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Women Who Run With the Wolves

Myths and
Stories of the
Wild Woman
Archetype



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INTRODUCTION

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, extinguishing 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 disguised *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 beautiful 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 ghostly 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 field 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 dream- time, 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 lives, that we have not lost our chance. And when we pick up her trail, it is typical of women to ride hard to catch up, to clear off the desk, clear off the relationship, clear out one’s mind, turn to a new page, insist on a break, break the rules, stop the world, for we are not going on without her any longer.

Once women have lost her and then found her again, they will contend to keep her for good. Once they have regained her, they will fight and fight hard to keep her, for with her their creative lives blossom; their relationships gain meaning and depth and health; their cycles of sexuality, creativity, work, and play are reestablished; they are no longer marks for the predations of others; they are entitled equally under the laws of nature to grow and to thrive. Now their end-of-the-day fatigue comes from satisfying work and endeavors, not from being shut up in too small a mindset, job, or relationship. They know instinctively when things must die and when things must live; they know how to walk away, they know how to stay.

When women reassert their relationship with the wildish nature, they are gifted with a permanent and internal watcher, a knower, a visionary, an oracle, an inspiratrice, an intuitive, a maker, a creator, an inventor, and a listener who guide, suggest, and urge vibrant life in the inner and outer worlds. When women are close to this nature, the fact of that relationship glows through

them. This wild teacher, wild mother, wild mentor supports their inner and outer lives, no matter what.

So, the word *wild* here is not used in its modern pejorative sense, meaning out of control, but in its original sense, which means to live a natural life, one in which the *criatura*, creature, has innate integrity and healthy boundaries. These words, *wild* and *woman*, cause women to remember who they are and what they are about. They create a metaphor to describe the force which funds all females. They personify a force that women cannot live without.

The Wild Woman archetype can be expressed in other terms which are equally apt. You can call this powerful psychological nature the instinctive nature, but Wild Woman is the fence which lies behind that. You can call it the natural psyche, but the archetype of the Wild Woman stands behind that as well. You can call it the innate, the basic nature of women. You can call it the indigenous, the intrinsic nature of women. In poetry it might be called the "Other," or the "seven oceans of the universe," or "the far woods," or "The Friend."¹ In various psychologies and from various perspectives it would perhaps be called the id, the Self, the medial nature. In biology it would be called the typical or fundamental nature.

But because it is tacit, prescient, and visceral, among *cantadoras* it is called the wise or knowing nature. It is sometimes called the "woman who lives at the end of time," or the

“woman who lives at the edge of the world.” And this *criatura* is always a creator-hag, or a death Goddess, or a maiden in descent, or any number of other personifications. She is both friend and mother to all those who have lost their way, all those who need a learning, all those who have a riddle to solve, all those out in the forest or the desert wandering and searching.

In actuality, in the psychoid unconscious—an ineffable layer of psyche from which this phenomenon emanates—Wild Woman has no name, for she is so vast. But, since this force engenders every important facet of womanliness, here on earth she is named many names, not only in order to peer into the myriad aspects of her nature but also to hold on to her. Because in the beginning of retrieving our relationship with her she can turn to smoke in an

instant, by naming her we create for her a territory of thought and feeling within us. Then she will come, and if valued, she will stay.

So, in Spanish I call her *Rio Abajo Rio*, the river beneath the river, *La Mujer Grande*, the Great Woman; *Luz del abtsmo*, the light from the abyss; *La Loba*, the wolf woman; or *La Huesera*, the bone woman.

She is called in Hungarian, *O, Erddben*, She of the Woods, and *Rozsomdk*, The Wolverine. In Navajo, she is *Na’ashje’ii Asdzaa*, The Spider Woman, who weaves the fate of humans and animals and plants and rocks. In Guatemala, among many other names, she is *Humana del Niebla*, The Mist Being, the woman who has lived forever. In Japanese, she is *Amaterasu Omikami*, The Numina, who brings all light, all consciousness. In Tibet she is called *Dakini*, the dancing force which produces clear-seeing within women. And it goes on. She goes on.

