

# **Unmothered Daughters in Search of the Self**

Mother–daughter relationships and the construction of the self in  
Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*

Mari Koski

MA Thesis

English, Language Specialist Programme

School of Languages and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

December 2020

*The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.*

UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

School of Languages and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

KOSKI, MARI: Unmothered Daughters in Search of the Self. Mother–daughter relationships and the construction of the self in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*

MA Thesis, 47 pages

English, Language Specialist Programme

December 2020

---

In my master's thesis I study mother-daughter relationships and how mothering and non-mothering affect the development of a girl child to an adult in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* from a psychoanalytic and feminist criticism point of view. In my opinion *The Robber Bride* is a feminist novel that discusses women's oppressed position in a patriarchal society, especially the role of a mother in the family. Within the concept of mothering there is also contemplation between "the good" and "the bad" woman, where the mother has traditionally represented the good whereas the childless other woman is the bad woman. In *The Robber Bride* Atwood plays with these assumptions and presents three flawed protagonists and an evil robber bride.

I have argued that these women have been left unmothered, because they all have mothers that have in one way or another abandoned them. This unmothering is the main cause for their low self-esteem and brokenness which allows the robber bride to enter their lives.

Theoretical background is based on Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* and Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering*. Their work has been groundbreaking in the field of feminist psychoanalytic criticism.

Keywords: psychoanalytic literary criticism, feminist literary criticism, motherhood, womanhood, self-image, defence mechanisms, mother-daughter relationship, object-relations theory, psychoanalytic criticism, Margaret Atwood, *The Robber Bride*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction		
	1.1	About Margaret Atwood	1
	1.2	The Atwoodian voice	2
2	<i>The Robber Bride</i> – the plot and the protagonists described		8
	2.1	The plot and the setting	8
	2.2	Zenia – the villainous Other Woman	11
	2.3	Tony – the petite war historian	12
	2.4	Roz – the Big Mom	14
	2.5	Charis – the tough fairy	16
3	Why women mother		19
4	Theoretical frame		25
	4.1	Psychoanalytic criticism: focus on unconsciousness	25
	4.2	Reproduction of mothering	27
	4.3	Psychoanalytic and feminist criticism	29
	4.4	Key terms explained	33
	4.5	Object relations theory	35
5	The Mother – Daughter relationships in <i>The Robber Bride</i>		39
	5.1	The construction of female self	39
	5.2	What happens to daughters when they are not mothered?	40
	5.3	The next generation, is the chain broken?	41
6	Conclusions		43
	The List of References		
	Finnish summary / Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä		

# 1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to study and discuss the construction of mother–daughter relationships and the female sense of self according to psychoanalytic and feminist criticism in Margaret Atwood’s *The Robber Bride*. Atwood has often been described as a feminist writer, even though she herself has not really liked to be categorized as such. In my view *The Robber Bride* is a feminist novel that discusses women’s oppressed position within patriarchal institutions of family and motherhood. There is an impression of dualism that contemplates between good and bad: in a patriarchal view, the mother is considered to be ‘good’ whereas the childless other woman is ‘bad’ and yet nothing is that simple. Atwood’s texts are always multifaceted. In a lecture given after the publication of *The Robber Bride* Atwood (1994) asked: “Was all the bad behaviour reserved for men?” and explained: “It does make a difference if you change the gender.” She also pointed out that she has often been asked why she does not make the men in her novels stronger. She answered that God should be asked this question, not her, showing her witty sense of humour she also cultivates in her novels. (*Atwood, Margaret. 1994. Lecture in John Adams Institute (March 29,1994).*)

In Atwoodian novels, the men are not relevant because the patriarchal value system is internalized by the women themselves. Atwood often writes about “victimization” and in *Survival, A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972, 32–39) she introduces the metaphor of survival as a fundamental theme in Canadian literature, the idea of “hanging on, staying alive” (1972, 33) and explains four basic victim positions (1972, 36–39). In the first position a person denies being a victim, in the second she acknowledges the victimhood but explains it as faith, in the third position a person refuses to accept the position as inescapable and in the fourth position she becomes a “creative non-victim” (ibid.). In her own writings these victim positions are often examined from the point of view of women. Her protagonists are often prisoners of tragic life events having difficult childhoods, as it is in *The Robber Bride* as well. In *The Robber Bride*, however, the common evil is a woman, Zenia, when typically according to feminist thought it is men that do bad things to women. Roz, one of the protagonists in *The Robber Bride*, thinks to herself “women haven’t let themselves to be molded into male fantasies, they’ve done it to

themselves” (RB, 388). Katarina Gregersdotter (2003,13) explains that Atwood’s “female protagonists experience a duality of victimhood and power, for they are all simultaneously both victims and at least potentially powerful. But social constraints deform their power, so it is often expressed in distortion or excess.”

This thesis examines the construction of femininity through a girl-child’s relationship with her mother and also how the institution of motherhood affects this process. I am also interested in how the identities and self-images of the protagonists in the novel are produced. On the surface the characters seem rather prominent women in their individual ways, but underneath they are broken souls with worthless self-esteem. In Atwood’s opinion, crucial in a girl’s development to a woman is how the parents treat the girl child and she herself was never treated like a little girl. She said in an interview that when other little girls complained about having to wear pink dresses, she longed for one; instead she was given overalls, because they lived in the wilderness. To Atwood it was a practicality, a matter of fact, not a statement. (A Conversation with Margaret Atwood, 16.1.2015). Gregersdotter (2003, 78) writes about the Atwoodian novels: “It is clear, for example, that parental influence plays a large role in most of the character’s stories.” Nancy Chodorow and Adrienne Rich provide the theoretical framework and I will use their concepts and analyses of western motherhood such as what does it mean, what is the role of a mother, what makes mothers and why women mother. One has to bear in mind that both Chodorow and Rich are North American and their books were first published in 1970s, although revised in 1990s, but they both have had a significant impact on psychoanalytic feminist criticism. Psychoanalytic literary theory gives this thesis the unconscious world and psychoanalytic feminism the outer frame.

## **1.1 About Margaret Atwood**

Heidi Slettedahl Macpherson has written about Margaret Atwood that “[s]he is amongst the most important contemporary women writers, and critics are still discovering new ways to address and respond to her work” (2010,120) and Natalie Cooke (in Nischik 2002, 16) has described: “Margaret Atwood is one of the most prolific, best-enjoyed and respected writers of our age, perceived to be extraordinary.” Caroline Rosenthal (in Nischik 2002, 41) has written about

Atwood's fame and popularity that even though she is a writer, she is on the list of the ten most famous and internationally known Canadians. The others on the list are people like the ice-hockey player Wayne Gretzky and a singer Celine Dion. Interestingly Margaret Atwood has managed to succeed in pleasing a vast audience while also satisfying the fastidious appetite of critics. She is being read around the world. In understanding and interpreting her writings, I think it is worthwhile to get to know her a little better. Walter Pache (in Nischik 2002, 120,125–26) describes Atwood as an amazingly ubiquitous role model who as a critic as well as a writer has stood up for women's rights and emancipation, attacked against “established patriarchal hierarchies” and yet she has steadfastly refused to adhere herself “to a definitive mode and code of *female writing*”. According to Pache Atwood favours sharp-eyed observation of the society from a woman writer’s point of view rather than acting as a spokesperson for feminism hence feminist observations are just common sense to Atwood (ibid.).

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa as the second child in the family of wealthy and educated middle-class parents. She grew up with a big brother in the Canadian wilderness because of her father’s work as an entomologist. Atwood has described that the society in Canada in the 1950s “was very bent on having girls collect china, become cheerleaders and get married,” but Atwood herself grew up with different expectations; she was “expected to make use of my intelligence and abilities,” and was not pressured to get married (Staines in Howells 2006, 12). Her relationship with her own mother proved to be the grounding of her “intellectual and practical resourcefulness” in her writings later on and also her “healthy sense of humour” (Cooke in Nischik 2002, 16).

J.Brooks Bouson (2010, 1–2) portrays Atwood as an author who has among other things focused “on the social construction of female identity” and “on the power politics inherent [...] in mother–daughter relations and female relationships.” Brooks Bouson also describes Atwood as the best known and most frequently studied (at the university level) contemporary writer whose works are studied all over the world (ibid). In outlook of Reingard M. Nischik (2002, 1), besides being a distinguished author, Atwood is an activist and a Canadian nationalist, who takes a solid stand for what she believes in:

A writer of fiction and poetry, as well as literary and cultural criticism, Margaret Atwood is one of the most fascinating, versatile, and prolific authors of our time, a superb writer in every genre she has chosen to tackle. Her extraordinary intellectual and imaginative powers and gift of language, the uncanny topicality of her themes, her never-failing humor, as well as her exceptional talent for combining intellectually challenging writing with a high readability, have made her a favorite with readers, critics and scholars alike. A spokeswoman for human rights – of which her acute awareness of gender differences forms an integral part – a Canadian nationalist, a brilliant observer of contemporary Western culture who in her works question conventional modes of perception and evaluation. Atwood is one of the most important literary chronicles of our time.

Coral Ann Howells describes Atwood in *Textual Assassinations* (2003, 88) as a critic, who sees the world from the perspective of a white western woman, yet broadening that view to include the multiculturalism of Canadian society:

Atwood has always been an astute and sensitive cultural critic, charting shifts in Canada's social attitudes and nationalist ideology, speaking from her own position as a white Anglophone Canadian woman, born in Ontario and living in Toronto. The narrative voices in her novels may speak out of that specific location of culture, gender, and race, but her fictional territory extends beyond that to include other and "othered" ethnic and racial identities in Canadian society, their presence sharpened by Atwood's critique of widespread English Canadian prejudice and what non-white writers refer to as the systemic violence of racism in Canada.

Howells (2005 [1995], 1–3) writes about the secret behind Atwood's appeal saying that if there is "a single distinguishing Atwoodian marker" it is the way how Atwood challenges her readers "to see more by seeing differently" through her persistent irony and intelligent empiricism where there are no simple definitions. Atwood herself has said that: "If we cease to judge this world, we may find ourselves very quickly in one which is infinitely worse" (Becker in Nischik 2002, 30). Becker further comments that "judging is something that writers do" and Atwood has "always taken on the challenge" (ibid.). Today she is 81 years of age (on November 18, 2020) and is still going strong, travelling around the world giving speeches and taking stands for issues she finds important. Her probably most famous novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, about a female dystopia, has awed with its sharp-eyed perception that is very actual and current in today's political climate. She is a fascinating author whose books will be read for times to come.



## 1.2 The Atwoodian voice

Atwood has always been very persistent in claiming that she does not adhere the “mode and code of female writing” even though a feminist standpoint is definitely “of paramount importance” throughout her entire production. She has frequently taken a stand for the women’s rights and emancipation and unfolded patriarchal hierarchies and their shortcomings both as a writer as well as a critic. Her standpoint is often seditious but at the same time full of witty sense of humour which resembles a woman’s position in the patriarchal system. Atwood does not apply feminist theories instead she prefers to remain independent and study woman’s role through a lens of a writer, a woman writer. She substantiates dissonances and disparities as well as paradoxes while she keeps watch for mainline approaches and their changes (Pache in Nischik 2002, 125–26).

Brooks Bouson (2010, 17) portrays Atwood as a storyteller who is irrepressible and textually inventive and says that according to Atwood, “what survives in writing is a voice telling a story”. And Atwood does have a voice. Brooks Bouson (2010, 7–11) cites Atwood by pointing out that the women’s movement has unmasked how the power in gender relations is socially constructed thus widening the scope of characters and language for writers. She points out how Atwood has made “feminist observations” in her essay “If You Can’t Say Something Nice, Don’t Say Anything at All” on the sexist insults made by men which has affected Atwood’s way of writing: “Put a paper bag over their heads and they’re all the same. She’s just mad because she is a woman. Nothing wrong with her that a good screw won’t fix ” (Brooks Bouson 2010, 7). According to Brooks Bouson Atwood’s writing was also affected by the women’s movement since according to the essay it “affected ways of looking, ways of feeling, ways of saying (ibid.). Atwood has been fascinated by the lives of women in general and by the duplicitous female goodness. In the interview (1994) she talked about the characters that are “deeply flawed but also deeply human” and questioned further: “was all the bad behaviour reserved for men?” In *The Robber Bride* one of her protagonists wonders: “It’s odd what a difference it makes, changing the pronoun” (RB, 294). In *The Robber Bride* she awakens “the female villain” Zenia, who in spite of being the villain of the story, she is also “deeply flawed” and “deeply human.” In the interview (1994) Atwood explains that also the three protagonists are flawed because of their

motherlessness and difficult mother–daughter relationships and only because of these they let Zenia into their lives or Zenia can enter their lives (ibid.).

Atwood is generally considered a feminist writer, even though she herself refuses to align herself with the feminist movement. Slettedahl Macpherson (2010, 23) argues that while her characters are trapped in a patriarchal frame of reference thus representing anti-feminist metaphors in literature yet most of the critique is feminist in tone.

Atwood’s investigation of female subjectivity ranges from explorations of the female as victim, to representations of the dissembling, monstrous female. Throughout her writing, she reinvents the subject of ‘woman’, while also acknowledging the need to ‘take the capital W off Woman’” (Atwood, *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose*, in Macpherson 2010, 22)

In her work Atwood studies power in gender relations which mostly is portrayed unevenly distributed. In *The Robber Bride*, e.g. Zenia is the villain – a feature generally reserved for men in literature but she is a victim too.

