

Fig. 1 Paula Rego, *Mother Takes Revenge* (2003).  
Pastel on paper, 76 x 57 cm, 29 46/50 x 22 22/50 in  
© Paula Rego. Courtesy the artist and Victoria Miro.



# From Rape Trauma to Genius through Narration in Contemporary Little Red Riding Hood Tales

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## Introduction

Jack Zipes, Sandra Beckett and Claudia Barnett describe 'Little Red Riding Hood' (LRRH), classified as ATU 333 and published by Charles Perrault (1697), later taking the form of 'Little Red Cap' in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's (1812) versions, as a rape narrative. The traditional rape narrative, defined in terms of an empowered male subject and an objectified female subject,<sup>1</sup> socially constructs female identity as 'rapable', penetrable and passive,<sup>2</sup> making her body a space at risk of rape that she must protect.<sup>3</sup> This is seen in Zipes's interpretation of Perrault's red-hooded girl as a 'somasochistic object', who invites rape and is accountable for the wolf's wrongdoing, wherefore she is murdered.<sup>4</sup> Although the Brothers Grimm added a happy ending through a male hunter who saves the girl and her grandmother, the girl still suffers the trauma of rape and bears responsibility for tempting fate by behaving waywardly and sexually.<sup>5</sup> Beckett contends that most contemporary versions of LRRH continue to represent rape narratives.<sup>6</sup> For example, Sara Moon's (1983) version of Perrault's LRRH confronts viewers with the dangers of 'abuse, rape, prostitution'.<sup>7</sup> Barnett's reading of Perrault's, the Grimms' and Paul Delarue's versions of LRRH, in conversation with Zipes's analysis of Western rape culture, has demonstrated not only the part played by fairy-tale characters in generating and strengthening traditional gender roles, but also how the approaches to and terms employed in analysing fictional victim-survivors of sexual violence and abuse can have broader cultural ramifications.<sup>8</sup> Barnett hopes that in the future, 'academic power-discourse' may be instrumental in changing this rape-culture narrative, which in turn may influence how actual survivors view themselves and inspire them to initiate justice.<sup>9</sup>

Contemporary feminist versions by Portuguese-British artist Paula Rego, Canadian writer Margaret Atwood, British writer Tanith Lee and American writer Francesca Lia Block focus on the physical and traumatic impacts of rape on the survivors. As such, these trauma narratives constitute literary and artistic metatextual returns to, or intertextual re-enactments of, traumatic instances in Perrault's and the Grimms' texts. Simultaneously, they analyse the effects of rape trauma in ways that invite the audience to empathise with

the survivors' suffering. As Robin E. Field argues, it is necessary to centralise the victim-survivors in rape narratives.<sup>10</sup> The surviving protagonists' desire to live and recreate their stories in the narratives here engenders the outwitting of the wolf: he is actually or imaginatively killed by either girl, mother, or grandmother. Yet these narratives are not just reversal tales where the victim assumes the role of the aggressor. Rather, they view rape from the perspective of the protagonists who narrate their trauma, an act of recalling the traumatic event which recreates female identity from object to subject, from victim to survivor. Narrating the victim-survivors' stories, the tales offer the protagonists a voice denied them in the traditional tales, construct what Teresa de Lauretis terms an alternative 'measure of desire'<sup>11</sup> and help shape the meaning of LRRH regarding rape for today's audiences. Herein, they challenge the traditional rape narrative which Stockton maintains is normalised in compulsory heterosexuality and narrated from a masculine viewpoint, hinging on men's fears of false claims and fantasies of possessing the female and her sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

Rego's illustration series *Little Red Riding Hood Suite (LRRHS)* (2003), Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Lee's Gothic short story 'Wolfland' (1980) and Block's young adult piece 'Wolf' (2000) represent various categories of artistic composition, but all centre on similar concerns and so invite an exploration across genres. With the exception of Atwood's novel, they have marginally been studied in the context of rape, gendered subjectivity and self-narrativity. In *LRRHS*, comprising six illustrations executed in pastel, Little Red Riding Hood's mother derives power from killing a man named Wolf, who raped her daughter.<sup>13</sup> According to Marina Warner, Rego's fairy tales resist simplistic interpretations of victim and oppressor through surprising reversals, fluidity and ambiguity.<sup>14</sup> Atwood's novel features Offred, a Handmaid who is forced to produce children for the male ruling class in fictional Gilead, but recovers her agency by telling herself stories.<sup>15</sup> Zipes categorises *The Handmaid's Tale* as a feminist version of LRRH which explores women's rising from collective victimhood through the solitary heroine, who consults her own resourcefulness, wit and intelligence to overcome difficulties.<sup>16</sup> In this, Offred resembles Julia Kristeva's individual heroine, highlighted in her idea of the female genius that describes ordinary women doing the extraordinary to change the conditions which define them.<sup>17</sup> Lee's 'Wolfland' features a girl named Lisel, whose grandmother was sexually abused by her husband and became a werewolf to defend herself. Andrea Gutenberg examines how changes in female subjectivity through abjection (an internal process that dissolves subjectivity) in Lee's tale help the characters escape gendered violence.<sup>18</sup> The protagonist in Block's 'Wolf' is a survivor of incestuous rape, who finally takes matters into her own hands. Elizabeth Marshall links 'Wolf' to the Grimms' 'Little Red Cap', arguing that it challenges assumptions of girls' vulnerability to rape and empowerment through self-protection,<sup>19</sup> an idea Laura Mattoon D'Amore terms 'vigilante feminism'.<sup>20</sup> Ann Martin situates Block's heroine among alternative feminist subjects who appropriate their own narratives.<sup>21</sup> However, these studies do not recognise in the focal narratives rape trauma, trauma narration, or the victim-survivor genius.

