

## Monstrous Women

The Use of the Magical Realist Mode in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and  
"I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth"  
from the Perspective of Feminist Literary Criticism

Janika Nekala

Master's Thesis

Language Specialist Degree Programme, Department of English

School of Languages and Translation Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Turku

April 2024

Master's Thesis

**Language Specialist Degree Programme, School of Languages and Translation Studies**

**Janika Nekala**

**Monstrous Women: The Use of the Magical Realist Mode in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" from the Perspective of Feminist Literary Criticism**

**Number of pages:** 54 pages, appendix 6 pages

Margaret Atwood is commonly known for her intertextual parodies that blend fairy tales, magical events and mythical characters with settings that mirror existing realities. In this thesis, I examine the undeniable connection between magical realism and feminist criticism in Atwood's novel *The Robber Bride* (1993) and the short story "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" (2012). I study how magical realism is used to produce a feminist narrative that critiques patriarchy in the chosen primary material.

Magical realism is an important literary mode that can be applied to disrupt patriarchal narratives and highlight issues in actual patriarchies. The narrative mode of magical realism creates spaces for marginalised voices that challenge existing patriarchal narratives and ideologies by blending magical events and characters with realistic settings. I base my analysis on feminist theories by Judith Butler and theories on magical realism by Theo D'haen, Christopher Warnes, Kim Anderson Sasser, and Wendy B. Faris.

In my analysis I examine three magical figures, the vampire, the femme fatale, and the cannibal Robber Bride, who appear throughout the texts in the images of the texts' antagonist Zenia. Through the magical realist narratives of Tony, Charis, and Roz, Zenia occurs as a monstrous woman who inevitably exposes the deviant nature of all human beings. I conclude that the magical realist mode in *The Robber Bride* and "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" produces a feminist narrative that critiques both patriarchal ideologies and some branches of feminism. Thus, in this thesis magical realism proves to be a powerful mode for marginal voices, including women.

**Key words:** Magical realism, Feminist criticism, Feminism, Margaret Atwood, women, patriarchy, femininity, vampire, cannibal, femme fatale

## **Table of contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Theoretical Background</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1	Feminist Literary Criticism	7
2.2	The Mode of Magical Realism	10
<b>3</b>	<b>Magical Realism in the Images of Zenia</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1	The Magical Femme Fatale Figure	17
3.2	The Monstrous Female Vampire Figure	25
3.3	The Cannibal Robber Bride Figure	34
<b>4</b>	<b>Feminist Critical Approach to Magical Realism</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>51</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>54</b>
	<b>Appendices</b>	<b>58</b>
	Appendix 1: Finnish Summary	58

## 1 Introduction

For a long period of time, writers have written literary narratives in which women are depicted as the Other to men. Such narratives as the Biblical story of Eve were crucial in producing the ideal for femininity in the West (and elsewhere) and depicted women as deviant and a threat to the male protagonist and societies (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg, and Foka 2015, 9). The ideal for femininity is strongly connected to societal norms: women who resist their culturally and situationally ascribed gender norms in patriarchies can be labelled for instance as unfeminine (ibid.). Through their failure or refusal to abide by ascribed gender norms, ‘unfeminine’ women bring attention to patriarchal norms and ideals, and to how central they are, in fact, in society (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg, and Foka 2015, 9–10). These deviant figures can thus function as critique against patriarchy and power politics that maintain a hierarchical order by producing otherness and difference based on for instance biological sex. Studying narratives wherein deviant women occur is especially important in current climate of opinion where the human rights of minorities are under attack in Western societies wherein patriarchal ideologies are being reinforced to maintain the social order under which the white male is perceived as superior to all others.

The battle for equality and human rights for all is currently fought through for instance literature. Literature produced by the voices from the margins, from the narratives of the Other, challenges especially Western and patriarchal narratives. For instance, ideological femininity and the limited depictions of women as either angelic and feminine or deviant and unfeminine are disputed with women figures who are multidimensional, both ‘feminine’ and ‘unfeminine’. In this thesis the terms feminine and unfeminine refer to characteristics attached to certain gender performances in patriarchal thought. Conscious of their ideological basis, the terms are applied in order to discuss the manner in which women are categorised and constructed as the Other. These descriptive terms are thus seen as patriarchal tools for oppression which rely on ideologically held ‘truths’. These truths can be challenged through, for example, the narrative mode of magical realism. Margaret Atwood is especially known for her morally ambiguous female characters and also for the use of magical realism in her works. Atwood applies the mode of magical realism for instance in her novel *The Robber Bride* (1993; henceforth referred to as *Robber*) and the short story “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth” (2012; henceforth referred to as “Dream”). In both texts a magically deviant Other, Zenia, exposes and challenges patriarchal and misogynistic ideologies.

*Robber* is a novel with a realistic setting and magical events and characters. It is a story about three women, Tony, Roz, and Charis, whose lives are turned upside down when Zenia robs them of their male partners. The three women each narrate parts of the novel in which they describe their life stories including their encounters with the mysterious Zenia. The novel is inspired by the Grimm's fairy-tale story "The Robber Bridegroom" (1812) in which a miller's daughter discovers her betrothed is a murderer and a cannibal. In *Robber* Zenia is the robber and the cannibal. "Dream" is a short story Atwood wrote as a sequel to *Robber*. In these stories, intertextual references and allusions to mythical, historical, and Biblical figures characterise Zenia as the image of a monstrous and threatening magical being. Zenia takes on different roles as the Other through the mode of magical realism and consequently symbolises many different meanings (Bouson 2010, 20). For instance, Zenia appears as a vampire figure, a metaphorical cannibal, a femme fatale, a witch, a Medusa, a demon, and a trickster, and is associated with Biblical and historical figures like Jezebel (ibid.). Most of all Zenia is a threatening woman and a deviant and unfeminine figure that Atwood explores through the mode of magical realism.

Magical realism is a literary mode that has been generally applied to challenge Western narratives and ideologies by highlighting issues in actual societies through different narrative techniques. Wilson (2010, 23) claims that the use of magical realism has been ignored in Atwood's works. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the feminist function of magical realism has not been widely studied in Atwood's texts as arguably her use of magical realism has been recognized. For instance, magical realism is characterised by the use of intertextual references and magical events which blend with a realistic setting (Faris [1995] 1997, 169, 176). Wilson (2010, 26) states that Atwood is known for "feminist parodies of the sexist beliefs embodied in classic western myths and stories" which she situates in realistic settings, for instance, Toronto in *Robber* and "Dream". Certainly, it can be argued that Atwood is well known for the use of magical realism in her works. Establishing Atwood as magical realist writer is not the purpose of my thesis as she has been identified as one by, e.g., Wilson and Tolan. However, I argue that the use of magical realism for the purpose of feminist critique has not been studied as deeply as it could be, especially in the works of Atwood. While Atwood is known for her feminist stories and has been studied for her application of magical realism, the connection between the mode of magical realism and the feminist narratives that have been identified in Atwood's works seems to have received much less attention.

In this thesis, I examine the use of the magical realist mode in *Robber* and “Dream” from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. The main research question for this thesis is: how the magical realist mode can be used to produce a feminist narrative that critiques patriarchy? I analyse the use of intertextual and magical figures, particularly the vampire, the femme fatale, and the cannibal, in the characterisation of Zenia. I argue that through these magical figures, Zenia is portrayed as a monstrous, sexually deviant, and threatening unfeminine being who threatens patriarchal ideologies and norms. As the embodiment of patriarchal unfemininity and otherness, Zenia questions and threatens the Western patriarchal social order by rejecting patriarchal gender ideologies and reveals femininity as a construct of patriarchal ideology. Furthermore, I analyse how the magical realist narration produces commentary on how women are dehumanised and othered both through patriarchal ideologies and by women. Thus, I argue that in the texts magical elements are used to illustrate the problems of patriarchal societies which are built on the oppression of the Other and ideologies that function in producing and reproducing difference and inequality based on biological sex. I conclude that the use of the magical realist mode produces a feminist narrative that critiques both patriarchy and feminisms and women who engage in the oppression of others. I finish my thesis with the conclusion that the magical realist mode is used to produce a narrative that argues for the human rights of all.

I begin by discussing the theoretical background of my thesis in chapter 2. I discuss for instance feminist theories by Judith Butler and feminist literary theories by Ellen Rooney and Kari Weil in section 2.1. After that, I discuss theories on the mode of magical realism and its functions in section 2.2. I base my discussion on theories by Theo D’haen, Christopher Warnes and Kim Anderson Sasser, and Wendy B. Faris. In chapter 3, I first discuss the novel, the short story, and Zenia. Then, I analyse Zenia’s characterisation through the magical figures of the vampire, the femme fatale, and the cannibal Robber Bride. I examine the ways in which these figures occur in the texts in the images of Zenia and how they construct the image of the deviant woman who challenges and critiques patriarchy. In chapter 4, I discuss how these two magical realist texts produce a feminist narrative that disrupts Western patriarchal narratives and decentres patriarchal ideologies. In addition, I discuss the future that is imagined for feminism in the novel and the short story. Finally, in chapter 5, I conclude that magical realism can function as a feminist mode that exposes patriarchal systems in contemporary cultures, literature, and the real.

## 2 Theoretical Background

In this thesis I examine the use of magical realism from a feminist perspective. In this chapter I discuss theories of feminist criticism and the mode of magical realism. I concentrate particularly on the relevant theories on gender performance and the notion of femininity as well as the purpose of magical realism as a mode for marginalised voices. I begin section 2.1 with a discussion on feminist literary criticism, gender performance and femininity. In addition, I discuss feminism(s) – a topic which I foreground in chapter 4 when I explore feminism in Atwood's literary works. In *Robber* and "Dream", Atwood uses the mode of magical realism to portray women as individual subjects who resist patriarchal norms and idealised femininity. Thus, in section 2.2, I discuss magical realism and its functions as a feminist mode.

### 2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is inherently political because literary texts are political: they both produce images of women and function in the project of dismantling them (Rooney 2006, 89). Feminist literary critics study the production and reproduction of the categories that define women as women in literature as well as strive to rewrite patriarchal narratives of femininity (Rooney 2006, 73). Critics argue that literary texts do not reflect predetermined differences between biological sexes or genders but instead they produce those differences, for instance forms of femininity and masculinity, into 'real' life through representation (Rooney 2006, 88–89). By studying and critiquing patriarchal narratives and the stereotypes of femininities they produce, femininity is unmasked as a political ideology involved in the making of a woman (Rooney 2006, 74). Indeed, in de Beauvoir's (2011, 283) famous words already from 1949: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Feminist literary criticism, and this thesis, assumes that literary texts produce images that affect the process of accepting a certain gender identity in real life. Studying both patriarchal narratives and literature that challenges those narratives is a current and important objective in feminist literary criticism.

The work of some women writers, described as French feminists in the US, came to inspire feminist literary studies that focused on how the images of women and femininity were produced in and through literature (Weil 2006, 153–154). Their work accentuates the role of language in women's oppression in patriarchy as well as its potential as a mode for subverting or even escaping oppression (Weil 2006, 153). Particularly, the French writers contend that

language is patriarchal – a system governed by a logic of difference (Weil 2006, 153–154). For instance, they argue that masculinity and femininity gain their meaning and values in opposition to each other (Weil 2006, 154). This opposition occurs when particular qualities on one side are repressed and projected onto the other: for instance, masculinity is viewed as “powerful, reasonable, and essentially of the mind [which] is derived from the definition of femininity as vulnerable, emotional, and essentially of the body” (ibid.). In other words, women are viewed as the Other to men and have been established as such throughout the history of patriarchy (de Beauvoir 2011, 159). Studying the way in which language and narratives produce or disrupt the ideology of femininity in literary works can function as feminist critique against patriarchal ideologies in real societies.

Butler (2021, 355) argues that gender is a survival strategy in society. In other words, gender is essentially a performance and the process of ‘becoming a woman’ – particularly the embodiment of the historical idea of a woman, is motivated by the desire to survive in contemporary culture: “Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture” and those who break their gender norms have punitive consequences (Butler 2021, 355). In other words, ‘fitting in’ in culture – becoming an accepted member of one’s culture and society – has historically required gender performance. For instance, the desire to measure up to the idealised images of femininity and the idea of a woman in contemporary culture is a means to survive, to thrive, especially in patriarchies. Butler (2021, 355) observes that the “tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production”. The discrete and polar genders are produced in various ways; for instance, literature can produce saturated images of genders and thus, reinforce the already existing gender norms.

Butler (2021, 356) explains that over time the sedimentation of gender norms has produced for instance an idea of a real woman and “a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes which exist in a binary relation to one another”. In other words, femininity and masculinity have become specific performances that appear as natural representations of gender rather than socially constructed performances. Ironically these performances are based on a script that has survived through the act of rehearsing which reproduces it continuously into reality (Butler 2021, 357). Gender performance is based on an individual’s interpretation of the cultural script which is interpreted and performed within culturally restricted spaces and according to existing guidelines (Butler 2021, 358). However, certain acts usually signify a specific gender identity

to people, and these acts either correspond to an expected gender identity or challenge the expectation that is based on the viewer's perception of sex (ibid.). Based on Butler's theories, I consider gender as performative, so, instead of considering that gender acts express a gender identity, I too view them as aspects that establish one's gender identity (ibid.).

The social performative nature of gender reality also subverts the notions of an essential sex or true femininity and masculinity, uncovering them as parts of a system that suppresses the performative side of gender (Butler 2021, 358). Thus Butler (2021, 359) argues that "gender is made to comply with a model of truth and falsity which not only contradicts its own performative fluidity, but serves a social policy of gender regulation and control". Performing gender so that it contradicts the gender norms established in the socially produced script results in implicit and explicit consequences while conducting gender performance accordingly to the norms reaffirms the essentialism of gender identity (Butler 2021, 359). Butler (2021, 360) warns that the risk of reification of sexual difference exists within feminist theory too. The focus of feminist literary theory should be on the diverse experiences of different women, *human beings*, rather than on a collective experience of a category of women (ibid.). Gender performances and experiences under the societal pressure to conduct gender performance according to established scripts and norms are not all same. Therefore, expressing collective female experience rather than individual experiences of human beings would actually serve patriarchal ideas about gender.

Another issue within feminism is that the category of women has been applied with exclusionary ways which have cast out some women (Butler 2004, 37). Butler (ibid.) urges the political field to move towards the consideration and social transformation of human rights of all rather than of different (and often exclusionary) categories like woman, lesbian, or trans. Feminist literary criticism similarly faces an innate problem; political conflicts among different feminisms stem from different interests and create forms such as socialist, radical, postcolonial, black, cultural, lesbian, Asian American, and "free market" feminisms, and so on, of which differences are reflected and reproduced in literary critical feminism (Rooney 2006, 82). Western feminism has been often determined only by the category of women and by gender and consequently "has been normed by whiteness, heterosexuality, and middle-class status" (ibid.). Feminist critique should thus involve an acknowledgment of the impossibility of a universal category of woman and the consideration of women as individual human beings, or otherwise, feminist critique only aids in deepening the divisions of the

feminist movements which are “the ground of feminist theories, their determining context, and their referent” in “the real world” (Rooney 2006, 83).

With this notion in mind, I argue that Atwood’s *Robber* and “Dream” convey Butler’s arguments. *Robber* produces images of women as different humans who each produce gender performances that both resist and conform to their expected gender norms. In addition, “Dream” produces an image, a future, for changes coming in the political field. Indeed, both Atwood and Butler argue in their own ways how women’s rights are and should be *human rights*. I share their optimism that as gender politics evolve to be more conscious of the fluidity of gender and human rights of all, feminism evolves too. The process of dismantling gender norms, scripts, and categories that define us requires time and effort. Butler (2004, 38) argues that this process involves the rearticulation of the categories of being human and gendered: a process of cultural translation that will take time but will lead to social and ethical transformation. This transformative process involves translation between languages and cultures (ibid.) and, I would argue, consequently literary texts and the study of literature too. Challenging expected gender behaviour and scripts through literature and exposing such societal critique with feminist literary criticism is an important part of the transformation from women’s rights to human rights.

Gender performance is not a simple cultural question but a question about who and what is considered human and what is real and reality (Butler 2004, 30). The concept of the human is presupposed and defined with very Western and parochial terms (Butler 2004, 37). Thus, the feminist literary critical approach in this thesis also involves the study of what it means to be a human. The question of who is considered human, and who deviant, monstrous, or magical, and why, arises especially in this thesis. While the characters discussed in this thesis are predominantly white and presumably heterosexual men and women, the mode of magical realism raises the question of what it means to be a human in association with the deviant and ‘unfeminine’ character Zenia. In the next section, I discuss magical realism and its functions in literature. Magical realism will prove to be a multifunctional and international mode that challenges notions of what and who is real and human.