According to Howells the most significant influences on young Atwood’s way of thinking in the 1960s were Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. This was also the decade when the second wave of the North American feminism emerged and Atwood’s novels have “provided a chronicle and critique of the changing fashions within feminist politics” (2005, 14). *The Robber Bride* was published in 1993 that was the era of power feminism which examined how power is divided in gender relations and which according to Atwood exposed this power being a social construction (Brooks Bouson 2010, 8–9). Atwood explores in her fiction female positions as victims or manipulators, positions that are caused by women lacking legitimized power. This is also what feminism is interested in: how women use the powers traditionally granted to them and how women have tried to expand their influence.

At every stage, Atwood has speculated beyond the issues addressed by the feminist movement with her awkward and daring questions, not only about relations between women and men, but about relations between women and women. She has explored the relations between mothers and daughters and sisters or between little girls or adult female friends, and the challenge posed by a *femme fatale* to members of both sexes. (Howells 2005, 15–17)

The aim of this thesis is to discuss how in *The Robber Bride* the non-mothering of the three protagonists has resulted in the creation of flawed adults and how each of their sense of self is composed. All three of them have painful but repressed childhood memories that are forced out

in the open through Zenia. At the same time, Zenia is the one who drives them to face up with these memories and to deal with them.

In my view, *The Robber Bride* is a good example of how applicable Atwood's feminism still is today after 27 years of its publication. We live in a very gendered world e.g. "the #metoo" campaign in the social media that went viral and became worldwide in 2017 (metoomvmt.org, 2020) strongly showed that the victimization of women is very relevant still in the 21st century. Gregersdotter (2003, 11) – referring to *The Robber Bride*, *Cat's Eye* and *Alias Grace* – states that "these novels clearly demonstrate Atwood's contribution to the contemporary feminist discussions of a gendered world" and this discussion is still very relevant today.

## 2 The plot and the protagonists introduced

In this chapter I will present the storyline of *The Robber Bride* briefly and peek into the lives of the three protagonists together with the fourth, the Other Woman. I will introduce each of the protagonist separately and also Zenia, because the story is Zenia's story even though she only exists through the stories told by each of the protagonist. Zenia is the con artist and the catalyst for everything to start happening. The perspective of this thesis is psychoanalytic feminist literary criticism, so the characters are presented from that standpoint. According to Sonia Mycak (1996, 10): "Margaret Atwood's novels are preoccupied with the self." With this Mycak refers to Atwood's explorations of what constitutes a human being and the self. She continues defining "the Atwoodian self" that is divided and split sharing "dysfunctional behaviours, multiple personalities and complete disintegration" (1996, 10-11). Mycak calls these "the calling cards of Atwoodian protagonists" (ibid.).

### 2.1 The plot and the setting

The foundation of Atwood's *The Robber Bride* lays in a Gothic fairy tale of the Robber Bridegroom but Atwood has reversed roles, exactly as in the novel Roz's twin daughters when they are about five years of age, "they'd decided that all the characters in every story had to be female" (RB, 293). Atwood's protagonists are women and of course the most villainous villain, Zenia, in the story is female too. Zenia steals husbands and boyfriends, betrays and lies and sucks the life out of the characters. She is the femme fatale, the sexual goddess but without any of the positive qualities of a goddess. She is a maneater. But Zenia gets destroyed in the end. And the good wins the bad – or does it? Atwood is lured by open endings and in *The Robber Bride* it is left for the reader to decide.

The story is about three women who become friends after sharing distressing experiences of betrayal and loss. The story proceeds via flashbacks as each of the three protagonists Tony, Charis and Roz reminisces going through decades, when each of them had their encounters with Zenia, The Robber Bride, ending with the final confrontation. Zenia does not exist on her own, she only comes alive when the three protagonists share their individual histories. These decades

can be linked to the feminist movement: its second wave took place in the late 1960s and 1970s and what was called 'power feminism' is dated in the 1990s. Simultaneously Atwood paints a picture of after war Canada and draws attention to what it was like to be Canadian or who is a true Canadian. The story is set in Toronto 1990.

The themes in the novel are multifaceted and layered as in Atwood's novels matters most often are. She makes the reader notice for example women's oppression and the effects a war has on society and its people. There are interesting supporting characters like Shanita who can be described as a 'hybrid' since she represents multi-ethnic Canadianness. There are always hints to her literary knowledge and texts in Atwood's novels: Roz's thoughts of "No matter what you do, somebody always gets boiled" (RB, 296) can be gathered as Adrienne Rich's construct of mothering, "*whichever we did has been turned against us*" (Rich 1995, 253) meaning that the concept of mothering is such a complex issue: "we can be "daughter" – therefore free spirits - rather than "mothers" – defined as eternal givers" (ibid.). According to Chodorow (1999, 211) the "contradictions in mothering" lead to a mother losing her sense of self simultaneously as the child is not able to develop an autonomous self. In *The Robber Bride* Roz feels inadequate because she has tried her very best to "be kind and nurturing" (RB, 295) and yet it does not seem to be enough. Then there is the theme of the Other Woman, the concept of the mysterious Other and the return of the repressed. In the novel Zenia represents this return of the repressed. Howells (2005, 130–31) describes this "[a]s the Other Woman, her identity is fabricated through their stories about her, which are all stories of seduction, betrayal and humiliation. She herself is an enigma." Zenia is their worst nightmare come true and at the same time she represents their deepest desires; she brings forth what they have repressed: the deeply wounded children whose traumatic experiences continue to affect their adult lives. Zenia is "the dark double of them all" and her otherness makes them encounter their own otherness like Tony who "sees her own reflection: herself as she would like to be" (RB, 167) or "Charis merges into her [...]. What she sees is herself, herself in the mirror, herself with power" (RB, 398).

According to Gina Wisker (2012, 108), the three protagonists stand for the contemporary woman whereas Zenia, the fourth woman is the straw that stirs the drink. Through Zenia, all the others get to explore and develop their selves while she makes them unearth their "worst fears,

insecurities and finally breakthroughs” (ibid.). Finally, this engagement to Zenia forces and empowers them to re-create their personal identities and find their own strengths. Wisker (2012, 111) describes further that behind each woman there is “a useless father” that they replicate in their husbands or partners. They also share childhood memories of “abandonment, betrayal, abuse and treachery” (ibid.). Atwood leads the reader into each of their childhoods: Tony’s mother ran off leaving Tony with an alcoholic and suicidal father, Charis’s mother was hospitalized and she was abandoned to her relatives and Roz is not sure what to think of her father, whether he is a crook or a hero of war.

*The Robber Bride* is a story of Zenia, she is the Robber Bride whose story “defines and focuses the narrative” (Howells 2005, 128). She is the representation of the characters’ “unfulfilled desires” and “their repressed pain-filled childhood” (Howells 2005, 130) and “her otherness acts as a catalyst in their redefinitions of personal identity” (Howells 2005, 132). All three have repressed their traumatic childhoods and reinvented themselves as adults “though hidden histories of unbelonging, immigrant parents, sexual abuse, and isolation characterise all three, so that they feel like outsiders in the country of their birth” (ibid). They need Zenia who is the one who opens their eyes, “the past survives into the present” (Howells 2005, 128–35). Through Zenia the protagonists get to redefine themselves, through Zenia’s otherness they are able to define the good in themselves because “Zenia is in each one, for she represents their unfulfilled shadow selves” (Howells 2005, 132). “Was she in anyway like us or? thinks Tony. Or, to put it the other way around: Are we in any way like her” (RB, 470). Atwood talked about this in a lecture explaining that as a woman “the bad female character is your shadow” and as we all know “she who loses her shadow also loses her soul” (Atwood, Margaret. 1994. Lecture in John Adams Institute March 29,1994).

Slettedahl Macpherson (2010, 64) defines *The Robber Bride* as the first postfeminist of Atwood’s novels where some well-known feminist issues are rearranged and presented often comically. Slettedahl Macpherson also writes about “the woman's right to be bad” (ibid.) and suggests that the three protagonists “ are reclaiming spaces that women have perhaps been denied ”(2010, 68). Obviously Zenia is the manifestation of ‘bad’ but what about the others? When they do get their revenge, is it acceptable or are they as bad as Zenia? That is what Tony

ultimately reflects: “Who was the enemy? What past wrong was she seeking to avenge? [...] What side she was on doesn’t matter, not to Tony, not any more” (RB, 469). She refers to Zenia but at the same time she is contemplating her shadow self finally accepting her true self. In Lorna Irvine’s (2002, 211 in Nischik) opinion: “The novel dramatizes the psychological hold the past has on the present both in the lives of individuals as well as in the passing decades of the latter part of the twentieth century.”

Brooks Bouson (2010, 15-16) argues that *The Robber Bride* views feminism complexly because it brings back to life the she-devil Zenia who is in contradiction with the feminist thought of solidary sisterhood and that women are always good (the essential goodness of women). Zenia is “the classic Atwoodian twist” while she is the femme fatal and the other woman she is also” the psychic projection and double of the three characters – an embodiment of their outlawed emotions and an expression of their own desires for power and revenge” (ibid.).

*The Robber Bride* is a psychological novel showing how deeply rooted our defense systems and ways of behavior are; we are often not even aware of why we behave the way we do. In *The Robber Bride* Zenia represents the shadow self of each character and we get to read each of their stories individually as they have their encounters with Zenia.

## **2.2 Zenia – the villainous Other Woman**

Whether Zenia is real or imaginary is an interesting question since she only exists through the stories told by three protagonists: Tony, Charis and Roz. However, Zenia is very important to the psychological development of these three. She is the force that makes them confront their pasts. Gregersdotter (2003, 136) describes Zenia as a bitch but at the same time she is the dark double that Tony, Charis and Roz have each repressed and she says that “through Zenia, the construction of femininity becomes blatantly clear” (Gregersdotter 2003, 137). She displays Zenia as a transformer who is able to change shape and as such she represents a provocative force that is also political, she makes the other women react. Gregersdotter describes this as “a manifestation of the constructedness of people in general, and of women in particular” (ibid.). Howells (2002, 148) characterizes Zenia as an inevitable otherness that the three women need to be able to

define themselves and in Wilson's (2002, 224 in Nischik) opinion Zenia is “the shadow self we must know in order not to be controlled by it.”

Atwood has said in an interview that Zenia can only come in, because the characters have flaws – in other words had they been flawless Zenia would not have been able to enter their lives, she needs to be invited and allowed in. Furthermore, the characters are flawed mostly because “something happened to their mothers” (Margaret Atwood interview,1994):

Tony was the first one of them to befriend Zenia; or rather, Tony was the first one to let her in, because people like Zenia can never step through your doorway, can never enter and entangle themselves in your life, unless you invite them. There has to be a recognition, an offer, of hospitality, a word of greeting. Tony has come to realize this, although she didn't at the time. The question she asks about herself now is simply: why did she do it? What was there about her, and also about Zenia, that made such a thing not only possible but necessary? (RB,114)

### **2.3. Tony – the petite war historian**

Tony is a contradictory character. She is, like Roz describes her, petite in size, and yet she is a university professor and a war historian showing thus immense brightness and also power. She loves the study of war and yet she is a homebody who loves to take care of her husband West, and “the only hammer in the house belongs to Tony” (RB, 18). She was a premature baby who spent her first months in an incubator. “Anthea would come and look at Tony through the glass” (RB, 141). She often called her mother by her name, Anthea. Practically from birth she has felt motherless: “Tony spent her first days motherless. Nor – in the long run – did things improve.” (RB, 135). Later on, her mother literally abandons her, running off to California with a man, leaving Tony with her alcoholic and unstable father. Tony learns to get by on her own very early in life.

Tony has a very special skill of reversing words and she is also left-handed, of which her teachers at school tried to force her out. It was a little shameful “but it was the hand she loved best, all the same” (RB, 138). Tnomerf Ynot alias Tony Fremont spelt backwards, is her “invisible twin”:

Sometimes it was the name of a twin, an invisible twin; and when Tony grew up and learned more about left-handedness she was faced with the possibility that she might in fact have been a twin, the left-handed half of a divided egg, the other half of which had died. But when she was little her twin was merely an invention, the incarnation of her sense that part of her was missing. (RB, 137)



Ynot is the brave and courageous double of Tony. Gregersdotter (2003, 132) explains that this language that Tony developed when a child, symbolizes the past Tony has buried and by means of this language Tony can express thoughts that she keeps from others as well as from herself. Tnomerf Ynot words “make her feel powerful” (RB, 139). “It’s her seam, it’s where she’s sewn together, it’s where she could split apart” (RB, 19). The language of her own and her ambidexterity are defense mechanisms she uses unconsciously. Howells (2003, 93) describes: “The voice of her other self speaks out of the anger and frustration that even as a child she has assiduously repressed.” Howells calls this “double voicing” and explains that this coherent motif stands for “Atwood’s construction of a split female subjectivity” where the conscious self is displaced by its “unborn twin” (ibid.). Howells (2003, 93–94) clarifies how in dialogue with Zenia Tony is able to tell her childhood story and this for Tony is an act of exorcism because Zenia represents “her idealized other self” (ibid.). “Tony looks at her, looks into her blue-back eyes, and sees her own reflection: herself, as she would like to be. Tnomerf Ynot. Herself turned inside out” (RB, 167).

Tony loves her work as a war historian: “The whole point of being a historian [...] is that you can successfully avoid the present, most of the time” (RB, 29). Even in her work she wants to escape the real world into the world of her own and she calls herself a warbaby because of her parents, so it makes sense the war became her profession.

Tony’s relationship with her husband, West, is very protective. She thinks that her mother ruined her father, so she wants to protect West from herself but also from Zenia: “West must be kept out of it as much as possible. He must be insulated. He’s already been damaged enough. For kindly and susceptible souls like West’s, the real world, especially the real world of women, is far too harsh a place” (RB, 110).