All these narratives return to the meeting of wolf and girl that ends in violence in the traditional tale and creatively transform it into an empathic and agentic trauma narrative of the rape survivors' healing. Roberta S. Tristes emphasises that young sexually abused heroines find their narrative voices only after 'their bodies have been completely disempowered',<sup>22</sup> to which Marshall responds that girls' rescue from sexual violence may be late and result from outliving childhood and creating agency through self-narration.<sup>23</sup> While the focal protagonists are temporarily victimised, they work through trauma in ambivalent and complex ways, elucidating a creative change regarding female fear, suffering and victimhood in relation to the rape narrative that is emancipatory for girls. By having the protagonists change their selves, the tales represent responses, new understandings and efforts to make sense of the ongoing influence of such violence in our culture, addressing rape and girls' and women's reactions to it as a real issue. They recognise rape trauma and depict the protagonists' efforts at post-trauma recovery in ways that resonate with post-traumatic growth (PTG), positive transformation after traumatic experience as delineated by Judith Herman,<sup>24</sup> and with the Kristevan subject and the genius: specifically, the focal heroines overcome rape trauma by narrating it, through which process they transform into, or assume characteristics of, the wolf. In her work on PTG, Herman outlines the victim-survivor's narrative reconstruction of traumatic experience as a central part of healing together with creating a safe space for narration and re-establishing connection.<sup>25</sup> In reconstructing one's trauma narrative, traumatic experiences must be represented to oneself; as Kristeva emphasises, one must 'think about them, name them, master them, traverse them, forget them'.<sup>26</sup> However, traumatic experiences often seemingly resist representation and are, therefore, described as non-representational; they challenge narratives that individuals tell themselves about themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Kristeva's work on subjectivity and genius provides important insights into the focal protagonists' representation and non-representation of trauma and agency as subjects. Her subject is dialectic, constructed through representational and non-representational functions of signification. Key terms include the maternal, symbolic, abjection and the imaginary father, of which the latter relates to the genius. The maternal is an unconscious psychic function or space, constructed in and by an individual's first relationship with the mother; her body, affects and drives.<sup>28</sup> Judith Butler refers to the Kristevan maternal as a 'libidinal multiplicity', pointing to a wealth of non-representational meanings created here,<sup>29</sup> whereas Elizabeth Grosz calls it the order of 'subject formation' since it marks out subjective space.<sup>30</sup> An orderly representation of signification and an individual's assuming the position of subject correspond to the conscious function of the symbolic.<sup>31</sup> While a symbiosis of the symbolic and the maternal constructs the dialectic subject,<sup>32</sup> abjection and the imaginary father are extensions of the maternal. Abjection is a negative process that both defends and 'pulverizes' symbolic subjectivity:<sup>33</sup> the former action rejects while the latter opens for the maternal.<sup>34</sup> Kristeva invents the imaginary father, a positive,

regenerative and productive process, to (re)establish the subject's relationship with the symbolic, disrupted by abjection.<sup>35</sup> The imaginary father is the function of imagination and possibility<sup>36</sup> and the locus of both fairy tales and geniuses. Warner characterises fairy tales as 'a language of the imagination', making a space for females to re-represent themselves and their stories.<sup>37</sup> For Kristeva, the imaginary is the origin of genius-ness.<sup>38</sup> This view is supported by Suzanne Guerlac, who in her structuring of Kantian genius on the Kristevan subject, relates the genius to the spontaneous, intuitive and imaginative functions of the maternal, arguing that 'productive imagination', the capacity to produce new (which is at the heart of the Kantian genius),<sup>39</sup> is the principal constitutive factor of genius.<sup>40</sup> The focal heroines' trauma narrations in the works examined here highlight the productive imagination of what we call the girl genius (to differentiate it from the Kristevan genius that centres on nonfictional women and to emphasise the role of the girl). The girl genius is presented textually and non-textually through artwork in the conclusion.

