

“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”

“Completar el círculo”: el proceso de auto-realización e individuación de las mujeres en *The Robber Bride* y “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth”, de Margaret Atwood

MANUELA LÓPEZ RAMÍREZ

Independent Scholar

E-mail: lopez.ramirez.manuela@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-5503-8290

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Abstract: In *The Robber Bride* and its sequel, “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth,” Margaret Atwood underscores the complex feminine identity through the femme fatale, who is depicted using mythic Gothic figures, such as the vampire. Atwood contradicts socially-sanctioned roles for women. She shapes newer and more complete social and personal female identities, questioning how inadequately the patriarchal system represents their multiplicity. The author describes how the protagonists challenge the patriarchal definition of the feminine Self on their Jungian journey towards individuation, for which the fatal woman, as the Shadow Self, acts as a catalyst.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood; Zenia; individuation; Jung; Shadow Self; femme fatale.

Summary: Introduction. Zenia’s Key Role, as a Femme Fatale, in the Protagonists’ Self-Definition. Charis’s Quest for Closure and Individuation Journey. Conclusions.

Resumen: En *The Robber Bride* y su secuela, “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth,” Margaret Atwood enfatiza la compleja identidad femenina a través de la femme fatale, descrita a través de figuras míticas góticas, como el vampiro. Atwood contradice los roles sociales asignados a las mujeres. Ella crea nuevas y más complejas identidades femeninas, tanto sociales como personales, cuestionando cómo el sistema patriarcal representa de forma inadecuada su

multiplicidad. La autora describe cómo las protagonistas desafían la definición patriarcal de la identidad femenina en un viaje junguiano hacia el desarrollo personal, para el cual la mujer fatal, la Sombra, actúa de catalizador.

Palabras clave: Margaret Atwood; Zenia; individuación; Jung; arquetipo de la Sombra; femme fatale.

Sumario: Introducción. El papel esencial de Zenia, como Mujer Fatal, en el proceso de auto-definición de las protagonistas. La búsqueda de cierre y viaje de individuación de Charis. Conclusiones.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to analyze, from a psycho-social perspective, how “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth,” a short story and sequel to *The Robber Bride*, completes the female protagonists’ process of individuation already initiated in the novel. The focus is on how Atwood’s novel and follow-up can be interpreted as an inner journey of the characters Toni, Roz, and Charis, from having split selves to wholeness.

Margaret Atwood’s *The Robber Bride* (1993) is an updated female version of the eponymous classic fairy tale, in which a robber lures women to his house in the forest to eat them. Donna Haraway believes that “[i]n retelling origin reverse stories . . . authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture” (175). It is essentially a story about women from the viewpoint of women, with a villainess, Zenia. In a scene from the book, Tony is telling Roz’s twin daughters—who are going through a phase in which they want all the characters to be female—the Grimm’s fairy tale, “The Robber Bride.” Roz thinks: “Well, why not? Let the grooms take it in the neck for once” (*RB* 352).

“I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth,” which stands on its own, is Margaret Atwood’s follow-up to *The Robber Bride*. It was commissioned by the Canadian magazine *The Walrus*, which asked established authors to write about characters from their previous books. Its name can be traced back to the popular radio song “I Dream of Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair,” penned in 1854 by Stephen Foster, which deals with permanent separation and longing for the loved one. In *The Robber Bride*, Boyce, a minor character, uses a version of it, “I dream of Zenia in her light brown lair” (*RB* 544), highlighting the animalistic condition of the femme fatale, Zenia, while the actual title of the tale specifically underscores her vampiric nature.

Atwood's tale revisits the now elderly characters from the novel and centers on Charis's dissociative psyche and unfinished narrative, leaning more toward the comic side. She deals with issues such as aging, female friendship, identity, and gender politics. She challenges and interrogates the image of the older woman and her sexual and love needs:

Atwood's more recent short stories can be read as a vehicle for disrupting the stereotype associated with senior women in literature . . . an indication perhaps that a return to reignite these radical approaches surrounding gerontology is a conscious redress to the current neglect in contemporary feminist literature. (Snaith 121)

Moreover, Atwood satirizes the role of the vampiric fatal woman/seductress and continues to emphasize her positive impact on the main characters despite her evil ways, while also hinting at retribution.

Much has been written on *The Robber Bride*, mostly concentrating on Zenia, from Phyllis Perrakis's exploration of Zenia as a psychological vampire in "Atwood's *The Robber Bride*: The Vampire as Intersubjective Catalyst" to more recent research such as Sharon Wilson's "Magical Realism in *The Robber Bride* and Other Texts" on magical realism, Hilde Staels's "Parodic Border Crossings in *The Robber Bride*" on postmodern Gothic and fairy tale elements or Laurie Vickroy's "You're History: Living with Trauma in *The Robber Bride*" on trauma. In contrast to *The Robber Bride*, there are not many scholarly contributions on Atwood's follow-up, which has been mainly approached from a gerontological angle. Neither has there been much research about sequels and how they build on the previous stories, how the characters develop or how the author may explore new facets or enact other narrative perspectives.