## **2.2 The Mode of Magical Realism**

Magical realism is a mode produced by various international currents of thought (Warnes and Sasser 2020, 7). In accordance with Warnes and Sasser (ibid.), I consider magical realism a mode of narration rather than a genre or a movement because placing it in the category of

genre would be contradictory to its diverse nature (Warnes and Sasser 2020, 1, 7). Because of its diversity, Warnes and Sasser (2020, 7) argue that magical realism has no geographical limits nor restrictions on how it can be used. ‘Magic realism’ originally referred to a new style of painting (Roh [1995] 1997, 15). The term was coined in 1925 by the German art critic Franz Roh who applied it in his descriptions of a painting style (D’haen [1995] 1997, 191). In addition, D’haen (2020, 118) traces the term’s literary origins to a 1927 issue of the Italian Massimo Bontempelli’s journal *900* in which it was applied to literature. Magical realism has been linked to works of surrealism and European literature but after 1960s it was first closely associated with Latin American literature (D’haen [1995] 1997, 191–192). In fact, Latin American writers are considered the primary contributors in developing the critical concept of magical realism (Zamora and Faris [1995] 1997, 2). Scholars like Warnes and Sasser (2020, 7) and D’haen (2020, 117–119) describe an international history for the concept of magical realism. Zamora and Faris ([1995] 1997, 2) similarly argue that magical realism has evolved into a global commodity that thrives especially in postcolonial literature. All in all, magical realism’s transnational development has established it as a versatile mode for marginalised voices.

As a mode of expression, magical realism challenges the dominant mode of realism in Western cultures (Faris 2004, 1). From marginalised positions and voices, the mode challenges readers to consider how “claims to truth function in literary domains” (Warnes and Sasser 2020, 4). One of magic realism’s intrinsic features is its otherness and ex-centricity; magic realism functions as a decentring mode that can displace privileged centres in literature from both geographical locations and the location of the ex-centric and the unprivileged like races, classes, or genders (D’haen [1995] 1997, 194–195). This displacement can be achieved with magical realist texts that access the privileged modes of Western literature and appropriate techniques of these privileged centres and central movements to then produce alternative worlds with magic realism that correct existing unequal realities (D’haen [1995] 1997, 195). Therefore, magical realism has become an influential contemporary trend in international fiction and an important mode of expression not only for postcolonial cultures and narratives but also for other submerged and marginalised voices because it provides a medium for writing back for marginalised positions (Faris 2004, 1).

Magical realism merges realism with the magical so that the latter seems to be a natural aspect of the real (Faris 2004, 1). Consequently, the magical aspects of the text function to highlight central issues by disrupting the reader so that the magical is noticeable but not overpowering

which also persuades the reader to participate in the creation of the text much like in the writerly texts of the postmodernist movement (Faris 2004, 8–9). Faris (2004, 7) identifies five characteristics for magical realist texts. First, magical realist texts have an “irreducible element” of magic, i.e., the narrator reports magical events that defy the laws of the universe according to Western beliefs and science (ibid.). Second, the descriptions in the text detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world and the magical, and third, the reader may experience hesitation when reconciling two contradictory understandings of events (ibid.). For instance, intertextuality is a common magical realist feature, and it is common that other characters from other fictional works may appear in a magical realist text (Faris [1995] 1997, 176). The fourth characteristic is that the narration of a magical realist text merges different realms, for instance life and death (Faris 2004, 22). And last, the mode disturbs established ideas about time, space, and identity (Faris 2004, 23). For instance, the text might disrupt the reader’s understanding of identity through for instance the merging and changing identities of a character (Faris 2004, 25). When analysed with Faris’ characteristics, Atwood’s *Robber* and “Dream” can be considered to be magical realist texts.

Magical realism calls readers to evaluate what is ‘truth’ and ‘real’ (Warnes 2020, 14). Furthermore, magical realism challenges the idea that literature represents the absolute truth or reality and that it produces ‘real’ and truthful images. Warnes (2020, 13) explains that magic has always been connected to otherness since the supernatural elements of magic are “different, secret, frightening and uncanny”. In contrast, Western modernity, founded on for instance colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchalism, produces otherness and diminishes difference (Warnes 2020, 14). Faris ([1995] 1997, 168) states that in magical realist literature the irreducible elements of magic and reversals of logic cause people to react in ways that expose behaviours we recognize and find disturbing which can cause the real to seem amazing or ridiculous. The magical elements in magical realism function as highlighting elements that bring something from the real into focus and thus the magical can function as political commentary (Faris [1995] 1997, 168). Faris ([1995] 1997, 179–180) theorises that magical realist texts, “which are receptive in particular ways to more than one point of view, to realistic and magical ways of seeing”, illustrate “a desire for narrative freedom from realism”. Thus, the mode can challenge the ‘realism’ of Western patriarchy which produces images of women as inherently Other to the man.

Magical realist texts resist “basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationality and literary realism” and encourage the erasure, disruption, merging, and refashioning of boundaries

between for instance life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, and male and female (Zamora and Faris [1995] 1997, 6). Faris (2004, 4) explains that feminist scholars have suggested that speaking with a voice of that is “not one” within patriarchal culture is a female strategy. Therefore, both the female and the magical realist narratives are double-voiced and integrate both a dominant and a muted mode in a text (Faris 2004, 4). D’haen ([1995] 1997, 194–195) concurs that women are categorized as the Other in gender and speak with ex-centric and marginalised voices. While magical realism is not particularly a feminist mode, it certainly can function as a medium for feminist criticism because in the mode patriarchal realities can be invaded and de-centred through the narratives of the Other – women. By displacing a patriarchal reality through a narrative from the margin – the space of otherness – magical realism creates an alternative reality that exposes patriarchal systems and narratives in the real. Furthermore, magical realism functions to disrupt the notion of the category of women as it illustrates how women, as human beings, are multi-voiced and their experiences cannot be represented as one category.

Magical realism and feminist literary criticism share the same objective of challenging Western ‘truths’ and patriarchal narratives about the real, and they also produce spaces through which feminist critique can be voiced. Hutcheon (1988, 5) argues that Canadian writers and women writers both challenge the dominant traditions and privileged centres of male and/or British/Americans. Atwood and the main characters of *Robber* and “Dream” are Canadian women and thus, they speak with multi-voiced and marginalised voices. For this reason, I have chosen to examine how magical realism functions also as a mode for feminist critique in these two texts. In the following chapter, I analyse how Atwood criticises patriarchal systems and narratives through the magical realist character Zenia. I first discuss the main characters and stories of *Robber* and “Dream” and then I examine Zenia’s magical realist image as the femme fatale, the vampire, and the Robber Bride cannibal respectively.

### 3 Magical Realism in the Images of Zenia

Zenia is a mysterious woman whose identity, history, and behaviour changes depending on who she interacts with. Her background is a complete mystery to the reader and to characters like Tony, Roz, Charis, and West who all have been told a different story by Zenia. For instance, she claims to be Slavic sold by her Russian mother, a Romanian gypsy, a Jewish-Catholic from Berlin saved during World War II, and a Greek immigrant. Zenia also feigns money problems, abusive sexual relationships, work history, and even cancer to manipulate others. Even her name has multiple meanings, which coincides with her magical realist characterisation. Tony observes that:

Even the name Zenia may not exist, as Tony knows from looking. She's attempted to trace its meaning – *Xenia*, a Russian word for hospitable, a Greek one pertaining to the action of a foreign pollen upon a fruit; *Zenaida*, meaning daughter of Zeus, and the name of two early Christian martyrs; *Zillah*, Hebrew, a shadow; *Zenobia*, the third-century warrior queen of Palmyra in Syria, defeated by the Emperor Aurelian; *Xeno*, Greek, a stranger, as in *xenophobic*; *Zenana*, Hindu, the women's quarters or a harem; *Zen*, a Japanese meditational religion; *Zendic*, an Eastern practitioner of heretical magic – these are the closest she has come. (*Robber*, 553)

In the end, Zenia's identity and story remain a mystery – a web of stories and histories impossible to sort through.

Tony, Roz, and Charis each learn not to trust Zenia's story as it is slowly revealed how she manipulates the women and their partners with different stories about her background and current events. *Robber* begins with Tony's narration in the present day in which the three women have lunch together at a restaurant called Toxique five years after Zenia's funeral. To their shock, Zenia walks into the restaurant as if returned from the dead. The novel is then split into three different parts and perspectives: Tony's "Black Enamel," Charis' "Weasel Nights," and Roz' "The Robber Bride". First, they each flashback into their childhood and then tell the story of how Zenia destroyed their relationships. Tony is a history teacher at McClung Hall and has a passion for war and a habit of speaking backwards. Tony is married to Stewart, who she has nicknamed West. Tony met Zenia in college in the 1960s through West who was dating Zenia. Tony and West were just friends until Zenia blackmailed Tony for a large sum of money and disappeared after which Tony and West begin dating and eventually marry. After some time, Zenia returns and manipulates West into thinking she needs his constant help and so, West leaves Tony for Zenia.

When Charis was a child, she was called Karen. She had no living father, and her mother physically abused her and suffered from a mental illness for which she was placed in a facility. After spending a summer with her magical grandmother who had for example healing powers, Karen went to stay with her aunt. Her aunt's husband, uncle Vern, sexually abused Karen until she hit puberty. Once the abuse stopped, Karen fully repressed herself and chose the name Charis for her new self. Charis sees auras, predicts her future with the Bible, and believes in the spiritual realm and resurrection. She has lived in the same dilapidated house on an island her whole adulthood. In the 1970s Charis works as a yoga instructor and lives together with her boyfriend Billy who is a war defector. She meets Zenia at her yoga studio and invites Zenia to stay at her house because Zenia pretends to have cancer and claims that her current boyfriend, West, abuses her. Charis does her best to heal Zenia with holistic methods while unbeknownst to her, the very healthy Zenia and Billy have an affair. After a magical event, which I discuss later in section 3.2, Charis becomes pregnant. In the end, after killing the chickens Charis keeps in her yard, Billy and Zenia leave without a word, and pregnant Charis is left alone.

When Roz was a child, she lived with her mother in a rooming house and attended a Catholic school. Her parents had a tumultuous marriage: Roz' father cheated her mother constantly, but they still stayed together. Roz met her husband Mitch while working at her father's company. They eventually had a son, Larry, and twin daughters Erin and Paula. Roz and Mitch's marriage mimics her parents' relationship: Mitch has affairs with other women which Roz knows about. She and Mitch have a sort of unspoken pact: once Mitch is done with his latest conquest, he leaves clear clues about his affair for Roz to 'catch' him and 'make' him end the affair. When Roz meets Zenia unexpectedly in a restaurant in the 1980s, Roz is aware of Zenia's past robberies. Despite knowing what Zenia had done to Tony and Charis' relationships, Roz gets caught in Zenia's web after Zenia tells her that Roz' father rescued Zenia when her parents were taken by the Nazis when she was a child. Roz believes Zenia's childhood story, becomes her friend and even gets her a job. Soon Mitch falls desperately in love with Zenia and leaves Roz. After stealing money from Roz' company by using Mitch's name, Zenia disappears again. Mitch goes after Zenia but is unsuccessful in finding her. After Zenia 'dies' in a bombing in Lebanon, Mitch drowns himself in despair.

When Zenia 'returns from the dead' five years later, the three women are puzzled. In the final part of the novel, "The Toxique", the three women separately confront Zenia at the hotel she is staying at in an attempt to understand her past behaviour and to get closure. Each come to

the realisation that there is no good reason for Zenia's actions and that she is indeed manipulative and selfish. When Charis meets with Zenia, the former has a vision of herself becoming enraged and her repressed self, Karen, taking over her body and pushing Zenia off a balcony. Later, Tony, Charis, and Roz meet to discuss their bizarre meetings with Zenia. Then, Charis senses that something has happened and the three go to Zenia's hotel; Zenia is found dead in the fountain of the hotel. Atwood's "Dream" continues the open-ended novel. Many years after her death, Zenia reappears in Charis' dream and warns her about the return of Billy who had already moved into the apartment next to Charis. Charis has a pet dog, a "black and white mystery-mix dog, Ouida", who has "special perceptive powers" ("Dream", 7). Later, Charis concludes that Ouida is actually a reincarnated Zenia who always wore fur in the dreams ("Dream", 29). The reincarnated Zenia eventually chases Billy away from Charis' life and the women finally come closer to understanding her past actions.

Zenia is certainly the focal point of most of *Robber* and "Dream". She is an enigma, affecting most of the other characters' actions, thoughts, and even identities. On the surface, Zenia has many characteristics some would associate with 'unfeminine' women. According to the patriarchal gender order, feminine women are for instance nurturing, emotional, compliant, and passive (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg, and Foka 2015, 15). Zenia on the other hand is described as sexually frigid, soulless, and unapologetically selfish. Zenia looks like a model or moreover, a fantasy. No man or woman has the ability to resist her, and they all fall under her spell almost magically, becoming so besotted that they seem to lose a part of themselves once Zenia breaks the spell by moving on to her next victim. In *Robber*'s "Onset" chapter Tony reflects on Zenia's origins. She thinks that Zenia's story must have begun a long time ago somewhere "distant in space" and "someplace bruised and tangled" (*Robber*, 3). Tony imagines Zenia's origins with a "European print, hand-tinted, ochre-coloured, with dusty sunlight and a lot of bushes [...] with thick leaves and ancient twisted roots, behind which [...] something ordinary but horrifying is taking place" (ibid.). Finally, Tony states that she is not sure what was true about the stories Zenia told about herself (ibid.).

Zenia thus remains truly unknown as the novel's focalisers Tony, Charis, and Roz produce different stories of Zenia. Atwood hints at Zenia's symbolic purpose in the novel's "Acknowledgments" wherein Zenia's name is described to be pronounced with "a long e, as in *seen*" (*Robber*, unnumbered). Unknown but seen from the beginning, Zenia's existence is surrounded by magic and mystery. She is a metaphorical vampire returned from the dead, a trickster femme fatale, and a metaphorical Robber Bride cannibal. The only access to Zenia's

narrative, identity and past is through the three women who report the stories Zenia has told them in order to get close to them – stories that would in some way connect to their own childhoods or their insecurities. For instance, Roz was first raised a Catholic and then later Jewish. To lure her, Zenia tells Roz that her mother was a mixture too because her mother's grandparents were Jewish while she was a Catholic (*Robber*, 433). In “Dream”, Zenia's narrative is even more unattainable because she speaks backwards in Charis' dreams and cannot speak in the body of the dog Ouida. Because the reader has no access to Zenia's perspective, the narratives of the other three women are the only source for knowledge about Zenia. This further develops the image of Zenia as a magical and threatening character as the reader and the characters attempt to reconcile the contradictory narratives, stories, and magical events.

Next, I analyse and discuss the use of magical realism in Zenia's characterisation. I examine how Zenia is portrayed as a magical realist character through the images of the vampire figure, the femme fatale figure, and the cannibal Robber Bride figure inspired by the Grimm's fairy-tale story “The Robber Bridegroom”. I argue that these images characterise Zenia as a deviant woman who functions as critique against patriarchal norms and ideologies. In the following section, I briefly discuss the history of the femme fatale figure and her purposes in literature and then I analyse the magical portrayal of the figure in *Robber* and “Dream”.

### **3.1 The Magical Femme Fatale Figure**

The *femme fatale* figure is a cultural stereotype that defies definition (Hanson and O'Rawe 2010, 1). Stott (1992, ix) traces the figure's appearance in literature to the early nineteenth century but proposes that she did not become a formulated and recognizable trope until the late nineteenth century. Even though a stereotype, the femme fatale is surrounded by mystery – she is “never quite fully known” (ibid.). Therefore, even as a realistically portrayed character, the femme fatale is also inherently magical. Place (1980, 35) describes the femme fatale figure as “old as Eve” and as “[t]he dark lady, the spider woman, the evil seductress who tempts man and brings about his destruction”. Stott (1992, viii) explains that the femme fatale is a recurring figure in art, poetry, and fiction that “crosses boundaries of class and race”: she can appear “either in her mythical forms or in contemporary guise: she can be prostitute, man-hunting aristocrat, vampire, African queen, native (black) woman or murderess”. Furthermore, the femme fatale is associated for example with renown figures such as Cleopatra, Salome, and Judith (Stott 1992, viii). Therefore, the femme fatale can

function as a magical realist figure due to the figure's magical and intertextual nature. Ultimately the femme fatale is a threatening figure of power whose insatiable sexuality proves usually fatal to her partner (Stott 1992, viii).

Stott (1992, 31) explains that in the late nineteenth-century culture, the femme fatale existed in the metaphorical "space 'outside' normality, order, light, outside 'masculine' logic, reason [and] culture". Stott (1992, 37) further argues that the femme fatale symbolises the Other because "she represents chaos, darkness, death, all that lies beyond the safe, the known, and the normal". The femme fatale has remained an enduring figure of otherness; she functions as the Other to both men and the ideological femininity of the patriarchal society. Stott (1992, 39) describes this dichotomy regarding the femme fatale:

The idealised woman (the woman seen as representative of a higher and purer nature, as Virgin or Mother of God) is conceived as an inherent part of the inside of the frontier (protecting and shielding the symbolic order from chaos). The second type, the woman vilified as Lilith or the Whore of Babylon, is to be found on the outside edge of the frontier, part of the chaotic wilderness outside, representing that darkness and chaos.