The focal heroines' narrations of trauma highlight the (grand)mother-(grand)daughter relationships, shifting attention from male violence and female suffering to female bonding and heroism. Traumatic events can, indeed, lead to the Kristevan genius that simply stated is creativity that raises an individual above ordinariness:<sup>41</sup> the protagonists' narration of trauma results in unique accounts of imaginative work, providing the turning point towards healing, through fantasies of murdering the wolf and remaking their identities from beauties into beasts, or explicitly into wolves. For Warner, the beast motif in women's fairy tales symbolises the release and representation of the heroine's libido and creativity in the function of the imaginary similar to the genius.<sup>42</sup>

### **Paula Rego's *Little Red Riding Hood Suite*: Picturing Trauma**

*LRRHS* is a little girl's trauma story that raises the mother to the status of heroine, narrated from a safe environment post-trauma. According to Warner, Rego speaks from within her fairy tales, more specifically, from the ignored place of girls, centralising their 'dramas of sexual curiosity and conflict' through images before the mastering of written language.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to that of adults, children's locus of control relates 'to instinct, to irrationality, to pre-social'.<sup>44</sup> What the viewer of Rego's piece witnesses is the girl's piecing together of her sexual trauma. As trauma can resist verbal representation, images that appear disconnected or frozen in time express the survivor's early attempts to represent traumatic experience that resist representation.<sup>45</sup> In such a situation, Herman maintains that creating pictures is superior to other modes of expressing trauma, including writing or speech.<sup>46</sup> In Kristevan theory, traumatic experience provokes abjection, a regression to maternal space which breaks down meaning.<sup>47</sup> In narrating her trauma, the girl in Rego's work, who imagines herself as Little Red Riding Hood, wants her mother. Oliver asserts that, in the end, all individuals desire the same thing, their 'mommies'.<sup>48</sup> It is well known in child development that if the mother primarily attends to her child, she becomes her



child's first love object.<sup>49</sup> Yet, behind the child's love for the mother-object lurks the maternal space, into which infants are born but nevertheless abject in order to acquire language and become subjects, after which the maternal continues in the periphery of selfhood.<sup>50</sup> While individuals long for the love and nurture experienced as infants in the maternal phase, pre- and postnatally, charged with pre-objects, bodily drives and abjection, the maternal frightens, too.<sup>51</sup>

The first illustration, *Happy Family – Mother, Red Riding Hood and Grandmother*, depicts the girl's family, as seen through her loving lens, which resonates with how trauma reconstruction ideally begins with the survivor's life pre-trauma and progresses towards the traumatic experience.<sup>52</sup> Here, the girl indicates the feelings of love, happiness and intimacy, emphasised in the word 'happy' of the title. Specifically, the first illustration foregrounds the girl and her mother, captured in an embrace, under the protective eyes of the grandmother in the background. The girl demonstrates love for her mother and grandmother, who are her 'stern heroines',<sup>53</sup> a love which is clearly reciprocated. The female characters of three generations are represented in red throughout the series and so allude to Perrault's and the Grimms' traumatised, red-hooded girl. Simultaneously, red highlights a bond between the characters, symbolising protection. In folklore and literature, red is, above all, the colour of attachments, charms and eternal love.<sup>54</sup> Female character bonding here constitutes a women's culture. The model for Rego's female sphere is Portuguese female culture, dictated by Catholicism, in which Rego was raised.<sup>55</sup>

The girl's remembrance of sexual trauma in *LRRHS* occurs in the gutter of illustrations four and five, *The Wolf Chats up Red Riding Hood* and *Mother Takes Revenge* (Fig. 1). The first four illustrations, where the girl cloaked in red leaves the family nest to meet her grandmother but is stopped along the way by a man named Wolf, follow the storylines of Perrault and the Grimms. Therefore, remembering can here be viewed as an intertextual re-enactment of rape in their tales. While illustration four describes the meeting, illustration five depicts the Wolf with a bulging belly. Blank spaces between images allow viewers to add narrative details to a story.<sup>56</sup> Not depicting rape by placing it in the gutter, Rego thus asks viewers to draw upon what Marshall refers to as 'a larger repertoire of graphic knowledge about girl's bodies, ... spaces and sexual vulnerability' to imagine the violation.<sup>57</sup> Moon uses this gutter strategy in her version, too. On one page spread, a photograph shows the two black shadows of a frightened little girl threatened by a huge wolf with open jaws, accompanied by the line 'this wicked wolf fell upon Little Red Riding Hood, and ate her all up'.<sup>58</sup> The next spread presents an empty bed with rumpled bedsheets, indicating the forbidden sex through eating as a metaphor for rape.<sup>59</sup> Like in Moon's, Perrault's and the Grimms' tales, Rego's visual narrative turns to eating to describe rape. What the viewer of *Mother Takes Revenge* is shown is the girl's captivation in the Wolf's gut after he has devoured her. The representation of sexual trauma as incarceration has been used by, for example, Anne Sexton in her poem *Red Riding Hood* (1971), where it is likened to

pregnancy: 'he appeared to be in his ninth month and Red Riding Hood and her grandmother rode like two Jonahs up and down with his every breath'.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in *Mother Takes Revenge*, the girl imagines trauma by placing herself inside the wolf's belly, a creation that illustrates the workings of the imaginary. While both trauma and the maternal require repetition,<sup>61</sup> the imaginary, key to the genius, produces.<sup>62</sup> Productive imagination turns away from traumatic repetition in the maternal and towards the symbolic for understanding. It provides the link between these<sup>63</sup> through the imaginary father, a child's orientation of bodily energy in reference to her mother.<sup>64</sup> Male pregnancy in illustration four is ironically ascribable to the imaginary father as far as this function is the child's imagination of returning to the undifferentiated plenitude of the mother's womb, 'the first possible image of a life'.<sup>65</sup> The love provided here, 'the mother's love and her love for her own mother, a narcissistic love from generation to generation', supports the child's shift to the symbolic<sup>66</sup> in *LRRHS*: this love saturates language with non-representational meaning through instincts, feelings, sounds, images, rhythms, etc.<sup>67</sup>