Contrary to other psychoanalytical studies of the novel, such as Perrakis's "Atwood's *The Robber Bride*: The Vampire as Intersubjective Catalyst," which draws on Daniel Stern and Jessica Benjamin's theories and Jean Wyatt's Lacanian analysis, I have chosen a primarily Jungian approach. I base my reading on the concepts of self-realization, the shadow, the animus/anima, the Self, and especially, individuation. This is the process by which a human being achieves self-realization through the integration of the conscious and the unconscious, thus healing the fragmented mind. Other studies have used Jung's ideas, but they have applied them to other aspects or features of Atwood's novel, as in Staels's "Parodic Borders Crossings in *The Robber Bride*" and Donna

Bontatibus's "Reconnecting with the Past: Personal Hauntings in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*," whose accent is on folkloric tradition. Even though this essay draws largely on key concepts of Carl Jung's work, Jungian analytical psychology is not the exclusive theoretical framework of this article. Other concepts are Laing's "false self," Kai Erikson's "psychic erosion" or Luce Irigaray's "the masquerade of femininity." This paper expands on the protagonists' inner journey of self-actualization and individuation by connecting *The Robber Bride* and its sequel "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth."

In the first part of this article, the analysis begins with how Zenia becomes the trigger for Tony, Roz, and Charis's individuation quest of self-discovery by aiding each one of the friends, whose psyches are fragmented, in a process of personal growth and creation of female bonds: she facilitates an awareness and acceptance of their repressed identities, but also an awareness of their unequal relationships with men, based on an imposed hegemonic masculinity that thwarts their identity development. These are necessary steps towards self-realization and self-development.

The second part mainly addresses Charis's process of individuation and her need to achieve closure in order to move on. In the 1990s, social psychologist Arie Kruglanski coined the phrase "need for closure" to explain the need of finding answers to unresolved significant situations that create painful feelings so as to let go and move forward, as well as the eschewal of "confusion and ambiguity" (337). Throughout the novel, Tony and Roz have grown as individuals in their relationships with their partners, but Charis's story has not reached closure. She has never truly recovered from her relationship with Billy. She did not want to believe he was evil, even though deep down she knew he was. She cannot reach individuation until she confronts him, which will provide her with the piece that completes the puzzle of her narrative. At the end of the sequel, Charis manages to let go of the past and acquires closure with the help of Tony and Roz.

In this paper, I intend to show how in both the novel and the tale, the protagonists are travelling on a journey of individuation towards psychological wholeness—the Self, Jung's archetype of the unification of conscious and unconscious by means of female solidarity and friendship.

1. ZENIA AS A FEMME FATALE IN THE PROTAGONISTS' SELF-DEFINITION

In *The Robber Bride*, Tony, Roz, Charis, and Zenia are very different females who, as Karen Stein claims, represent "three aspects of the personality: Tony the mind, Charis the spirit, and Roz the body" (99). They become acquainted when they are residents of McClung Hall at the University of Toronto. Tony is a professor of war history; Charis is a spiritualist with special abilities for astral projections or to detect auras; Roz is a successful businesswoman who takes over the family business. Tony, Roz, and Charis become long-term friends as a result of their ordeals with Zenia, a femme fatale who victimizes them all at different times of their lives. They come to the rescue of each other and bond over their tribulations with the fatal woman. Atwood uses Zenia as much as a character than as a narratological construction to analyze and introspect about the three friends' selves as well as about their gender relations and sexual power politics. In the end, Zenia's impact on the three friends makes her a positive catalyst that triggers their process of individuation.

The femme fatale is almost invariably portrayed as an evil and irresistible hyper-sexualized seductress who makes men fall in love with her while she is drawn to money and/or power. Fatal women seem to be able to thrive and get away with what they want. They are female versions of the classic "Don Juan," or of male predators in children's tales like "Bluebeard." Unlike villains, villainesses are often sexually attractive, capitalizing on their sexual appeal (Willis 57). The femme fatale's dangerous sexuality does not only define her, but also brings about the downfall of the male protagonist.

At the beginning of *The Robber Bride*, Zenia is introduced as an ancient evil associated with an allusion to the story of Eve and the Garden of Eden:

The story of Zenia ought to begin where Zenia began. It must have been someplace long ago and distant in space . . . someplace bruised, and very tangled. A European print . . . with dusty sunlight and a lot of bushes in it—bushes with thick leaves and ancient twisted roots, behind which . . . something ordinary but horrifying is taking place. (*RB* 3)

However, Zenia, a pure personification of evil, turns to be a “positive” force in the protagonists’ process of self-realization. She binds them together and open their eyes so they get to redefine themselves.