The femme fatale – the figure who exists in the borders of what is deemed good and pure – is thus a threat to patriarchal ideologies. This figure appears in *Robber* and "Dream" through Zenia who crosses boundaries between the magical and the real and in doing so she challenges the fantasy the femme fatale represents.

Like the classic femme fatale figure, Zenia is also associated with deviant women figures from the Bible such as the Whore of Babylon and Jezebel. These two figures are often associated with the figure of the femme fatale as they all function as the vilified Other to the pure and angelic women. The Whore of Babylon is a Biblical figure from the Book of Revelation in which she is portrayed as a prostitute among other things (Duff 2001, 84). Jezebel is also a Biblical figure associated with immoral behaviour such as sexual promiscuity, and she for example entices others to sin (Duff 2001, 90). When Charis was a child, her grandmother would take out the family Bible on Sundays and they would look for passages with a pin for some guidance (*Robber*, 292–293). Charis would usually land on passages about Jezebel. One of these passages is from Revelation 2:20 and says that "thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (*Robber*, 300). The passage alludes to Zenia who seduces the three women's partners and in doing so provokes them to break social norms. For instance, her actions lead the women to live in sin at least

according to Christian beliefs: Roz, a Catholic, divorces her husband, Charis has a baby out of wedlock, and Tony plans to murder Zenia though she eventually does not go through with it. It is also implied that in the end of the novel Charis/Karen does kill Zenia.

The figure of the Whore of Babylon is connected to Zenia through another passage from Charis' Bible (Revelation 17:5) when she pins down her daily prediction when she prepares to confront Zenia at her hotel at the end of *Robber*:

*the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: And upon her forehead was written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (Robber, 504)*

In a magical realist event Charis has a vision of Zenia being attacked by herself and Karen while Zenia is "purple and red and flashing like jewels" (*Robber*, 516). Thus, in this magical intertextual event Atwood connects Zenia with the immoral figure of the Whore of Babylon. As the Biblical passage suggests, the mother of harlots, and consequently Zenia, is an abomination – a mysterious and deviant sexual being who defies definition. The femme fatale, Jezebel, and the Whore of Babylon all oppose ideological femininity because they are the opposite of sexually passive, fragile, and angelic. They are female monsters whom patriarchy tries to control through oppressive ideologies produced and reproduced through texts like the Bible.

As I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, Tony places Zenia's origins somewhere distant and in a setting with bushes, thick leaves, and ancient twisted roots (*Robber*, 3). Producing the image of a Biblical being with ancient origins, Atwood applies magical realism to produce Zenia as the image of a powerful and mythical woman. Furthermore, Charis' predictions, which connect Zenia with Jezebel and Whore of Babylon, contribute to the image of the mythical being. Charis' Biblical predictions combine religion (the Bible) and magic (prediction of the future) in the otherwise realistic setting which I argue is an example how Zenia's monstrous and magical image is produced through magical realism. The figure of the femme fatale is evoked through the Biblical passages which describe ancient deviant women such as Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon who themselves possess femme fatale characteristics. Like Jezebel, Zenia seduces men and consequently teaches Tony, Charis, and Roz to commit fornication. Thus, I argue that the connection between Zenia and Whore of Babylon and Jezebel, characterize Zenia as the magical and ancient femme fatale. In the

novel, Zenia's immoral actions eventually free Tony, Charis, and Roz from the constraints of patriarchal norms and ideologies by forcing them to break free of their toxic relationships which consequently forces them out of their passive roles. The femme fatale figure thus functions as a mythical character who critiques patriarchy which propagates the idea that independent and sexual women are sinful prostitutes and false leaders that tempt others to sin, i.e., stand against patriarchal norms and societies.

The femme fatale is always a textually disruptive figure of resistance: she often functions as an obstacle to the male character's journey as a sexual distraction and a threatening woman (Hanson 2010, 216). Zenia too is textually disruptive, but her purpose is not to disrupt the male quest but to disrupt the women's stable positions and force them out of them. It certainly seems at first that Zenia's function is that of a classic femme fatale's: to be a seductive man-eater and an obstacle to the relationship between the man and the feminine woman. Tony thinks that Zenia turned their lives upside down because "it was an exercise in power" while Roz compares Zenia to a predatory cat who eats birds ("Dream", 19). Thus, Tony and Roz see Zenia as the classic evil and unfeminine femme fatale who is motivated by power and money (López Ramírez 2022, 187). For example, when Zenia asks Tony for some money and Tony refuses, she resorts to blackmail and threatens to expose Tony for writing Zenia's essay which is something Zenia had also manipulated Tony to do earlier (*Robber*, 203–205). Even though Zenia could not financially gain from Charis, she manipulates Charis into providing for her by faking having cancer. Zenia's grandest robbery occurs when she seduces Roz' husband Mitch whose name Zenia uses to steal money from Roz' company (*Robber*, 452–453). Thus, Zenia's actions support the analysis of her as the femme fatale figure whose goal is to financially gain from the people she manipulates and seduces.

Storytelling is one of Zenia's conniving ways of exercising power over the three women who all relate to her through their individual traumas and consequently accept her into their lives. Because Zenia's identity and background are glaringly obscure, the possibility of being able to uncover the mystery of Zenia is what Tony, Charis, and Roz are seduced by. Zenia, whose goal is to gain their trust, uses this to her advantage. Zenia lures them with stories about herself that in some way relate to them. This creates a false sense of trust between them as the three women believe that they finally know Zenia. For instance, Zenia tells Tony that her mother rented herself and Zenia out to men (*Robber*, 193, 195) which appeals to Tony who also had a complicated relationship with her absent mother. Roz, who has always struggled with her background as a Catholic and a Jew, had a complicated relationship with her father

who made a fortune by stealing and selling art during World War II (*Robber*, 418). Zenia, who claims she is of Catholic and Jewish descent, convinces Roz that she was saved by Roz' father during the war (*Robber*, 433, 435). Roz eagerly believes Zenia because Zenia's story portrays Roz' father as a hero and, thus, relieves Roz' guilt about their family fortune. Charis, who has experienced sexual and physical abuse throughout her life, is more than willing to believe Zenia when the latter claims that she has cancer and that her boyfriend beats her. Thus, I argue that the femme fatale figure functions as an embodiment of mystery and obscurity which consequently produces the magical feel of Zenia.

Once Tony, Charis, and Roz realise that they can never truly know Zenia, the latter becomes a powerful and threatening femme fatale figure in their eyes. Milfull (2000, 216) observes that Tony, Charis, and Roz all describe Zenia or their relationship with her with battle terminology. For example, Tony observes how Zenia is someone who is aware of and takes advantage of the *battle* of sexes in which Zenia "was a double agent" working only for herself (*Robber*, 218). Roz describes Zenia as the villain of a Western movie with "two pearl-handled revolvers slung on her hips" (*Robber*, 120). Even years after Zenia's death, Tony still associates Zenia with the powerful and sexual femme fatale figure when she imagines Zenia would wear leather and "a silver-handled whip" in Charis' dream ("Dream", 12). Thus, Zenia symbolises the three women's enemy – the Other, the femme fatale, who represents death, violence, and danger. Though the three women learn to recognize Zenia's manipulation tactics, they also observe the magic in Zenia's ability to manipulate men. For instance, Roz notes how, even when Zenia shows her victims how her magic trick works, they still fall for it because they "want to believe" in the fantasy of her (*Robber*, 457). Hence, Milfull (2000, 229) argues that Zenia is aware of the gender politics in Western society and of the value of her body and thus, she uses them for her own gain. As hinted by Atwood in *Robber's* Acknowledgments, Zenia's magic trick appears to be that she takes advantage of being *seen*; she uses her body and the fantasy it represents in contemporary culture to entrance male victims while performing her manipulative tricks right in front of their eyes.

Certainly, Zenia's destructive power over others is deeply connected to her magical realist outer appearance. Her beauty is described as ethereal and superhuman. For instance, Tony describes that Zenia looks like

a high-fashion photo done with hot light so that all her freckles and wrinkles are bleached out and only the basic features remain; [...] the full red-purple mouth,

[...] the huge deep eyes, the finely arched eyebrows, the high cheekbones tinged with terracotta. (*Robber*, 39)

Thus, Zenia's beauty is magical realist; she looks so unrealistically beautiful that she looks edited in real life and thus, the magical and the real blend together in her appearance. Zenia's beauty also gives her power over other women; for instance, Tony thinks that "Zenia is the incarnation of how plainer, more oblong women wish to look" (*Robber*, 157). Furthermore, Zenia's presence makes Tony feel "non-existent" and obliterated (*Robber*, 149). In contrast with the other 'plainer' women, Zenia becomes an abnormality which I argue reproduces her image as the Other to women too. Furthermore, Zenia functions as the symbol for the fantasy image of femininity which patriarchal cultures produce and reproduce. I argue that because Zenia is both the embodiment of this fantasy and 'unreal' in contrast with other 'real' women, the magical realist portrayal of her highlights the issue of ideological femininity in patriarchal cultures.

Staels (2010, 46) agrees that Zenia represents the fantasy of femme fatale figure and therefore "arouses ambivalent feelings of attraction and repulsion in Tony and Roz, whose looks do not coincide with the dream image of ideal femininity". Especially Roz' descriptions of Zenia's looks highlight Roz' struggle as a larger woman in a society wherein opposing beauty ideals persist. When describing Zenia's fake breasts, nose, teeth and hair, Roz imagines a magical realist event in which she "can picture the stitch marks, the needle tracks, where the Frankenstein doctors have been at work. She knows the fault lines where Zenia might crack open" (*Robber*, 121). Roz' descriptions produce the image of a monstrous Zenia who lures men in with manufactured and magical Frankenstein-beauty. Roz also expresses her desire for norm-breaking and deviant behaviour but concludes that to be able to do what she wants she would need *superhuman* beauty or she would have to be *superhumanly* virtuous (*Robber*, 472). In other words, Roz observes that patriarchy allows two gender performances for women: a woman can either look feminine enough, i.e., embody the fantasies of men, or she can be a Mother Teresa. Roz' thoughts thus highlight the impossibility of Zenia's beauty and the feminine fantasy and reveal the way in which patriarchal ideologies affect gender performances and one's acceptance in society.

Milfull (2000, 230) argues that in Tony's descriptions of Zenia's unrealistic beauty, Zenia becomes a caricature of the modern femme fatale commercialised in fashion magazines and advertisements in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, Zenia's airbrushed face "indicates a certain absence and marks her as the domain of the other women's – and late twentieth

century patriarchal culture's – fantasies" (Milfull 2000, 230). Thus, Milfull (2000, 231) argues that Tony, Charis, and Roz are not only enticed by Zenia's looks but also by the marketed stereotype of the femme fatale and the promise of female empowerment the fantasy image of the figure entails. The femme fatale gains power through her beauty which concurs with the ideological femininity Western culture markets for women. Thus, the three women imagine that Zenia's power over them and their partners stems from her beauty. I suggest that by parodying the femme fatale figure through the mode of magical realism the novel brings attention to the magical realist dimensions of the figure and also to the unrealistic beauty ideals that exist in the fantasies of patriarchal cultures. I argue that Zenia's unreal beauty functions as a literary device that highlights the issue of the fantasy images which have been concretized in Western cultures with the femme fatale figures in the real. In other words, Zenia's physical appearance is a continuous magical event which contradicts with the realistic setting of the texts. In actual societies, women battle with the marketed fantasy images of ideological femininity which produce unreal representations of women into the 'real' with techniques like photo editing. Thus, the descriptions of Zenia's physical appearance highlight the ideological and unreal nature of idealised femininity.

Zenia uses her body not only to attract her victims but to tell a story. When Charis meets Zenia, the latter looks tall, "white as mushrooms" and "so thin Charis can see [...] each rib in high relief as if carved, with a line of darkness beneath it" (*Robber*, 257). Charis' descriptions of Zenia's "razor thin" body and geometrical movements also produce a magical realist image of a living skeleton. Zenia's appearance is actually manufactured to support her story of having cancer (*Robber*, 260). Therefore, I argue that Zenia's physical appearance functions as a manipulative tool she uses to her advantage like the classic femme fatale figure. Because Zenia looks sick and abused, like a weak and fragile female victim, Charis takes her in because she wants to save her. At the time of Charis' narration, Zenia's physical transformation is a mystery to the reader who does not know why Zenia looks like a living skeleton. Thus, Zenia's ability to manipulate her appearance and coax her victims with her looks seems magical. When Charis confronts Zenia at the end of the novel, the latter reveals that she achieved her sickly look by cutting all vitamin C from her diet (*Robber*, 512). Thus, Zenia's looks are shown to be an ordinary trick of the femme fatale which contributes to the magical dimension of her. By revealing the tricks behind Zenia's appearance in the end, the novel highlights how greatly outer appearance affects the way one is seen and treated.

Consequently, *Robber* illustrates how ideological femininity is associated with attributes that are ultimately performative.

Zenia is depicted magically beautiful among the plainer women of the novel to contrast the realistic portrayal of Tony, Charis, and Roz. The descriptions of Zenia's appearance vary depending on the narrator and thus, it is hard to grasp exactly how she looks. I argue that this attests to the interpretation that Zenia is a fantasy image that responds to the fantasies of the viewer. For instance, Tony, who looks "like a stick", thinks the curvaceous Zenia is what other flat-figured women want to look like (*Robber*, 157). In contrast, Charis' ominous and repressed younger self, Karen, looks "tall and thin and straggly" like Zenia (*Robber*, 316). Roz describes Zenia with "a ravishing cloud of dark hair and amazing great tits, and a tiny little waist" (*Robber*, 377). On the other hand, Roz says she has the body of a peasant – not fat but solid (*Robber*, 93). Tony and Roz see the opposite of themselves in Zenia: the perfect body desired by everyone. Charis sees someone weak and sick: Zenia looks like her repressed self she wants to save. Therefore, Zenia holds power over the women through her physical appearance on which the women mirror their own negative feelings born out of inability to correspond to the patriarchal ideologies persistent in their society. Through the figure of the femme fatale Zenia becomes the fantasy image onto which the three women impose their own fantasies of bodily freedom in a patriarchal culture which evaluates women's worth based on their looks and biological sex.

Like the classic femme fatale, Zenia is always successful in getting what she wants: she gets the men, the money, and, in the end, her final goal which is to force the women out of their toxic relationships. Under the guise of the femme fatale figure, Zenia is able to apply patriarchal gender norms breaking tactics like using ideological femininity and her body to her advantage. Her ability to fool and seduce everyone lies in her ability to appeal to her victim's own feelings and ideologies because her magical beauty is manufactured according to the already existing and held beauty ideals and fantasies. In addition, Zenia upholds the fantasy image of her through lying and storytelling which is why she is able to commit robberies again and again. Thus, from the perspective of feminist criticism, magical realism functions as a narrative mode that highlights the unreal dimensions in ideological femininity and gender performances in patriarchies. The magical realist mode exposes the problematic and magical quality of ideological femininity and its power over humans in the real. After all, Zenia's attractiveness is produced in the gaze of the other characters who exist in a culture obscured by fantasy images of women. Marked by her unnatural beauty, Zenia becomes the

Other in the gazes of Tony, Charis and Roz who feel as though *they* are the Other in their culture. Therefore, Zenia's magic trick is the ability to take advantage of patriarchal power politics: by understanding the ideological basis of femininity, Zenia is able to gain power over everyone else by weaponizing patriarchal ideologies and fantasies.

In this section I have analysed and discussed the femme fatale figures that appear in somewhat human forms both in Biblical references and contemporary fantasies like *Robber* and "Dream". The descriptions discussed in this section illustrate the magical qualities of the femme fatale Zenia. In the end, the magical quality of Zenia's beauty and abilities to have power over others is demonstrated to be an illusion. Thus, I argue, the mode of magical realism illustrates the false norms and expectations patriarchy places on women. I also suggest that Zenia is a fusion of different recurring femme fatale figures because she occurs in the role of the contemporary femme fatale of the modern capitalist culture and also takes a mythical form as the figure of the femme fatale vampire. Thus, in *Robber* and "Dream" the mode of magical realism illustrates the many fantastical figures of the femme fatale which caricature the patriarchal norms for women. While the human femme fatale figure exposes the patriarchal fantasies associated with ideological femininity, the vampire figure of Zenia challenges the Western and patriarchal narratives concerning deviant and unfeminine women. In the following section I first discuss the vampire figure and its purposes in literature and then I analyse the vampire images Atwood uses in *Robber* and in "Dream".

### **3.2 The Monstrous Female Vampire Figure**

While vampires do not actually exist in the realistic world of *Robber* and "Dream", Zenia becomes the image of the classic monstrous female vampire through the magical realist narration of the works. In accordance with the realistic setting, vampires are imaginary figures that appear for example in literature and film. To Tony, Roz, and Charis, vampires do not exist outside the fantasy world of fiction and historical myths. However, they use symbolic references to vampires when describing Zenia which, I argue, produces the image of the metaphorical monstrous female vampire. In this section I first discuss the history of the vampire figure and its purposes as a literary trope. I then discuss the vampire images produced in the texts and examine how the figure functions as critique against patriarchal ideologies through the character Zenia.