In *LRRHS*, the girl represents the resolution of rape trauma through the mother's empowerment. First, the girl imagines her mother coming to save her in *Mother Takes Revenge*. Along with male pregnancy, this illustration presents a revenge fantasy. While revenge fantasies may be fantasies that delay recovery,<sup>68</sup> in the context of productive imagination, they are unique inventions of the child's imaginary father. Corollary, since they reciprocate the symbolic through the imaginary, revenge fantasies empower the subject. Armed with a dung fork, the mother, like the huntsman in the Grimms' tale, sets out to deliver her daughter from the wolf's gut. The girl's rescue is staged like a gender-reversed birth scene, as illustrated by the wolf's position on the floor, wide-open knees and as if full-term pregnant belly. The blood he must shed is promised through the red colour of the girl's robe stuck underneath his pelvis. Second, while in the final phase of recovery, the survivor recreates herself and achieves agency by becoming the person she wants to be;<sup>69</sup> in the last illustration, *Mother Wears the Wolf's Pelt*, the girl does not remake herself but her mother. Here, the mother wears the wolf's fur as a trophy, symbolically displaying compensation for the girl's suffering, to be witnessed by others. The wolf's fur alludes to Roald Dahl's poetic version 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf' (1983) where, after killing the wolf, the girl exchanges her red hood for a 'lovely furry WOLFSKIN COAT'.<sup>70</sup> In Rego, one of the mother's hands strokes the fur while the other touches her belly, indicating fullness after a heavy meal like she has devoured the Wolf as he has her daughter. The cunning look on her face confirms this, which means that rather than aligning with the Grimms' huntsman, the mother has allied herself with the wolf. In short, the girl imaginatively transforms her mother into a beast heroine, which Warner says is a signature of Rego's fairy tales<sup>71</sup> and is, as will be shown, shared by the other focal tales.

## **Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Narrating the Survivor**

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred resolves trauma by telling stories to herself since Gilead prohibits writing. Her trauma story unfolds both during and after traumatic events. She addresses an unknown listener called 'you': 'I will say, you, you, like an old love song'.<sup>72</sup> In trauma recovery, having someone witnessing one's story is essential for restoring relationships with others which are disrupted by trauma.<sup>73</sup> After escaping Gilead, Offred records her traumatic past on an old-fashioned tape recorder which is discovered in the future. Recording is a method of trauma narration that helps to control the recalling of dissociated traumatic memories.<sup>74</sup> Thus, telling stories authorises Offred's function of storyteller: 'If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending'.<sup>75</sup> Since her Handmaid's position is unavoidable, resembling a non-agentic girl ('She called us girls'),<sup>76</sup> Offred's 'private narrative about her body' empowers her to flout Gileadean patriarchal prescriptions.<sup>77</sup> Denying herself the status of victim ('Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for')<sup>78</sup> gives Offred a sense of bodily agency during the rapes, although Herman suggests repressing the perpetrator's victory may delay healing.<sup>79</sup> Offred apologises for the tribulation, limping and mutilation of her narrative: 'I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story. I'm sorry it's in fragments'.<sup>80</sup> Herman confirms that trauma stories contain contradictions, fragments and emotions.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, confronting traumatic experiences to take control of, mourn and remember, and finally reconstructing a personal narrative of body and self that have been destroyed by trauma, constitute healing.<sup>82</sup>

The Waterford house that Offred imagines as a winding labyrinth with corridors and rooms represents her confrontation with traumatic experiences that destroy her senses of body and self. Here, Atwood makes use of traditional fairy-tale settings in a context of trauma. Location, as Donald Haase notes, communicates the estrangement and peril experienced by protagonists: rooms and mansions are emblematic places 'that threaten characters with isolation, danger, and violence, including imprisonment and death'.<sup>83</sup> During the rapes in the master bedroom, while held down by Serena Joy and penetrated by the Commander, Offred disconnects from her body and emotions. She tells her imagined listener that 'One detaches oneself' and 'I lie there like a dead bird'.<sup>84</sup> Such descriptions typify the traumatic reaction of dissociation.<sup>85</sup> Offred's portrayal of corporeal death indicates the dying of herself: 'There's something dead about it, something deserted. I am like a room where things once happened and now nothing does'.<sup>86</sup> She contemplates suicide: 'you could use a hook, in the closet. I've considered the possibilities'.<sup>87</sup> Suicidal fantasies, typical for rape victims, are provoked by the danger of obliteration that traumatic moments entail.<sup>88</sup> Offred further expresses vast emotions, including great anguish ('There's no way out of here. I lie on the floor ...') together with hysteria and disintegration ('I've broken, something has cracked. ... I shake, I heave, seismic, volcanic, I'll burst. Red all over the cupboard ...').<sup>89</sup>