In *The Robber Bride* Zenia shows herself as a true fatal woman, a “devourer of men,” who seduces men and then dumps them. She “steals” the lovers of the protagonists, who think Zenia “probably has a row of men’s dicks nailed to her wall, like stuffed animal heads” (*RB* 335). Both males and females are her victims, even though men can also be regarded as her “loot.” Zenia is depicted as a Gothic monster veiled in mystery of mythic proportions, linked and compared to different supernatural creatures, among them vampires and witches. According to Hilde Staels, Atwood’s “writing is informed by Jungian archetypal theory in her use of conventions from the Gothic, ancient myth, and fairy tales” (41).

Atwood became familiar with Jungian analytical psychology and his archetypal theory at the University of Toronto. There she also met the literary critic and professor Northrop Frye, whose lectures about myth/archetypal criticism deeply influenced her (*Obidic* 7). In Jungian theory, archetypes are defined as primal and universal symbols/images or themes that derive from the collective unconscious. Jung’s term the collective unconscious refers to part of our unconscious mind common to all humankind that contains genetically inherited deep-seated beliefs and instincts. Zenia is a negative manifestation of the Jungian anima archetype, which Jung defines as the totality of the unconscious feminine psychological components of a man’s psyche. Men tend to overvalue their masculine aspects while their feminine ones remain unconscious, which leads to negative anima projection. According to Jung, projection, a defense mechanism, occurs when we attribute unconscious, especially negative, elements of our personality to another person or group. The most frequent manifestation of the anima takes the form of an erotic fantasy:

Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? . . . Even pretending you aren’t catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. . . . The Zenias of this world . . . haven’t let themselves be moulded into male fantasies, they’ve done it themselves. They’ve slipped sideways into dreams; the dreams of women too, because women are fantasies for other women, just as they are for men. But fantasies of a different kind. (*RB* 471–72)

Zenia is, above all, a product of the three women's imagination" (Lorubbio 183–84). She is also a "a projection of the desires of the three women" (Sceats 119). The protagonists see the contents of their unconscious in Zenia, who epitomizes the Other or Otherness.

Zenia is capable of pure evil with no apparent reason. Indeed, we do not know what really drives her and makes her wicked. Her vileness might be associated with her refusal of the socially-sanctioned patriarchal roles for women. Jennifer Hedgecock argues that the femme fatale "vehemently refuses to be treated as a pathetic, helpless, fallen woman" (45). The fatal woman unveils the limitations placed on Victorian females, who were classified according to the angel/demon dichotomy and subjected to social injustices. The femme fatale offers an alternative to these stereotypes by creating "subversive images of women" (5), raising questions about societal gender constructs. Zenia indicates that freedom is not free: defying the social order comes with a price (*RB* 198). Atwood challenges the inadequate, simplified patriarchal representations of the multifarious female self.

Female characters have not usually been depicted as evil, as if they were incapable of being wicked. Thus, they have been denied their true humanity, which includes their "bad" self as well, the Jungian Shadow archetype. The shadow refers to those repressed "aspects of one's own personality that for various reasons one has preferred not to look at too close" (Franz 174). These aspects are suppressed and pushed away into our unconscious in an attempt to adapt to cultural norms and expectations. In her speech, "Spotty-Handed Villainesses," Atwood claims, with regards to literary villainesses, that

if you are a man, the bad female character in a novel may be—in Jungian terms—your anima; but if you're a woman, the bad female character is your shadow; and . . . she who loses her shadow also loses her soul.

Zenia exemplifies how "[w]omen play all the roles—vampire as well as victim" (Perrakis 165).

In *The Robber Bride*, Atwood appropriates the myth of the wicked woman by mainly focusing on her relationship to the other female characters and describing the impact of her evil actions on them. Zenia becomes their archenemy and the protagonists' fragmented identities make them easy prey for the villainess. All three friends, but also Zenia, are war babies with dysfunctional families, whose traumatic narratives

are, at least in part, the consequence of World War II, an event that deeply affected their lives and their parents'.¹ They undergo domestic emotional/physical abuse or violence in their traumatic childhoods. Prolonged exposure to domestic violence, which produces what Erikson calls "psychic erosion," is determinant in the friends' identity development: "they are alienated from their inner self owing to their repressed childhood trauma" (Obidic 14). Coral Howells argues that Zenia "represents their repressed pain-filled childhood selves" (82), that is to say, their shadow selves. To protect and distance themselves from their traumas, the protagonists rename themselves, building new identities. As Laing claims, they acquire "a false self to adapt to false realities" (12). Tony creates Tnomerf Ynot, a sort of female warrior. Roz chooses three different names for herself: Roz Grunwald, Rosalind Greenwood, and Roz Andrews. Charis was originally known as Karen.

Undeniably, young people and infants are singularly vulnerable to the family gaze and care. Their sense of self heightens "both as an object of one's own awareness and of the awareness of others" (Laing 106). Particularly traumatic is children's ordeals with their mothers. As many psychologists contend, the mother's Look is paramount for the child's subjectivity growth, since the "*failure of responsiveness* on the mother's part to one or other aspect of the infant's being will have important consequences" (Laing 116). Tony, for the most part, grows up motherless. She has few painful memories of her loveless mother, who finally abandons her and soon after drowns. Roz's strict and virtuous mother never showed her any affection. She never measured up to her standards. Charis's single mother, diagnosed with hysteria and finally institutionalized, physically abused her daughter, a sensitive girl who suffered in silence and grew up with a traumatized and crippled identity.