The vampire is the image of difference – a creature that symbolises infectious otherness (Williamson 2005, 1). Studying the vampire figures that appear for instance in culture,

literature, and film can uncover criticisms of society and especially patriarchy and ideological femininity. For instance, Western vampires have been applied as a tool to scare people into compliance and to validate patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormative family values (ibid.). However, instead of rejecting the vampire, our culture has been fascinated by this outsider figure whose otherness some can relate to (ibid.). The vampire “offers a way of inhabiting difference with pride” and for embracing the identity of the Other (ibid.). Hence, the vampire has become an enduring figure in Western societies wherein patriarchal culture produces otherness and difference. Instead of validating patriarchal order, the vampire figure has become its enemy. In this fashion, *Zenia* is the metaphorical vampire figure, a symbol for otherness, and a threat to the patriarchal society of *Robber* and “Dream”.

The vampire is an abiding figure in the Anglo-American cultural imagination and has appeared in either visual or print culture ever since its introduction into the English language (Williamson 2005, 1). The figure has been a part of countless cultures and occurs for instance in “religious texts, folklore, oral storytelling, and fictional explorations” (Hobson 2016a, 2). Born out of folktales, vampires were answers to things humans could not yet explain, for instance coma or death (ibid.). Since the mediaeval times, vampires have been considered monsters, and in the Christian church’s perception, they were the symbols of God’s displeasure (ibid.). Even when advancements in science helped to explain previously unexplainable things, the vampire figure became a permanent part of culture, for instance a persisting literary trope. The amount of vampire “folktales, literature, graphic novels, theatre, art, films, television shows, and marketing” illustrate how interested cultures are in vampires (ibid.). Hobson (2016a, 2–3) observes how the image of the vampire figure has also evolved in the contemporary era: for instance, there is the monstrous vampire who resembles the former folkloric version of the figure and the romanticised vampire who has morals. Even though the figure has evolved into more humanised versions, the vampire still functions as a symbol for otherness.

Vampires, as the symbolic figures of otherness and deviancy, take different roles in fiction. Vampires usually have characteristics that are considered deviant or different in for instance patriarchal Western societies. They can appear for example as a sexually deviant woman or an effeminate or homosexual man (Williamson 2005, 1). The vampire has functioned as a symbol for humans desires, fears, and their discomfort with otherness, and the battle between good and evil (Hobson 2016a, 2). Hobson (2016a, 1) explains that for scholars the vampire can function as metaphors for sexuality, gender, cultural identities, and political ideologies.

Furthermore, the vampire is “a socio-cultural lens” through which issues of justice and identity can be analysed because the figure physically resembles humans but operates on the margins of what is considered humanity (ibid.). Thus, vampires can be utilised to highlight and critique issues in patriarchies such as patriarchal power politics, inequality, and the oppression of others. As I discussed in section 2.1, women have been established as the Other to the male norm (de Beauvoir 2011, 159). Because both the figure of the vampire and women symbolise otherness in patriarchal cultures, the vampire figure can function as a disrupting figure that highlights issues in actual patriarchies.

In the early vampire stories, writers “exploited the fear of miscegenation and threats of sexual violence to the perceived fragility of white upper-class women and their social connections” through male identified vampires (Hobson 2016a, 3). In some texts the male vampire was feminised or androgenised to illustrate the dangers of non-normative sexuality and the effeminate man further alienated the cultural Others: homosexuals and women (ibid.). In other words, writers have applied the vampire figure to produce otherness and difference and thus, reproduce the patriarchal hierarchy in which for instance women and queer people are considered deviant and the Other to normative men. While the figure of the hypermasculine alpha male vampire has become popular with romance novels, the female vampire has remained a secondary character and a plot-device for a male character (ibid.). In addition, the female vampires are often depicted as inherently predatory and perverted because they reject for instance motherhood (ibid.). As sexually and emotionally destructive, the female vampire figure can symbolise cultural fears about insubordinate and independent women and female sexuality (ibid.). Studying the vampire as a literary trope in contemporary contexts reveals how patriarchal ideologies are decentred and disrupted with the image of the female vampire.

Hobson (2016b, 9) suggests that the female vampire figure “embodies contradicting ideals of femininity, such as fragility, strength, beauty, and power”. As such, the female vampire is a threat to ideological femininity because it assumes that females are fragile and emotional and need to be controlled by males based on biological sex. For instance, the Western medical and psychological traditions have produced the cultural view that female sexuality is abnormal (Hobson 2016b, 10). Consequently, images of female sexuality alternate between a dichotomy of frigidity and hypersexuality which both are seen as something that needs to be controlled and cured (ibid.). Particularly women who embrace their sexuality and act out their sexual desires evoke cultural fears about female sexuality; the female vampire figure thus is the embodiment of these fears because she is sexually and emotionally destructive and

uncontrollable (ibid.). Furthermore, the female vampire is a hypersexualised predator who merges “violence and seduction with fears of the destructive beauty and charm of womanhood” and thus, contradicts patriarchal ideologies about female passivity, weakness, and womanhood (Hobson 2016b, 12). The female vampire figure is ultimately a symbol of the Other who male-dominated systems like patriarchies have attempted to oppress for centuries.

I argue that the vampire figure is one of the magical realist methods with which patriarchal ideologies and societies are critiqued in *Robber* and “Dream”. In these texts, Atwood applies allusions and intertextual references that imply that Zenia is a monstrous being – a threatening and deviant female vampire who is magically enchanting. Furthermore, she is a hypersexual and a perverted seductress who sexually and metaphorically devours her victims and leaves exhausted bodies behind her. There are multiple references to her vampiric nature. The most conspicuous one is located in the short story’s title “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth” which suggests Zenia has bloody teeth – perhaps even fangs. Zenia is portrayed with characteristics Hobson and Williamson attribute to the female vampire: she is destructively beautiful, seductive, hypersexual, and powerful. Furthermore, Zenia is portrayed as immortal, impossible to kill permanently, and capable of resurrection. For instance, one of the first allusions to Zenia’s vampiric nature occurs in the beginning of the novel when Tony, Charis, and Roz attend Zenia’s funeral after she faked her death. When Tony feels uneasy and that they have forgotten something, Roz suggests that Zenia should have been staked (*Robber*, 14). Because staking is a culturally known stereotype for a method for killing a vampire, Roz implies that Zenia is a monstrous vampire who needs to be staked in order to truly kill her.

When Charis suggests that Tony thought Zenia was “a fellow human *being*”, Roz affirms her belief in Zenia’s monstrous nature: “If she was a fellow human being, I’m the Queen of England” (*Robber*, 14). Tony thinks about what people did in the past when someone people feared died and concludes that Zenia would probably stay buried if there was “[a] bowl of blood, bowl of pain and some death” (*Robber*, 15). Tony’s thoughts both foreshadow Zenia’s resurrection and characterise her as someone to be afraid of – a vampire who would only stay dead with the help of human sacrifice and bloody rituals. Tony’s thoughts also illustrate how Zenia takes the role of the Other in the three women’s narration. To them Zenia is both the other woman and the Other: the supernatural enemy lurking in the margins, waiting to destroy them. Tony, Charis, and Roz’ conversation highlights how the vampire figure, and Zenia, symbolise discomfort with otherness as it is clear that they see Zenia as dangerous and deviant and are troubled by the idea that she could return. Their conversation also reveals that Zenia

remains a threatening figure in their lives even in death and thus, the image of her as a powerful and monstrous vampire is produced in the very beginning of the novel.

Years after Zenia's funeral, Charis is still disturbed by Zenia's presence in her life as "shreds of Zenia cling to her" and Zenia's name flashes in Charis' head "glowing like a scratch, like lava" (*Robber*, 52). At the time Zenia is thought to be dead and, thus, her presence is a supernatural phenomenon in Charis' life. Charis, who believes in spirits and resurrection, thinks that Zenia's spirit is roaming around looking for another body in order to return (*Robber*, 58–59). Thus, when the three women have lunch at the Toxique and Zenia walks into the restaurant, Charis thinks she is seeing Zenia's spirit manifested (*Robber*, 77). Charis describes seeing the angry spirit of Zenia as follows: "A dark aura swirls out from around her [...]. It's a turbulent muddy green, shot through with lines of blood red and greyish black – the worst, the most destructive colours, a deadly aureole, a visible infection" (*Robber*, 78). However, when the other two women also react to Zenia, Zenia's aura becomes invisible and she "appears to be solid, substantial, material, disconcertingly alive" (*ibid.*). I argue that Zenia's return symbolises a resurrection: Charis sees her transform from a spirit surrounded by blood into a living physical being. After the magical realist event, Charis feels as though energy and substance, a part of her own body, have been sucked out of her "in order for Zenia to materialize" (*Robber*, 79).

Thus, Zenia is portrayed as a monstrous vampire who emotionally and even physically devours her victims and sucks life out of them. Much like the vampire figure who sucks the blood of a human victim, Zenia sucks the energy out of her victims and leaves traces of herself into their bodies and lives. After Zenia leaves West for the first time, he becomes like a doll. To Tony, West seems as though "he's blind: he goes where Tony steers, sucked dry of any will of his own" (*Robber*, 207). Much like West, Roz' husband Mitch is devastated when Zenia disappears, and after hearing about her 'death', he ends up taking his own life. Charis' boyfriend Billy ends up "a broken-down acid head and whining drunk" after his affair with Zenia (*Robber*, 514). Roz also feels Zenia's presence clinging to her office and the building as "tiny fragments of her burnt and broken soul infest the old woodwork like termites, gnawing away from within" (*Robber*, 113). Zenia's supernatural presence bothers her enough to make her think about hiring an exorcist even though she does not believe in them (*ibid.*). Though a sceptic, the supernatural aura of Zenia makes Roz doubt her beliefs which are founded on logic and science. Just like the monstrous female vampire figure, Zenia drains her victims and leaves them emotionally destroyed and ideologically transformed.

Allusions to Zenia's vampirism can be found also from Charis' flashbacks into her childhood. When Charis was little, her grandmother told her about weasels who come at night, bite the chickens in the neck and suck out their blood for pleasure (*Robber*, 290). Charis imagines the weasels as long and thin with sharp fangs (*ibid.*). This description fits also Zenia who is described as long and thin and later as someone who would have fangs ("Dream", 12). When Zenia is staying at Charis', she allegedly sneaks into the henhouse where Charis keeps her chickens and slits their throats with a knife after which she and Billy leave together and abandon Charis (*Robber*, 331). Although Charis cannot know for sure that it was Zenia who killed her chickens and not her boyfriend Billy, she still describes Zenia as the "chicken murderer, drinker of innocent blood" (*Robber*, 342). This blending of the weasel story and the event of the chicken murders produce Zenia's vampire image because the weasel story evokes vampire imagery which connects to Zenia when she allegedly slaughters the chickens (*Robber*, 290). In Charis' narration Zenia takes the role of a metaphorical weasel who slips into the henhouse and kills for pleasure – much like how she slips into the women's lives and destroys their relationships for her pleasure and financial gain. Therefore, Zenia is depicted as a monster who has a vampiric appetite for innocent blood.

Tony, Charis, and Roz are significantly focused on Zenia's body and hypersexuality. For instance, Tony compares herself to Zenia who is "raw sex" while she is "the cooked variety", i.e., passive (*Robber*, 487). Zenia's sexuality is reaffirmed as deviant and perverse when West tells Tony that Zenia is frigid because she was sexually abused as a child (*Robber*, 488). Tolan (2007, 45) analyses that "Zenia's sexuality is powerful and subversive: she mimics or masquerades as a male fantasy, but like a siren, she lures men to their destruction". Because Zenia's sexual acts are often described as means of consumption, her sexuality also connects to the animalistic hypersexuality of the vampire figure who eats her lovers. Zenia's powerful sexuality is therefore not only threatening but also deviant to the three women who in comparison are passive. Zenia's sexuality thus functions as a catalyst towards sexual freedom for the three. For instance, Roz who had always been Mitch's "angel wife" expresses her desire to be "like Zenia" – to be able to sin and have for example a "blood-thirsty kink" (*Robber*, 528, 472). During her conversation with West about Zenia, Tony realises that Zenia's hypersexuality was a manipulated fantasy and accepts her 'cooked' sex as normal and desirable. While Roz finds sexual freedom through the realisation that she does not have to be passive and angelic, Tony realises that she does not have to act or look like a femme fatale seductress to be desired. They essentially become free of the patriarchal ideologies and

expectations that deem women and female sexuality appropriate and acceptable only when it is passive and controlled, and desirable and dangerous when it is deviant and perverse.

Charis also gains sexual freedom through a magical realist event in which Zenia's hypersexual self blends with Charis in a fusion of identities. Charis' sexuality has been always controlled by men: for instance, her uncle sexually abused her when she was a little girl. This trauma has taught Charis that her consent does not matter. Consequently, sex is a magical realist act in which she surrenders her physical body to a male partner whenever he wants while her spirit exits her body (*Robber*, 245). When Zenia is staying at Charis', the latter feels her repressed and sexually abused self, Karen, coming back to the surface (*Robber*, 316). However, Karen does not look like herself but instead she is grown up, has dark eye sockets and bruises and looks exactly like the monstrous Zenia (*ibid.*). Bringing "ancient shame" with her, the vampire Zenia/Karen possess Charis' body and then the magical realist blend of the three has sex with Billy (*ibid.*). This magical realist event leads Charis to have a first sexual experience that is not forced by a man, and when she has her first orgasm ever, she feels guilt, relief, and anguish (*ibid.*). I argue that Zenia/Karen forces Charis to face both her trauma of sexual abuse and the ancient shame women have been taught to feel over their sexuality. This leads to Charis experiencing sexual freedom and desire for the first time (*Robber*, 317). Thus, she becomes free from the (sexual) control of men as she becomes possessed by Karen and the hypersexual femme fatale and vampire Zenia which affirms Zenia's function as a decentring figure against patriarchal ideologies.

There are allusions to Zenia's vampiric characteristics also in "Dream". When Charis tells Tony and Roz that she has dreams about Zenia, Tony guesses that dream-Zenia "had fangs dripping blood" ("Dream", 12). Charis explains that her teeth were not fangs, but they were "kind of pointy [and] sort of pink" ("Dream", 14–15). Thus, in the beginning of the short story Zenia is described looking like a vampire figure. Vampire figures penetrate the whole short story as Tony, Charis, Roz, and the dog Ouida also have vampire movie nights at Charis' home – a tradition that evokes many thoughts in Tony. Tony mulls over vampires thinking:

You used to know where you stood with them – smelly, evil, undead – but now there are virtuous vampires and disreputable vampires, and sexy vampires and glittery vampires, and none of the old rules about them are true anymore. Once you could depend on garlic, and on the rising sun, and on crucifixes. You could get rid of the vampires once and for all. But not anymore. ("Dream", 14)

Tony's thoughts foreshadow both the return of Zenia and the forthcoming realisation that the three women have participated in the reproduction and maintenance of patriarchal ideologies. I argue that when Tony observes the new complex nature of the figures, she actually observes the changes in her society: contemporary culture is evolving into a more accepting space for difference. Furthermore, Tony's thoughts foreshadow how the three women eventually come to realise they created Zenia's female monster image when she in fact was just like them – a human being.

In the short story Zenia returns both in dreams and as a reincarnation in the body of Charis' pet dog Ouida. In the story, Charis' abusive ex-boyfriend Billy returns to Toronto and convinces Charis to get back together. Tony refers to Ouida as their "last line of defence" because the dog does not like Billy ("Dream", 23, 26). Charis even admits to locking Ouida away when Billy is at her house because Ouida is jealous of Billy ("Dream", 31). When Billy and Charis begin having sex, Billy claims that Zenia slaughtered Charis' chickens after which Ouida starts barking loudly in the closet ("Dream", 32–33). When Charis lets Ouida out, the dog rushes to a naked Billy and bites off his penis ("Dream", 33). López Ramírez (2022, 199–200) analyses that Ouida bites Billy's penis because vampire bites are sexual in nature and Ouida and the vampiric Zenia are connected. In other words, Ouida's bite symbolises Zenia's vampiric bite which metaphorically robs Billy of his (sexual) power, functioning symbolically as revenge for Charis who Billy had abused (*ibid.*). In addition, Zenia as a dog has no power because she is not able to speak while Billy has the power of language. When Billy uses his words to lie about the chicken, he also oppresses Zenia and establishes his power over her which results in Zenia's vengeful bite and therefore Zenia's powerful vampiric nature allows her to decentre Billy's male power. Thus, Zenia functions as a catalyst for Charis' freedom from the oppressive male figure of her past and a disrupting figure against the patriarchal power hierarchy.

