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Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype

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—The Washington Post Book World



Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D

WOMEN WHO RUN WITH THE WOLVES:

Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.

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65 FOREWORD

We are all filled with a longing for the wild. There are few culturally sanctioned antidotes for this yearning. We were taught to feel shame for such a desire. We grew our hair long and used it to hide our feelings. But the shadow of Wild Woman still lurks behind us during our days and in our nights. No matter where we are, the shadow that trots behind us is definitely four-footed.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D. Cheyenne, Wyoming

M PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The tales, poems, and translations in Women Who Run With the Wolves are original literary works written by Dr. Estés. Her literary tales expand on brief poems, songs, and stories handed down in the unique languages and styles of her families. The renditions in this book are copyrighted and are not in the public domain.

In Women Who Run With the Wolves, the stories of Tsati, Skeleton Woman, La Loba, DeadBolt, Manawee, Tüz, and others, as well as various anecdotes, poems, and original translations of poems, prayers, and phrasing from other languages are original literary works written by Dr. Estés and published here for the first time. They are protected by copyright and are not in public domain.

Very different versions of certain tales such as "The Red Shoes," "Bluebeard," and "The Little Match Girl" can be found in the Brother's Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson, and Perrault collections. Legends like the arcane La Llorona, the ancient story of Demeter and Persephone, can be found in any number of editions published by various publishers. These renditions may or may not be in public domain. Contact the publishers and translators of these works for further information.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D., is an internationally recognized and award-winning poet, a Diplomate senior Jungian psychoanalyst certified via the International Association of Analytical Psychology, Zurich, Switzerland, and a *cantadora*, keeper of the old stories in the Latina tradition. She is past executive director of the C. G. Jung Center for Education and Research in the United States. Her doctorate is in intercultural studies and clinical psychology, and she has taught and practiced privately for twenty-five years.

Women Who Run With the Wolves was begun by Dr. Estés in 1971 and completed over twenty years' time. Her work has been translated into eighteen foreign languages worldwide and has been hailed as a classic and seminal work on the inner lives of women.

Dr. Estés' other published works include *The Gift of Story, A Wise Tale About What Is Enough*. She is the author of a nine-volume bestselling audio series, and *Theatre of the Imagination*, a thirteenpart series that is broadcast on many NPR, Pacifica, and community public radio stations across America.

Dr. Estés, a longtime activist, heads the nascent C. P. Estés Guadalupe Foundation, which has, as one of its goals, to broadcast strengthening stories, via shortwave radio, to trouble spots throughout the world. For her lifetime social activism and writing, she is the recipient of the *Las Primeras* Award from MANA, the National Latina Foundation in Washington, D.C. She was awarded the 1994 President's Medal for social justice from The Union Institute and has received a 1990–91 fellowship from the Rocky Mountain Women's Institute. Dr. Estés is a former Artist-in-Residence for the State of Colorado through the Arts and Humanities Council. Additionally, she is the first recipient of the annual Joseph Campbell festival "Keeper of the Lore" Award.

Women Who Run With the Wolves has received the ABBY Honor Award from the ABA, the Top Hand Award from the Colorado Author's League, and the Gradiva Award from the National Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis.

Dr. Estés is married and has three grown children. She is a lifetime member of La Sociedad de Guadalupe.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D., is the creator of a collection of original audio works combining myths and stories with archetypal analysis and psychological commentary. Titles include:

- Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories on the Instinctual Nature of Women (180 minutes)
- The Creative Fire:
 Myths and Stories on the Cycles of Creativity (180 minutes)
- The Boy Who Married an Eagle:

 Myths and Stories on Male Individuation (90 minutes)
- The Radiant Coat:

 Myths and Stories on the Crossing between Life and Death (90 minutes)
- Warning the Stone Child:
 Myths and Stories About Abandonment and the Unmothered Child
 (90 minutes)
- In the House of the Riddle Mother:

 Archetypal Motifs in Women's Dreams (180 minutes)
- The Red Shoes:
 On Torment and the Recovery of Soul Life (80 minutes)
- How to Love a Woman:
 On Intimacy and the Erotic Life of Women (180 minutes)
- The Gift of Story:
 A Wise Tale About What Is Enough (60 minutes)

For more information about these and new audio releases by Dr. Estés, write or call Sounds True Audio, 735 Walnut St., Dept. WWX, Boulder, CO 80302. Phone 1-800-333-9185.