Furthermore, the protagonists have a complicated and/or traumatic relationship with their fathers; being the father the first carrier of the animus image—the first masculine imprint in the daughter's unconscious—, a sort of "deposit . . . of all woman's ancestral experiences of man" (Jung 209). Toni is reared by an abusive alcoholic father, who eventually commits suicide. Roz encounters her father for the first time when she is seven. Charis never meets her father, who was

¹ Hedgecock states that "images of the femme fatale are more pervasive during socially and economically troubled times" (4).

killed during the war. In addition, after her mother's death, she endures, for a long time, the sexual abuses of her uncle, her surrogate father.

The animus plays a complex role in women's relationship with men, providing a psychological focus to the problem of female patriarchal oppression; it constitutes the psychological dimension of a social problem (Walker 55). Neither of the friends have an easy relation with men, as their animus is somehow warped; especially in Charis's case, due to her childhood sexual abuses which make her unable to attain sexual satisfaction as an adult. Atwood exposes the protagonists' crippling heterosexual relationships, and "explores the unequal sexual politics that shape and restrain" their lives (Buxton 43). Zenia befriends Tony, Roz, and Charis, and wins their sympathies by telling them stories that are similar to their own experiences, so they invite her into their inner circle. The femme fatale knows how to exploit their fears and weaknesses—their male partners—which allows her to gain power over them (Stein 98). And yet the temptress cannot be entirely blamed for the damage she causes, as the friends have chosen to comply with the roles the patriarchal society has assigned to them, despite their disappointing lovers.

Even though Zenia supposedly ruins the protagonists' lives by stealing their men, she actually does them a favour. Charis explains it as the "workings of the universe" (*IDZ* 174): there must be a reason for their haunting experiences with the evil woman, which end up with improved situations for the friends. Tony keeps West and, as disclosed in the tale, Roz eventually marries a much better man than Mitch. Only Charis remains single after Billy flees with Zenia. At the end of the novel, Roz feels something she had never thought she would feel towards the fatal woman: gratitude (*RB* 561).

The protagonists resent, fear, and hate Zenia, but also admire her. Thereby, even if she is a true villainess, she is depicted as endowed with extraordinary qualities as well, such as strength, independence, audacity, and resourcefulness (Bontatibus 365). Roz wishes to be like her: powerful, daring, beautiful, outrageous, and sexy (Stein 98): "[S]he would like to be somebody else. But not just anyone . . . sometimes she would like to be Zenia" (*RB* 473). As a researcher of war, Tony compares the seductress with a warrior and can see traces of heroism in her rebellion against patriarchy: although Zenia "was many other things, she was also courageous" (*RB* 564). She feels admiration for her: "Despite

her disapproval . . . there's a part of her that has wanted to cheer Zenia on To participate in her daring, her contempt for almost everything, her rapacity and lawlessness" (*RB* 218).

The femme fatale truly acts as a catalyst that aids the protagonists' shift out of victimhood into empowerment. They have accepted and internalized, in many aspects, patriarchal views of females, in accordance with patterns of interpersonal dominance and submission, which affect their sense of self and their relationships with both men and other women. They have entered a "masquerade of femininity," "a system of values that is not [theirs], and in which [they] can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men" (Irigaray 134). In a male-dominated society that equates femininity with submissiveness, their whole lives have been centered on their male partners in detriment to their own selves.

Zenia teaches them lessons about their male relationships: Billy was just seeking free lodging, West was weak-willed, and Mitch was a charming philanderer. Even though they can see how the temptress's actions were cruel, they start to understand how their lovers' actions were unacceptable (Heilman 180). As Jessamyn West's epigraph of *The Robber Bride* says: "A rattlesnake that doesn't bite teaches you nothing." Zenia makes the friends realize that she did not steal their loved ones: they made their own decisions (Stein 101). The fatal woman embodies their subconscious, telling them what they did not want to hear about their male partners. Roz realizes that she is better off without Mitch, Toni reconciles with her husband, and Charis devotes herself to motherhood in place of her relationship with men.

At the end of the novel, in the hotel scene, the protagonists meet Zenia separately. In turns, she tells them about the false perceptions they have about themselves and their loved ones. Tony, Roz, and Charis already know what she is capable of and do not fall victims of her schemes again. Tony wonders: "Was she in any way like us? . . . Or, to put it the other way around. Are we in any way like her?" (*RB* 564). In spite of all the suffering and pain, the three women are no longer in toxic relationships and have become truer to themselves (Perrakis 152). As Stein underscores, female friendship has become a source of strength, even if heterosexual relationships have failed (97). In the denouement of the novel, Zenia dies in suspicious circumstances in the year 1989. She falls from a balcony into a fountain, into the water element that may indicate her ensuing rebirth. Zenia is ultimately punished for her actions,

so order can be restored. Being that the characters' lives are shaped by World War II, the fact that Zenia dies the exact year the Berlin Wall comes down may signal that the protagonists can begin their liberation from patriarchal constrictions.