Offred indicates feeling self-abased and completely submissive: 'I'll obliterate myself, if that's what you want; ... I'll sacrifice. I'll repent. I'll abdicate. I'll renounce. ... I resign my body freely, to the use of others. They can do what they like with me. I'm abject.'<sup>90</sup> She experiences abjection, known for dissolving identity, rendered in Kristeva's own words, 'I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself ... "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death.'<sup>91</sup> The abject additionally emerges in Offred's estrangement from language, as 'a language that gives up',<sup>92</sup> typical for traumatised individuals.<sup>93</sup> English words and spelling feel foreign to Offred when she secretly plays Scrabble with the Commander in his study: 'My tongue felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language I'd once known but had nearly forgotten.'<sup>94</sup> Kristeva comments on trauma in another context: 'the trauma had threatened verbal construction itself.'<sup>95</sup> At another point in her story, when recalling old song lyrics, words slip away from Offred: 'I don't know if the words are right. I can't remember',<sup>96</sup> and she appears like one of Kristeva's trauma patients, described as 'plunged in verbal and mental confusion: she forgot words, even sentences.'<sup>97</sup> Like in Rego's series, abjection destroys identity in Atwood's novel.

Offred mourns her relationships before trauma. She goes back and forth between memories and present events, which helps her cope.<sup>98</sup> In order to survive, Offred builds a dream world where her family and friends are with her in Gilead, during nights which she claims as her own ('the night is my time out').<sup>99</sup> The traumatic loss of her daughter is especially painful, and she dreams that her little girl turns into a ghost and an angel that slowly fades away from her.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, Offred mourns her mother: 'I've mourned her already. But I will do it again, and again.'<sup>101</sup> Traumatic suffering, Kristeva says, opens 'old traumas', pointing to an unspeakable trauma of the maternal function,<sup>102</sup> which is described as a 'labyrinth of strangeness, otherness, and affectivity'.<sup>103</sup> If the maternal is not properly mourned and named in childhood, it is buried alive in the mind.<sup>104</sup> Offred further imagines the ghost of her predecessor, who died in Offred's room, promising to mourn her, too.<sup>105</sup>

As part of her PTG, Offred, like the girl in *LRRHS*, conjures up revenge fantasies. While trauma renders the victim powerless, revenge fantasies give a false sense of agency and are, Herman suggests, ways of resisting mourning the loss experienced.<sup>106</sup> In these, the roles are reversed;<sup>107</sup> Offred assumes the role of perpetrator, her captors her victims. However, Offred's fantasies defy being reduced to resistance in that they are unique inventions of her imaginary space and, thus, exemplify the genius: they produce possibilities, not in a sensical/symbolic but nonsensical/maternal sense, like fairy tales that Warner states innovate through the nonsensical, marvellous and fantastic.<sup>108</sup> In her fantasies, Offred transforms into a killer, reinventing herself through murder. She senses freedom, creativity and a shift of power to her advantage by inventing crime scenes. She plans to kill the commander by stabbing him with a toilet lever, in a way that signals sexual aggression and orgasm: she would 'slip the lever out from the sleeve and drive the sharp end into him suddenly, between his ribs. I think about the blood coming out of him, hot as soup, sexual, over my hands'.<sup>109</sup> Her

creative plot to set fire to the house brings her great pleasure, 'Such a fine thought it makes me shiver'.<sup>110</sup> In sheer desperation, Offred invents new murder weapons relating to gendered tasks: 'a knife from the kitchen', 'sewing scissors', 'garden shears', 'knitting needles'.<sup>111</sup> Sharing destiny with the mother in Rego's piece, Atwood's heroine adjusts herself to the beast. As Herman confirms, revenge fantasies engender the feelings of monstrosity and horror for oneself.<sup>112</sup> On the outside, Offred still resembles Little Red Riding Hood, 'a nondescript woman in red carrying a basket';<sup>113</sup> on the inside she is a beast who derives (sexual) pleasure from violent thoughts of murder.

Offred miraculously restores her ability to love and form new relationships. Restoring one's capabilities of love and social relationships that trauma has destroyed are necessary for recovery from and letting go of traumatic events.<sup>114</sup> Serena Joy orders Offred to have sex with the Commander's driver Nick since she wants a child but suspects that the Commander is sterile. However, Offred falls in love and begins a sexual relationship with Nick outside Serena Joy's arrangement. This relationship gives Offred meaning and hope. She becomes pregnant, and Nick eventually helps Offred escape the darkness of Gilead. Offred and Nick's lovemaking occurs when Offred, under the moon's protection, sneaks out of the Waterford house to meet her lover. Their relationship links to the 'moonlight', 'night' and 'hunger',<sup>115</sup> which invoke the beast motif of the werewolf, central to the heroines of 'Wolfland'.

