



THE WAY OF

THE RADICAL PATH OF
THE DIVINE FEMININE HIDDEN
IN THE ROSARY

THE ROSE

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Is Mary Real?

IS THE LADY REAL? OR IS SHE ONLY A SYMBOL for some ecological principle or abstract force? Couldn't she just be the projection of our nostalgic longing for the safety and security of childhood—the desire for a mother who will care for us and watch over us no matter what? How could there possibly be a divine being who speaks to us and appears to us and answers our prayers? How could she be real? In truth, it is like asking if the ground is real...or a stone is real...or the handful of dirt that crumbles in our hands.

The dirt under our feet doesn't ask for our belief. It bears us up and feeds us, whether we believe in it or not. The soil gives birth to the trees, the edible plants, and all manner of other living beings. Likewise, it stands ready at any moment to receive the dead. From vanished forests to the fragile wings of dragonflies, the dirt is nothing but the bodies of the dead, and it is from those very rotting bodies that living bodies grow. Dirt is what happens when life happens. Dirt is as real as it gets.

But it isn't just dirt. The vast darkness between worlds is also real. And yet it also does not demand our belief. The dark matter of the universe will go on swallowing stars and giving birth to galaxies just as it always has, whether we believe in it or not. Whether we understand it or not, the moon will go on pulling on the tides and the blood in our bodies. Month after month, she will vanish and return, always there, always real.

Our Lady is as real as the dirt and the darkness and the space between stars. She is the *mater* in all matter—the body of all existence. No wonder people see her face in the trunks of trees, her form in the roundness of stones.

In her book *Untie the Strong Woman*, Jungian analyst Clara Pinkola Estes recalls her Italian grandmother arising each morning and sifting through her burnt-out fireplace for charred pieces of wood in the shape of what she called Night Marias. She would then place these “Black Madonnas” lovingly about her garden in order to help it grow. There is nowhere that we cannot find Our Lady's presence once we begin to look for her. She is always showing herself to us.

Is Our Lady real? The answer is all around us. Trees are not abstractions, oceans are not algorithms, life is not an idea. To recognize Our Lady in the world is to acknowledge the world as real again. To belong to it as we belong to a mother. To feel moved by its beauty and blessed by its generosity. To feel kinship with everything else that is.

*Ask a grass blade what it means to grow,
to have her feet in the damp and the dark of the Earth,
her head in the breezy sunlight.*

*Ask a beetle what he knows
of clouds and rainfall and renewal.*

*Ask the dirt to teach you Mother-Wisdom,
and lay your ear against her belly or her breast.*