In essence, Zenia has helped the friends achieve personal growth. As Sonia Mycak claims, the difficult relationship with the fatal woman stands for the crucial identity battle to be recognized that every individual must undergo to reach subjective maturity (213). What they learn from her "serves to track the ways in which each begin to embrace the female Other(s) that reside in their own psyches, and, by extension, that which is repressed in or by the collective (white) male psyche of contemporary Toronto culture" (Adamo 98–99). They go through a process of self-awareness, transformation, and realization that makes them confront their traumas and empowers them.

The protagonists' individuation processes and identity development are intrinsically connected to their relationship with Zenia. From a Jungian perspective, as Heather Cole says, Zenia symbolizes the unconscious, the dark part of the friends' psyches (82–83), which they have repressed because of the patriarchal system, and which can only become conscious "through a negotiation of an Other woman" (Adamo 122). Confronting the repressed aspects of our psyche, our shadow selves, is essential to self-knowledge and the individuation process. Zenia "forces them to face the psychological trauma from the past and relive their suppressed pain that enables them to eventually heal and regain their lost identity" (Obidic 14). Hence, Zenia becomes a catalyst in the protagonists' Jungian pathway to wholeness, the Self, by helping them confront the split-off fragments of their selves and gain knowledge and wisdom from them, as well as to create female bonds, so they can advance in their process of self-realization, self-healing and self-empowerment.

2. CHARIS'S QUEST FOR CLOSURE AND INDIVIDUATION JOURNEY

As told in *The Robber Bride*, in her childhood Charis was exposed to overwhelming traumatic experiences. Her mother's bereavement and the pervasive maltreatment, especially sexual, she endures at the hands of her caregivers cause her psychological fragmentation. Charis has to desensitize herself and split her identity—"All she can do is split in two" (*RB* 312)—a common coping strategy to deal with unspeakable

situations. At age twenty-six, she gets rid of her old self, Karen. Charis imagines how Karen is “a leather bag” where she puts all that she does not want and throws it into the lake, keeping only what she liked or needed (*RB* 315). She buries her broken self in the figmental lake—water—which becomes a symbol of the unconscious (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1089) and the psychological border between Charis’s painful past and her present. She adopts a new identity and from then on, she will interact with the world through her false self.

Eventually, Charis becomes a yoga teacher, who lives on the Toronto Islands, isolated from urban life and bonded with nature. Her house, and mainly the chickens, might recreate her grandmother’s farm, where she had spent the only happy days of her childhood. In Canadian literature, according to Faye Hammill, the Islands stand for the Canadian wilderness, “the natural environment . . . the site of authenticity [which] provides healing, escape and self-knowledge, and may also teach humans about their kinship with animals” (63). The lake is also the physical frontier between civilization, Toronto, and nature, the Islands. Charis lives with her boyfriend Billy, an American draft-dodger she takes in and by whom she becomes pregnant. In her submission to gender patriarchal constrictions, everything is about his happiness, while she is only “a temporary convenience” (*RB* 249) for him. It is at this stage that Zenia reenters her life. Charis shelters and looks after Zenia because she believes the femme fatale is a battered woman with cancer in need of care and compassion. However, the fatal woman is pretending.

As a New-Age believer, Charis has a cosmic vision of life. She thinks that we are all a part of everybody else. Indeed, “she wasn’t sure where the edges of her body ended and the rest of the world began” (*RB* 73), which, unpleasantly, makes her a part of Zenia, “[o]r the other way around, Zenia may be what she’s breathing in” (*RB* 65). Zenia helps Charis’s repressed self to come back, but this time it returns looking like the fatal woman. Charis wonders if Zenia has taken possession of her body. She can feel how everything in her “has been fused together” (*RB* 316). For the first time, Charis experiences pleasure when having sex with Billy. Henceforth, the conventional female role of pleasing the male is no longer enough for Charis, who does not just want to minister to her boyfriend, “she wants something back” (*RB* 317).

One day, Billy goes off with Zenia after killing Charis’s chickens, an act of extreme and intentional cruelty and which is particularly painful because of their significance to her. Charis sees Billy and Zenia for the

last time on board the ferry that takes them to the mainland. The boat represents, for Charis, the transition from one state to another. Charis feels as if "shreds of Zenia cling to her. . . . She sees the name Zenia in her head" (*RB* 52). She decides to go on living, as a single mother, for her baby, which provides her with strength and growth.