Due to these magical events, Charis concludes that to protect her from Billy, Zenia had come to Charis' dreams and had to "reincarnate herself in the body of Ouida" ("Dream", 34). Furthermore, it is revealed that Zenia did not lie about not killing Charis' chickens because it was Billy after all (*ibid.*). Zenia, like the classic monstrous female vampire figure, was falsely portrayed as the villain of the story when in fact she was the one who tried to free Tony, Charis, and Roz from their oppressive settings. Zenia's vampiric bite was not only motivated by pleasure or the lust for blood but by the desire to diminish Billy's oppressive power. López Ramírez (2022, 185) supports the argument that the female vampire becomes a positive figure

in the texts: “Atwood satirises the role of the vampiric fatal woman/seductress and continues to emphasise her positive impact on the main characters despite her evil ways”. Furthermore, the texts portray evil as an innate part of all humans by depicting how the three women let out and embrace the evil, or as I suggest, their sexual desire seen as evil by patriarchy (López Ramírez 2022, 198). In “Dream” Tony, Roz, and Charis embrace the darker sides of them: their vampire nights symbolise their interest in the deviants and thus, their desire to be free of their ideological gender performances.

In conclusion, Zenia represents the classic female vampire figure: she is ancient, mythical, and surrounded by smoke and blood. Tony, Roz, and Charis certainly think she is at least a metaphorical vampire; when they think of Zenia’s death they think of stakes, rituals, blood, sacrifices, and exorcists. Charis, who herself is a magical, sees Zenia’s dangerous, dark, and bloody aura and feels her draining effects on her body. Zenia is described as an inhuman being who sucks her victims dry and leaves them emotionally drained and distraught and some physically destroyed. The men she robs become shells of themselves and seem to never fully recover. In the novel, Zenia’s actions seem self-serving: like a femme fatale vampire she seduces and robs the women’s partners with her hypersexual nature and then sucks them dry for her own pleasure and gain. However, Zenia’s vampiric actions eventually lead to favourable consequences for Tony, Roz, and Charis: due to Zenia’s invasion in their lives, the three begin both craving and experiencing sexual freedom. Furthermore, they are freed from their passive positions in their relationships and thus, their lives become better. Tony stops trying to please West, Roz is freed from a toxic relationship with a cheating husband, and Charis no longer faces emotional or physical abuse in the hands of Billy. Thus, Atwood reverses the negative image of the classic female vampire into a positive being who tears down patriarchy.

The short story confirms that “Zenia’s intentions were benevolent all along” (“Dream”, 35). However, Zenia’s monstrous image is not reversed. Zenia is able to seduce her victims effortlessly; she infiltrates the women’s lives and homes with her stories and plucks their partners out of their lives as if it was a magic trick. She not only seduces the men but also leaves them desperately in love so that they feel intense despair when she leaves them. Zenia is able to escape capture, detection, and even death which makes her truly powerful. As the female vampire figure, Zenia threatens patriarchal ideology of femininity because she symbolises deviancy, perverse sexuality, and power. Like the classic figures of the female vampire and the femme fatale, Zenia is described as a perverted seductress who takes

advantage of male victims and thus, functions as an obstacle in their lives. Through magical realism Zenia becomes the image of both ideological femininity and the unfeminine. Therefore, I argue that her magical realist portrayal challenges the notion that women are either angels or monsters, passive or aggressive, powerful or weak. Even though Zenia's vampiric image gains positive connotations, her character and actions still remain at the very least morally ambiguous which supports the argument that women are complex human beings capable of many things. In the next section, I discuss how the cannibal imagery and the Robber Bride figure challenge images of women and ideological femininity, and critique patriarchal power politics.

### 3.3 The Cannibal Robber Bride Figure

*Robber* is inspired by the fairy-tale "The Robber Bridegroom" by the Grimm Brothers (1812). In Hunt's translated version of the tale (Grimm 2011), a miller betroths his beautiful young daughter to a wealthy suitor. The groom insists that his betrothed come to his house, located deep in the woods. Unable to refuse him, the miller's daughter eventually accepts and follows a path to his house. The house is empty apart from an old woman in the cellar. The old woman warns her that the groom is a murderer and a cannibal and that he is planning to kill and eat her. The miller's daughter hides when the groom comes into the house along with other men and a girl. Then, she witnesses how the men poison the girl, undress her, and chop her to pieces. In the process, one of the dead girl's fingers flies through the air over to the miller's daughter. In the end, the old woman and the miller's daughter escape the house and later use the finger as proof of the men's crimes and the men are executed. In *Robber*, the gender of the cannibal robber is switched: Zenia is the Robber Bride figure who robs and consumes everybody. Furthermore, Tony, Charis, and Roz are revealed to also have Robber Bride characteristics. In this section I analyse how Atwood produces cannibal imagery and creates the Robber Bride figure in the images of Zenia through the mode of magical realism.

I argue that cannibal imagery in *Robber* and "Dream" is produced through the magical realist narration with vocabulary that blends the uncanny and unnatural with the realistic setting of the described events. The vocabulary includes for instance lexical verbs like 'biting' and 'eating' and different nouns for animals and food that function as metaphors. These metaphors are frequently used to describe the characters, relationships, and sexual relations between men and women. More specifically, the metaphors usually describe the patriarchal hierarchy of the relationships in which the male is the eater, the animal attacker, and the

female the one being eaten. For instance, Roz describes Mitch's affairs as bear and shark attacks because she thinks that Mitch is a predator who takes advantage of women (*Robber*, 355). Furthermore, Mitch's attacks result in women with "pieces of love bitten out of [them]" (*Robber*, 357). While Roz wonders how Mitch can "sink his teeth into them [and] spit them out", she also admits that she enjoys when Mitch bites her (*Robber*, 357, 441). I argue that the vocabulary in these examples produce an image of Mitch as a predator who savages women. In these magical events Mitch is an animal mauling his prey, and thus, the magical realist narration highlights the patriarchal hierarchy in which women function as prey and food for the dominant male predator. Furthermore, I argue that the blending of human and animal entities produces cannibal imagery that critiques the power politics of patriarchy that destine men in the position of predators and women in the position of victim and prey based on their biological sex.

The other women's relationships are also described with vocabulary that produces cannibal imagery. For instance, Charis calls Billy a "mythological creature" whose urges are "overpowering" (*Robber*, 248, 255) and Tony compares West to "a dog summoned by a supersonic whistle" who would "run off if Zenia returned" (*Robber*, 225). In comparison with Mitch, West appears more gentle and less abusive when he is described as a wild dog rather than a shark or a bear. However, as a metaphorical dog, even West is described as an aggressor with an animalistic urge to chase Zenia who presents herself as a prey for the men to take. The men's portrayal as animals also highlights Zenia's effect on them: Mitch, West, and Billy become even more animalistic in Zenia's presence. For instance, Billy wants to "jump" Zenia and "haul [her] into bed" (*Robber*, 271). I argue that the language used to describe the men and their sexual acts is magical realist: in the given examples the language used blends human sexual acts with animal attacks and thus, the sexual relations produce unnatural and cannibal imagery. Furthermore, the descriptions of the men as animals who eat and chase women depict them as hybrid animal-humans, or rather cannibals. I argue that the magical realist descriptions of Billy, Mitch, and West as metaphorical cannibals symbolise the hierarchical power order of patriarchy and highlights the ideological notion that men have animalistic sexual urges they cannot and should not control.

Zenia accuses Billy of "eating off" Charis and using her as "a free meal-ticket" whilst ironically doing the same (*Robber*, 513). Furthermore, Zenia claims that Billy thinks Charis is "a cow" (*ibid.*). Not only are cows a common source for food produce but the noun is also a derogatory and abusive term used against women in the English language. I argue that the

double meaning of ‘cow’ symbolises both Billy’s abuse and Charis’ oppressed position in the relationship: Charis is the produce and abused woman the cannibal Billy feeds on and abuses. Karen, i.e., Charis’ former self, is also described with animal and food vocabulary when she is abused: she looks like she is made of hen’s fat and flails like a fish in a hook (*Robber*, 311). In addition, Zenia describes her mother as “a big lump of rotting meat” that was “lying in the snow” after she was “stoned to death” for being a witch (*Robber*, 322–323). Similarly, Charis compares her abusive and mentally ill mother to luncheon meat, and her face to a dead fish and skin to moulding bread (*Robber*, 302–304). Thus, the magical realist language of the narration highlights the position of women as the oppressed produce and prey in patriarchy. It also contrasts the power position of men and women because the men are described as predatory animals while the women are described as passive food and consumable goods. The women’s mothers who are no longer useful or desirable to men after becoming older or otherwise deviant from the fantasy image of ideal femininity, are described as rotten. In contrast, Charis and Karen are described as animal/food which symbolises how women are seen as products for people to use until they metaphorically expire. I affirm these arguments in the following paragraph in which the descriptions of Karen/Charis’ sexual abuse highlight the oppressive treatment of women through vocabulary that produces cannibal imagery.

Karen’s uncle Vern is a paedophile, a metaphorical cannibal, and the embodiment of the Robber figure. Karen has magical abilities which allow her to see Vern’s evil aura: for instance, his hands have “a luminescence around them, thick like jelly, sticky, brown-green” (*Robber*, 305). When Vern starts the abuse, his aura is deep red and he smells like a wet dog when he uses Karen “as if she’s a washcloth” (*Robber*, 307–308). Karen tries to evade her predatory uncle who “lurks” and “lies in wait” but is unable to because she is a child stuck in the cannibal robber’s house (*Robber*, 308). Vern’s face looks like “uncooked beef shining with triumph”, and when he rapes Karen, he smells like “stale sweat and rancid meat” (*Robber*, 310–311). During the rape, Charis “flies out” of Karen like a butterfly from “a cocoon” while Karen “wriggles and flails as if hooked through the neck” and looks like she is made of “the fat in a gutted hen” (*ibid.*). I argue that Uncle Vern is a metaphorical cannibal who smells like rotten flesh and looks like uncooked beef when he symbolically eats Karen who is like a fish caught in the predator’s net. Vern is described as “an animal eating an animal” – a cannibal who traps Karen in his house and robs her of her body and even life because when Karen matures, the abuse stops, and Charis takes over the body (*ibid.*). The magical realist descriptions of the sexual abuse and Vern blend the magical (auras and the

birth of Charis) with realistic event of abuse and paedophilia. By describing Vern's appearance with rotten and raw meat textures, the magical realist narration connects paedophilia with cannibalism which consequently produces criticism against patriarchal power hierarchies which also enable the abuse of young girls especially.

Although women are depicted as perishable foods in the novel, they are not the only ones getting eaten. Atwood reverses the gender of the cannibal Robber of "The Robber Bridegroom" by making Zenia a villain who victimises men and women (Wilson 2010, 28). Roz suspects that Zenia seduces men by presenting herself "as vacancy, a starvation, as an empty beggar's bowl" which I argue appeals to their animalistic urges (*Robber*, 447). In addition, Tony compares her "cooked" sex to Zenia's "raw sex" (*Robber*, 487). In connection with the description of Karen's matured cooked body, the novel implies that the hypersexual and perverted Zenia offers herself as a prey and as something taboo – uncooked. In other words, Zenia appropriates the role of the fragile victim, the prey, and presents herself as raw produce. However, Zenia too is a predator and a metaphorical cannibal in disguise. Zenia's cannibalism becomes apparent in the analysis of the vocabulary the narrators use to describe her robberies. For instance, Billy and Zenia both eat off Charis and enjoy "chewing" each other (*Robber*, 325). When West leaves Tony for Zenia, Roz reminds Tony that Zenia will throw him away after taking a bite out of him (*Robber*, 220). Thus, Zenia is like Mitch who also bites pieces out of his victims. After West returns from Zenia he looks "so pulled apart – as if he'd been on the rack, as if every one of his bones had been disconnected from every other bone, leaving only a kind of anatomical jelly" (*Robber*, 224). When Karen is raped by her uncle, her body splits in two and becomes "something slippery and yellow" (*Robber*, 311). After their similar experiences as cannibal's food, Charis and West's bodies break and metaphorically transform into another consistency. In addition, Zenia cuts slices out of hearts, sucks men dry and eats men "for breakfast" (*Robber*, 486, 527–528). I argue that as the cannibal Robber Bride figure is parallel to the cannibal men, Zenia breaks boundaries between natural and unnatural and consequently between men and women. Thus, the novel challenges patriarchal ideologies about women and femininity.

Wilson (2010, 32) argues that all Atwood's characters have magical Robber Bride sides which both double and foil Zenia. I affirm that the Robber Bride figure functions also as a foil and a mirror to the three women characters whose cannibal desires emerge from the magical realist descriptions of Zenia. The magical realist narration plays with the derogatory term 'man-eater' through the monstrous cannibal Robber Bride figure who infiltrates the

ideological masculine space through cannibalism. The term man-eater refers to cannibals and predatory women (OED 2023, s.v. “man-eater” 1, 4a, n.). Hence, man-eater is an oppressive term for women who resist ideological femininity through sexual behaviour that mimics the behaviour of the womanizing and often idealised men in patriarchy. I argue that the metaphorical cannibalism, being a man-eater, symbolises women’s desire to have power. I also argue that the metaphorical cannibalism of women, that is having and exercising power through sexual acts, is considered monstrous while men’s women-eating is often considered natural attribute to the male sex. The Robber Bride figure, i.e., the man-eater Zenia, incites jealousy in Roz who wishes to have power. Roz reveals her cannibal fantasies when she observes how “women disapprove of man-eaters” the way she disapproves of Zenia because they want to eat men, too (*Robber*, 471). Tony, then, has covert cannibal desires: she builds replicas of historical battlefields and armies out of kitchen spices and then eats the male soldiers (*Robber*, 132–134). After the identity-blending magical event in which Charis/Karen/Zenia and Billy have sex, the previously passive Charis becomes also hungry for men: she starts craving Billy’s body and wanting to gain something back from the transaction of bodies (*Robber*, 317). The narrative mode thus exposes the dichotomy between men and women in patriarchy wherein both women’s sexuality and efforts to have power are deemed unnatural and deviant while men’s are seen as natural and justified.

I argue that the novel highlights the theme of misogyny through cannibal imagery the intertext produces. For instance, the magical realist narration depicts the issue of misogyny between women in actual societies through animals who function as symbols for women and men. In *Robber*, Charis describes

how greedy chickens are, how selfish and unfeeling, how cruel they are to one another, how they gang up [...]. Nor are they placid vegetarians: you can start a riot among them just by tossing them a few hot-dog ends or scraps of bacon. As for the rooster, with his eye of an insane prophet and his fanatic’s air of outrage and his comb and wattles flaunted like genitals, he’s an overbearing autocrat, and attacks her rubber boots when he thinks she’s not looking. (*Robber*, 242)

As I discussed in section 3.2, Zenia represents the vampiric weasel who infiltrates the hen house and murders ‘innocent’ chickens. I argue that the chickens symbolise other women, mainly Charis, Tony, and Roz. The novel also compares Karen to “a gutted hen” (*Robber*, 311). Thus, I argue that in the example above, Charis observes misogyny in women who attack each other for the sake of some food, or rather power. At the same time men, the roosters, control the hierarchy and power politics of patriarchies. However, Charis is unable to

recognize the symbolism between the three women and her chickens and is blind to their own battle with Zenia over scraps of meat and the roosters.

Wilson (2010, 33) analyses how other characters like Charis' magical grandmother and the man-eater Mrs. Morley who has an affair with Roz' father produce cannibal images that "present these characters as magical realist Robbers [and] emphasise the book's power politics theme". By contrasting the realistic women characters with the magical cannibal Robber Bride figure, the mode of magical realism produces commentary on women's involvement in eating women. As Butler (2021, 355) theorises, performing gender i.e., producing and reproducing scripts and ideological gender expectations, is a survival tactic in society. Thus, women born into patriarchies internalise and produce the very same ideologies and norms that function in their oppression. Indeed, the vocabulary describing the men, the relationships, and the Robber Bride figure illustrates how Zenia represents a threat to Tony, Charis, and Roz who consequently portray her as a monstrous figure because she opposes the societal script they abide by. Thus, the Robber Bride figure functions not only as a dark double for the three women but as a catalyst for awareness of the patriarchal ideologies, narratives, and attitudes women, including feminists, have internalized. The cannibal images produced in the magical realist mode are connected to women who challenge patriarchal ideologies by for instance 'eating' and having power over men. In *Robber* the metaphorical cannibalism, eating men, symbolises a reprehensible action that violates both patriarchal ideologies and second wave feminist values like being loyal to victimized women. At the same time, cannibalism symbolises power and freedom because as cannibals the Robber Bride figures have reversed their subjugated position in the patriarchal hierarchy by becoming the predators.

Roz' twin daughters seem to also have the same cannibal appetite for power as Zenia. Eager to both correct the absence of women and to reverse their victimized position in fairy tales, the twins decide to make all characters in every story female (*Robber*, 350). For instance, they decide in "The Three Little Pigs" that one of the (female) pigs should fall into a cauldron of boiling water because "[s]omebody had to be boiled" (*Robber*, 351). When Tony reads "The Robber Bridegroom" story to the girls, they again insist on changing all of the characters into females (*Robber*, 351–352). Wilson (2010, 31) notes how the twins create stories in which women are not doomed to take the roles of victims because of their gender. In the stories narrated by the twins, women kill and get killed. The twins thus remove all patriarchal ideologies about human beings from their narratives which I argue is commentary on how

children, who have not yet fully internalised the ideologies and norms of their society, see all humans as equally capable of having power – of being predator and prey. I argue that here the novel makes its strongest base for the argument that all humans are capable of evil and good regardless of their biological sex and gender identity. In other words, the cannibal functions as a boundary breaking figure who blurs the lines between male and female and challenges the patriarchal gender binary. I thus argue that through magical realism the novel critiques patriarchal ideologies by highlighting how biological sex does not determine one's impulse or right to have or exert power.