### **Tanith Lee's 'Wolfland': Traumatic Transformation**

Anna in 'Wolfland' tells her story about her violent past to her granddaughter Lisel in a dream ('Had Lisel been asleep and dreaming?').<sup>116</sup> Like Rego's protagonist, her trauma is narrated from a safe environment after trauma. Her trauma story thus manifests in dreaming which recalls Warner's descriptions of fairy tales as 'a literature of dreaming',<sup>117</sup> of wonders, nonsense and imagination that unlock possibilities.<sup>118</sup> In Freud's dream work, the meaning of dreams derives from unconscious thoughts which, because they are prior to meaning, appear meaningless: in dreams, 'nonsense, tones, rhythms',<sup>119</sup> gaps and trails of different sound-image combinations indicate the workings of the maternal function.<sup>120</sup> Like dreams, traumatic memories appear fragmented, vague, meaningless, mute, unintegrated and disorganised.<sup>121</sup> In the dream, Anna confronts violence inflicted on her by her husband while she holds on to her daughter: 'She held a whip out to him. "Beat me," she said. "Please beat me. I want you to. Put down the child and beat me"'.<sup>122</sup> She submits to her husband's will: "'Do as I say, or you'll be worse.'" The fire flared on the swirl of her bloody cloak as she moved to obey him'.<sup>123</sup> Like in the other focal tales, 'Wolfland' challenges the connection between red and rape, traceable to the Grimms and Perrault. While Anna meets aggression, violence and suffering with valour and strength, Lisel indicates a violent take on female heterosexuality, 'confining her attention to those portions which contained duels, rapes, black magic' in her reading.<sup>124</sup>

Through dreaming, Lisel bears witness to Anna's trauma story. Testifying to another's narrative symbolically makes the other part of oneself, and both sharers' imaginative and symbolic capacities are expanded.<sup>125</sup> Interpreting the trauma of another makes their unconscious known in a new way.<sup>126</sup>

Through werewolf transformations, Lee's 'Wolfland' illustrates the protagonists' capabilities of the genius's productive imagination. In the dream that she shares with Lisel, Anna acts out her revenge fantasy by identifying with werewolves. Anna draws inspiration from werewolf legends connected to the land on which her husband's castle stands and creates a new identity for herself as werewolf. One night, she ventures alone in the forest and ends domestic rape. She eats the yellow flower that grows near the castle to conjure up the goddess Wolfwoman, which will give her the gift of transmuting into a werewolf. Herman describes trauma recovery as a second adolescence.<sup>127</sup> Imaginary activity is particularly strong in adolescent years due to an opening in the psyche towards the maternal body, which allows adolescents to experiment with different identities.<sup>128</sup> The imaginary can create multiple different identities<sup>129</sup> which, although to some extent reproducing stereotypes and fantasies that are common among adolescents, are 'genuine inscriptions of unconscious content that flower in the adolescent pre-conscious'.<sup>130</sup> Identities like these, seen in Anna's and Lisel's identifications with werewolves, thus exemplify genuine productive imagination, credited to the genius.

In the figure of a werewolf, Anna meets violence with violence. Through animal transformations, Lee explores female reactions to gendered violence in a similar manner as Warner does in *The Leto Bundle*, in which Leto metamorphoses into a pelican and a cuttlefish to defend herself against rape.<sup>131</sup> Leto's transformations empower her as a subject.<sup>132</sup> She attacks her rapist and gives birth to twins in the shape of two blue eggs. Similarly, Anna, as a werewolf in 'Wolfland', meets her drunk husband halfway on his journey home from the tavern to beat her up, and ravenously rends him to pieces.<sup>133</sup> The werewolf, which in folklore stands for immoralities related to sex and death,<sup>134</sup> functions as a revenge fantasy that rescues the females from violence and, therefore, Gutenberg argues, stands outside 'sin and punishment'.<sup>135</sup> Anna's transformation from beauty into beast gives her strength to take hold of her life. Shouldering responsibility for one's life helps trauma survivors acknowledge the harm done, assert personal authority and control healing.<sup>136</sup> Beastly behaviour shifts from beast to human where the real monster is Anna's human husband.<sup>137</sup> Warner interprets the 'beast symbol' in women's literature as a release of the heroine's 'inner dynamic of desire, creativity, self-expression' that is often destroyed by convention, and this force is always erotic.<sup>138</sup> Comparably, in folklore, the werewolf's body is constructed as erotic.<sup>139</sup> Fur seemingly adds sexual attraction.<sup>140</sup> After killing her husband, Anna finds a new life companion in her servant Beautiful, who submits to and helps her with her nightly transformations.