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The Transformative Fire and Right Action

MINTRODUCTION

Singing Over the Bones

Wildlife and the Wild Woman are both endangered species.

Over time, we have seen the feminine instinctive nature looted, driven back, and overbuilt. For long periods it has been mismanaged like the wildlife and the wildlands. For several thousand years, as soon and as often as we turn our backs, it is relegated to the poorest land in the psyche. The spiritual lands of Wild Woman have, throughout history, been plundered or burnt, dens bulldozed, and natural cycles forced into unnatural rhythms to please others.

It's not by accident that the pristine wilderness of our planet disappears as the understanding of our own inner wild natures fades. It is not so difficult to comprehend why old forests and old women are viewed as not very important resources. It is not such a mystery. It is not so coincidental that wolves and coyotes, bears and wildish women have similar reputations. They all share related instinctual archetypes, and as such, both are erroneously reputed to be ingracious, wholly and innately dangerous, and ravenous.

My life and work as a Jungian psychoanalyst, poet, and *cantadora*, keeper of the old stories, have taught me that women's flagging vitality can be restored by extensive "psychic-archeological" digs into the

ruins of the female underworld. By these methods we are able to recover the ways of the natural instinctive psyche, and through its personification in the Wild Woman archetype we are able to discern the ways and means of woman's deepest nature. The modern woman is a blur of activity. She is pressured to be all things to all people. The old knowing is long overdue.

The title of this book, Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, came from my study of wildlife biology, wolves in particular. The studies of the wolves Canis lupus and Canis rufus are like the history of women, regarding both their spiritedness and their travails.

Healthy wolves and healthy women share certain psychic characteristics: keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion. Wolves and women are relational by nature, inquiring, possessed of great endurance and strength. They are deeply intuitive, intensely concerned with their young, their mates and their pack. They are experienced in adapting to constantly changing circumstances; they are fiercely stalwart and very brave.

Yet both have been hounded, harassed, and falsely imputed to be devouring and devious, overly aggressive, of less value than those who are their detractors. They have been the targets of those who would clean up the wilds as well as the wildish environs of the psyche, extincting the instinctual, and leaving no trace of it behind. The predation of wolves and women by those who misunderstand them is strikingly similar.

So that is where the concept of the Wild Woman archetype first crystallized for me, in the study of wolves. I've studied other creatures as well, such as bear, elephant, and the soul-birds—butterflies. The characteristics of each species give abundant metaphoric hints into what is knowable about the feminine instinctual psyche.

The wild nature passed through my spirit twice, once by my birth to a passionate Mexican-Spanish bloodline, and later, through adoption by a family of fiery Hungarians. I was raised up near the Michigan state line, surrounded by woodlands, orchards, and farmland and near the Great Lakes. There, thunder and lightning were my main nutrition. Cornfields creaked and spoke aloud at night. Far up in the north, wolves came to the clearings in moonlight, prancing and praying. We could all drink from the same streams without fear.

Although I did not call her by that name then, my love for Wild Woman began when I was a little child. I was an aesthete rather than

an athlete, and my only wish was to be an ecstatic wanderer. Rather than chairs and tables, I preferred the ground, trees, and caves, for in those places I felt I could lean against the cheek of God.

The river *always* called to be visited after dark, the fields *needed* to be walked in so they could make their rustle-talk. Fires *needed* to be built in the forest at night, and stories *needed* to be told outside the hearing of grown-ups.

I was lucky to be brought up in Nature. There, lightning strikes taught me about sudden death and the evanescence of life. Mice litters showed that death was softened by new life. When I unearthed "Indian beads," fossils from the loam, I understood that humans have been here a long, long time. I learned about the sacred art of self-decoration with monarch butterflies perched atop my head, lightning bugs as my night jewelry, and emerald-green frogs as bracelets.

A wolf mother killed one of her mortally injured pups; this taught a hard compassion and the necessity of allowing death to come to the dying. The fuzzy caterpillars which fell from their branches and crawled back up again taught single-mindedness. Their tickle-walking on my arm taught how skin can come alive. Climbing to the tops of trees taught what sex would someday feel like.

My own post-World War II generation grew up in a time when women were infantilized and treated as property. They were kept as fallow gardens . . . but thankfully there was always wild seed which arrived on the wind. Though what they wrote was unauthorized, women blazed away anyway. Though what they painted went unrecognized, it fed the soul anyway. Women had to beg for the instruments and the spaces needed for their arts, and if none were forthcoming, they made space in trees, caves, woods, and closets.