While “Dream” does not have overt intertextual references to the Robber Bride figure and cannibalism, I argue that the short story's ending is parallel with the ending of the “The Robber Bridegroom”. In “Dream”, Zenia appears in the body of the pet dog Ouida, and bites off Billy's penis after Charis interrupts Billy from having sex with her by asking if he killed her chickens. Not only is the bite symbolic of the vampire's sexual bite but I argue that it symbolises also the cannibal bite of the Robber Bride figure. By consuming Billy's penis, Zenia stops him, the metaphorical cannibal, from eating off Charis again. Essentially, Zenia emasculates him and thus, removes his ability to ‘eat women’ and have power. When they were together, Billy physically abused Charis who could not stop it because she already suffers from traumas. While Zenia gains power through the bite by oppressing Billy who was lying about her to Charis, I argue that also Charis gains power through the bite because it frees her from the obligation to surrender her body to men. Furthermore, the bite allows Charis to finally see Billy's true cannibal nature and realise his toxic effect on her. In other words, Billy's cut off penis symbolises the dead girl's finger in the original Grimm's story. Both the finger and the bitten-off penis testify to the male cannibal's abusive power. While the Robber of the Grimm's story is reprimanded by the villagers, Billy is punished physically by the Robber Bride Zenia. Thus, I argue that the function of magical realism in “Dream” is to highlight especially the traumatic effects women may experience because of the existing patriarchal ideologies and power politics.

Finally, I argue that the function of the cannibal imagery in *Robber* and “Dream” is not to portray the three women as opposed to men and Zenia but to highlight how all humans, no matter what their biological sex is, are capable of wrongdoings. Both the male characters and Zenia are surrounded by cannibal imagery which portray them as Robber figures and metaphorical cannibals. Zenia consumes and spits out her victims like Mitch, discards her partners like West, and eats off her victims like Billy. While Zenia and Uncle Vern's actions

are not comparable, all of the characters' cannibalistic tendencies have similar outcomes as their victims' bodies transform in their hands. Labudova (2017, 414) observes that Zenia's cannibal tendencies mirror Tony, Charis, and Roz' appetites for revenge and power. I argue that the covert cannibal desires of the three women are symbolic of how women are expected to hide their 'unfeminine' desires which Zenia as their dark double is able to reflect. I suggest that the women resent Zenia because she is able to have power whilst behaving unfemininely which results in her portrayal as the Other in their magical realist narrations. However, in "Dream" the three women come to the realisation that having power requires deviancy from patriarchal norms. Hence, when Ouida/Zenia commits her final vampiric and cannibal act by biting off Billy's penis, the three women are not repulsed, nor do they judge her for this action. Instead, they accept Zenia's spirit into their lives and do not judge her anymore even when Ouida "flirts shamelessly" with Charis' new potential partner ("Dream", 37). Ouida/Zenia's bite solidifies her function as a boundary breaking figure who highlights both the absurd dichotomies between men and women and the harmful power politics and hierarchies caused by patriarchy.

The examples discussed in this section illustrate how the mode of magical realism can direct the reader to pay special attention to the described events and what they symbolise by blending the magical with the real. All in all, the cannibal imagery produced through the magical realist narration highlights issues caused by patriarchy, for instance, the dehumanised position of women in patriarchies. Labudova (2017, 416) argues that cannibalism dissolves every boundary and thus, Atwood "rewrites the boundaries between victims and victors, prey and predators" by connecting Zenia with the cannibal Robber Bride figure. The figure functions as a catalyst for Tony, Charis, and Roz who realise their desire for power through Zenia who exerts similar power to their male partners through metaphorical cannibalism. The connection between Roz' twin daughters and the Robber Bride figure illustrates how differences between men and women are based on patriarchal ideologies. The texts thus produce critique against sexist and patriarchal beliefs and ideologies about biological sexes, femininity, and gender roles. Furthermore, the cannibal Robber Bride questions the power of patriarchal ideologies about gender over human beings. In the next chapter, I discuss how the mode of magical realism produces feminist criticism against patriarchy and feminist ideologies through the magical and deviant figures of the femme fatale, the vampire, and the Robber Bride cannibal.

## 4 Feminist Critical Approach to Magical Realism

One of magical realism's main functions is that it highlights issues in the 'real' by combining the magical with a realistic setting (Faris [1995] 1997, 168). By using the mode of magical realism, Atwood introduces notorious deviant figures who cross boundaries between real and magical and by doing so, they highlight key issues for feminist critics in actual societies. The mode allows Atwood to introduce the femme fatale, the vampire, and the Robber Bride figures in realistic settings so that they create magical events that draw attention to actual social issues without disturbing the realistic feel. While the texts' realistic setting assumes that vampires do not actually exist, the magical realist narration of the texts produces images of Zenia as a female monster who threatens other human beings. The femme fatale, who is the most human-like among the three figures, attains magical qualities through the intertextual references to Biblical figures and in descriptions of her Frankenstein beauty and changing physical appearance. The Robber Bride figure is inherently magical realist as an intertextual character, and she highlights societal issues through metaphorical cannibalism that symbolises the power politics of patriarchy. The figures come to symbolise the Other through taboo and magical events which blur the line between unfeminine and feminine, human and inhuman and real and fantastic by highlighting the mythical nature of actual patriarchal ideologies. Thus, the magical realist mode creates an alternative reality in which monstrous figures decentre power politics in the real by exposing the ideological and fantastical basis of them.

The figures of the vampire, the femme fatale, and the Robber Bride produce images that challenge the patriarchal ideology of femininity according to which women are inferior, passive, and fragile. The femme fatale and the vampire figures have historically functioned as representation for instance for dangerous and deviant women who stand in opposition to the ideologies and values patriarchal cultures are based on. Thus, as the monstrous metaphorical vampire, Zenia becomes the embodiment of deviancy: she is hypersexual, ancient, indestructible, and insatiable. The figure of the femme fatale and the vampire intertwine in the image of the mysterious and threatening Zenia as traits like hypersexuality and hypnotic beauty connect to both the image of the vampire and the femme fatale. The figures of the vampire and the Robber Bride connect in the insatiable and bloodthirsty Zenia through language that produces images about metaphorical vampirism and cannibalism that leaves her victims emotionally dried out and even physically transformed or dismembered. The magical realist narration connects Zenia to historical femme fatale figures like Jezebel and the Whore

of Babylon which amplifies her deviant image as a perverse seductress and a threat to the patriarchal order in societies. Hence, I argue that these three magical figures function as symbols for deviancy by embodying the unwanted and unaccepted qualities in women such as sexual freedom, desire, aggression, and power.

While I analyse the femme fatale, the vampire, and the Robber Bride figures separately in this thesis, they are deeply connected by their role as the Other. The figures rewrite the boundaries between the destined victors and victims and the boundaries between the feminine and unfeminine, male and female. The femme fatale Zenia embodies both feminine and unfeminine attributes: she is at the same time an enchantingly beautiful siren who fulfils every fantasy of Western culture and an unfeminine Other who is hypersexual, cold, and desires money and power. Zenia's association with the femme fatale figure functions to illustrate her overtly feminine attributes and her magical ability to embody idealised beauty standards in contemporary consumption culture. I argue that Zenia's alternating outer appearance exposes the ideological basis of femininity and highlights how the ideology has emerged from male fantasies. In other words, the portrayal of Zenia as the femme fatale critiques the patriarchal ideologies that assume that femininity is a result of the female sex. In connection with the 'unfeminine' monstrous vampire and the Robber Bride, the many images of Zenia illustrate how women are multidimensional human beings with specific gender performances. The gender ideologies of patriarchy are thus revealed to be social fantasies, tools to maintain the power politics according to which women are either victims or monsters.

The ideological nature of femininity which relies on dichotomies is explicitly established in Roz' monologue:

Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that your strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole [...] in your own head, if nowhere else. You are your own voyeur. The Zenias of this world have studied this situation and turned it to their own advantage; they haven't let themselves be moulded into male fantasies, they've done it themselves. They've slipped sideways into dreams [...] of women too, become women are fantasies for other women, just as they are for men. But fantasies of a different kind. (*Robber*, 471–472)

I argue that Roz' monologue underlines the performative nature of gender. Furthermore, the monologue illustrates how the cultural scripts people reproduce into existence affect the

gender identities and performances of every person born into patriarchies. A woman has become an ideological fantasy built on irreconcilable contradictions – a performance with unrealistic expectations. To have power then, as the woman Other, requires the impossible because the performance is destined for failure.

I argue the novel challenges the ideology of femininity and gender roles through magical realist techniques by illustrating how all women are complex human beings. Roz identifies Zenia as the Robber Bride who lurks “in her mansion in the dark forest, preying upon the innocent, enticing youths to their doom in her evil cauldron” (*Robber*, 352). Roz imagines Zenia as a false prophet, the femme fatale Jezebel, who leads young women into their doom by encouraging deviant behaviour. I argue that Zenia also symbolises the old woman in the cellar in “The Robber Bridegroom”. When Roz wishes for a wise woman who would warn about the evil nature of men (*Robber*, 468), she fails to acknowledge the ancient Zenia as one. Zenia, who both encourages deviant behaviour and exposes the wicked nature of humans with her actions, is both the Robber Bride and the old crone of the fairy-tale. Furthermore, Roz too resembles the presaging old woman: she sits in the cellar of her house while narrating parts of her story which warn the reader of the actions of her husband and challenge the reader to reflect on patriarchal ideologies, politics, and issues. Ironically, Roz also becomes the femme fatale Jezebel by both fantasising about being like Zenia and by encouraging deviant behaviour by narrating such desires to the reader. I argue that the connection between Roz, Zenia, the old woman of the Grimms’ fairy-tale, and the femme fatale Jezebel disrupts the ideology that women are either victims or victors, good or bad, feminine or unfeminine.

Women too produce and reproduce scripts that function in oppressing people and thus partake in the oppression of others. Not only is this a survival tactic, like Butler (2021, 355) argues, but also means to have power in male-dominated systems. On the basis of my analysis, the femme fatale, the vampire, and the metaphorical cannibal are unfeminine monstrous beings who challenge patriarchal ideologies and norms through the act of consumption. The three deviant figures are culturally connected to consumption: the vampire drinks the other’s blood, the Robber Bride is connected to cannibalism, and the femme fatale consumes for instance men sexually. The three magical figures obtain power by consuming their victims which consequently reverses the patriarchal power structure that oppresses women. Tony, Charis, and Roz are oppressed especially in their relationships but are unable to recognize their need and desire for power and freedom from the ideologies that separate them from having it. In contrast with Zenia, their desire for consumption and power becomes apparent in their

narration which oppresses Zenia and uncovers their desire to eat men. Like Charis' hens, the women in patriarchies attack each other for scraps of power while the "overbearing autocrat" watches (*Robber*, 242). Ultimately the magical realist narration exposes how women partake in maintaining patriarchy by dehumanising women who threaten the very same power that oppresses them to gain some power for themselves.

Hence, Milfull (2000, 225) argues that "Zenia is Atwood's response to what she regards as the feminist unease with women's "will to power" and with the depiction of female aggression". For instance, Tony has a knack for violence as "she has another self, a more ruthless one, concealed inside her. She is not just Tony Fremont, she is also *Tnomerf Ynot*, queen of the barbarians" (*Robber*, 486). Much like Charis's Karen, Tony's darker invisible "twin", the "left-handed half" of her, remains hidden because Tony is taught to hide her patriarchal norm-breaking side (*ibid.*). Charis, the most passive and angelic of the three, merges with Karen and appears to push Zenia off a balcony into her death. The question of whether Karen/Charis truly murdered Zenia is left open in the novel – Atwood's last magical realist act in *Robber* is to let the reader decide whether Charis' vision was true and Zenia died as the result of Charis/Karen's violent burst. When the women go together to Zenia's hotel and find her dead, Charis realises how they are "the dogs" drinking "the Jezebel blood" – they have become the animals who consume women for power (*Robber*, 536). Consequently, the reader is encouraged to reflect on whether there is any difference between Tony, Charis, and Roz and the deviant Other Zenia – and between what is considered feminine and unfeminine and why in patriarchal thought.

By reversing the roles of the predator and the prey in *Robber* through magical realism, the novel also demolishes the notion that women are the Other to men. As the Other unfeminine woman created to oppose both the feminine angelic woman and the man, Zenia's character ultimately accentuates how similar human beings are. Labudova (2017, 424) analyses how Zenia functions as an empowering figure whose stories free Tony, Charis, and Roz who are forced "to acknowledge the darker dimension of their repressed otherness" for instance in the novel's ending as the dogs drinking the femme fatale's blood. I argue that Zenia's monstrous and magical characteristics give her power over every character, which she uses to force her victims into the position of the Other. Her magic causes the men to become hysterical, passive, and fragile victims. In other words, the men attain qualities that are associated with femininity. This also affects Tony, Charis, and Roz who consequently become their families' protectors and providers, and more independent, logical, and powerful compared to their male

partners. Thus, the men come to symbolise patriarchal femininity and the women patriarchal masculinity, highlighting the absurdity of patriarchal gender roles and the ideologies they are based on. Furthermore, by challenging the ideological basis of genders through magical realism, the texts disrupt the hegemonic position of men in culture by creating a narrative in which men become the Other and the classic other woman figure is freed from her subjugated position.

Atwood notably refuses to identify her books as feminist works. Instead, she believes that when writing “a mash-up of actual reality”, people will inevitably consider such texts feminist because they depict reality and call for a change in societies (McNamara 2017). Atwood’s refusal to proclaim herself as a feminist writer, together with the popularity of her novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) and especially the televised version of it (2016–2025), has resulted in multiple enquiries about her feminism. When discussing if *The Handmaid’s Tale* is feminist, Atwood (2017) states:

If you mean an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized they are incapable of moral choice, no. If you mean a novel in which women are human beings – with all the variety of character and behavior that implies — [...] then yes. In that sense, many books are ‘feminist’.

From a feminist perspective, Atwood’s answer sums up the objective of magical realism in *Robber* and “Dream”. The mode produces images of women as human beings and challenges the ideologies that assume women are only angelic and/or victims. The characters in *Robber* and “Dream” are all victims and victors, angels and monsters.

After Zenia’s death at the end of the novel, Tony wonders if Zenia was anything like the three women (*Robber*, 564). Wilson (2010, 33) notes that “we never see Zenia’s point of view because she is muse, story, and history and the object of the others’ gaze”. I argue that the reason why Atwood emphasises how Zenia’s name is pronounced with an ‘e’ as in /seen/ is because she is meant to be seen but not known (*Robber*, unnumbered). This is also why Tony struggles to find out what Zenia’s name means (*Robber*, 553). Wilson (2010, 33) argues that if the reader had access to Zenia’s perspective, her story would also be of the Robber Bridegroom victim because in *Robber* “the archetypal roles of Robber and Robber Bride are interchangeable” and thus all of the women characters play both. Indeed, Zenia’s deviant image is created through the biased perspectives of Tony, Roz, and Charis who narrate what they see and want to believe. Consequently, the texts show how patriarchal ideologies affect

the way women are seen, and how having the power of language and narration to produce and reproduce patriarchal ideologies can have punitive consequences for the Other.

Atwood is commonly known for exposing and critiquing the power structures embedded in the patriarchies we live in. For instance, the morally ambiguous character Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale* controls other women in the novel's patriarchal and totalitarian society that oppresses especially women (EW Staff 2017). Atwood explains that she based her choice of such a character on actual reality:

That's how such a power structure would operate, that's how they've operated in the past: You give somebody a bit more power over the others, and they will take it. So it's not a case of all women being angelic. [...] Women are human beings, a mixed lot. (EW Staff 2017)

Zenia, like Aunt Lydia, is morally ambiguous and manipulates women and men. Zenia's actions highlight not only the sedimented power structures in patriarchies but also women's part in the production of those structures. While creating narratives centred on their own victimisation, Tony, Roz, and Charis reflect patriarchy's effects on women. In order to survive and gain power in society, they produce gender performances that satisfy their male partners. When Zenia evokes negative feelings in the three women by refusing to act according to the gender script of society, they use the ultimate patriarchal weapon against her by portraying her as a representative of deviant and monstrous figures. They might not do this consciously but their narrative power functions in purifying them from their own unfeminine sides by portraying them as victims of men and Zenia. Thus, the magical realist narration is ultimately how Tony, Charis, and Roz exercise their own power over Zenia who oppresses them through her contradictory and deceitful stories. By telling the story of Zenia, the deviant Other, the women establish their own power over those who have oppressed them.