At the end of *The Robber Bride*, in the hotel scene, Zenia tells Charis about her perverse relationship with Billy:

[Billy] thought you were a cow . . . He thought you were so stupid you'd give birth to an idiot. He thought you were a stunned cunt, to be exact. . . . I know you, and I can guess how you've been spending your time. . . . Mooning around after Billy. He's just an excuse for you; he lets you avoid your life. Give him up. Forget about him. (*RB* 513)

At the onset of "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth," Charis, now an old woman, has inherited some money from a distant cousin and moves off the island into a duplex on the mainland. Unscrupulous Billy appears out of nowhere, "as if teleported" (*IDZ* 175), to rent the other half of her duplex. Tony and Roz suspect he has returned to rob Charis, now that she "is no longer an old street bat in training but is worth solid cash" (*IDZ* 175). This is the reversal of Charis's journey to escape from her past, when she was still Karen. Now she does not have to run away anymore; on the contrary, she will finally be able to advance in her individuation process and give closure to her unending story.

In the tale, Zenia enters back into Tony, Roz and Charis's lives through both dreams and "reincarnation." Dreaming of someone who has passed away helps people understand and cope with their feelings and emotions, and let go of the past they might be holding onto. In addition, according to Jung, dreams may have a prospective function that focuses primarily on the individual's future growth towards psychological integration and wholeness. Prospective dreams can be a source of insight (1948, 41-42). The femme fatale returns in one of Charis's dreams. Charis does not really believe that people die. For her, death is a process that helps one achieve a better reincarnation in the next life. When Charis tells her friends about the dream, Tony asks about Zenia as if she had returned from the dead: "Did she ooze out of a tomb?" (*IDZ* 168). To advance towards individuation, individuals first need to know and integrate their shadow— all the "negative" parts of their psyche—, which

has remained unconscious. Charis needs to embrace her shadow self, symbolized by Zenia.

Tony and Roz inquire about the fatal woman's clothes in the dream. Tony pictures her as a stereotypical seductress in leather "with a silver-handled whip" (*IDZ* 169). Roz also associates her with glamour and sexual appeal, in "luscious colours like sepia and plum" (*IDZ* 169). And yet, Charis underlines her connection to death by comparing her clothes to a shroud. Nevertheless, later she associates them with a sort of white nightgown. Roz points out that she cannot envision Zenia in white. In effect, the white nightgown is more what Charis herself would wear, signalling that the dream is more about her inner self than about the wicked woman—as in her frequent dreams of dissolving into Zenia's body.

The Zenia of the dream is not threatening, but friendly. She has a message—a sort of omen, a sign of unexpected changes—to deliver. She tells Charis: "Billy's coming back" (*IDZ* 172), when he has already moved into her duplex. Humorously, Tony ironizes: "News must travel slowly in the afterlife" (*IDZ* 172). When Charis underlines that he is "[n]ot exactly back" (*IDZ* 172), but that he just lives next door, she seems still to harbour the idea of the two of them together. In a second dream, the femme fatale, clad in some kind of black and white fur, comes and sits at Charis's bed to warn her about someone in her life, whose name looks like a woman's name, beginning with Y. Tony, who is good at codes and puzzles, thinks it might be Yllib, Billy spelled backwards.

Currently, Charis is living with Ouida, a black-and-white terrier blend her friends have given her as a present, as they worry about her safety in the new neighbourhood, Parkdale. They believe that, owing to her innocence and vulnerability, she needs protection. However, Charis does not believe that Ouida is an ordinary dog, but a mystery-mix dog full of energy and with perceptive powers, whose paw prints are messages. That is why, comically, Charis is convinced that the fatal woman's soul has reincarnated in Ouida (whose fur is also black and white as in the dream). Thus, the Otherness of the femme fatale is emphasized through her "metamorphosis" into an animal: "animality is key to the representation of the monster as the Other" (Fukuhara 87). Only Charis can tell when she is inside the dog. The evil woman, apparently, comes and goes unpredictably, as she had always done.

Zenia's "reincarnation" is in consonance with Charis's New Age beliefs about life after death and reborn souls. She "believes in recycling,

not only for bottles and plastics, but also for psychic entities" (*IDZ* 177). In *The Robber Bride*, Charis thought of keeping the vase with the wicked woman's ashes, as it had a strong energy, but keeping the vase would be a mistake: "[I]t would be holding Zenia to the earth. . . . The mere absence of a body would not stop Zenia; she would just take somebody else's. The dead return in other forms" (*RB* 561). Certainly, when the three friends went on the boat so as to cast the fatal woman's ashes, the vase split in two and "Zenia trail[ed] off in a long wavering drift, like smoke" (*RB* 562), which Charis believes was caused by the evil woman to get their attention. She was genuinely happy to see that the temptress had attended her own scattering, which was "a token of her continuation. Zenia will now be free, to be reborn for another chance at life. Maybe she will be more fortunate next time. Charis tries to wish her well" (*RB* 563).