The subject of my thesis is the relationships between mothers and daughters. Therefore, the most interesting in the story is of course the relationships between the individual protagonists and their mothers. Tony’s relationship with her mother is complex, to say the least and she has felt motherless even from the very beginning of her life. Her mother, Anthea was English and a warbride, and she never felt at home in Canada with Tony’s father. Tony thinks of her as Anthea, since “Anthea isn’t very much like the other mothers, although occasionally she tries to be” (RB,

144). Anthea gave her a nickname when she was still in the incubator because she used to open and close her mouth, but did not cry, she called her Guppy. Tony “was hurt and insulted when she discovered that it was a fish” because she had thought that the word meant “something warm and soft, like a puppy“ (RB, 141).

Tony has a very deep need to feel and be loved, so she tries to please her mother by being dutiful. But even as she tries, she knows that this will never happen: “She never says ‘I truly, truly love you’. It’s always Mother, as if mother is someone else” (RB, 40) and Tony realizes that she “is a foreigner, to her own mother” (RB, 145). Her mother “wanted Tony changed, fixed, turned right inside up” (RB, 138). Tony knows that she was never what her mother wanted her to be, no matter how hard she tried.

Anthea chooses not to be a mother nor a wife, and Tony feels it is her fault: “Dogs run away, cats, horses. Mothers did not” (RB, 153). Yet she does not feel any rage, because she does not know how that would feel like. She does not know how to show emotions; like Zenia would. Through the aggression and anxiety, she witnessed in her parents’ marriage as a child, she has learned to suppress her feelings. After her mother was gone Tony feels that “she was there more than ever”; she had never emotionally been there for Tony and now she was gone physically too: “*Anthea. Aehtna*. Like *dead*, it was almost the same thing backwards or forwards” (RB,154 italics original) and Tony is very aware of “whatever was lacking when Anthea was there, it was much worse now that she wasn’t” (RB, 154).

By telling her story to Zenia, Tony finally gets a release from her mother; together they go and toss her mother’s ashes into the sea: “It’s not something she’d have done on her own; it’s just to please Zenia” (RB, 159). The metal container storing her mother’s remains does not sink though, as if Anthea still had a hold on Tony. Only after the final confrontation with Zenia can Tony accept her past.

## **2.4 Roz – the Big Mom**

Roz is a tough businesswoman, a skill learned from her father, only “she can do it better” (RB, 93). Financially she is very successful but since she is a woman, she feels that she lacks power:

“[S]he’s been in the annual *Toronto Life* list of Toronto’s Fifty Most Influential. But if that kind of recognition is the measure of power, then Mickey Mouse is a million times more powerful than she is, and Mickey Mouse doesn’t even exist” (RB, 88). She does a lot of charity work and still wonders: “How much compassion is enough?” (RB, 92). She carries a lot of guilt on her shoulders and feels what Rich describes as the Everymother’s guilt towards her children and also feels guilty of her success and money. She is “the Big Mom” as her twin daughters call her and she takes this role in business as well as in her relationship with Tony and Charis: “She wants to spread her hen wings over them, reassure them, tell them that everything will be alright“ (RB, 103). Gregersdotter (2003, 127) finds this a manifestation of Roz’s desire to be needed by other people. Her taking this role as a mother not just with her children but with her employees and friends as well defines their roles also. She wants to please everybody and “*secure*, is what she wants them to feel” (RB, 303; italics original).

Gregersdotter states that Roz’s past defines her too, not just the motherhood. Her endless guilt comes from her past, from her relationship with her parents. Through Zenia Roz is able to outweigh her tormenting past: “However, the fact that Roz has acknowledged that she and Zenia are similar, the they are both a ‘mixture’ is also a realization that Roz adds up to more than the many labels Mother, Fat, Ritch Bitch, and Woman Boss” (Gregersdotter 2003, 127–28). According to Howells (2003, 97):

Zenia’s main function seems to be to confront Roz with her own limits of power: as a wife (Zenia seduces Mitch away from Roz), as a mother (Zenia claims to have seduced Roz’s son Larry), as a feminist ( Zenia causes a debacle over *WiseWomanWorld*), as a businesswoman (Zenia defrauds Roz in several quite spectacular ways), and as a Canadian.

Roz feels stuck with her heritage not knowing who she is; poor and Catholic from her mother’s side and rich and Jewish from her father’s, “split in two by her dual cultural inheritance” (Howells in Wilson 2003, 96) and feeling herself as an outsider, feeling insecure and inadequate. She has several names expressing her different identities, Rosalind Greenwood, Roz Grunwald and Roz Andrews after her marriage to Mitch. With the name changes she is able to transform even though the different identities shadow each other, and she is tormented by her insecurities of not being enough and not being authentic. These insecurities are the flaws that let Zenia enter. “When you alter yourself, the alterations become the truth” (RB, 102). It is only because of

Zenia, Roz accepts herself and realizes that she can choose whoever or whatever she wants to be (Howells 2005, 136–37). After Zenia’s death she feels sad but also relieved:

The funny thing is, she actually feels sad. Now figure that out! Zenia was a tumour, but she was also a major part of Roz’s life [...] Roz will finally be a widow. No. She’ll be something more, something beyond that. What? She will wait and see. (RB, 467)

## 2.5 Charis – the tough fairy

Charis is the all-loving, gentle, spiritual, New Age woman that was born to the wrong parents. Originally, she was Karen, but “finally she changed into Charis, and vanished, and reappeared elsewhere, and she has been elsewhere ever since” (RB,41). Howells (2003, 98 in Wilson) describes this splitting of self “in two in a desperately willed act of migration from herself.” Gregersdotter (2003, 125) claims that because Karin is excluded “from herself, and therefore drawn a rigid line between past and present,” Charis has in this way managed to find closure, even though she later finds out that she had just repressed Karin’s existence. This action is a very typical defense mechanism in psychology, the emergence of Charis was a necessity for her to survive. Charis was very traumatized as a child, her childhood is the most traumatic in *The Robber Bride*. When she was a small child her mother was physically very abusive, “hitting Karen’s legs with a shoe or a broom handle or whatever was around” (RB, 41). Her mother was widowed because of the war, and she is very unstable. Charis has never met her father. Later on the mother cannot cope anymore, and Charis is taken first to live with her grandmother and after she passes away, to her aunt and uncle, where her uncle sexually abuses Charis.

Like Tony, Charis also has difficulties with emotions because as a child she had to face so much violence and she feels abandoned by her mother: “She was used to smiling even when she didn’t feel like it” (RB, 234). She is afraid of emotions, especially strong emotions. Gregensdotter (2003, 90) notes that “this requires a great amount of self-control and also self-denial,” because whatever she did, it was never the right thing to do according to her mother:

Karen cried a lot when her mother hit her, not just because it hurt but because she was supposed to show that she was sorry, although she was confused about why. Also, if she didn’t cry her mother would keep right on hitting her until she did. *You hard girl!* But she had to stop at the right moment or her mother would hit her for crying. (RB, 235 italics original)

Charis/Karen was not a hard girl though, but she has a daughter Augusta who is the opposite of her mother: “Her daughter is a hard girl. Hard to please, or hard for Charis to please” (RB, 40). Charis wonders whether this is because she is fatherless, like herself. She also wonders whether she deserves it. Charis loves her daughter very much and takes good care of her and yet, “they never seem to be the right things, they never seem to be enough” (RB,41) and she also carries the guilt of Everymother. In the end her daughter absolves her:

“You don't have to keep giving me stuff, Mom,” says Augusta, in an oddly grown-up voice. “ I love you anyway.” (RB, 450)

“I wish you'd stop feeling so guilty,” says Augusta. “Maybe I minded when I was small, but look around you, Mom, this is the twentieth century! Fathers come and go -a lot of the kids on the Island didn't have them.” (RB, 451)

Charis's boyfriend Billy is an American Vietnam war victim. Charis is very possessive and protective of him: “Although he is not a prisoner, he is in a way a prisoner of war. It's war that has brought him here [...]. She can't help thinking of him as a captive; her captive, because his very existence here depends on her" (RB, 210). This way she is reassuring herself that Billy needs her. Slettedahl Macpherson (2010, 66) describes Charis's sexuality as follows: “For Charis, Zenia is the sexual woman she will not allow herself to be, and thus her own desire must be projected onto an Other either malevolently or benignly.” In *The Robber Bride* Charis thinks that “[w]hen she makes love with Billy she doesn't think about being Karen, or Charis either. She thinks about being Zenia” (RB, 267). She then wonders who is the mother of her daughter, Karen or Charis, or maybe Zenia. Charis projects her entire motherhood to her other self and even to Zenia, projection being one of the defense mechanisms used in psychoanalysis. Billy disappears with Zenia and Charis believes he is dead, thus having the same fate as her own father in a way.

Charis is middle-aged and it is 1990 when Zenia re-enters her life opening the door for Karen, this worthless shadow of herself, to resurface. They used to know of each other in college, so Zenia refers to Charis using the name of Karen. Charis had already realised that Karen was not entirely gone, that she had repressed Karen from her consciousness: “Karen is hiding somewhere else inside their shared body, but when she closes her eyes and searches with the mind's eye,

here and there within herself, she can't find her, although there is a dark patch, a shadow, something she can't see" (RB, 267).

In her final confrontation with Zenia Charis goes through a "schizophrenic struggle" (Howells 2003, 99 in Wilson) when she accepts the rage hidden inside her and confronts not only Zenia but also her shadow self. It is a triumphant victory when she realizes "her own otherness" and the identities of Karen and Charis merge into one, into Zenia: "Charis merges into her [Zenia]. She slides her on like a glove, she slips into her like a flesh dress, she looks out through her eyes. What she sees is herself, herself in the mirror, herself with power" (RB, 398).

### 3 Why women mother?

Women mother. In our society, as in most societies, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility for infant care, spend more time with infants and children than do men, and sustain primary emotional ties with infants. When biological mothers do not parent, other women, rather than men, virtually always take their place. (Chodorow 1999, 3)

According to Nancy Chodorow (1999, 11) in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, we take it as given that women mother, because women biologically bear children. But biology does not explain the institution of motherhood. Chodorow (ibid.) says that being a mother does not only mean bearing a child but also being responsible for socializing and nurturing, because that is what the primary parent does:

Women's maternal role has profound effects on women's lives, on ideology about women on the reproduction of masculinity and sexual inequality, and on the reproduction of particular forms of labor power. Women as mothers are pivotal actors in the sphere of social reproduction.

Chodorow (1999, 28) further suggests that this infantile relationship with the mother and baby can have some psychological bearing in later mothering. Societies have changed throughout history so women's mothering is not that much needed for physical reproduction as it was before:

Women's emotional role in the family and their psychological mothering role grew just as their economical and biological role decreased. We notice women's mothering today because it has ceased to be embedded in a range of other activities and human relations. It stands out in its emotional intensity and meaning and in its centrality for women's lives and social definition. (Chodorow 1999, 6)

That women mother is a product, says Chodorow (1999, 32), "a product of feminine role training and role identification. Girls are taught to be mothers, trained for nurturance, and told that they ought to mother." This leads to girls wanting to be like their mothers. Fundamentally, social organization of gender and women's status as the inferior gender are enhanced by women's mothering because we acquire our roles through our family (Chodorow 1999, 31).

Rich (1995, 251) in *Of Women Born* asks: "What makes us mothers?" and gives us several scenarios because there is no simple answer. According to Rich defining mothering is in itself a

complex issue since there are so many different ways of mothering; biological mothers, adoptive mothers, stepmothers and being a nanny, just to mention a few and in this thesis the interest lies only in the female gender. Chodorow (1989,168) points out that it was Freud who said that “[W]oman is made, not born”. Chodorow points out that the reality “that we are mothered by women” is culturally and socially such an important fact that it is worth studying further. The same goes for all societies, women rather than men are primarily responsible for parenting. And this is significant “for people’s constructions of self and interpersonal relations, for their emotions, their fantasies, and their psychological apprehensions of gender” (Chodorow 1989, 6). In Rich’s (1995, 222–23) opinion all mothers fail their children according to the institution of motherhood, they are always blamed if anything goes wrong, and she calls this “the guilt of Everymother.” Atwood applies this concept in *The Robber Bride*: “Roz wonders how long it will take her kids to forgive her, once they’ve figured out exactly how much they need to forgive her for” (RB, 83).