The comprehension of this Wild Woman nature is not a religion but a practice. It is a psychology in its truest sense: *psukhi/psych*, soul; *ology* or *logos*, a knowing of the soul. Without her, women are without ears to hear her soultalk or to register the chiming of their own inner rhythms. Without her, women’s inner eyes are closed by some shadowy hand, and large parts of their days are spent in a semi-paralyzing ennui or else wishful thinking. Without her, women lose the sureness of their soulfooting. Without her, they forget why they’re here, they hold on when they would best hold out Without her they take too much or too little or nothing at all. Without her they are silent when they are in fact on fire. She is their regulator, she is their soulful heart, the same as the human heart that regulates the physical body.

When we lose touch with the instinctive psyche, we live in a semi-destroyed state and images and powers that are natural to the feminine are not allowed full development. When a woman is cut away from her basic source, she is sanitized, and her instincts and natural life cycles are lost, subsumed by the culture, or by the intellect or the ego—one's own or those belonging to others.

Wild Woman is the health of all women. Without her, women's psychology makes no sense. This wilderwoman is the prototypical woman... no matter what culture, no matter what era, no matter what politic, she does not change. Her cycles change, her symbolic representations change, but in essence, *she* does not change. She is what she is and she is whole.

She canalizes through women. If they are suppressed, she struggles upward. If women are free, she is free. Fortunately, no matter how many times she is pushed down, she bounds up again. No matter how many times she is forbidden, quelled, cut back, diluted, tortured, touted as unsafe, dangerous, mad, and other derogations, she emanates upward in women, so that even the most quiet, even the most restrained woman keeps a secret place for her. Even the most repressed woman has a secret life, with secret thoughts and secret feelings which are lush and wild, that is, natural. Even the most captured woman guards the place of the wildish self, for she knows intuitively that someday there will be a loophole, an aperture, a chance, and she will hightail it to escape.

I believe that all women and men are born gifted. However, and truly, there has been little to describe the psychological lives and ways of gifted women, talented women, creative women. There is, on the other hand, much writ about the weakness and foibles of humans in general and women in particular. But in the case of the Wild Woman archetype, in order to fathom her, apprehend her, utilize her offerings, we must be more interested in the thoughts, feelings, and endeavors which strengthen women, and adequately count the interior and cultural factors which weaken women.

In general, when we understand the wildish nature as a being in its own right, one which animates and informs a woman's deepest life, then we can begin to develop in ways never thought possible. A psychology which fails to address this innate spiritual being at the center of feminine psychology fails women, and fails their daughters and their daughters' daughters far into all future matrilineal lines.

So, in order to apply a good medicine to the hurt parts of the wildish psyche, in order to aright relationship to the archetype of the Wiki Woman, one has to name the disarrays of the psyche accurately. While in my clinical profession we do have a good diagnostic statistical manual and a goodly amount of differential diagnoses, as well as psychoanalytic parameters which define psychopathy through the organization (or lack of it) in the objective psyche and the ego-Self axis,² there are yet other

defining behaviors and feelings which, from a woman's frame of reference, powerfully describe what is the matter.

What are some of the feeling-toned symptoms of a disrupted relationship with the wildish force in the psyche? To chronically feel, think, or act in any of the following ways is to have partially severed or lost entirely the relationship with the deep instinctual psyche. Using women's language exclusively, these are: feeling extraordinarily dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, muzzled, unaroused. Feeling frightened, halt or weak, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning, shame-bearing, chronically fuming, volatile, stuck, uncreaiive, compressed, crazed.

Feeling powerless, chronically doubtful, shaky, blocked, unable to follow through, giving one's creative life over to others, life-sapping choices in mates, work, or friendships, suffering to live outside one's own cycles, overprotective of self, inert, uncertain, faltering, inability to pace oneself or set limits.

Not insistent on one's own tempo, to be self-conscious, to be away from one's God or Gods, to be separated from one's revivification, drawn far into domesticity, intellectualism, work, or inertia because that is the safest place for one who has lost her instincts.

To fear to venture by oneself or to reveal oneself, fear to seek mentor, mother, father, fear to set out one's imperfect work before it is an opus, fear to set out on a journey, fear of caring for another or others, fear one will run on, run out, run down, cringing before authority, loss of energy before creative projects, wincing, humiliation, angst, numbness, anxiety.

Afraid to bite back when there is nothing else left to do, afraid to try the new, fear to stand up to, afraid to speak up, speak against, sick stomach, butterflies, sour stomach, cut in the middle, strangled, becoming conciliatory or nice too easily, revenge.