

EVE'S SHADOW: HEALING THE WOUNDED FEMININE
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"There is a void felt these days by women and men who suspect that their feminine nature, like Persephone, has gone to hell. Wherever there is such a void, such a wound agape, healing must be sought in the wound itself"

-Nor Hall

Most of us know what the Shadow is, and everyone will know who Eve was but who or what is the Wounded Feminine? She is of course an archetype of both the collective and personal unconscious. As a Jungian therapist of thirty years and a seasoned wounded woman, I can safely say that I know her. I am in illustrious company; I join Silvia Plath, Marilyn Monroe, Camille Claudel, Frida Kahlo, Whitney Houston and countless other wounded women who lost themselves to their men, their lovers, to their careers, to the call of the glittering Persona all at the expense of themselves. It is a simple fact that if you feel unworthy deep inside, then you will sell your soul for love or what you consider to be love. The wounded feminine is just that, wounded. She longs to be loved, but often travels down the wrong road looking for it. The feminine in me is both the voice of my soul and my heart, a benevolent and essential part of my nature but as a shadow figure in my unconscious, she is deeply wounded. As wounded, she is unreachable, likely to be critical, harsh and judgmental of any weakness or vulnerability instead of nurturing and compassionate. And if I can't connect with her, then I cannot heal myself. And I remain incarcerated in the mother complex like Rapunzel in her tower, shut away from life (consciousness).

An archetype is a force that informs our being, our psyches, we feel its influence through our inner imagery and outer behaviour. The feminine is of course, not gender related and so men's

wounded feminine might be in your hidden hurt, in your inability to reach your heart, in your loneliness and emotional isolation-in your relationship difficulties. The story of Rapunzel, locked away in a tower is symbolic of our inner (young) feminine, imprisoned by our inner witch, the part of us that doesn't want us to grow, that controls and keeps our life force in the unconscious, in the Shadow. And what remains in shadow emerges into our life unbidden. As Jung said, "*Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.*" On a collective archetypal level, our jailor may be a cold heartless hierarchy Church or institution that shuns or tries to control the feminine keeping it in shadow (out of sight, out of mind). Our recent history is heavy with a culture of the shaming, blaming and incarcerating of pregnant women and the forced, cruel separation from their babies. Sexuality (especially if it resulted in unwanted pregnancy), childbirth and women were viewed with suspicion and fear. It was not so long ago after all that women were 'churched' after childbirth. We may have moved on, but history cannot be erased, and the scars and wounds still haunt our psyches and influence our lives. We hear her in the voice of the lost mothers and grandmothers and in the cry of the Magdalene whose sacred wisdom was silenced. We can call it misogyny, religious and church values or dominance by intellectualism (avoiding the body by staying in the head). Either way, our inner feminine, the voice of our soul is both ignored and shunned. And so feminine consciousness, the ability to love, to create new life and instinctual nature are in shadow, resulting in what Jung called the Wounded archetype.

We have our own brand of the Wounded Feminine archetype here in Ireland. Our history is witness to this wounding, so it is no wonder we may find it hard to be in our hearts and connect with our souls, our precious and sacred feminine. A wounded feminine image/archetype/belief structure impacts our ability to give and to receive love. How can you (we) love when we have cut out our hearts or stifled the voice of our inner feminine?

Healing the Wounded Feminine

Without the feminine we cannot heal or grow. Healing involves deep inner communion with our psyches: it involves trekking our souls, listening to our unheard stories of abandonment, pain and heartbreak. It involves crying, suffering and endurance of the healing process that can take a long time. It involves forgiveness, acceptance and compassion, deeply soulful qualities. It can be the acknowledgment of how we were hurt, cursed and abused—that comes first. Most of all, it will be about forgiving ourselves for loving the wrong person, for selling ourselves short, for not feeling good enough, for abandoning or silencing ourselves. Then, through suffering and the slow work of engaging with our emotional wounding, comes the awakening of our inner healer. No one can heal us, only we can. Forgiveness and compassion, a component of feminine consciousness, is an essential part of healing. In my recent webinar [The Compassionate Soul-Learning to Forgive Yourself and Others](#) I noted several key ingredients to being able to forgive. One is an acknowledgment of the wrongdoing; two is having the humility to admit one was wrong and three apologising. And so, the first step in healing is an acknowledgment of our hurt. We often struggle with our own vulnerability and wish for our wounded natures to just magically disappear. We hope we can 'think' and analyse our wounds away.

That doesn't work.

Healing the Wounded Feminine means to free your Rapunzel, to let her out of her tower, to bring your feeling life force out into consciousness so your healing journey can begin. The feminine is about process and not product. It is important to remember this when we are healing. Jungian author Jeanne Achterberg writes *"In a balanced viewpoint that includes both masculine and feminine perspective, healing is seen not as a technique, but as a process."* This serves a reminder that our aim is always to seek the balance of both sides of our nature. The inner marriage of masculine and feminine is essential to psychic, spiritual and

emotional wellbeing-and to healing. Whenever we are split, we are un-whole and therefore unhealthy. What heals us is firstly, to access our inner feminine, letting her out of her prison. And secondly, enlisting our inner masculine to heal her. Masculine energy and consciousness are about being proactive, taking steps to heal ourselves. I once heard Marion Woodman in a workshop I attended, tell us *'The Masculine takes the Feminine out into the world because he loves her'* -he is our inner King, the part of us that we can rely on to help us heal, to listen to us and to take action to protect us. Leaving your tower means freeing yourself from whom or whatever force has oppressed you. It can be an addiction, a relationship, and your own deep sense of unworthiness that has kept you trapped in unhealthy situations.

It goes like this.

You wake up one morning, and make the decision to finally leave a relationship, job or situation that is no good for you and in which you have 'allowed' yourself to be caught for whatever reason... you walk away from the tower and start to live. The scales of projection, oppression or misguided vision fall from your eyes and you can see clearly for the first time. You can identify the cause (and cure) for your sickness, your incarceration, and you take yourself in hand. You begin to live, to heal, to forgive, and to finally move on. A new world awaits you. But none of this you could have seen or achieved without due process; without time, effort, engaging your heart and trekking your soul. Therapeutically, healing the Wounded Feminine means taking the time to engage with the voice of your soul and listening to your dreams and imagery. That bite from your dog or the sick cat in your dreams is not meaningless; your instincts are trying to get your attention. The feminine is your instinctual life and your nature. Navigate your history, go back and take note, let the tears come, draw, paint, write or dance. If your mothering or fathering has been harsh or you feel you haven't had much mothering or nurturing...become your own mother. I still hear the voice of my therapist, thirty-five years on, who tells me to be

my own mother, not to abandon myself, to love myself. It sounds simple and it is, but not without courage and a willingness to feel and to endure all the while trusting in the wisdom of your inner feminine to guide you towards what you need for your healing.

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