According to Rich, throughout history a woman who has no children, the “childless” woman has been considered a failed woman. This “unchilded” woman has been denied the respect given to mothers (except nuns and virgins) and as such she cannot represent her sex, because “the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of heterosexual pairing and bearing” has been seen a “great threat to male hegemony” (Rich 1995, 252). These attitudes of functions of a woman on birthing and child-rearing are not new, they go back for centuries and these attitudes are shared by both women and men (Rich 1995, 251–52). *The Robber Bride* addresses this issue, most obviously in the character of Zenia, the actual robber bride – even though she cannot be described as a failed woman, she definitely is a threat to men and women alike. She has sexual power that is threatening to both men and women, and she also knows very well how to use this power in seducing the protagonists’ husbands and partners: “*innocent* was never Zenia’s favourite adjective for herself, and *bystanding* was not her typical activity” (RB, 11 italics original). For Tony, one of the protagonists in *The Robber Bride*, every day is a constant proving of herself:

Male historians think she’s invading their territory [ ...]. They think she should be writing social history, such as who ate what when, or *Life in the Feudal Family*. Female historians, of whom there are not many, think the same thing, but for different reasons. They think she ought to be studying birth; not death, and



certainly not battle plans. Not routs and debacles, not carnages, not slaughters. They think she's letting women down. (RB, 21–22)

Whether it is mothering or non-mothering, they both have had the same effect on women. According to Rich (1995, 253), “*whichever we did has been turned against us*”. She says that we as women are both mothers and daughters. There is a special bond between actual mothers and daughters, a kind of duality of separation and bonding. We find it confusing because patriarchal attitudes have encouraged the polarization of a mother and a daughter and any unwanted negative emotions have been projected towards “the other woman”: “Emotions such as guilt, anger, shame, power, freedom” (ibid.). In *The Robber Bride* this “Other Woman” is Zenia, the villain of the story. According to Howells (2002, 148–49) Zenia is ominous yet she is necessary for the three protagonists to be able to redefine themselves. She stands for the otherness and is the return of the repressed. Sharon R. Wilson (2002, 224 in Nischik) describes Zenia’s role as “not only the contradictory roles a woman is imagined to play or does play, but the endless number of goddesses who are all part of the global Great Goddess.” Brooks Bouson (2010, 41) writes that Atwood has chosen the image of a dark shadow “since Zenia will confront the characters with the shadowy unconscious aspects of themselves which they have tried to reject or ignore. In Atwood’s words, “Zenia is the incarnation of how plainer, more oblong women wish to look, and therefore to be” (RB, 132). Even the successful Roz thinks to herself: “Either way, she would like to be someone else. But not just anyone. Sometimes – for a day at least, or even for an hour, or if nothing else was available then five minutes would do – sometimes she would like to be Zenia” (RB, 393).

Throughout centuries non-biological mothers have raised girl children:

For centuries, daughters have been strengthened and energized by non-biological mothers, who have combined a care for the practical values of survival with an incitement toward future horizons, a compassion for vulnerability with an insistence on our buried strengths. In the name of sisterhood we need to be able to adapt to strengthen the mother as well as the daughter in ourselves. (Rich 1995, 252–53)

The sisterhood in *The Robber Bride* comes into being between the three protagonists because they have a common enemy, Zenia. They are also godmothers for each other’s children. Together they find out their hidden strengths because they all share a motherless childhood and Zenia is the force that makes them face their past traumas. When Roz thinks about Tony and Charis, she thinks that “the two of them know everything already. They know the worst ” (RB,

99) and Charis thinks that “Tony and Roz are friends now, that's beyond a doubt. They're part of her pattern, for this life” (RB, 43).

The fear of becoming one's mother is called ‘matrophobia’, a term invented by the poet Lynn Sukenick (Rich 1995, 235). It can be seen as a woman trying to become oneself whilst trying to free herself from her mother, her self is split. The victim, the martyr in ourselves is represented by our mother. In *The Robber Bride* all three protagonists have traumatizing childhoods so they invent double personalities. They all have split identities with different names: Tony is Ynot, the brave and courageous heroine, who is the opposite of tiny and timid Tony. Charis used to be Karen, but her childhood traumas drew her to repress Karen and transform into soft and all-forgiving New Age Charis. Roz is the presently successful true Canadian who never has managed to get rid of the feeling of being an outsider because of her immigrant background when her name was Rosalind. Rich (1995, 235–37) says that this is “the essential female tragedy”, both are lost the mother and the daughter even though this is not recognized in literature like father–daughter split in Hamlet, or son and mother in Oedipus.

Rich discusses “unmothering” and “the motherless woman” saying that the woman may live in denial, not accepting her own vulnerability and contradicting any absence of a mother. This woman then could spend the rest of her life seeking mothers even in men and proving herself to others. At the same time, she needs others to need her, so that she can give them what she herself has not received and thus prove her own strength. (Rich 1995, 242–43). In *The Robber Bride* all the protagonist are unmothered differently: Tony feels motherless from the very beginning of her life and she is constantly proving herself in her profession; as a teacher she cares a lot of her students: “If she doesn't watch it, she'll turn into a hearty, jocular den mother” (RB, 23) and with her husband West, she protects and nurtures him: “He's already been damaged enough. For kindly and susceptible souls like West's, the real world, especially the real world of women, is far too harsh a place” (RB, 110). Charis is left with her relatives by her mother. For Charis her boyfriend Billy is “her captive, because his very existence depends on her” (RB, 210) and her only goal is for Billy to be happy: “He was so lost, so wounded, how could she refuse to offer him whatever comfort she had?” (RB, 214). Roz feels that her mother is a martyr and her father a

hero and they do not leave any role for her to be played while she is not abandoned like Tony and Charis.

Freudian psychoanalysts talk about the penis envy, Rich (1995, 243–44) calls this the rage of daughters toward their mothers, meaning that the daughter is disappointed in her mother and feels that she has not fought enough for her because for her to be able to fight for herself her mother has had to have loved her enough and also fought for her. Charis loves her daughter, Augusta, and raises her with warmth and giving her love, and yet Charis feels that “they never seem to be the right things, they never seem to be enough” (RB, 41). Augusta rebels against her mother’s way of life, she has chosen to be the opposite of her. Charis’s own mother abandoned her, so she had no mother fighting for her. Furthermore, Rich (1995, 245) says that when a woman is proud of being a female, she will pass this on to her daughter, but this is difficult in a system that “has persistently stolen women’s bodies and egos from us.” She gives examples of emotionally unavailable mothers (alcoholics, drug users, suicidal mothers) and of nurturing fathers that have replaced these unavailable mothers saying that all this will eventually lead to “stolen power from the mother,” because the father has been loved at the mother’s expense, “it is love lost.” Roz worries about her daughters whether they were reacting to their father’s absence in “some attempt to deny his existence. But maybe it was simply the lack of penises on the stuffed animals” (RB, 293) and about her own father she cannot decide whether he was a hero or a crook. When a mother is victimized it will tear the daughter apart because she learns everything from her mother, especially what it is to be a woman. Such mothers not only feel powerless, but they pass on their experiences of guilt and self-hatred to their daughters (Rich 1995, 245).

Chodorow (1999, 169) seems to share the same view as Rich since in her opinion, “[t]he basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world” saying that women are committed to mothering “[b]ecause women themselves are mothered by women.” A girl’s sense of self is connected to her mother’s sense of self and a woman’s sense of self is ambivalent: it can be a strength because it allows “empathy, nurturance, and intimacy” but at the same time it can be a hazard increasing the possibility of losing one’s independence. If a girl has no woman role models and even the father is absent, she tends to have problems with her sense of self and then later on separates

herself from her own children. Chodorow (1989, 169) also argues that a girl-child is always related to her mother but at the same time she wants her father “as a refuge from mother” and this leads to her “taking the character of her relationship with her mother to her relationship with men.” How the psyche then develops and structuralizes is based on the experiences a child has from her early relationships. Atwood toys with these since all the protagonists have had something happening to their relationships with their mothers which have affected their relationships with their men. Tony’s mother ruined her father, so she tries to protect her husband. Charis had no father and she either has no partner; her father was killed during the war and her boyfriend disappears with Zenia. Roz’s father was a DP, displaced person, who was lost during the war but resurfaced and her own husband disappears because of Zenia and gets killed. Roz feels a heart-breaking longing for the men in her life.

## 4 Theoretical frame

This chapter deals with psychoanalytic criticism from a feminist point of view and that is the literary theory behind my thesis. Peter Barry (2009, 128) states that feminist critics “raise the question of whether men and women are ‘essentially’ different because of biology, or are socially constructed as different.” I will explain in more detail how Adrienne Rich and Nancy Chodorow came up with their explanations for the social constructedness of motherhood in patriarchal society and how this in turn has affected the construction of a female self in girl-children.

The feminist view of today has its roots in the women’s movement of the 1960s and according to Peter Barry (2009, 116) the movement was “literary from the start.” Literature offered the role models needed to change the views and attitudes on women's role in the society. Furthermore, the feminist critics studied representations of women and power relations in literature and wanted to revise the experiences of women. Psychoanalysis was one method to analyze female identity and how it is constructed (Barry 2009, 92–101; 125–29).

The early feminists in the late 1960s attacked Freudian theories but later Freud has also been defended by saying that female sexuality is a process and that the Freudian penis envy can be considered “ as an emblem of social power” (Barry 2008, 125). Sonia Mycak (1996, 22) has argued that “[p]sychoanalysis is by definition a discourse of reminiscence” therefore feminist psychoanalytic theory sits well in studying the mother–daughter relationships and the construction of the female self in Atwood’s *The Robber Bride*, because the novel looks back on the lives of the three protagonists. In this chapter I will also explain the key concepts of psychoanalysis that I have used in examining the novel.

### 4.1 Psychoanalytic criticism: focus on unconsciousness

In *Beginning Theory*, Peter Barry (2009, 92) describes psychoanalytic criticism as “a form of literary criticism which uses some of the techniques of psychoanalysis in the interpretation of literature,” and according to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* psychoanalysis is interested in the mind and its disorders by investigating conscious and unconscious elements. Chodorow (1989,

4) in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* writes that psychoanalytic theory investigates and tries to understand how our unconscious fantasies are developed and experienced and how these are constructed and reconstructed from our past to the present:

Psychoanalysis helps here because it shows us that we also live our past in the present. We do not just react to our contemporary situation and conscious wishes, nor can we easily change values, feelings and behaviour simply if we have an encouraging social setting. Moreover, psychoanalysis explains our commitment to this past, which arouse at a time of huge feelings of helplessness and dependency, a commitment which is now repressed, unconscious, and inaccessible to our conscious self. It is who we are, and changing that is very difficult. (Chodorow 1989, 171)

Chodorow argues that psychoanalysis is a theory of active and creative human nature that can result in liberation and its goal is to get the individual to evolve away from those unconscious fantasies that drive her because they are not always desirable and to bring the unconscious conscious. Also, it is a theory that people adapt in their everyday life making sense to their experiences psychologically and as such have the ability to change them (Chodorow 1989, 171; 177). In this thesis I will look into how the protagonists in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* live their pasts to the present and only through the other woman these repressed memories are brought out in the open. The protagonists evolve through Zenia, the Other Woman who makes them face their childhood memories and to deal with them. The stories of Tony, Charis and Roz are presented through a historical frame; today is formed and born out of what happened to each of them with Zenia. In *The Robber Bride*, the unconscious is brought conscious through Zenia. Eleonora Rao (in Howells 2006, 103) indicates that Zenia forces all the three protagonists to "face chaos and instability both inside and outside." Coomi S Vevaina (in Howells 2006, 94) ponders whether Zenia has after all benefited the threesome and says: "she is repeatedly depicted as a psychic externalization of the deepest hopes and fears of the three women." Because she is the shadow she cannot be rejected. Wilson (2002, 224 in Nischik) claims that by Atwood we must know our shadow self so that it does not get to control us. This shadow self in *The Robber Bride* is Zenia.

In *Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow (1999, 41) explains what is essential in our psychoanalytic input: it is how our unconscious mind operates. Psychoanalysis shows us that we have mental activities that we are unaware of and that we have actively repressed them from our consciousness "because it was too threatening, painful, or frustrating." Chodorow (1999, 41–42)

states that according to Freud some unconscious mental activity is transformed by symbolizing, by association or by displacing. These unconscious functions are used as defences “to cope with lack of control, ambivalence, anxiety, loss, feelings of dependence, helplessness, envy” (Chodorow 1999, 42). In Chodorow’s words:

Psychoanalysis concentrates on unconscious mental processes, affects and psychic structure. Psychoanalysts discuss the relationship between mental life and behaviour, but psychoanalysis is not in the first instance a psychological theory about behaviour. It is a theory developed through interpretation of a particular kind of behaviour in the analytic situation – talk (play, in the analyses of children) – as an index of the content of unconscious processes and structure. Psychoanalysis argues, unlike many other psychologies, that there is no one-to-one correspondence between unconscious processes or structure and the content of consciousness and intended activity. A particular unconscious process, affect (an idea, wish, preoccupation), or structural form can express itself in almost endless behavioural as well as conscious psychological modes. (1999, 41)

Psychoanalysis is a means to study how our childhood’s unconscious inner worlds and intrapsychic conflicts affect our adulthood’s external experiences and situations we find ourselves in and how we feel and behave in those situations by giving meaning to these. Adults, especially when they have had unresolved, ambivalent and repressed relationships, are often unaware of the unconscious way of recreating aspects of them and unconsciously living their past to the present. These perplexities can then enrich, distort or even destroy their interpersonal relations. Psychoanalysts interpret “symptoms, talk, behaviour, and dreams” that appear in a clinical situation (Chodorow 1999, 51–52).