Dancing was barely tolerated, if at all, so they danced in the forest where no one could see them, or in the basement, or on the way out to empty the trash. Self-decoration caused suspicion. Joyful body or dress increased the danger of being harmed or sexually assaulted. The very clothes on one's shoulders could not be called one's own.

It was a time when parents who abused their children were simply called "strict," when the spiritual lacerations of profoundly exploited women were referred to as "nervous breakdowns," when girls and women who were tightly girdled, tightly reined, and tightly muzzled were called "nice," and those other females who managed to slip the collar for a moment or two of life were branded "bad."

So like many women before and after me, I lived my life as a dis-

guised *criatura*, creature. Like my kith and kin before me, I swagger-staggered in high heels, and I wore a dress and hat to church. But my fabulous tail often fell below my hemline, and my ears twitched until my hat pitched, at the very least, down over both my eyes, and sometimes clear across the room.

I've not forgotten the song of those dark years, hambre del alma, the song of the starved soul. But neither have I forgotten the joyous canto hondo, the deep song, the words of which come back to us when we do the work of soulful reclamation.

Like a trail through a forest which becomes more and more faint and finally seems to diminish to a nothing, traditional psychological theory too soon runs out for the creative, the gifted, the deep woman. Traditional psychology is often spare or entirely silent about deeper issues important to women: the archetypal, the intuitive, the sexual and cyclical, the ages of women, a woman's way, a woman's knowing, her creative fire. This is what has driven my work on the Wild Woman archetype for over two decades.

A woman's issues of soul cannot be treated by carving her into a more acceptable form as defined by an unconscious culture, nor can she be bent into a more intellectually acceptable shape by those who claim to be the sole bearers of consciousness. No, that is what has already caused millions of women who began as strong and natural powers to become outsiders in their own cultures. Instead, the goal must be the retrieval and succor of women's beauteous and natural psychic forms.

Fairy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still, into their own knowing. The tracks we all are following are those of the wild and innate instinctual Self.

I call her Wild Woman, for those very words, wild and woman, create llamar o tocar a la puerta, the fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female psyche. Llamar o tocar a la puerta means literally to play upon the instrument of the name in order to open a door. It means using words that summon up the opening of a passageway. No matter by which culture a woman is influenced, she understands the words wild and woman, intuitively.

When women hear those words, an old, old memory is stirred and

brought back to life. The memory is of our absolute, undeniable, and irrevocable kinship with the wild feminine, a relationship which may have become ghosty from neglect, buried by over-domestication, outlawed by the surrounding culture, or no longer understood anymore. We may have forgotten her names, we may not answer when she calls ours, but in our bones we know her, we yearn toward her; we know she belongs to us and we to her.

It is into this fundamental, elemental, and essential relationship that we were born and that in our essence we are also derived from. The Wild Woman archetype sheaths the alpha matrilineal being. There are times when we experience her, even if only fleetingly, and it makes us mad with wanting to continue. For some women, this vitalizing "taste of the wild" comes during pregnancy, during nursing their young, during the miracle of change in oneself as one raises a child, during attending to a love relationship as one would attend to a beloved garden.

A sense of her also comes through the vision; through sights of great beauty. I have felt her when I see what we call in the woodlands a Jesus-God sunset. I have felt her move in me from seeing the fishermen come up from the lake at dusk with lanterns lit, and also from seeing my newborn baby's toes all lined up like a row of sweet corn. We see her where we see her, which is everywhere.

She comes to us through sound as well; through music which vibrates the sternum, excites the heart; it comes through the drum, the whistle, the call, and the cry. It comes through the written and the spoken word; sometimes a word, a sentence or a poem or a story, is so resonant, so right, it causes us to remember, at least for an instant, what substance we are really made from, and where is our true home.

These transient "tastes of the wild" come during the mystique of inspiration—ah, there it is; oh, now it has gone. The longing for her comes when one happens across someone who has secured this wildish relationship. The longing comes when one realizes one has given scant time to the mystic cookfire or to the dreamtime, too little time to one's own creative life, one's life work or one's true loves.

Yet it is these fleeting tastes which come both through beauty as well as loss, that cause us to become so bereft, so agitated, so longing that we eventually must pursue the wildish nature. Then we leap into the forest or into the desert or into the snow and run hard, our eyes scanning the ground, our hearing sharply tuned, searching under, searching over, searching for a clue, a remnant, a sign that she still