23/the-heart-goes-last-margaret-atwood-review-novel> [21.1.2024.]
- Howells, C. A. (2000). Transgressing Genre: a Generic Approach to Margaret Atwood’s Novels. In: R.M. Nischik (ed.) (2000). *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Rochester, NY: Camden House. 139-156.
- Howells, C. A. (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Osborne, C. (2008). Mythmaking in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. In: S. A. Appleton (ed.) (2008). *Once upon a Time: Myth, Fairy Tales and Legends in Margaret Atwood’s Writing*. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 25-46.
- Palumbo, M. A. (2000). On the Border: Margaret Atwood’s Novels. In: R.M. Nischik (ed.) (2000). *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Rochester, NY: Camden House. 73-86.
- Scholes, L. (2015, 24 September). “The Heart Goes Last: Margaret Atwood’s latest ‘falls flat’ “. *BBC, Culture*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20150924-the-heart-goes-last-margaret-atwoods-latest-falls-flat> [13.2.2024.]