## **4.2 The concept of mothering**

According to Chodorow (1989, 176–77) psychoanalytic theory helps us to understand how we became gendered and how sexual inequality is repeated generation after generation i.e., “how women develop maternal capacities through their relationship to their own mother.” It is the “sex–gender system” where within the institution of a family women mother, because that is how the labour in the family is divided. The process of reproduction of mothering is unintentional and it is assumed and transmitted not only socially and culturally, but also through psychic changes of consciousness. Psychoanalysis gives us a structure of social reproduction claiming that the family institution produces personalities that transfer major features of the social organization of gender thus creating gendered members of society. The structure of the family together with family practices raise different needs in men and women. This development is systemic and

produces women as mothers. “Girls are taught to be mothers” (Chodorow 1999, 31). Girls are expected to acquire a gender role and to behave in a certain way. Atwood however challenges these traditional roles, often with witticism.:

It’s complicated, being a woman boss. [...] [I]f you’re a woman and you hire a woman, you have to make them into girlfriends, into pals; you have to pretend you’re all equal, which is hard when you’re twice their age. Or else you have to baby them. You have to mother them, you have to take care of them. (RB, 89)

“How a person parents, moreover, is to a large extent determined by childhood experiences and conflicts” (Chodorow 1999, 28). When a child grows up, she organizes her childhood experiences and conflicts in her relationships to her sense of self and these can then later or affect her behaviour unconsciously and separately from the original relationship (usually to her parents). This is easily universalized as a sustained quality of her psyche. What Chodorow says is that biology does not explain women’s mothering but “all result from a male-dominant father-absent family where women mother” (ibid.). Psychoanalytic theory can also explain how it is the family that actually makes mothers out of women. Chodorow discusses asymmetry in the family meaning that it is the woman who mothers and says that this in turn also affects the child’s psychic development because there is always a history of social patterns based on the family structure. A child develops in interaction with the people close to her and how these people behave affects how her personality and emotional self is developed (Chodorow 1999, 49). In this thesis I will discuss what happens in *The Robber Bride* when the girl children are unmothered. In the novel mothers are mentally absent but there are no fathers either. So Tony, Roz and Charis grow up in broken families and in order to survive they become independent quite early, like Tony sees it, she “was hardened off early (RB, 135). Only Tony has no children of her own, but the other two have them: Roz has a son and twin daughters, Charis has a daughter. Roz is called The Big Mom by her twins and she even mothers her two friends. For Charis motherhood is more difficult: when she gets pregnant, she finds that hard to believe but when her daughter is born, she “vows to be the best person she can be “(RB, 284). Tony and Roz are her daughter’s godmothers unofficially, “they’ll teach her to stand up for herself” (RB, 285) thinks Charis. Charis loves her daughter very much, even though she wonders whether she is actually her mother, or is it Karen (the young Charis) or even Zenia. Charis never felt love from her mother so it is difficult for her to understand that her own daughter loves her unconditionally: “And she does find it difficult to believe – that a person would love her even



when she isn't trying. Trying to figure out what other people need, trying to be worthy” (RB, 450). In this thesis I will look into the construction of self to understand how the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* develop their senses of self and become mothers themselves.

In Chodorow's opinion a very substantive element in psychoanalytic theory has been a precise focus on sex and gender thus giving us a method of analysing these two. Socially and culturally the fact that mothering takes place mostly by women is important and worth analysing, says Chodorow. Her focus is on the process of internalization which includes the process of unification of other people's opinions and values in the person's sense of self. Furthermore, she concentrates on the development of the feminine psychic structure where women are being prepared to mother because the family and especially its individual members are the institution that produces social reproduction and makes children “gendered members of society.” Chodorow uses psychoanalytic object-relations theory in explaining the reproduction of mothering. She examines how our early infancy affects our experiences and the way we perceive inequality and difference unconsciously and what is the importance of women's mothering to gender in general (personality and relations). The object-relations theory places an emphasis on emotional as well as social, cultural and political power of the mother (Chodorow 1999, 6; 39; 51). In *The Robber Bride* each protagonist gets belittled by their mothers from very early on, Tony was never what her mother wanted her to be, “ [a]most is what she has always felt; approximate “ (RB, 36). They construct their senses of self via their mothers because that is what little girls do.

### **4.3. Psychoanalytic and feminist criticism**

“Freud is central to an understanding of the meanings and trajectories of the twentieth century” (Sprengnether in Plain and Sellers 2007, 251). When studying psychoanalysis, we of course need to at least mention Sigmund Freud even though his status has been questioned especially by the feminists. The psychoanalytic theory itself was created by Freud. He had some major concepts that work well when interpreting literature. Sprengnether argues that the value of Freud is in the ambiguity of interpretation of his theories of consciousness/ unconsciousness. Freud's first finding was that people have mental activity that affects their behaviour and yet their conscious self is unaware of this (Sprengnether 2007, 251). According to Barry (2009, 98):

Freudian interpretation, then, has always been of considerable interest to literary critics. The basic reason, again, is that the unconscious, like the poem, or novel, or play, cannot speak directly and explicitly, but does so through images, symbols, emblems, and metaphors. Literature too, is not involved with making direct explicit statements about life, but with showing and expressing experience through imagery, symbolism, metaphor and so on. However, because the “statements” made are not explicit there is an inevitable “judgemental” element involved, and in consequence psychoanalytic interpretations of literature are often controversial.

Freud has given us a theory of how we became sexed and gendered:

Psychoanalytic theory is almost by definition a theory of sexuality and the way sexuality develops in women and men. Freud shows us why we do not exist apart from our particular sexualization and gender identification, even though that sexualization and the gender identification are created. (Chodorow 1989, 168)

The development of gender personality and sexual orientation usually follows a certain pattern and yet affects differently to women and men. Their sense of self and their relational capacities develop differently in boys and girls. Women tend to develop maternal capacities via family structure where women mother, in men this structure “produces a psychology and ideology of male dominance, masculine superiority and the devaluation of women and things feminine” (Chodorow 1989, 176). Furthermore, women tend to carry their mother-relationship to their relationships with men. (Chodorow 1999, 169–73; 179). In *The Robber Bride* all protagonists share the need for their mothers’ love which they lacked as children and this is portrayed in their later relationships with their men.

According to Freud, the relationship between mother and daughter is the basis for how women develop their maternal capacities. Chodorow implies that in psychoanalysis there are two separate concepts explaining the mother-daughter bond: firstly the mother–infant relationship that looks into the libidinal and ego development of the girl-child and secondly the pre-oedipal phase in the child's development that is interested in the relationship and what happens if this is underdeveloped. Children’s identification processes are different between girls and boys, Chodorow calls this “asymmetrical”. Because women predominantly mother, their roles are familial, and they are first associated with the family – women tend to be portrayed as either mothers or wives i.e. in relation to others (children or men). This is the relational institution that produces reproduction. “Feminine identification processes are relational” ( Chodorow 1999,176) and “[f]eminine identification, then, can be based on the gradual learning of a way of being familiar in everyday life” (ibid.) and since the child is first mostly involved with the mother, a

girl's identity is developed in relation to her mother. Identity is at the same time sameness and separatedness, girls are not able to separate themselves from their mothers because of the same sex. For a girl individuation is more problematic and through differentiation a child develops her ego. Later on mother–daughter relationship is reflected in other relationships as well. (Chodorow 1999, 97; Chodorow 1989, 171; 176–77). In *The Robber Bride* Roz contemplates about her love for her children: “Her love for him is different in quality from her love for the twins” (RB, 83) and she thinks that Larry, her son is weak and needs his mother's protection whereas the twin daughters “have resilience; it's not that they won't get any wounds, they have wounds already, but they can lick their wounds and then bounce back” (ibid.). For Atwood women are stronger than men and she brings forth that women are not mere victims of their fate nor are they passive bystanders, instead they are the creators of their own fates. It is the position four in Atwood's victim category: “[Y]ou are able to accept your own experience for what it is” (Atwood 1972, 39). In *The Robber Bride* the protagonists are able to change their victim position with the help of Zenia; they manage to remove “the internal causes of victimization” (ibid.).

“Feminism, psychoanalysis and literary interpretation have more in common than their early histories might seem to suggest – or promise” (Sprengnether in Plain and Sellers 2007, 235). In the opinion of Madelon Sprengnether, these intellectual activities on culture, psyche and text have evolved “to an interrogation of the possibilities of pre-oedipal subversion into something that we might describe as our current decentred, post-Freudian, post-postmodernist era” (ibid.). Feminism demanded a theory of how we became sexed and gendered. Freud's psychoanalytic theory was such a theory because it explains how sexuality is developed in women and men (Chodorow 1989, 168). In the early days, feminist theorists criticized and attacked Freudian theory for being the source of patriarchal attitudes that must be fought against. This was especially in the 1970s when feminists attacked strongly against “the mechanism of patriarchy” (Barry 2009, 117) but even today this way of thought is still influential. Freud has also been defended by saying that female sexuality is formed by early experiences, that it does not just exist naturally, but it is being produced and constructed. “It follows that gender roles must be malleable and changeable, not inevitable and unchangeable givens” (Barry 2009, 125). Slettedahl Macpherson (2010, 68) discusses female power that it “is *not* benevolent” and suggests that all the protagonists in *The Robber Bride* “are reclaiming spaces that women have

perhaps been denied – even by feminism itself”(ibid.). According to her these three women are very powerful, they are not victims and not even the classical binary position of good/ bad does not hold. Atwood clearly molds traditional roles with brilliant humor e.g.in the novel Roz had “grown up thinking business was something mysterious, something way beyond her, something her father did behind closed doors. Something only fathers did, that girls were forever too dull-witted to understand (RB, 294) and when she gets to sit and watch a meeting, she realizes “*Holy Moly, I can do this !*And she can, she can do it better. Better than most. Most of the time” (ibid.). As a *Ms President* of a business Roz has an assistant, Boyce, a smart, gay lawyer by training who is in his late twenties and she thinks: “Boyce brings out the lady in her, such as it is” (RB, 90) and “that Boyce was a person who would fill in the blanks for her without being asked” (ibid.). Yet, despite all this prestige and authority Roz feels powerless because she is *a woman boss*.

When Freudian psychoanalytic critics study the author’s and the characters’ unconscious motives and feelings, feminist critics develop psychoanalytic ideas further by exploring female and male identities. Feminists began questioning are men and women different because of biology or is the difference a social construction. It all started with Simone de Beauvoir’s thoughts on sex and gender: “One is not born a woman; rather one *becomes* a woman” (Barry 2009,125; italics original). Betty Friedan (1963, 61) discussed the frustration of women as wives and mothers without a possibility for a career and their frustration of the futility of education. Both of these women affected Atwood’s way of perceiving the female world. Juliet Mitchell (Barry 2009, 125) defended Freudian views saying that infantile experiences build our female sexuality and claiming that gender roles are not fixed and given but they must be changeable. According to Chodorow, psychoanalysis substantiates that gender and sexuality are internally orchestrated within the socio-cultural context proving that “personal is political.” That was the argument of the early feminists claiming also that inequality and oppression are rooted very deeply in our society. Women’s mothering is also significant to “gender personality and gender relations” because in women mothering creates strengths and ambivalences in selfhood. Chodorow is interested not only in how womanness is created and sexual and gender identity is developed and originated but also what follows when the development does not take place as what is considered normal (Barry 2009, 125–28; Chodorow 1989, 176–78).

Feminist theory is involved in liberating women from sexual inequality and one of its aims is to make changing of things possible. The theory is concerned with the sexual inequality in the social organization of gender within family as well as in working life dealing with the relationship between a man and a woman. Chodorow (1989, 167) implies that “women’s oppression is social not psychological,” saying that a gender role is something we cannot just quit, we are either women or men, female or male. It is predetermined and we cannot change it. “Feminist critics re-read psychoanalysis to further explore the issue of male and female identity” (Barry 2009, 129). In *The Robber Bride*, none of the protagonists represent purely the traditional roles preserved for women or mothers; despite all their progress in the men’s world they all feel that they are lacking power. Atwood clearly shows the reader that change is possible and that one’s destiny is not predetermined on the grounds of her sex. All of the three are independent women despite their upbringings. In *Survival, a thematic guide to Canadian literature*, Atwood (1972,131–32) examines how a family and its ties are typically portrayed in Canadian literature: “it’s a trap in which you’re caught” saying that the protagonist often senses the feeling of entrapment within his family: “he feels the need to escape, but somehow he is unable to break away” and she talks about survival. “Families in Canadian fiction huddle together like sheep in a storm or chickens in a coop: miserable and crowded, but unwilling to leave because the alternative is seen as cold empty space” (ibid.). In *The Robber Bride* Atwood introduces these same protagonists that seem trapped but here they succeed in facing their childhoods through Zenia, the Other Woman and pull off and evolve as women and mothers; they reach an understanding of their own identity and as such re-gain the power of their own lives.

#### **4.4. Key terms explained**

My perceptions of the psychoanalytic theory in the context of feminism and literary theory rest upon Nancy Chodorow and Adrienne Rich, and further in their interpretations of the Freudian psychoanalysis. There are some key terms and concepts invented by Freud that summarize how our consciousness functions. Most well-known are the tripartite system of ego, id and superego together with defence systems. Freud maintained that our unconscious mind has a strong influence in all our actions. *Defence mechanisms* are strategies that we use subconsciously when

we need to protect ourselves psychologically from overwhelming feelings of fear, shame, pain, guilt, anger or anxiety. Everyday life can place demands on us we cannot handle. These demands can be of social or biological nature or related to our relationships with ourselves as well as others. Our brains and bodies develop different defence mechanisms to help us face these situations. Repression, sublimation, denial and projection are examples of these mechanisms. (Barry 2009, 92–94). Many of these feelings are represented in *The Robber Bride* that are projected to Zenia: for Roz, Zenia represents mostly envy, for Charis it is “the ancient shame” (RB, 266) and for Tony, the feelings are mainly of fear and anxiety.

We tend to forget or ignore difficult situations especially if they have not been resolved, this Freud called *repression*. Psychoanalysis assumes that when we have difficulties in facing something we very easily repress it but Freud says that “there is always the return of the repressed” (Barry 2009, 96). In *The Robber Bride*, all these three characters have repressed their disturbing childhood memories and Zenia is “the return of the repressed” because she forces them to face these.