By adopting the nature of female werewolves, the protagonists in 'Wolfland' challenge assumptions of gender-based violence in the history of LRRH. To break the curse of gender violence in the story, Anna invites Lisel to the castle so that she, too, can be transformed into a werewolf. Anna takes what Herman refers to as 'social action' to prevent future generations from male violence.<sup>141</sup> Anna's trauma story has elements of a cautionary tale that warns against marital abuse: 'he showed me the whip he had been hiding under the fruit. You see what it is to be a woman, Lisel. Is this what you want?'<sup>142</sup> Concurrently, Anna recognises her own kin in Lisel, which warrants the action of transforming her.<sup>143</sup> When Lisel realises that she is a werewolf, too, Anna responds that 'I've put nothing on you that was not already yours', to which Lisel replies that marriage has never been for her.<sup>144</sup> Actually, Lisel's transformation begins during her drive towards the castle. When a wolf taps on the carrier's window, Lisel's body reorganises itself into a wolf: 'Her eyes also blazed, her teeth also were bared, and her nails raised as if to claw.'<sup>145</sup> Even though terrified, she finds the wolf strangely attractive. Lisel's transformation is final when she, in her red cloak, swallows a liquor made with the yellow flower and, like Anna once did, wakes up to a new cross-speciated identity in which she writes the rules of the sexual script: 'She suddenly knew red feasts and wild hymnings, lovers with quicksilver eyes and the race of the ice wind and stars smashed under the hard soles of her four feet',<sup>146</sup> indicating emancipation of female sexuality and gender from the conventions of submission, marriage and childbirth within heterosexual desire, albeit with a bestial twist. After Lisel's change, Beautiful obeys her, too, by kneeling and kissing her red robe. Still in dream state, Lisel declares that 'Of course, it was all a lot of nonsense' but nevertheless, caught between the cross-speciated identities of human and wolf, pursues her grandmother into Wolfland on four paws.<sup>147</sup>

### **Francesca Lia Block's 'Wolf': Writing Incest**

In Block's 'Wolf', the targets of trauma are the nameless narrator and her mother. The protagonist's trauma story begins in the shadow of chronic child sexual abuse, perpetrated by her stepfather. Like Rego's and Lee's protagonists, Block's heroine narrates her story of trauma in a safe place. Contrary to staging the stranger rape in the woods of Perrault and the Grimms, Block's tale tackles incest in the heterosexual home where the reader witnesses rape.<sup>148</sup> Block's narrative uses fairy-tale settings in a traumatic context in terms of how not only unfamiliar locations but also domestic places such as the home can be 'defamiliarized and threatening'.<sup>149</sup> Comparable to Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* and Anna in 'Wolfland', who also suffer domestic abuse and resort to dreams, the protagonist in 'Wolf' creates an alternative reality, a dreamscape which, although it indicates despair, helps her cope with the chronic rapes: 'Here you go on this long, long dream. ... Just relax and observe because there is pain and that's it mostly and you aren't going to be able to escape no matter what'.<sup>150</sup> Her statement clearly exemplifies

constriction in trauma whereby survivors in dangerous situations of terror realise the uselessness of resistance and instead surrender, manifesting a disconnected calm.<sup>151</sup> Cathy Caruth likens trauma to a bad dream, the repetition of which represents the incomprehensible and fearful brush with death that trauma entails and in which the traumatised individual has lost the memories of the cause of fright.<sup>152</sup>

Block spotlights the mother-daughter relationship in the father-daughter incest trauma. This special focus breaks conventions of romance and heterosexuality found in traditional fairy tales.<sup>153</sup> The strong bond makes the daughter and mother allies ('we were made of the same stuff')<sup>154</sup> and contrasts with most father-daughter incest stories, in which females compete for male affection.<sup>155</sup> Like the girl in *LRRHS*, the girl in 'Wolf' adores her mother: 'I really love my mom. You know we were like best friends.'<sup>156</sup> People mistake them for sisters, they do each other's hair and exchange clothes. The mother reciprocates her daughter's love.<sup>157</sup> Martin observes that the love that flows between them validates non-normative desires,<sup>158</sup> although heterosexual curiosity is displayed through the boy whom the girl meets on a bus. While in normative heterosexuality, female children negotiate homosexual love for the love of the opposite sex, in Kristevan theory, female sexuality is grounded in the relationship with the mother and insists on the child's relationship with the maternal body and drives. It remains homosexual also after the exchange of love object, although this type of lesbianism is suppressed through abjection in heteronormativity.<sup>159</sup> Amber Moore sees female character bonding as protection against the incestuous stepfather figure where the girl insists on her mother's happiness.<sup>160</sup> Marshall maintains that the girl sacrifices herself for her mother.<sup>161</sup> Albeit afraid ('I was scared shitless'), she suffers the abuse to keep her mother, whom her stepfather has threatened to kill after her mother has discovered the abuse and threatens to take her daughter away against his will.<sup>162</sup> These circumstances serve as an invitation to bravely accept the call to face her fears and establish a sense of safety; the protagonist in 'Wolf' makes a courageous decision to leave LA. On the one hand, the girl tries to save both her mother and herself;<sup>163</sup> on the other hand, she captures her own story<sup>164</sup> and in this, breaks cultural assumptions of girl victims who fail to defend their bodies.<sup>165</sup>

