

Following Wolf Calls in the Wilderness

Chloe Donaldson

Independent Scholar

The wolf inspires great emotional reactions in people. They are the villains in our children's tales, and the villains of ranchers and hunters in the Western States. They are shouldered with heavy blame for everything from poor elk hunts to missing pets, the villains of every bad hunting year and dead calf. However, the wolf's image is immensely popular. People decorate with wolves, wear their image on clothing, and even tattoo the wolf to their bodies. Werewolves have moved from being the monsters in fairytales, and have become heroes, even love interests, in popular culture.

In this paper, I will address the fear and desire that the wolf symbolizes. In many ways, the wolf is the avatar of wildness. Is it something to be feared, as a remnant of the uncivilized world that society has fought to overcome? Or, is it the promise of freedom from the control the civilized world brings with it? Is it the monster, killing ranch herds or luring Little Red Riding Hood from the path? Or, is it like Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, an inescapable urge for wilderness that comes from an ancient, universal memory?

I will draw from folklore and literature, to popular culture, to explore what the wolf means in popular consciousness. I also will draw on my own experiences, wolf-watching in Yellowstone, growing up with hunters, and living in the wilderness of Alaska. I seek to answer the question that I had inside myself, as well: Is reaching out to wild-places a part of this wolf tradition? Is it even possible to resist this 'call of the wild' – and what does the wolf's image mean to someone who has said yes?

Chloe Donaldson is a recent MA graduate from Bangor University, working in freelance writing and publication. She currently resides in Alaska.