A *sublimation* means that what is repressed is either brought into open as something bigger and greater or disguised as something noble or it can mean transformation of “bad” urges into positive and productive activities. Denial is a defence used in situations and confrontations we want to avoid by denying their existence. In order to cope we block these from our conscious mind, pretend that they do not exist and refuse to handle them. This often leads to these matters re-appearing and then they need to be dealt with eventually. In *The Robber Bride*, Zenia brings out into open what the protagonists in the novel have repressed and finally everything is revealed in a final confrontation; Karen’s emergence is the most obvious of this.

*Projection* (or *externalization*) means how our own usually negative qualities of personality are reflected to someone else for example feelings that one does not accept. (Chodorow 1999,43; Barry 2009, 93). Zenia represents the other woman towards whom these unwanted feelings e.g. anger, shame and guilt are projected. Charis who used to be Karin when she was a child, is rather a classical example of an almost schizophrenic personality; Karen is suppressed but as the story moves along Charis cannot resist her resurfacing. Karen represents all the negative qualities and memories Charis does not want to deal with but Karen is also very powerful and ominous, so

when she emerges Charis is forced to act.“ Although she couldn't see it clearly, she thinks she knows who that person was. It was Karen [...] Karen has murdered Zenia, and it is Charis's fault for holding Karen away” (RB, 445). Whether this actually happened or not, is not clear, but Charis feels guilty because she had wished for Zenia to be dead. Finally, she meditates on Zenia and writes, “*Zenia has returned to the Light*” (RB, 451) and she herself is worthy of redemption.

Zenia represents according to many scholars “the return of the repressed.” Gregensdotter (2003, 95) points out that “through the interaction with others, it can be possible on a symbolic level for the protagonists in Margaret Atwood's novels to visit the past.” She talks about “re-watching” that enables them to gain new power with the help of Zenia (Gregensdotter 2003, 97). Zenia's stories lead to their new stories because she is constructed and transformed and only exists in context with the other characters (2003, 95; 97; 119–20).

In Freudian terminology *dream work* is a process where the reality is transformed into dream images e.g. displacement when someone is represented by someone else and condensation where a number of meanings are combined into a single image. Charis in the novel sees a reflection of a woman's face on a window and thinks instantly that it is Zenia, but it was her own daughter instead. She thinks that “the worst thing was that she hadn't really been all that surprised” (RB, 47), suggesting that unconsciously she had wishes to be Zenia, as her speculations of her daughter's mother also imply. Tony, Charis and Roz all have dreams about Zenia. Sprengnether (in Plain and Sellers 2007, 177) clarifies that “dreams give expressions to a secret or repressed wish,” which also Barry (2009, 94) confirms:

Thus, characters, motivation and events are represented in dreams in a very “literary” way, involving the translation, by the dream work, of abstract ideas or feelings into concrete images. Dreams, just like literature, do not usually make explicit statements. Both tend to communicate obliquely, or indirectly, avoiding direct or open statement, and representing meanings through concrete embodiments of time, place, or person.

*Cathexis* is what Freud defined as a partition of libido and an investment of energy towards an object, e.g. a person. He claimed that if a person had some frustrated desires that were blocked, these energies would find release in other ways for example through regression. According to Rich (1995, 225): “This cathexis between mother and daughter – essential, distorted, misused – is the great unwritten story” because the history is patriarchal and the stories in literature tell

about the mother and son. Throughout history men have felt threatened by relationships between women in general and especially so with the relationship between the mother and daughter but Rich (1995, 218–35) claims that motherhood has awakened hostile feelings and emotions also between women themselves particularly among non-mothers. Atwood examines motherhood in *The Robber Bride*. Zenia is the femme fatale, she is the man-eater that has husbands for breakfast; she raises adversarial feelings in the reader. Goodness is mainly reserved for mothers and Zenia is not a mother. Notwithstanding Tony, who is also childless but she is “good”; she is a teacher in a manly field of war, she raises admiration in the reader, she is very petite physically so how could she be threatening to anyone: “If she were six feet tall and built like a blockhouse; if she had hips. Then she'd be threatening, then she'd be an Amazon” (RB, 22) and nevertheless it is her intelligence that causes menace in her male colleagues.

#### **4.5 Object-relations theory**

Object-relations theory is a theory that differs from Freud's idea that we are driven by our sexuality, instead object-relations theory believes in our need to be in contact and in relationships with others. When Chodorow published her *Reproduction of Mothering*, this was a new perspective in feminist literary interpretation, and it directed attention away from the father to the mother and especially in the pre-Oedipal period. Sprengnether (2007, 243 in Plain and Sellers) suggests that object-relations theory was fascinated with the pre-Oedipal period and wanted to recompose and subvert the Freudian Oedipal ideas. The new focus was on the daughter–mother relationship where the mother is seen as “her first love” and on how a baby's sense of self and gender identity is developed from infancy onwards. Chodorow construes that object-relations theory pays attention to inter-relationships with others as subjects and to transference and countertransference processes where there is always a context of personal history involved. She argues also that the “libido is object seeking” and that “people are fundamentally social,” saying that in order to be able to live in this world psychological development is not just necessary, it is inevitable (Chodorow 1999, 149).

Sprengnether (2007, 251 in Plain and Sellers) states that in order for us to understand the trajectory within the 20th century we need Freud. She says that his value lies mostly in the



concentration of the conscious–unconscious even though a lot of post-Freudian thinking has been deconstructed by psychoanalytic feminism. Object-relations theory emerged from some British and American analysts who argued that a baby’s ego is developed in a relationship with the first people taking care of her and typically this is the mother. This thought was fundamental and shifted the attention in psychoanalysis to the mother. The emphasis was redirected on the pre-Oedipal period thus challenging the actual Oedipal theory and yet did not entirely deny it:

Rather the infant’s loss of its mother’s body, coveted gaze or exclusive attention signals a fall from grace into individual subjecthood, along with the necessity of finding alternate (symbolic) means of connection and communication. (Sprengher in Plain and Sellers 2007, 242; 251–52)

Chodorow is one of the most recognized scholars that has explored this more positive scenario of mother as the baby’s first love in the female relationships within literary interpretation and via object-relations theory: “The hypothesis of primary love holds that infants have a primary need for human contact for itself. Attempts to fulfil this need play a fundamental role in any person’s development and eventual psyche makeup” (Chodorow 1999, 64). A baby begins to perceive her self gradually through repeated experiences and physiological changes while she begins to become aware of her mother being separate and not-me. “This beginning perception of mother as separate, in conjunction with the infant’s inner experience of continuity in the midst of changing instances and events, forms the basis for its experience of a self” (Chodorow 1999, 67).

According to Greenberg and Mitchell (1983, 9, 13) everything in psychoanalysis starts with “individuals’ relations with others” and that “an object” refers to an entity that exists in time and space. This entity usually refers to an individually meaningful relationship that has left a mark and is then internalized. So object-relations theory explains how individuals interact “with external and internal (real and imagined) other people and to the relationship between their internal and external object worlds” (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, 14). Thus, the theory defines relationships rather than sexuality as inevitable in terms of “personality development”. The object-relations theory is concerned with and explores “the relationship between real external people and internal images and residues of relations with them” saying that individual development is “systemic” and a consequence of a patriarchal family system when women mother (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, 12–14; Chodorow 1999, 54).

The relationships between mothers and daughters in *The Robber Bride* are the foundation of this thesis. Some scholars have argued whether Zenia's character is real or imagined, yet she is crucial to the development of Tony, Charis and Roz. Gregersdotter (2003, 78) calls attention to the object-relations theory saying that: "It is clear, for example, that parental influence plays a large role in most of the character's stories" and that "the characters were once born into familial situations and contexts that are firmly constructed. Therefore, ties to their parents, and often especially their mothers, are depicted as being hard to untie." Zenia of course is another story altogether as her story changes depending on through whom her story is told. She does not even exist on her own. The interest in this study is on the relationships of Tony, Charis and Roz to their mothers and to a minor extent also on the relationships between Charis and Roz to their own children. Zenia is the internal image of the characters themselves and only through Zenia they are capable of accessing their childhood traumas.

## **5 The Mother- Daughter relationship in *The Robber Bride***

The mother-daughter relationships in *The Robber Bride* share similarities even though they all have a different story to tell. Tony, Roz and Charis all have flaws that stem from their repressed childhood memories and their damaged relationships with their mothers. In this chapter I will review how crucial this mother-daughter relationship is in constructing a female sense of self according to Chodorow and Rich. Roz and Charis have children of their own and their relationships with them are not simple either.

In *Survival* (1972) Atwood presents a theory of three generations and how they most often are presented in Canadian literature. In this chapter I will also look into the three generations Atwood portrays in *The Robber Bride*.

### **5.1 The construction of the female self**

The object-relations theory presents the concept that the development of a child is systemic whereby relationships between people are affected by the inner visions whether real or imagined. This process is unconscious. Furthermore, how a child is parented, especially by her mother, affects the development of how a child perceives herself and her sense of self. In *The Robber Bride* Tony's mother is an unhappy warbride who feels that she was somehow forced to become a wife and a mother (which is not actually true). She damages Tony therefore Tony never feels the love of her mother and has the feeling of being unwanted. There is suppressed anger between Tony's parents and she witnesses the coldness of their relationship, consequently learning to suppress her emotions. As the expectation of being a 'good girl' lay in the background, she tries time after time to please her mother, but she never gets praise for it. Tony is small in size and her mother, as well as Zenia, talk to her in the third person which Tony hates because it belittles her even more, "as if she's a child, as if she's anyone at all, as if she's a topic" (RB, 128). For Roz being a 'good girl' is something else, she calls her mother "the landlady" and "improbable martyr" (RB, 74) and feels that the only role left for her in the family is Cinderella, "the toilet cleaner," since she scrubs and cleans but again, it is never good enough for her mother. The adult Roz feels unworthy and compensates this feeling by doing a lot of charity work, excelling in the business world and paying a lot of attention to her appearance and looks. Charis's relationships

with her caretakers: her mom, her grandmother and her aunt, are the most vicious in *The Robber Bride*. She is originally Karen, but she has to repress Karen and reincarnate in the shape of Charis whose inner light and spirituality shines through the tormenting experiences she has witnessed as a child. Charis is pure and innocent and exceptionally resilient. In the final confrontation with Zenia she forgives her, forgiving Karen at the same time.

## **5.2. What happens to daughters when they are not mothered?**

According to Rich (1995, 225), the little girl who lives in us feels “wildly unmothered” throughout her adult life, if the mother left her, even though the adult self seems to have forgiven the mother. In *The Robber Bride*, all the protagonists share an emotional vacuum because they all have been abandoned in a way by their mothers. They all seem successful and ambitious; Tony academically, Roz financially and even Charis is able to provide for herself and her daughter. Chodorow (1999, 175) reminds us that there are often other women taking the place of the biological mother: “kins, teachers, mother’s friends, mothers of friends,” and the feminine identity is thus learned gradually in daily life. Charis has several mother figures since her own mother is incapable of taking care of her after the first years of her life. There is her grandmother, from whom she learns to appreciate the mother nature, hens and gardens, even though for Charis she is also an intimidating figure. There is her aunt Viola, who does not really like her and does not believe Charis when she tells about her uncle’s abuse, so Charis learns to keep things to herself, she learns to accept her subordinate role in society. In line with Rich (1995, 225; 245) due to the unavailable mother the daughter does not perceive her role within the patriarchal family system; she does not get to know what it is to be a mother because she herself is unmothered. When Charis has her own daughter, she regards Tony and Roz as her daughter’s godmothers, because she thinks they can give her whatever it is she lacks herself as if she wants to make sure her daughter gets everything she needs in order to become independent.

Rich also describes how a child who is unmothered may seek a mother through her life. In many ways the group of three in *The Robber Bride* all seek mothers. Firstly they all need others to need them although it is not always uncomplicated. For Tony her career as a teacher gives her a sense of mothering and “[s]he used to regret not having had children, though she wasn’t sure she would have been all that good at it, considering Anthea. But being a godmother has suited her

better than being a mother” (RB, 401-02). Charis with her psychic abilities is a little eccentric fairy who does not want anything bad for anyone and Roz is the Big Mom and yet, “she’s tired of being a mother, she wants to be a child for a change” (RB, 76). Secondly this need is also projected towards their husbands together with the want to protect them: Roz e.g. is very much in love with her cheating husband and feels that “ she has to diminish herself, pretend she’s smaller than she is, apologize for her success” (RB, 351). The adult woman who has been unmothered may also live in denial and reject her vulnerability: Tony thinks that she has been tough from birth, Charis comes into being after Karen is repressed and Roz drowns her feelings into mothering, comfort-eating and business. This profound feeling of the neediness to nurture makes it feasible for Zenia to enter their lives because they all want to help out. They need her to need them in order to reassert their self-worth. At the same time they all feel embarrassed and insecure with other women in general (Rich 1995, 242; 243).

### **5.3. The next generation, is the chain broken?**

I have established how Chodorow and Rich define how a person parents is determined by childhood experiences and conflicts, and that the family structure has an effect on a person’s unconsciousness. Charis and Roz are both mothers themselves. According to Chodorow (1999, 135-38) adolescent daughters want to detach themselves from their mothers while unconsciously they still need their mothers. Consequently, the daughter ends up feeling dependent yet trying to be a distinct and separate self.

In *The Robber Bride*, all the protagonists have very deeply constructed insecurities which they project into proving their worthiness at work, with their husbands and with their own daughters. Augusta, the daughter of Charis and Paula and Erin, the twin daughters of Roz, represent the new generation showing a change in female gender. These daughters have had their mothers’ love and affection so they are strong enough to fight for themselves. According to Rich (1995, 246–47) “only when we can wish imaginatively and courageously for ourselves can we wish unfetteredly for our daughters.” It is the mother who sets an example to her daughter and in *The Robber Bride* this is made possible after Charis and Roz have confronted their shadow selves through Zenia. Their daughters are careless and free, able to do whatever they want and they do

not want to be like their mothers. In *The Robber Bride* Tony wonders: “Tony isn't sure how they've come by their confidence [...] They have none of the timidity that used to be so built in, for women” (RB, 402).