It seems karma that Charis's sworn nemesis "metamorphoses" into the most loyal animal, a dog, whose purpose is to defend her (and aid her in her individuation process) when, in other times, Charis would have needed protection from her.² It is not actually the first time that Zenia "returns from the dead." In *The Robber Bride*, when the three friends met for lunch at a restaurant named Toxique, five years after her faked death, Zenia reappeared. As Donna Bontatibus argues, "the thoughts and feelings surrounding past issues connected to the departed—keep the dead alive" (358). Bontatibus (1998) adds that Roz, Tony and Charis unconsciously summon Zenia back from the dead because they still have unresolved issues with her.

Becoming Ouida would also be consistent with Zenia's Gothic "vampiric condition." Dogs have often been represented as Dracula's incarnations—he arrives in London in the shape of a large dog—or as his agents, and he can mesmerize animals into doing what he wants. Dogs, Jeanne Dubino writes, "further the vampire's ambition to perpetuate his kind" (200). Dracula, however, is usually transfigured into wild or violent animals, dogs or wolves. He draws out "the beastliness of animals, forcing them to revolt against human beings" (Fukuhara 88). The Otherness of Dracula is built and bolstered through his resemblance, as a monster, to animals (87).

² According to Charis, reincarnation is associated with karma, which governs the cycle of death and rebirth. Karma can be a mechanism to bring retribution for someone's misdeeds by reincarnation into "lower existences" (animals), such as dogs.

In *The Robber Bride*, the femme fatale is constantly connected with vampires and blood, as when she is called “drinker of innocent blood” (RB 342). Vampires display characteristics associated with the Jungian shadow archetype. As a female vampire, Zenia stands for rebellion against the patriarchal order as well. Notwithstanding, vampire references are even more predominant in Atwood’s tale, starting with its title, “I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth,” which focuses on one of the main attributes of vampires, their teeth, red as the blood they suck. There are other allusions to Zenia’s vampiric nature throughout the tale. As regards the first dream, Tony asks Charis if Zenia had “fangs dripping blood,” since “[t]hat would be the sort of overacting Zenia would go in for. Red contact lenses, hissing, claws, the works” (IDZ 170). Charis answers that she did not have fangs, but her teeth were pointy and somewhat pink.

In the protagonists’ encounter at the Toxique, Zenia had already revealed herself as a sort of energy vampire who “fed” on others to gain power. When the fatal woman walked past Charis, it was as if she had passed “a hand of darkness over her, usurping her, blotting her out” (RB 79). Charis felt cold, as if life had deserted her. She had to repeat like a mantra: “*My body, mine. . . . I exist*” (RB 79). She struggled to regain her body. Charis thought that Zenia had resurrected and had “taken a chunk of Charis’s own body and sucked it into herself” (RB 79). The fatal woman seemingly drained her of energy and substance, and yet, she also felt lighter, as if a burden had been lifted. Just after that reunion, Charis felt odd, as if her body were commanding her. She wished for coffee. These cravings were very unusual for her. Furthermore, Charis welcomed her murderous thoughts towards Zenia, knowing that she would discard them afterwards. For the first time, she was listening to herself. These are important steps forward in Charis’s individuation process, getting to know her shadow, taking back her projection, as well as accepting and integrating all the parts of her identity, which Carl Jung thought was the solution to our tendency toward one-sidedness: to pursue “good” and avoid “evil.”

Atwood shows how evil is an intrinsic part of women, as it is of men. In *The Robber Bride*, the protagonists eventually let out the evil that is self-repressed inside them, thus embracing their shadow selves. Identifying and accepting your shadow self and integrating it into your

conscious psyche are essential to individuation. Ironically, in Atwood's tale, it appears that Zenia's vampire powers are not evil anymore (or they never were?), as evil is no longer what it used to be:

And the vampires. 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 any more (sic). (*IDZ* 171)

The vampire metaphor is extended when Charis becomes a vampire movie fan, which might explain her dreams about Zenia. The three friends institutionalize the vampire night, when both Tony and Roz go to Charis's house to watch vampire films, so she does not watch them by herself. They think Charis is too impressionable. When the protagonists are watching vampire films, whenever a wolf is audible Ouida howls. Tony considers vampire nights, which she calls "curious orgies" (*IDZ* 171), as a substitute for sex, as these creatures of the night have been traditionally associated with sexuality.

At the end of the tale, in the role of a loyal dog, Zenia is still capable of gaining the friends' trust, even to the point in which she is the center of attention for Charis. Tony and Roz feel some comfort as she takes more account of Ouida's opinion than anyone else's. The dog does not like Billy. She growls at him, hence warning of his bad intentions. When Billy proposes that Charis should open an urban B&B in half the duplex, as an investment, Tony and Roz believe he wants to trick her so as to steal her money. Ironically, they also believe that Ouida is the only way to protect Charis from him. In truth, she appears as Charis's saviour, as she defends her from Billy.