I argue that through the magical realist mode Zenia becomes a symbolical threat to also some feminist ideologies. Tolan (2007, 45) identifies Tony, Charis, and Roz as representatives of second wave feminism with such values as sisterhood and loyalty whilst Zenia symbolises "postfeminist individualism, sexuality, and diversity", which I argue are produced in the magical realist descriptions of the vampire, the femme fatale, and the cannibal (Tolan 2007, 45). Tolan (2007, 46) observes that the anxiety the three women experience over Zenia's return symbolises the anxiety second wave feminists experienced over the rise of postfeminism. Thus, the women view Zenia as the Other also because she challenges the three women's second wave principles and feminist values (Tolan 2007, 52). Furthermore, I argue

that this anxiety over postfeminism is also mirrored in the anxiety Roz experiences over her daughters who reject the notion of sisterhood between women by victimising them in their own fairy-tale remakes. Roz' daughters thus represent postfeminist individualism and diversity. Charis' daughter Augusta symbolises postfeminism too: for instance, Tony is afraid of Augusta who is "faintly chilling" and the twins who are "gigantic, and also careless" but admired how they "have none of the timidity that used to be so built in, for women" (*Robber*, 482).

Thus, I argue Atwood criticises particularly some feminists and feminisms in *Robber* and "Dream". Mead (2017) notes how Atwood's "feminism assumes women's rights to be human rights". Mead (ibid.) cites Atwood who recounts having issues with the kind of second-wave feminism according to which "you weren't supposed to wear frocks and lipstick" if you did not want to be labelled as a traitor to your biological sex. Butler (2004, 37) expresses a similar wish and a need to consider women's rights as human rights. Thus, when Atwood critiques second wave feminism through Zenia who is judged by the other women for using ideological femininity to her advantage, she also depicts how feminism can function as a tool in women's oppression. For instance, Tony, Charis, and Roz criticise Zenia for fashioning her outer appearance to (presumably) entice men. The three women, who represent second wave feminism, are ignorant of the way in which they portray Zenia as a threat, an Other, because she appears to consciously cater to the fantasies of patriarchal culture. Therefore, I argue that the magical realist narration that produces Zenia as the image of the anti-feminist monster highlights the problem within feminisms: to focus on the way women should or should not interpret and reproduce their gender undermines the issue of how women are seen as a universal category instead of different human beings with various gender performances. Thus, feminisms that focus on how women do their gender 'inappropriately' actually perpetuate patriarchal ideologies by creating difference and otherness based on how a person performs gender inappropriately or appropriately.

Atwood notes that the label of a feminist can mean different things to different people (EW Staff 2017). Atwood (ibid.) challenges the current generalised meaning of the term feminist and asks: "[D]o we mean equal legal rights? Do we mean women are better than men? Do we mean all men should be pushed off a cliff? What do we mean? Because that word has meant all of those different things". *Robber* and "Dream" reflect this problem within feminism in the magical realist mode with Zenia, Tony, Roz, and Charis. They oppress each other in different ways without realising their own involvement in maintaining the patriarchal power structure.

While the three women stand united against the other woman who breaks the 'girl code' between women – the feminist sisterhood – they are, on one hand also guilty of oppressing Zenia. Zenia on the other hand rejects the kind of feminisms that push for the oppression of men, and traitorous women, for the sake of “women’s rights” by refusing to stand on any other side but her own. In “Dream” the three women collide again but the result is different: they realise that Zenia has been a victim and a victor which consequently allows them to consider their own position as both. However, Atwood does not sugar coat the reasons why the women come to understand and accept Zenia’s actions. Essentially, they see her as a true victim for the first time when Billy is exposed as a liar which also solidifies Zenia’s position as a female victim and a part of the sisterhood of women.

Tony notes how the figure of the vampire has changed in contemporary times: vampires have become virtuous, disreputable, sexy, and glittery (“Dream”, 14). Vampires, like for instance the glittery ones in Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* (2005), have been humanised. Like Zenia, the vampires of the present day are not merely deviant monsters but multidimensional and morally ambiguous. Tony, Roz, and Charis are fascinated by vampires, but Tony sees this fascination as “an adolescent pursuit” and struggles with the new generation vampires (“Dream”, 14). I argue that Tony’s monologue symbolises the changes occurring within contemporary Western culture: people are fighting for their right to be themselves within the restrictive patriarchal spaces and refuse to conform to the patriarchal gender expectations of their societies. Feminism is changing too; instead of focusing on the binary category of women and their rights, scholars like Butler strive for recognition of all different humans as equal beings who deserve equal rights. Tony’s struggle with the changing category of vampires, not being able to categorise and label them, ultimately symbolises the humans persisting need to understand and control reality through language and to categorise people according to the gender binary. The magical realist narration thus explores how patriarchies insist on maintaining the current ideologies and societal norms because the unknown, uncategorisable monsters, challenge the existing power politics and the ways in which humans have understood reality.

Thus, I suggest that the mode of magical realism functions ultimately in producing a strong argument for change. The magical realist narration in *Robber* and “Dream” produces images of Zenia as a monstrous female figure who highlights issues within patriarchy and feminisms throughout the narration. Thus, *Robber* and “Dream” function in decentering patriarchal and some feminist narratives about women. In the end of the texts, the reader is encouraged to

consider all as morally ambiguous human beings who participate in the oppression of others in patriarchies. Thus, magical realism not only functions in decentring Western narratives and scripts but also highlights the need to revision what women's rights mean to feminism. From a feminist critical perspective, magical realism not only challenges the narratives of the central positions of men and women and highlights the needs of the Other but also exposes the magical and ideological nature of feminism. All in all, Atwood's use of magical realism in *Robber* and "Dream" uncovers the need for change that establishes human rights for all.

## 5 Conclusion

Magical realism is a versatile literary mode that can be applied to highlight issues in patriarchies. The mode blends together the (idea of) real and the magical by blending magical events and characters with a realistic setting and intertextual references to both fictional and factual events and people. With this thesis, I demonstrated how the magical realist mode is used in Atwood's *Robber* and "Dream" to highlight societal issues caused by patriarchy. The texts' protagonists Tony, Charis, and Roz narrate their own stories which produce the image of the deviant and monstrous Zenia into their world. In these narratives Zenia comes to symbolise the cultural Other through figures such as the femme fatale and the vampire. Furthermore, the intertextual references to the Grimm Brothers' fairy-tale "The Robber Bridegroom" produce Zenia's image as the Robber Bride cannibal. Thus, Zenia occurs in the text as representative of the ex-centric, the deviant, and the marginalised Other who functions as a threat to patriarchy.

The magical and deviant figures of the vampire, the femme fatale and the cannibal Robber Bride produce images of women that disrupt the patriarchal ideologies of femininity and women in *Robber* and "Dream". The figures create a powerful critique against the idea that human beings can be categorised based on their biological sex into genders and that gender signifies a specific nature, qualities, and behaviour. The ideology of femininity is challenged through Zenia who combines and exploits aspects of deviancy and patriarchal femininity for her own gain as a metaphorical vampire, cannibal, and femme fatale. As the Other to the three women, Zenia functions as a magical mirror to Tony, Charis, and Roz and thus highlights the ideological basis behind the categorisation of women and femininity in society. Zenia's deviant image brings out the three women's similar vampire, femme fatale, and cannibal desires and exposes their 'unfeminine' side. Thus, the mode of magical realism illustrates the ideological nature of femininity which is essentially a fantasy performance – a magical realist image that women are forced to maintain in order to be accepted in society.

Ultimately, the monstrous figures Atwood explores through the mode of magical realism are representation for the real women who are human beings, both prey and predators, 'unfeminine' and 'feminine'. Atwood, known for her desire to represent women as morally ambiguous, contests classic representations of women as an angelic category of victims in *Robber* and "Dream". With this thesis, I suggest Atwood is also interested in dismantling the stereotypes surrounding women: the overtly monstrous Zenia highlights the 'deviant' qualities

of the human Tony, Roz, and Charis and thus, the texts ultimately critique patriarchy for producing images of women that ignore the humanity, i.e., the complexity of women. The categorisation of women into one category based on stereotypical characteristics invites the othering and differentiation of women under patriarchal power politics which is founded on the subjugation of others based on biological sex, race, and class. By depicting women that are complex in nature, both capable of being victims and predators, Atwood attacks patriarchy and challenges the categories of women and men that serve the policy of gender regulation and control.

Atwood's feminism centres around the notion that women are above all human beings and thus, her depictions of women reach far beyond the one-dimensional representation of women as hypersexual monsters or victimized angels. By uncovering the 'unfeminine' qualities of the texts' victimised and angelic women, Atwood also explores women's involvement in the reproduction of patriarchal power politics and gender performances. The negative images of the monstrous vampire woman and the deviant femme fatale are revealed as patriarchal stereotypes that have been used to maintain the patriarchal hierarchy and the position of women as the Other. The mode of magical realism functions so that it accentuates the deviant and threatening qualities of Zenia in opposition with her victims Tony, Charis, and Roz. However, because the three women are the story's focalisers, the narrative mode exposes also how women internalise and reproduce patriarchal ideologies and reaffirm the patriarchal power politics. In addition, the contrast in behaviour between Zenia and the three women symbolises issues within feminism. Thus, the mode of magical realism not only uncovers the ideological foundation of patriarchal society and its policies but also the ideologies of some feminist movements.

In conclusion, the monstrous figures produced through the magical realist mode challenge the reader's notion of human nature, and thus, highlight the inhuman treatment of women in patriarchy. By using the mode, Atwood underlines the importance of producing images of women as morally ambiguous and complex human beings rather than victims or angels. Furthermore, the novel and the short story underline the need for feminism to focus on the refiguration of human rights for all. Ultimately, magical realism is an important literary mode that can challenge prevalent patriarchal ideologies and narratives in various means. As illustrated in this thesis, in addition to its essential functions for instance postcolonial literature, the mode also offers functions for feminist literary criticisms that are interested in dismantling and challenging patriarchal narratives and ideologies. With this thesis, I

emphasise the international relevance of magical realism and encourage further studies on the mode in hopes that it will be better recognized as a significant literary mode with endless possibilities for marginal voices all over the world.

## References

### Primary Sources:

Atwood, Margaret. [1993] 2020. *The Robber Bride*. London: Virago Press.

Atwood, Margaret. 2012. "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth". *Walrus Magazine*. Toronto: The Walrus Foundation.

### Secondary Sources:

Atwood, Margaret. 2017. "Margaret Atwood on What 'The Handmaid's Tale' Means in the Age of Trump". *The New York Times*, 10 March. Accessed 19 January 2024.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html>.

Bouson, J. Brooks. 2010. "Part 1: *The Robber Bride*". In *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, 19–22. London: Continuum. ProQuest.

Butler, Judith. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.

———. 2021. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". In *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, edited by Carole R. McCann, Seung-Kyung Kim, and Emek Ergun, 353–361. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Routledge. EBSCOhost.

de Beauvoir, Simone. 2011. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier. New York: Vintage Books. Originally published as *Le deuxième sexe: Les faits et les mythes* (Vol. I) and *L'expérience vécue* (Vol. II), 1949.

Duff, Paul B. 2001. *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse*. New York: Oxford University Press. ProQuest.

D'haen, Theo L. [1995] 1997. "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centers". In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 191–208. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

———. 2020. "Magical Realism: The European Trajectory". In *Magical Realism and Literature*, edited by Christopher Warnes and Kim Anderson Sasser, 117–130. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utu.fi/10.1017/9781108551601>.

- EW Staff. 2017. "Emma Watson interviews Margaret Atwood about *The Handmaid's Tale*". *Entertainment Weekly*, 14 July. Accessed 12 February 2024.  
<https://ew.com/books/2017/07/14/emma-watson-interviews-margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale/>.
- Faris, Wendy B. [1995] 1997. "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction". In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 163–190. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- . 2004. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press. ProQuest.
- Grimm, the Brothers [Johan and Wilhelm]. 2011. *Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales*. Translated by Margaret Hunt. San Diego: Canterbury Classics. Originally published as *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1812.
- Hanson, Helen. 2010. "The Big Seduction: Feminist Film Criticism and the *Femme Fatale*". In *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, edited by Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe, 214–227. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ProQuest.
- Hanson, Helen, and Catherine O'Rawe. 2010. "Introduction: 'Cherchez la femme'". In *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts*, edited by Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe, 1–8. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ProQuest.
- Hobson, Amanda. 2016a. "Introduction". In *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, edited by Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo, 1–8. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. ProQuest.
- . 2016b. "Dark Seductress: The Hypersexualization of the Female Vampire". In *Gender in the Vampire Narrative*, edited by Amanda Hobson and U. Melissa Anyiwo, 9–27. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. ProQuest.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1988. *The Canadian Postmodern: A Study of Contemporary English-Canadian Fiction*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Labudova, Katarina. 2017. "Cooking and Eating Your Own Stories: (Metaphorical) Cannibalism in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*". *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 65, no. 4: 413–427. ProQuest.
- López Ramírez, Manuela. 2022. "'Completion of a Circle': Female Process of Self-Realization and Individuation in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride* and 'I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth'". *ES Review: Spanish Journal of English Studies* 43: 183–205. ProQuest.

- McNamara, Mary. 2017. "Q&A: Margaret Atwood answers the question: Is 'The Handmaid's Tale' a feminist book?" *Los Angeles Times*, 24 April. Accessed 12 February 2024. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/hero/complex/la-et-hc-margaret-atwood-feminism-handmaid-tale-20170424-htmllstory.html>.
- Mead, Rebecca. 2017. "Margaret Atwood, the Prophet of Dystopia". *The New Yorker*, 10 April. Accessed 12 February 2024. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia>.
- Milfull, Alison. 2000. *Songs of the Siren: Women Writers and the Femme Fatale*. Sydney: UNSW. Accessed 4 December 2023. <https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/entities/publication/da9651b3-0efa-4b83-8d7a-5390f62dcdcf>.
- Mäntymäki, Tiina, Marinella Rodi-Risberg, and Anna Foka. 2015. "Introduction". In *Deviant Women: Cultural, Linguistic and Literary Approaches to Narratives of Femininity*, edited by Tiina Mäntymäki, Marinella Rodi-Risberg, and Anna Foka, 9–25. Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research. <https://www.peterlang.com/document/1067510>.
- OED: Oxford English Dictionary*. December 2023. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5865169755>.
- Place, Janey. 1980. "Women in film noir". In *Women in Film Noir*, edited by E. Ann Kaplan, 35–67. London: British Film Institute.
- Roh, Franz. [1995] 1997. "Magic Realism: Post-Expressionism". In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 15–31. Durham and London: Duke University Press. Originally published in 1945.
- Rooney, Ellen. 2006. "The Literary Politics of Feminist Theory". In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, 73–96. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Staels, Hilde. 2010. "Parodic Border Crossings in *The Robber Bride*". In *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, 36–49. London: Continuum. ProQuest.
- Stott, Rebecca. 1992. *The Fabrication of the Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. ProQuest.
- Tolan, Fiona. 2007. "Sucking the Blood Out of Second Wave Feminism: Postfeminist Vampirism in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*". *Gothic Studies* 9, no. 2: 45–57. EBSCOhost.

- Warnes, Christopher. 2020. "Magic and Otherness". In *Magical Realism and Literature*, edited by Christopher Warnes and Kim Anderson Sasser, 13–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utu.fi/10.1017/9781108551601>.
- Warnes, Christopher, and Kim Anderson Sasser. 2020. "Introduction". In *Magical Realism and Literature*, edited by Christopher Warnes and Kim Anderson Sasser, 1–10. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.utu.fi/10.1017/9781108551601>.
- Weil, Kari. 2006. "French Feminism's *Écriture Feminine*". In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, edited by Ellen Rooney, 153–171. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, Milly. 2005. *The Lure of The Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Wilson, Sharon R. 2010. "Magical Realism in *The Robber Bride* and Other Texts". In *Margaret Atwood: The Robber Bride, The Blind Assassin, Oryx and Crake*, edited by J. Brooks Bouson, 23–35. London: Continuum. ProQuest.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris. [1995] 1997. "Introduction: Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s". In *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, edited by Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, 1–11. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

#### Johdanto

Patriarkaalisia naiskuvia on kautta historian tuotettu kirjallisuuden kautta. Nämä naiskuvat kuvaavat naiset biologisen sukupuolen perusteella vastakkaisena, toisena, miehelle. Nämä toiseuttavat kirjalliset naiskuvat, jotka vakiinnuttivat naisellisuuden ihanteet läntisessä kulttuurissa, kuvaavat naisia poikkeavina oliona, jotka uhkaavat sekä miespuolisia päähenkilöitä että koko yhteiskuntaa (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg, and Foka 2015, 9). Naiset, jotka vastustavat käytöksellään ihanteellista naisellisuutta sekä sukupuolinormeja ja -rooleja, voidaan leimata epänaisselliseksi (ibid.). Kirjallisuudessa esiintyvät epänaisselliset naishahmot tuovat käytöksellään esiin patriarkaalisia ideologioita ja korostavat niiden keskeistä asemaa yhteiskunnissa (Mäntymäki, Rodi-Risberg, and Foka 2015, 9–10) Täten, epänaisselliset naiskuvat haastavat kirjallisuuden kautta patriarkaalisten yhteiskuntien normeja ja sukupuolirooleja sekä ideologioita, joihin patriarkaaliset yhteiskunnat nojaavat.