Chodorow (1999, 212) construes that when there is a need for her own mother in a woman, she might turn to her daughter as a surrogate. This leads to the daughter's incomplete sense of self. On the other hand, when a mother has support:

Mother–daughter relationships in which the mother is supported by a network of women kin and friends, and has a meaningful work and self-esteem, produce daughters with capacities for nurturance and a strong sense of self (Chodorow 1999, 213)

In *The Robber Bride* the protagonists have each other for support and their work is meaningful to them, so they are able to raise their daughters together. ““You don't have to keep giving me stuff, Mom' says Augusta, in an oddly grown-up voice. 'I love you anyway'” (RB, 450). For Charis this is odd because “she does find it difficult to believe – that a person would love her even when she isn't trying” (RB, 450). With Tony and Roz as godmothers Charis has succeeded in raising a daughter with a strong sense of self. When Charis reflects her daughter's childhood without a father, Augusta answers: ““I wish you'd stop feeling so guilty,' says Augusta. 'Maybe I minded when I was small, but look around you, Mom, this is the twentieth century!’” (RB, 451).

In *Survival* Atwood (1972, 134) construes the typical themes of Canadian literature and according to her families are often presented via three generations: Grandparents, Parents and Children. The Grandparents are adamant with their precepts and “grimly religious, and more than willing to police and censor the morals of others. They rule, or attempt to rule, their children with a rod of iron.” In *The Robber Bride* especially Roz's mother is portrayed as a lady of iron with a strong Catholic righteousness and morality. The middle generation, ie Parents tries to flee, as Charis's mother fled the farm to live in the city but is not very successful in life. Atwood (1972, 135) describes this as “the internalized guilt” passed on to them by the Grandparents. Children, represented by the twins and Augusta in *The Robber Bride*, “try to escape both previous generations [...].They want [...] to *live* but they have trouble finding a way to do this.” (Atwood 1972, 136). The children of Roz and Charis are rebellious but the story does not tell what happens to them.

## 6 Conclusions

*The Robber Bride* was published in 1993 for the first time, Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* in 1978 but the second edition came out in 1999 and Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* firstly in 1976 and reissued ten years later 1986 and again in 1995. Chodorow and Rich roused a lot of attention and critique in their time. They both put forward a controversial standpoint. Chodorow (1999, xiii) writes that "[i]n the 1970s, however, it was important to challenge the tyranny of biological explanations of gender, including a psychoanalytic theory" since the discussion on femininity was fundamentally concentrated on the female, and male, bodies. The 1990s was the era of power feminism and yet when these books were republished, nothing had really changed that much in terms of mothering or power in gender relations much of which, according to Atwood, is socially constructed (Brooks Bouson 2010, 8–9).

Rich (1995, xv) states in the Introduction to the 1986 edition *Of Woman Born* that "[s]ome ideas are not really new but keep having to be affirmed from the ground up, over and over. One of these is the apparently simple idea that women are as intrinsically human as men." Atwood has stated the same on several occasions: in the interview in 1997 she said with a twinkle in her eye that women are human beings and in the other interview in 2018 she talked about human rights that are women's rights because in some circles within feminism they are against one another . What has then changed according to Atwood are the attitudes as the young women of today do not even think about some of the issues as once having been controversial nor feminist. (Margaret Atwood discusses feminism, 1997; In conversation with Margaret Atwood at the #WITW Summit, 2018).

According to Rich patriarchy is the cause for the separation between a mother and a daughter, because it has necessitated the polarization and projection of unwanted feelings towards the "other" woman. She argues that if a woman is to become whoever and whatever she wants to be, she needs to be prepared to fight for herself against the patriarchal expectations and preconceptions (Rich 1995, 248; 253). Chodorow as well as Mycak discuss the Freudian concept of pre-oedipal relationship between the mother and the daughter, and Mycak cites Chodorow in saying that "while the daughter erotically cathects toward the father, the primary emotional

relationship remains always with the mother” (1996, 92). The self and other get confused because “the symbiosis” between the mother and the daughter is so deep (ibid.). In this thesis I have stated that in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* emotionally unavailable mothers have resulted in deeply flawed daughters, who have spent their adult lives in search of themselves. The figurative umbilical cord is,, however broken with the help of the Other Woman, Zenia.

Both Rich and Chodorow argue of course that both men and women should share equal parenting, Chodorow emphasizing “intragender differences and intergender similarities,” saying that in fundamental ways they stay the same (1999, 215). As the focus of this thesis has been on the relationship between a mother and a daughter, equal parenting has not been in the core of my master's thesis. I have discussed how a woman`s mothering and non-mothering of a girl-child affects the development of her sense of self, her self-esteem and self-worth. I have argued that an absent mother according to the psychoanalytic theory can have a very strong and deep influence on the girl child. I have also stated how in the terms of feminist psychoanalytic theory the patriarchal institution of motherhood is very deeply rooted in our western way of life. I have referred to Chodorow and Rich in pointing out that mothering is constructed, not biological, where girlchildren are raised and taught to be mothers. I have described how in the *The Robber Bride* the mothers of the three protagonists abandon their daughters: mentally, literally, physically and thus also fail them following the concept of the guilt of Everymother by Rich. Margaret Atwood has examined these issues in *The Robber Bride* with wittiness and humour.

Furthermore I have examined how through the Other Woman, Zenia, these women are forced to face their traumas and they evolve thus making it possible for the next generation to have a better pedestal from where to leap. The construct of sisterhood is also present in the story of *The Robber Bride* which would also be an intriguing concept to study.

As I have stated in this study Atwood is a remarkably fascinating and multifaceted writer. The themes in *The Robber Bride* clearly stand the test of time and hold water notwithstanding the novel also being a sharp-eyed zeitgeist of Canadianness of the 1990s. As a reader I remain perplexed how relevant her insights still are, the metoo -campaign disclosed how vulnerable the construction of the female self still is under the established forces of patriarchy. The study of unconsciousness and psychology of the mind remains fascinating, as well as the forces behind



what makes us what we are. Although the world of 2020 is undoubtedly different from the world of 1990 we might still be wandering in the wilderness: “ Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across the generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness” ( Rich 1995, 246) .

## LIST OF REFERENCES

ABCLibrarySales.1997.” Margaret Atwood Discusses Feminism.” YouTube, 4:33. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xB-510i8DTE>

Atwood, Margaret.1972. *Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*.Toronto: House of Anansi Press Limited.

Atwood, Margaret. [1993] 1994. *The Robber Bride*. London: Virago Press.

Atwood, Margaret. 1994. Lecture in John Adams Institute (March 29,1994).

Barry, Peter. 2009.3<sup>rd</sup> ed. *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to literary and cultural theory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Brooks Bouson, J, ed. 2010. *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Onyx and Crake*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Cherry, Kendra. 2020. “Cathexis and Anticathexis according to Freudian Theory. According to the Freudian Theory of Drives.” verywellmind. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://www.verywellmind.com/cathexis-and-anticathexis-2795843>.

Chodorow, Nancy J. [1978]1999. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chodorow, Nancy J.1989. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Friedan, Betty.1967. *Naisellisuuden harhat*. Translated by Ritva Turunen and Jertta Roos. Rauma: Oy Länsi-Suomen kirjapaino. Originally published as *The Feminine Mystique*.

Gibbs, Robert. 1985. *Second Words: Selected Critical Prose by Margaret Atwood ( review)* ESC: English Studies in Canada, Volume 11, Number 1, March 1985, pp. 113-117 (Review) Published by Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English. Accessed 20 October 2020.

Greenberg, Jay R., and Stephen A. Mitchell. *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1983. Accessed October 15, 2020. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvj2xv6>.

Gregersdotter, Katarina. 2003. Watching Women, Falling Women. Power and Dialogue in Three Novels by Margaret Atwood. Umeå : Institutionen för moderna språk, Umeå universitet.

Howells, Coral Ann. 2003.” The Robber Bride; or Who is a True Canadian?” In *Margaret Atwood's Textual Assassinations: Recent Poetry and Fiction*, edited by Sharon Wilson, 88 -101.The Ohio State University Press: Columbus.

- Howells, Coral Ann. 2005. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. *Margaret Atwood*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howells, Coral Ann, ed. 2006. *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John Adams Institute. 1994. "Margaret Atwood on The Robber Bride." YouTube, 1:36.29. Accessed 15 October 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zj-3a\\_NvKs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zj-3a_NvKs).
- Lang, Nancy & Raymont, Peter. 2019. Original title: Margaret Atwood: A Word After Word Is Power. Translated as Margaret Atwood: Sanojen voima. Yle Teema Fem. Accessed 31 March 2020. <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50313985>.
- Macpherson Slettedahl, Heidi. 2010. *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Manufacturing Intellect. 2016. "Margaret Atwood interview ( 1994)." YouTube. 16:15. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VekYEFs16qQ>.
- #metoo -campaign. 2020. "Get to know us." me too. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://metoomvmt.org/get-to-know-us/history-inception/>,
- Mycak, Sonia. 1996. *In SEARCH of the SPLIT SUBJECT: Psychoanalysis, Phenomenology AND THE NOVELS OF Margaret Atwood*. Toronto: ECW PRESS.
- Nischik Reingard, M, ed. [2000] 2002. *Margaret Atwood: Works and Impact*. Rochester, NY: Camden House.
- Rich, Adrienne. [1976] 1995. *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as experience and institution*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company Ltd.
- Sprengnether, Madelon. (2007). "Feminist Criticism and Psychoanalysis" in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, edited by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, 235 – 262 .Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
- Wisker, Gina. 2012. *Margaret Atwood: An Introduction to Critical Views of Her Fiction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wpsu. 2015. "A Conversation with Margaret Atwood." YouTube, 26:46. Accessed 15 October 2020. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5Wj\\_JQ6NhY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5Wj_JQ6NhY).
- Women in the World. 2018." In Conversation with Margaret Atwood at the # WITW Summit." YouTube, 26:13. Accessed 15 October 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G4bUsCwf2I>.

## **Finnish summary / Suomenkielinen tiivistelmä**

### **Äidittömät tyttäret itseään etsimässä**

#### **Äiti-tytär suhteet ja minäkuvan rakentuminen Margaret Atwoodin romaanissa The Robber Bride**

Opinnäytetyössäni olen perehtynyt Margaret Atwoodin romaaniin The Robber Bride tutkien siinä esiintyviä äiti-tytär suhteita ja miten ne ovat vaikuttaneet päähenkilöiden naiseksi kasvamiseen ja kehittymiseen. Näkökulma on psykoanalyttis-feministinen kirjallisuuden kritiikki, jonka pohjalla ovat freudilaiset näkemykset psyykestä ja erityisesti tietoisuus - alitajunta yhteydestä. Lähteinä olen käyttänyt Adrienne Richin Of Woman Born ja Nancy Chodorowin Reproduction of Mothering teoksia, jotka ilmestyessään olivat käänteentekeviä psykoanalyttisen feministisen kirjallisuuden kritiikin edustajia.

Margaret Atwood on kanadalaisen kirjallisuuden uranuurtajia ja kansainvälisesti merkittävä ja arvostettu kirjailija, jonka näkemykset ympäröivästä yhteiskunnasta ovat hyvin tarkkanäköisiä ja usein feministissävytteisiä, vaikka hän itse kieltäytyy kategorioimasta itseään feministiseksi kirjailijaksi. Päähenkilöt ovat hänen romaaneissaan usein naisia, kuten on myös romaanissa The Robber Bride. Atwoodilla on vahva oma ääni, jolla hän ottaa kantaa niin kanadalaisuuteen kuin naisena olemiseen patriarkkaalisessa yhteiskunnassa, usein piikikkäällä ja ironisella huumorilla.

The Robber Bride on kertomus Zeniasta, tarkemmin sanottuna kolme kertomusta hänestä, koska narratiivi muuttuu kun se, kenen kautta tarina kerrotaan vaihtuu. Romaanin varsinaiset päähenkilöt ovat Tony, Roz, ja Charis, joita yhdistää paitsi rikkinäinen lapsuus myös Zenia. Juurikin traumaattisen lapsuuden vuoksi nämä henkilöt ovat rikkinäisiä ja siitä syystä Zenialla on keino tunkeutua heidän elämäänsä, ryöstää heidän miehensä tai poikaystävänsä ja tuhota heidän elämänsä.

The Robber Bride:n tarina pohjautuu goottilaiseen satuun ryövärिमorsiamesta. Atwood on vaihtanut rooleja niin, että tarinan päähenkilöt ovat naisia, jopa tarinan roisto Zenia on nainen. Tarinan päähenkilöistä tulee ystäviä, koska heillä on yhteinen vihollinen, Zenia. Samalla kun tarina seuraa kunkin päähenkilön elämää ja kohtaamisia Zenian kanssa, se kulkee vuosikymmenten läpi yhdistäen feministisen näkemyksen vaiheita vuosikymmenten saatossa ja

maalaten lukijalle kuvan kanadalaisuudesta ja kuka on todellinen kanadalainen. Atwoodin kuvaus on monitahoista ja hän nostaa esiin mm naisen sorretun aseman patriarkalisessa yhteiskunnassa sekä sodan vaikutukset yhteiskuntaan ja sen ihmisiin. The Robber Bride on myös psykologinen romaani, joka nostaa pintaan miten syvältä käyttäytymisemme kumpuaa ja miten vakiintuneita puolustusmekanismimme ovat, usein emme itse edes ole tietoisia näistä.