In "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth," Atwood interrogates stereotypes of old age by highlighting Charis's love life and sexual desires. Charis wanted Billy back, which she felt was "the completion of the circle" (*IDZ* 182), and needed to believe the best of him. To that end, just before having sex, she had to make sure that he had not murdered the chickens, a red line for her. When questioned, Billy blames Zenia for the killing. Ouida/Zenia, whom Charis had locked up thinking she was jealous of Billy, goes really crazy. She escapes and attacks him. It is no coincidence that Ouida bites his penis, which could be symbolically connected with Zenia's vampiric nature, since vampire bites are sexual in nature. Besides, Ouida's castrating vampiric bite,

figuratively, deprives Billy of his (sexual) power; thus, instead of falling into his trap again, Charis inadvertently, through her dog, enacts a type of revenge on the man who wronged her when she was young.

In her reaction towards Billy, Ouida/Zenia proves to be a faithful and trustworthy protective dog; conversely, Billy's devious machinations are eventually exposed, and Charis accepts his true wicked nature. He is a shady character, as the extensive research of Roz's detective proves. Finally, Billy is gone again, but this time for good, opening new possibilities for Charis, who can move on with her life. Now, a jovial retired plumber, a widower, has started to live in the other half of her duplex. Tony and Roz have hopes that he might be the one for Charis. Indeed, Ouida does not only approve of him, but as Zenia would have done, she "flirts with him shamelessly" (*IDZ* 183).

According to Bonaventure Thekkeveetil, "[t]he destructiveness of the femme fatale is not a transient weakness or a character flaw. Instead, it is an intrinsic and immutable dimension of her persona. Consequently, the femme fatale is not capable of moral regeneration" (16). And yet, in Zenia's reappearance, Atwood seems to contradict the classic unredeemable destructive nature of the fatal woman. Atwood dismantles the idea of the femme fatale as a diabolic creature, as well as reclaiming her as a symbol of female subversion and rebellion against patriarchy. In fact, Charis even contemplates the possibility that "Zenia's intentions were benevolent all along": "Maybe Zenia was, like, the secret alter ego of each of them, acting out stuff for them they didn't have the strength to act out by themselves" (*IDZ* 182). Our alter ego/shadow self can become a destructive force when we do not accept it, but acknowledging and embracing it bring us closer to individuation.

In "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth," Atwood describes in a comic tone crucial steps of Charis's process of individuation: the acceptance of the shadow self and achieving closure. She cannot embrace her whole self until she confronts her ex-boyfriend. His return makes her face her fears and suspicions of his villainous nature, so she can definitively let go of the past and reach closure.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines, from mainly a Jungian-based psycho-social view, how Atwood's "I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth" works as a completion of the process of female individuation already started in *The*

Robber Bride, emphasizing the thematic continuity, but also pointing out the shift in tone and new gerontological approach. Hopefully, it may be helpful in opening new research avenues into the value of sequels.

Atwood's follow-up allows her to give a continuation to the voice of her characters beyond the scope of the novel from an elderly perspective. She questions and deconstructs the image of the older woman and her life experience, especially her sexuality. Moreover, Atwood underlines the pivotal role of female friendships and the need to reconcile with the past, while she also delivers a more positive ending to Charis's story.

In *The Robber Bride*, Atwood contests gender constructs and challenges how patriarchy misrepresents female multiplicity by shaping more complex female identities. She depicts how the protagonists' individuation processes and identity development go alongside their relationship with the femme fatale Zenia, a Gothic monster and a mythical figure, and a product of their fantasy. She epitomizes their unconscious, their Shadow selves, and becomes a catalyst in their self-realization and journey of self-discovery. It is through the dark woman that they can strengthen their empowerment and embrace the female Other repressed inside them.

"I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth," a tale of aging and sorority, expands on the open-ended novel by giving closure to Charis's truncated narrative, her love relationship with Billy. To move forward, Charis needs to cope with the uncertainties regarding her lover. She needs to confront the truth and stop avoiding her life. In her search for truth, the femme fatale plays a critical role through dreams and her ironic reincarnation in a protective dependable dog. Apparently, Charis has summoned the fatal woman from the dead because of her unresolved issues with her. She confronts her repressed feelings and Self, and starts to let go of the past by "righting the wrongs" of her love/sexual relationship with Billy. Lastly, Charis realizes how, in their patriarchal mindset, the protagonists had always blamed Zenia instead of their beaux. They eventually put the past to rest and empower themselves through female bonding.

In the course of both novel and tale, Tony, Roz and Charis have confronted the archetypes of their unconscious—the shadow, the anima, the animus, and the Self—, and have learned valuable lessons from them. They have got in touch with their inner selves. They are, ultimately, coming to terms with their traumas, healing and integrating the splits in their minds. The protagonists have moved away from participating in

“the masquerade of femininity” by putting their needs before the needs of their male partners, and thus they reject patriarchal constrictions and constructions of femininity. Their individuation journey would not have been possible without female friendship and solidarity, a “community” in which each of them relies on the others to be saved. In the denouement, the protagonists are on the path of individuation toward the Self, the acceptance of their whole psyche.

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