Maaginen realismi on merkittävä kirjallisuuden suuntaus, jolla on laaja kansainvälinen historia. Tässä tutkielmassa maaginen realismi ymmärretään kerronnallisena tekniikkana, joka haastaa länsimaisia patriarkaalisia ideologioita ja todellisuudenkuvauksia. Maagisen realismin kerronnoissa yhdistyvät realistinen maailmankuvaus ja taianomaiset tapahtumat ja hahmot. Maagisen realismin voi tunnistaa esimerkiksi intertekstuaalisuudesta sekä kuvauksista, joissa taianomaiset tapahtumat ja hahmot esitetään kuuluvan tekstin maailmaan siten, että ne eivät häiritse realistista maailmankuvausta. Margaret Atwood on tunnettu intertekstuaalisista parodioista, joissa taianomaiset tapahtumat ja hahmot yhdistyvät realistisiin maailmankuvauksiin. Tapansa mukaisesti Atwoodin romaanissa *The Robber Bride* (1993), joka perustuu Grimmin veljesten satuun “The Robber Bridegroom”, ja novellissa “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth” (2012) intertekstuaalisuus, taianomaisuus ja realistinen maailma yhdistyvät maagisen realistisen kerronnan kautta.

Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa käsittelem maagisen realismin käyttöä feministisen kirjallisuudentutkimuksen näkökulmasta Atwoodin teoksissa *The Robber Bride* ja “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth”. Tutkin teoksien antagonistin, Zenian, kuvauksissa esiintyviä maagisrealistisia hahmoja: vampyyri, kohtalokas nainen ja kannibaali Robber Bride. Esitän, että Zenian maagisrealistiset kuvaukset vampyyrina, kohtalokkaana naisena ja

Robber Bride -kannibaalina tuottavat feministisen näkökulman, jonka kautta kommentoidaan ja haastetaan patriarkaalisten yhteiskuntien ongelmia. Väitän, että Zenian epänaissellinen olemus tuo esiin yhteiskunnassa vallitsevia patriarkaalisia normeja ja naisellisuuden ihanteita, jotka perustuvat patriarkaalisiin ideologioihin. Keskustelen tutkimuksessani siitä, kuinka Zenian hahmo tuo esiin naiskuvien ja ihanteellisen naisellisuuden ideologisen perustan ja täten hän haastaa patriarkaateissa vallitsevia naiskuvia, ideologioita ja normeja. Lisäksi tutkin, miten teokset luovat feminismeihin kohdistuvaa kritiikkiä teosten kertojien, Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin, luomien naiskuvien kautta.

#### Teoreettinen tausta

Tutkimukseni pohjautuu Rooney'n ja Weilin feministisen kirjallisuudentutkimuksen teorioihin sekä Butlerin feministisiin teorioihin. Feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus keskittyy esimerkiksi länsimaisessa kirjallisuudessa tuotettujen naiskuvien ja niiden toisintojen tutkimiseen ja haastamiseen sekä patriarkaalisten naisellisuuden kuvausten haastamiseen tekstien kautta (Rooney 2006, 73). Esimerkiksi naisellisuuden kuvaukset, joita tuotetaan muun muassa kirjallisuuden kautta, vaikuttavat naisten sukupuoli-identiteetin omaksumiseen. Tästä syystä kirjallisuudessa esiintyvien patriarkaalisten naiskuvien ja naisellisuuden ihanteiden sekä niitä vastustavien kuvauksien tutkiminen on tärkeä tavoite feministiselle kirjallisuudentutkimukselle. Etenkin Yhdysvalloissa ranskalaiseksi feminismiksi nimetty feminismiin suuntaus on kiinnostunut muun muassa tutkimaan kirjallisuudessa syntyviä ja niiden kautta luotuja naiskuvia ja naisellisuuden kuvauksia. Suuntauksen alullepanijat käsittävät kielen patriarkaalisen alistuksen välineenä, jossa merkitykset muodostuvat vastakkaisuuksien kautta. Toisin sanoen, naisellisuus kuvataan maskuliinisuuden vastakohtana, toiseutena, ja sitä määrittää piirteet kuten heikkous ja tunteellisuus (Weil 2006, 154). Tämä tutkielma on feministinen kirjallisuudentutkimus, jossa tutkin Atwoodin teoksien kerronnassa syntyviä naiskuvia ja naisellisuuden kuvia ja sitä, miten niillä haastetaan patriarkaalisia naiskuvia.

Tässä tutkielmassa sukupuoli-identiteetti käsitetään ihmisen toteuttamana ja kokemana sosiaalisena sukupuolena. Sukupuolen ilmaisu (gender performance) on Butlerin (2021, 355) mukaan selviytymiskeino, jonka avulla ihmiset sopeutuvat muiden joukkoon. Naiseksi tuleminen ja patriarkaalisten ihanteiden mukaisen naisellisuuden ilmaisu ovat menetelmiä, joilla tullaan hyväksytyksi yhteiskunnassa ja kulttuureissa (Butler 2021, 355). Ajan myötä sukupuolinormit ovat kerrostuneet ja tuottaneet ajatuksen siitä, että sukupuolen ilmaisut

syntyvät luonnostaan biologisen sukupuolen perusteella (Butler 2021, 356). Tosiasiassa sukupuoli-ilmaisut perustuvat kulttuurisiin normeihin, joita tuotetaan uudelleen jatkuvasti ilmaisun kautta (Butler 2021, 357). Tämä tarkoittaa myös sitä, että esimerkiksi naisellisuus perustuu ideologiaan. Sukupuolen ilmaisuun liittyvät kysymykset herättävät myös kysymyksiä siitä, ketkä mielletään ihmisiksi (Butler 2004, 30).

Tässä tutkielmassa maaginen realismi käsitetään etenkin narratiivisena tekniikkana ja kansainvälisenä tyylinä (mode), joka on syntynyt monista eri vaikutteista ympäri maailmaa. Maaginen realismi yhdistetään pääasiassa latinalaisamerikkalaiseen kirjallisuuteen (D’Haen [1995] 1997, 191–192), mutta tutkijat käsittävät sen olevan monipuolinen ja rajoja ylittävä tyyli marginalisoiduille äänille (Zamora and Faris [1995] 1997, 2). Maagisen realismin kautta haastetaan etenkin länsimaisia todellisuudenkuvauksia maantieteellisistä sijainneista ja eri vähemmistöistä lähtien (D’haen [1995] 1997, 194–195). Maaginen realismi on vastakertomusten tyyli, jota voidaan hyödyntää myös feministiseen kritiikkiin, koska naiset ovat myös toiseutettuja ja puhuvat marginalisoiduilla äänillä (ibid.). Esitän tutkimuksessani, että Atwood haastaa patriarkaalisia naiskuvia ja paljastaa naisellisuuden ideologisen pohjan maagisen realismin kautta. Maagisen realismin tekniikoita käyttämällä Atwood tuo esiin, kuinka naiset ovat yksilöllisiä ja viallisia ihmisiä.

#### Analyysi ja pohdinta

*The Robber Bride* koostuu Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin kertomuksista heidän lapsuudestaan ja ajasta, kun he tutustuvat Zeniaan. Jokainen naisista on toksisessa parisuhteessa, jossa he kohtaavat kaltoinkohtelua tai jopa henkistä tai fyysistä väkivaltaa. Romaani pohjautuu Grimmin veljesten satuun “The Robber Bridegroom”, jossa tyttö kihlautuu miehen kanssa, joka lopulta paljastuu kannibaaliksi ja murhaajaksi. Atwoodin romaanissa Zenia on metaforinen kannibaali, vampyyri ja kohtalokas nainen, joka varastaa Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin miespuoliset kumppanit. Zenian hahmo on mysteerinen, koska hän kertoo jokaiselle hahmolle eri tarinan menneisyydestään, ja vaikuttaa palaavan jopa kuolleista. Tarinan lopussa jokainen naisista kohtaa Zenian saadakseen vastauksia hänen teoilleen. Lopulta Zenia kuolee mystisissä olosuhteissa. Atwoodin novelli “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth” jatkaa Tonym, Rozin, Charisin ja Zenian tarinaa vuosia romaanin tapahtumien jälkeen. Novellissa Zenia palaa muun muassa Charisin lemmikkikoiran kehossa auttaakseen häntä päästämään irti lopullisesti toksisesta suhteestaan.

Tutkielman analyysi on jaettu kolmeen osioon, joissa käsitellään kussakin yhden maagisrealistisen hahmon ilmentymisiä Zenian kuvauksissa. Ensimmäisessä osiossa käsittelen, miten maagisrealistinen kerronta kuvaa Zenian epämaisellisenä kohtalokkaana naisena. Tutkimukseni perustuu pääasiassa Stottin teorioihin kohtalokkaasta naisesta. Tutkin Zenian yhteyttä historiallisesti tyypillisiksi kohtalokkaaksi naisiksi tunnistettuihin Raamatun hahmoin Isebeliin ja Babylonin porttoon. Kuten he, myös Zenia esiintyy naisellisuuden vastakohtana – epämaisellisenä toisena. Zenian ulkonäkö kuvataan myös maagisrealistisin keinoin, mikä vahvistaa hänen asemaansa kohtalokkaana naisena – viettelijänä, joka käyttää naisellisuuden fantasiaa ja kehoansa hyväkseen houkutellakseen miehiä ja saadakseen valtaa. Tutkimuksessani esitän, kuinka Zenia käyttää hyväkseen naisellisuuden ihanteita, fyysisiä illuusioita ja tarinoita luodakseen valta-asetelman hänen ja Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin välille. Lopulta totean, että maagisrealistin kerronnan kautta Zenia kuvataan epämaisellisenä toisena, joka pystyy omaamaan kulttuurisia fantasioita naisellisuudesta. Täten Zenian hahmo parodioi patriarkaalisia normeja ja ihanteita.

Toisessa osiossa tutkin, miten vampyyrin hahmo ilmenee Zenian maagisrealistisissa kuvauksissa. Perustan tutkimukseni Williamsonin ja Hobsonin teorioille vampyyreista. Vampyyri on heidän mukaansa tunnettu hahmo kulttuureissa, joka symbolisoi toiseutta ja poikkeavuutta. Naispuoliset vampyyrit ovat patriarkaalisten kulttuurien pelkojen ruumiillistumia, koska he ilmentävät piirteitä, kuten kurittomuutta ja seksuaalisuutta, joita naisissa pelätään. Zenia kuvataan metaforiseksi vampyyriksi maagisrealistisen kerronnan keinoin. Zenia kuvataan muun muassa hyperseksuaalisena, epäinhimillisenä ja torahampaisena verenimijänä. Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin kumppanit pettävät kumppaneitaan Zenian kanssa, jonka jälkeen he vaikuttavat esimerkiksi siltä, että heidät olisi imetty kuiviin henkisesti. Zenian maagisrealistiset kuvaukset vampyyrina korostavat epämaisellisia piirteitä myös Tonyssa, Rozissa ja Charisissa ja ilmentävät, kuinka kaikki hahmot ovat inhimillisellä tavalla hirviömäisiä. Esitän, että maagisen realismin kautta Zenian vampyyrimaiset teot johdattelevat kolme muuta naista löytämään seksuaalisen vapauden. Tämän lisäksi Zenian vampyyrius auttaa häntä kääntämään patriarkaalisen valta-asetelman pääläelleen, minkä avulla hän pystyy alistamaan uhrinsa.

Kolmannessa osiossa tutkin Zenian kuvausta kannibaali Robber Bride -hahmona. Hahmo perustuu "The Robber Bridegroom" -sadun kannibaali-mieshahmoon. Tutkin, kuinka romaanissa kuvataan maagisrealistisen kerronnan kautta hahmoja, parisuhteita ja seksuaalisia kanssakäymisiä sanoilla, jotka luovat merkitysyhteyksiä kannibalismiin. Esitän

tutkimuksessani, että teoksissa kuvattu metaforinen kannibalismi symboloi patriarkaalisisissa yhteiskunnissa vallitsevia valta-asetelmia, joita Zenia miehiä sortavana kannibaalina vastustaa. Kerronnan sanastossa naisia verrataan ruokiin ja eläimiin, mikä vahvistaa maagisrealistisen kerronnan tuottamaa feminististä kritiikkiä. Zenian kuvaukset hirviömäisenä kannibaalina korostavat myös Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin kannibaalisia haluja, mikä osoittaa, että teokset purkavat rajoja epäinhimillisyyden ja inhimillisyyden sekä epänaissellisuuden ja naisellisuuden välillä. Tarkastelen osiossa myös kannibalismia ja Zenian kuvauksissa ilmenevää kritiikkiä naisvihaa kohtaan. Lopulta keskustelen siitä, kuinka Zenian metaforinen kannibalismi purkaa todellisuuskuvauksia, joissa naiset esitetään toisina olentoina tai enkelimäisinä uhreina. Sen sijaan, teokset luovat Zenian maagisrealististen kuvausten kautta naiskuvia, jotka luovat käsityksen naisista yksilöllisinä ja viallisina ihmisinä.

Vampyyri, kohtalokas nainen ja Atwoodin luoma maagisrealistinen Robber Bride -hahmo symboloivat toiseutta, poikkeavuutta ja epänaissellisuutta. Maaginen realismi on kerronnallinen tekniikka, joka yhdistää edellä mainitut maagiset hahmot realistiseen maailmankuvaan, mikä korostaa hahmojen taianomaisuutta ja toiseutta. Hahmot vahvistavat Zenian asemaa epänaissellisena naisena korostamalla hänen poikkeavia piirteitä kuten esimerkiksi hyperseksuaalisuutta ja aggressiivisuutta. Samanaikaisesti esimerkiksi kohtalokkaan naisen kuvan kautta Zenia ilmentää myös naisellisuuden ihanteita. Zenian maagisrealistinen kuvaus metaforisena vampyyrina ja kannibaalina sekä kohtalokkaana naisena haastaa naisellisuuden ihanteet ja osoittaa, kuinka naisellisuus on patriarkaalinen ideologia, joka perustuu kaksijakoisuuteen ja binääriseen sukupuolijärjestelmään. Maagisen realismin kautta voidaan siis haastaa patriarkaalisia todellisuuskuvauksia, jotka esittävät naisellisuuden muuna kuin sukupuolen ilmaisukeinona. Zenian kyky ilmentää sekä naisellisuutta että epänaissellisuutta korostaa sukupuolen ilmaisevuutta ja vahvistaa teoriaa siitä, että sukupuoli-ilmaisu ei perustu biologiseen sukupuoleen. Zenian hahmo saa myös Tonym, Rozin ja Charisin harkitsemaan heidän omaa identiteettiään sekä yhteiskunnan normeja ja valta-asetelmia.

Nojaten Atwoodin lausuntoihin hänen omasta feminismistään ja ideologioistaan, väitän, että hän selvästikin kritisoi naiskuvia ja naisvihaa, joka perustuu ajatuksiin, joiden mukaan naiset ovat joko enkeleitä tai uhreja. Romaanissa ja novellissa Atwood esittää jokaisen naishahmon viallisina. Kertojat Tony, Roz ja Charis näyttävät ensin Zenian uhreina, mutta lopulta maagisrealistinen kerronta korostaa naisten hirviömäisiä piirteitä Zenian kautta. Atwood, joka kuvaa teoksissaan yhteiskuntia realistisesti, ei pyri, mutta kuitenkin päätyy kirjoittamaan

feministisiä teoksia, koska hän kuvaa teoksissaan jo olemassa olevia valta-asetelmia ja yhteiskuntia. Toisin sanoen, tarkastelemani teokset luovat naiskuvia, joissa naiset kuvataan viallisina ja monitulkintaisina yksilöinä. Lopuksi ehdotan, että teosten maaginen realismi johdattelaa feministiseen kritiikkiin, jonka mukaan feminismiin pitäisi keskittyä kaikkien ihmisten oikeuksien ajamiseen.

Lopuksi

Maaginen realismi on monipuolinen kerronnan tekniikka ja kirjallisuuden tyyli, jonka kautta marginaaliset äänet voivat horjuttaa ja haastaa länsimaisia ja patriarkaalisia todellisuudenkuvauksia ja yhteiskuntia. Maagisen realismin kautta kirjallisuudessa voidaan tuoda esiin yhteiskunnissa, etenkin patriarkoissa, vallitsevia ongelmia ja epätasa-arvoa. Tarkastelemistani teoksissa maagista realismia käytetään tuomaan esiin naisellisuuden ideologisuutta ja purkamaan patriarkaalisia naiskuvia. Maagisrealistinen hahmo Zenia purkaa ja haastaa patriarkaalisia ideologioita ja ihanteita metaforisena vampyyrina ja kannibaalina sekä kohtalokkaana naisena. Kerronnan kautta luotu Zenian naiskuva osoittautuu maagisrealistiseksi tehokeinoksi, joka korostaa kertojien omia hirviömäisiä puolia. Naiset osoittautuvat kaikki yksilöiksi ja monitulkinnaisiksi ihmisiksi, joita alistetaan valta-asetelmalla, joka perustuu ideologioihin ja sukupuolen ilmaisukeinoihin. Täten maaginen realismi toimii myös feministisen kerronnan keinona.