Romaanissa Zenia edustaa minuutemme synkkiä varjopuolia, jotka haluaisimme pitää piilossa mutta joiden kautta päähenkilöt lopulta eheytyvät kokonaisiksi.

Tony on romaanin henkilöistä ristiriitaisin: fyysisesti hyvin pieni kooltaan mutta samalla ajattelun jättiläinen työskennellessään yliopiston opettajana ja sotatutkimuksen asiantuntijana. Hänellä on tiedollista valtaa, vaikka hän samaan aikaan on oman lapsuutensa uhri. Tonylla on erikoinen kyky kääntää sanat väärinpäin ja hän kutsuu tätä omaksi kielekseen, jonka avulla hän voi olla rohkea ja peloton sekä ilmaista itseään tavalla, johon oikea Tony ei pysty. Tonyn äiti hylkäsi hänet lapsena ja omasta mielestään Tony on ollut äiditön syntymästään asti. Kertoessaan elämäntarinansa Zenialle Tony vihdoinkin vapautuu menneisyytensä haamuista.

Roz on saanut lempinimen the Big Mom, koska hän on äitihahmo paitsi omille lapsilleen, myös ystävilleen ja jopa alaisilleen. Hän on taloudellisesti menestynyt businessnainen, joka samaan aikaan kärsii syyllisyydestä ja alemmuuden tunteesta, jota hän yrittää kompensoida mm. hyväntekeväisyydellä ja syömisellä. Zenian myötävaikutuksella myös Roz pystyy päästämään irti menneisyydestään käydessään läpi tuskallisen prosessin Zenian mm. ryövätessään hänen miehensä ja tunkeutuessaan Rozin elämään.

Charis edustaa tarinassa perinteisintä tulkintaa minuuden jakautumisesta erittäin traumaattisten lapsuuden kokemusten myötä. Alun alkaen hän oli Karen, mutta selviytyäkseen hänen on muututtava Charikseksi. Karen ei kuitenkaan katoa kokonaan, mutta Charis pystyy pitämään hänet piilossa syvällä sisimmässään, kunnes kohtaamiset Zenian kanssa pakottavat hänet kohtaamaan myös oman todellisuutensa. Charis on lempeä ja hyväntahtoinen, mutta resilientti ja vahva. Lopullisessa kohtaamisessa Zenian kanssa Charis käy läpi skitsofreenisen taistelun Charisin, Karenin ja Zenian välillä.

Päähenkilöitä yhdistävät kokemukset Zenian kanssa ja siksi heistä tulee ystäviä keskenään. Zenia on laukaisin, joka käynnistää jokaisessa eheytymisprosessin. He joutuvat kohtaamaan omat menneisyytensä ja Zenian avulla he pystyvät selviytymään.

Feministikriitikot esittivät aikanaan kysymyksen siitä johtuvatko naisten ja miesten erot pelkästään sukupuolesta vai johtuvatko ero sosiaalisesta rakenteesta. Sekä Chodorow että Rich ovat sitä mieltä, että etenkin äitiys on rakennettua ja näin ollen vaikuttaa vahvasti tyttölapsen omakuvan/ minäkuvan rakentumiseen. Opinnäytetyössäni pohdin äitiyttä ja sen vaikutusta The Robber Bride romaanin päähenkilöiden elämään, miten nämä kolme naista kasvavat aikuisiksi ja miten äidittömyys tähän prosessiin vaikuttaa, sillä jokainen tulee äitinsä hylkäämäksi tavalla tai toisella. He tarvitsevat Zeniaa voidakseen päästää menneisyydestään irti ja löytääkseen oman naisellisuutensa ja minuutensa.

Feministisen kritiikin juuret ovat 1960-luvulla ja vuosikymmenten saatossa se on käynyt läpi muutoksia painotuksessa mm suhtautumisessa Freudiin ja psykoanalyttiseen teoriaan. Tässä pro gradu työssäni keskityn psykoanalyttiseen ajatukseen alitajunnasta ja puolustusmekanismeista, joilla suojelemme itseämme. Pohjalla on Chodorowin näkemys ihmisestä, joka on aktiivinen ja kehittyvä ja hänellä on siten potentiaalia päästä eroon alitajunnan ohjaamista haluista, jotka usein ovat ei-haluttuja ja ahdistavia. Psykoanalyysin keinoin tiedostamaton voidaan tuoda tietoisuuteen. Tässä opinnäytetyössäni psykoanalyttinen kirjallisuuden teoria antaa pohdinnalle alitajunnassa olevan todellisuuden ja psykoanalyttinen feminismi tarkastelukehyksen.

Chodorowin mukaan psykoanalyttinen teoria auttaa ymmärtämään yhteiskunnan sukupuolittuneisuutta ja sukupuoli-identiteettiä, jossa seksuaalinen epätasa-arvo toistuu sukupolvelta toiselle, ei pelkästään kulttuurillisesti tai sosiaalisesti vaan myös psykologisesti järjestelmässä, jossa tytöiltä odotetaan erilaisia asioita kuin poikalapsilta. Tytöistä kasvatetaan äitejä. Edelleen lapsuuden kokemukset muovaavat sen, miten henkilö myöhemmin itse toimii ollessaan vanhempi. Tämä näkemys on opinnäytteeni perusolettamus ja The Robber Bride:ssä jokaisella päähenkilöllä, Tony, Roz ja Charis on eri tavalla traumaattinen lapsuus. Tony näkee itsensä sotalapsena, koska hänen äitinsä oli sotavaimo, mutta joka ei koskaan sopeutunut rooliinsa äitinä vaan hylkäsi perheensä jättäen Tony hyvin epävakaa isänsä kasvatettavaksi. Rozin äiti kohtelee tytärtään rautahansikkain ja Roz kokeekin olevansa Tuhkimo, jonka ainoa

tehtävä on kuurata ja siivota. Charisin äiti taas on psyykkisesti epävakaa ja lopulta Charis päätyy sukulaistensa kasvatettavaksi.

Miksi naiset ovat äitejä, mikä tekee naisesta äidin, miksi naisesta tulee äiti; ovat kysymyksiä, joita Chodorow ja Rich ovat molemmat esittäneet, pohtien miksi naisista tulee äitejä. Molemmat ovat sitä mieltä, että äitiyden instituutio on yhteiskunnassamme syvään rakennettu, mutta sillä ei juurikaan ole tekemistä biologian kanssa, vaan tyttölapsista kasvatetaan äitejä. Molempien kirjat julkaistiin alun perin 1970-luvulla, mutta niistä on otettu uusintapainoksia, viimeisimmät 1990-luvulla, jolloin myös Atwoodin *The Robber Bride* ilmestyi. 1990-luvulla feministit pohtivat erityisesti sosiaalisia valtasuhteita naisen aseman avulla.

Chodorowin mukaan pidämme äitiyttä itsestäänselvyytenä, koska naiset biologisesti kantavat ja synnyttävät lapsensa. Biologia ei kuitenkaan hänen mukaansa selitä äitiyden instituutiota, jossa äidin vastuulla on myös lapsesta huolehtiminen ja kasvattaminen yhteiskuntakelpoiseksi. Tytöistä hänen mukaansa kasvatetaan äitejä ja tytöt haluavat tulla äitinsä kaltaiseksi. Tämä puolestaan ylläpitää naisten alempiarvoista asemaa yhteiskunnassa, koska me omaksumme roolimme omasta perheestämme.

Rich`n mukaan lapseton nainen on historian saatossa nähty epäonnistuneena naisena, eikä ole siten yhteiskunnallisesti saanut samanlaista arvostusta kun äiti. *The Robber Bride* -romaanissa tämä toinen nainen on Zenia, ryövärिमorsian, joka ei tosin mahdu Richin perinteiseen määritelmään epäonnistuneesta naisesta, koska Zenialla on seksuaalista valtaa, jota hän myös osaa käyttää oman asemansa edistämiseen samanaikaisesti kun tuhoaa ihmisiä ympäriltään sukupuolesta riippumatta. Samalla Zenia on päähenkilöiden alitajunnasta nouseva pimeä kaksoisolento, joka pakottaa heidät kohtaamaan menneisyytensä ja lopulta löytämään oman naiseutensa ja arvonsa. Ilman Zeniaa päähenkilöt eivät pystyisi päästämään irti ja kehittymään sellaisiksi naisiksi, joiden heidän on tarkoitus kasvaa.

Atwood on kirjoittanut Kanadan kirjallisuutta tutkivan *Survival*-teoksen, jossa hän esittelee sen tyypillisiä piirteitä. Tällaisia piirteitä ovat mm uhriutumisen, joka näkyy myös *The Robber Bride* romaanissa, sillä kaikki päähenkilöt ovat traumaattisen lapsuutensa uhreja. Atwoodin tekstissä päähenkilöt eivät alistu uhriuteen vaan aktiivisesti etsittyvät siitä pois. Edelleen

Atwood esittelee kolme sukupolvea jotka tyypillisesti esiintyvät kanadalaisessa kaunokirjallisuudessa: isovanhemmat, vanhemmat ja kolmas sukupolvi. Jokaisella sukupolvella on käyttäytymisnorminsa, joita Atwood käsittelee myös *The Robber Bride*-romaanissaan.

Pro graduni johtopäätös on, että objektisuhdeteorian mukaisesti äiti-tytär suhde vaikuttaa erityisesti tyttölapsen naiseksi kasvamiseen ja hänen naisellisuutensa ja minäkuvansa muodostumiseen, mikä *The Robber Bride*:ssa on jokaisen päähenkilön taustalla. Edelleen kun äiti ei ole läsnä tyttärelleen, tämä käyttää koko aikuisikänsä äidin etsimiseen kaikista ihmissuhteistaan, myös parisuhteestaan. Tällaiset naiset tarvitsevat sitä, että heitä tarvitaan ja heillä on pohjaton hoivaamisen tarve, ja he usein myös kieltävät oman haavoittuvuutensa kääriytymällä suojamuuriksi rakennettuun vahvuuteen. Nämä ominaisuudet mahdollistavat Zenian ilmestymisen ja pääsyn päähenkilöiden elämään, sillä Atwoodin mukaan Zenian tyypiset hahmot kutsutaan sisään, ilman päähenkilöiden omaa myötävaikutusta Zenialla ei olisi mahdollisuutta toteuttaa omia suunnitelmiaan.

Kahdella päähenkilöistä, Charis ja Roz, on myös omia lapsia ja mielenkiintoinen kysymys on, että miten näiden, kolmannen sukupolven tyttärien kehitys etenee, tapahtuuko muutosta? Vaikka romaani ei annakaan vastausta, se esittää nämä tyttäret kuitenkin vahvempina kuin äitinsä, sillä sen lisäksi että, heidän äitinsä ovat olleet läsnä, heillä on varttuessaan ollut tukena myös äitinsä ystävien muodostama yhteisö ja sisaruussuhdeverkosto.

*The Robber Bride* samoin kuin lähteinä käytetyt Rich ja Chodorow ilmestyivät viimeksi 1990-luvulla, mutta kuten Atwood itsekin on todennut, äitiys on niin syvälle patriarkaaliseen rakenteisiin sisällytettyä, että suuria muutoksia ei yhä edelleenkään 2020-luvulle tultaessa ole tapahtunut. Vuonna 2017 esiin tullut metoo-kampanja esimerkiksi osoitti, miten haavoittuvainen nainen yhä edelleen länsimaisessa kulttuurissa on.

Freudilaiset ajatukset eivät enää 2020-luvulla edusta psykoanalyttisen ja feministisen kritiikin ajattelun valtavirtaa, mutta pre-oidipaalinen suhde äidin ja tyttären välillä on yhä relevantti, koska tyttölapsen primäärinen kontakti on yhä edelleen äiti. Tyttölapsen minäkäsitys tämän teorian mukaan hämärtyy, koska äidin ja tyttären välinen symbioosi on niin perustavanlaatuisen ja vahvan.



Margaret Atwoodin taito kuvata henkilöitä ja tarinoita on vertaansa vailla. The Robber Bride henkilöineen on kestänyt ajan saatossa, samalla kun sen kuvaus on tarkkanäköinen ajankuva 1990-luvun Kanadasta ja kanadalaisuudesta. Alitajunnan ja mielen psykologian tutkiminen on edelleen kiehtovaa tänäkin päivänä, etenkin sen ymmärtäminen, mitkä ovat käyttäytymisemme vaikuttavat taustavoimat mieleemme syvimmissä sopukoissa.

Opinnäytetyössäni tutkin Atwoodin romaanin The Robber Bride äiti-tytär suhteita kolmessa sukupolvessa: päähenkilöiden suhdetta omiin äiteihinsä sekä omiin tyttäriinsä ja myös ystäviensä tyttölapsiin (miehet ja poikalapset olen jättänyt tämän tarkastelun ulkopuolelle, samoin kuin isät). Olen osoittanut miten lapsen kokema äidittömyys vaikuttaa erityisesti tyttölapsen minäkuvaan ja aikuiseksi kasvamiseen Atwoodin maalaamien päähenkilöiden avulla. Minäkuvaa ja itsetuntoa on kuitenkin mahdollista muokata. Romaanissa tämä toteutuu niin vahvan sisarusverkoston kuin ennen kaikkea Toisen Naisen avulla, joka itse asiassa edustaa kunkin päähenkilön omaa pimeää puolta. Vain tuomalla tämän varjokuvan esiin, voivat nämä päähenkilöt vapautua menneisyytensä kokemuksista.