

## Owl Interpretations

### **Celtic Mythology: Blodeuwedd**

The story of Blodeuwedd includes love, betrayal, magic, heroes, villains and adventure. Blodeuwedd is a woman who was fashioned out of flowers as a wife for a man who had been cursed to have no wife of human flesh. She falls in love with another man and together they plot the death of her enforced husband. He is magically brought back to life and as her punishment for faithlessness and murder, she is turned into an owl. Curiously, she is not executed since it was not entirely her fault - she was never given the choice of a husband, or even asked if she wanted to be a woman.

### **The Owl in Greek Mythology: Athena**

In Greek mythology, the owl is firmly linked with Athena, the Goddess of wisdom (and in later times, of battle). This Goddess is pictured with her owl perched on her shoulder (perhaps to whisper in her ear?). Some say that this is why the owl is in modern times associated with Wisdom.

The city of Athens - dedicated to Athena - had an owl image on its coins, and they came to be known as "owls".

### **Native American Traditions and Folklore**

In his book *Medicine Wheels*, Roy I. Wilson speaks about the Owl as being one of the spirit messengers in the inner circle of seven stones around the sacred altar of the Native American Sundance Wheel. He says, "The owl is the bird of the shadows, the darkness, the night. It is the messenger of death". Yet "The ability of the owl to see so well in the darkness of the night speaks to us of the spirit of the owl, as a spirit messenger, guiding us through the darkness of our night of bereavement. Therefore, the owl not only gives the message of impending death, but when it continues to manifest itself over a period of time to someone, it may be giving the message to that person that he or she is being called to a ministry to the bereaved".

Owls are considered bad omens in Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole traditions. They are messengers of death and usually represent that someone close to you will die suddenly. To have any of their amulets is considered bad form.

The owl is fairly consistently associated with death on the indigenous north Pacific Coast, but not necessarily in a negative way. George Hunt discusses traditional Kwakwaka'wakw beliefs about owls in Franz Boas, *THE RELIGION OF THE KWAKIUTL* (1930, vol 1 -- see "The owls"). Every living man and woman owns an owl mask (great horned owl), a sort of owl double to which he or she is connected. At death a person goes toward that mask to become a real owl; if you ask an owl hooting at night

who it was in life, it will tell you its name. "The owl is not the soul, but only one side [of the person]." When Hunt shoots an owl whose hooting keeps him awake he is accused of murder -- "Don't you know it was a man you shot?" And a man does subsequently die, and some accuse Hunt of having killed him when he killed the owl.

According to de Laguna (in UNDER MOUNT ST. ELIAS, 1972: 829-30), among the Tlingit owls were also considered to speak human language -- to speak all human languages, in fact. Owls come to tell bad news, usually deaths or sickness, but also warn people of impending danger, and people should heed the warnings. Children who cry too much are also told they will turn into owls and there is a story of a girl who mistreated her mother-in-law and, after being shunned thereafter, turned into an owl.

Sources:

<http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/boardarchives/2002/oct2002/owlsinmyth.html>

<http://www.silvercrow.com/owl/mgreek.html>