Block's protagonist rises above victimhood, stating, 'I am not a victim by nature.'<sup>166</sup> This indicates healthy PTG, breaking the monotony of victimhood, and recreating self through 'imagination and fantasy',<sup>167</sup> which in turn parallels the genius's productive imagination. When she climbs out the window to take a bus to see her grandmother in the desert, she begins to align with nature in subtle ways. The awakening of the protagonist's animal instincts occurs on a sensory level reminiscent of Lisel's transformation in 'Wolfland' before swallowing the drink which permanently transforms her. The girl in 'Wolf' opens her senses to the trees, the night, the moon, connecting them to her own body as freedom: 'I smelled my own sweat but it was different. I smelled the same old fear I'm used to but it was mixed with the night and the air and the moon and the trees and it was like freedom.'<sup>168</sup> Like in Atwood

and Lee, the elements of night, moon and freedom in Block resonate with werewolves. The protagonist also expresses a desire to lose control, which increases her attachment to werewolves, which are known for their incapability to control their attacks:<sup>169</sup> 'I'd rather feel out of control at the mercy of nature than other ways ... I just closed my eyes and let it ride itself out. I kind of wished he'd been on top of me then because it might have scared him'.<sup>170</sup> Aside from the title 'Wolf', wolves are never mentioned in Block's narrative. However, drawing on the combination of the title and the protagonist's intimacy with nature, it becomes clear that she, not her stepfather, is the wolf. Block, too, subverts the roles of beauty and beast to release beauty's beast within.

The heroine's release of her inner beast culminates in the killing of her rapist. Like Rego's and Lee's heroines, Block's takes charge of her life by acting out her revenge and thereby asserting her authority and highlighting the genius's productive imagination. Marshall interprets 'Wolf' as a revenge fantasy without denying the girl's vulnerability to rape.<sup>171</sup> Like the other narratives here, red transforms into an ambiguous symbol of victory and killing from having been associated with female victimhood. When the girl sees her stepfather's car in the driveway and hears him arguing with her grandmother, a vivid image of the colour of dried blood dances before her eyes, bestowing her with magic powers and transporting her into the same room.<sup>172</sup> Moments before she seizes her grandmother's gun, rape memories return: 'I remembered him above me in that bed with his clammy hand on my mouth and his ugly ugly weight'.<sup>173</sup> The girl's shooting alludes to James Thurber's (1939) and Roald Dahl's (1983) adaptations of LRRH with similar endings.<sup>174</sup> Whereas the girl in 'Wolf' is admitted to a treatment centre, the grandmother takes the blame for killing him. As Marshall mentions,<sup>175</sup> the girl and her grandmother's revenge recall the Grimms' lesser-known version of LRRH, *Little Red Cap*, in which the girl and her grandmother kill the wolf by luring him down the grandmother's chimney into a large water-filled pot.<sup>176</sup>

Block's heroine writes about sexual violence committed against her in a journal she receives at the treatment centre. Although the staff disbelieve her and consider her to be ill, the heroine states that journaling is 'the best thing' in her life, turning vengeance into gratitude.<sup>177</sup> Tristes claims that child survivors learn to claim power over their voices and 'overcome their victimization only by talking about it'.<sup>178</sup> The protagonist in 'Wolf' feels no guilt. Killing her stepfather can be seen as a tactic to resist the trauma of rape culture enacted by him, and she is finally released from it. Comparably to Rego's tale, the mother is central to the healing process of Block's heroine. At the centre, she mourns the lost relationship with her mother, whom the stepfather killed, and whom she imagines in the figure of an angel ('my mom will be there like an angel').<sup>179</sup> Although Beckett indicates that 'Wolf' does not have a happy ending,<sup>180</sup> the depicted hope as the protagonist moves on, while not necessarily providing a model for complete healing, does offer an example of standing behind victim-survivors in their efforts at recovery and reminds readers of the suffering of sexually traumatised girls in society.





Fig. 2 Carola Maria Wide, 'Girl Geniuses'  
Narrating Trauma in LRRH' (2019-21).

## Conclusion

The focal heroines process rape trauma through narration; the audience witnesses traumatic events, which centralise the traumatised heroines and create empathy and compassion for them. In these trauma narrations, revenge and female bonding resist the rape scripts of Perrault and the Brothers Grimm, and further decentralise the rapists, indicating alternative desire, expressed through the heroines' alignment with the beastly wolf that deviates from normative heterosexuality and gender in traditional fairy tales. The photographic illustration series 'Girl Geniuses' Narrating Trauma in LRRH' (Fig. 2), created by Carola Maria Wide with photography, nature and a red marker on paper (2019-21), represents the heroines' mostly internal transformations from beauties into beasts, provoked by abjection through trauma. These transformations metaphorise a release of the heroines' freedom of expression, creativity and libido that originates in the non-representational imaginary as productive imagination, shifts to symbolic representation through narration and culminates in the girl genius that highlights the agentic and empowered heroine-subjects. As new versions of the LRRH, the visual results contribute to the story canon, indicating that beast and genius are identical; and the girl and wolf are more alike than might appear. In Rego, Atwood, Lee and Block, the LRRH intertext becomes a traumatic link between past and present that frames the story of sexual violence within a contemporary context, revealing levels of violence and harm with which the protagonists are entangled and from which they struggle to free themselves through self-narration which heals them, transforming vengeance into gratitude for life.

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## Carola Maria Wide and Marinella Rodi-Risberg

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