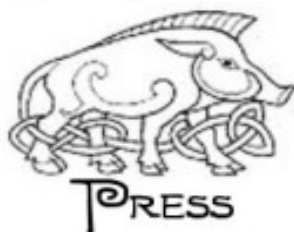


An Introduction to Vanatru

by

Nicanthiel Hrafnhild & Svartesól

GULLINBURSTI



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Statement of Purpose

This book is meant as an introduction to Vanatru - the side of Heathenry (Germanic paganism) focusing on the worship of the Vanir Gods. As an introduction, this text will be very basic and to the short side. It will give just enough for those who lean towards the Vanir to know this option is out there, but it will be necessary to progress in further study and putting it to practice.

This book operates under the assumption that the reader is already familiar with Paganism, and specifically a polytheist belief system, so while the idea of Vanatru may be new to them, the idea of worshipping multiple Gods who are powers of nature should not be new.

The material collected here is based in the observation and experience of the authors, who have been at this for some time, and have also gotten consensus with a group of Vanatruar - ergo, this material can be seen as representing a large portion of those who identify as Vanatru. However, the authors make no claim to speak for all who identify as Vanatru, and the reader may find beliefs and practices vary from one to the next. Indeed, the one thing that Asatru and Vanatru definitely have in common is having no central authority, and it is up to the individual to decide what such labeling means to them.

What is Vanatru?

The word Vanatru is a neologism meaning "true to the Vanir" which came into usage in the 1990s. The term Vanatru is used to describe the religious practice of those Heathens (Germanic Pagans) who focus primarily on Frey, Freya, and Njord (and sometimes Nerthus). The revival of Germanic Paganism has largely focused on the Æsir, and the Æsir and Vanir have traditionally been promoted as a neatly blended pantheon, with the same ritual structures and offerings given to all. The need for the term Vanatru arises in the acknowledgment that the Vanir and Æsir each have Their own set of mysteries, and the individual Gods in each tribe more so. Many of us, through connecting with the Vanir, feel They are inherently different from the Æsir, and many of us may not be able to connect with the Æsir at all.

It is often said that the Æsir are the Gods of civilization and the Vanir the Gods of nature; those who are drawn most to the Vanir seem to be called there or lean that way because they approach their religion as earth-centered, while many Asatruar will say their religion is community-centered. This is the key, and what differentiates the two.

Ultimately, all the word 'Vanatru' implies is a focus on the Vanir – it does not mean it is 'the Vanic version of Asatru' necessarily. Indeed, many who relate to the Vanir primarily also find they are asked by the Vanir (whether outright or in subtle leanings and proddings) to honor Them in a way different than the standard modern Heathen ritual formats. Some will go on to work with the Vanir in a Wiccan or Druidic context because these religions are earth-based and the ceremonial symbolism fits very nicely with the Vanir ethos and mythos. Some may still continue to worship in the standard modern Heathen ritual format, and this is fine too – Frey was given blots, after all – and if it works for them, then that is what counts. What is right for one person in their worship of the Vanir may not be right for another.

Working with each God on Their own terms with Their own rites and mysteries (as opposed to treating Them as being all the same, doing the same rites with the same offerings for all), is seen as central to our way.

Finally, a note about 'Wiccatru': there are forms of Wicca, such as Seax-Wicca and Norse Wicca, that honor the same Gods as Heathens, though obviously in a much different manner. But, in the end, Wicca is a religion, witchcraft is a practice, and practices can be common between religious expressions – just look at all the various implementations of Eastern religious thought in Western society. Witchcraft certainly seems very Vanic, particularly folk magic, but commonality does not imply correlation, any more than sun salutations at a Unity church imply that the congregation is Hindu. There are huge differences in cosmology, orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and many other long, Greek-inspired words between most mainstream Wiccan traditions and Vanatru.

However, that being said, it is certainly possible for someone following a Wiccan path to be called by the Vanir, and thus could be categorized as Vanatru, in the sense of "True to the Vanir." Likewise, Vanatru isn't limited to merely the Germanic Gods, but could realistically be used to refer to devotees of the "Vanic" Gods in other Northern European pantheons.

Frey

Ing, known as **FreyR** among the Norse and commonly anglicized as **Frey**, is one of the Wen/Vanir, and a God associated with fertility of fields and livestock, and by extension people. Moderns see Frey as being a God of “the good life”, and indeed He is that: a God associated with good sex, good food, a good home, good family and friends, good fun...

The main myth surviving of Frey is *Skirnirsmal*, where we see Frey pining away for the giantess Gerda and giving up the best sword in the worlds as a bride-price, which leaves Him with an antler as a weapon. Frey is said to be able to kill with His bare hands, and indeed the very best sword would not have been entrusted to less.

However, Frey is also a God closely associated with frith, the concept of a peace you work at. It is not the absence of conflict or dissent, but rather a “sane” co-existence. Historically, no weapons were allowed in Frey’s temples, and there are accounts of stallions kept in His honor as well as “effeminate” priests who danced in His rites.

It is the true warrior who knows to pick and choose one’s battles and it does indeed seem that Frey has enough to do with merriment that His warrior side can be hard to see.

Frey's sacred animals are the boar (Gullinbursti), the horse (Blodughofi, and the horses historically kept in His honour such as Freyfaxi), and the stag (from which He got the antler). He is connected with the colours green (for the growth of vegetation) and gold (for grain ready to harvest). Symbols associated with Frey are a sheaf of wheat, and the wagon (He was traditionally carried around the countryside in a wagon).

Some activities suggested for connecting with Frey (done with invocation and intent) include vegetable/herb gardening and yard work, helping to clean a local park, cooking, spending time with horses, and martial arts.

Freya

Freyja or **Freya** is the daughter of Njord and Nerthus and the sister and lover of Ing-Frey.

Freya is first and foremost connected with sovereignty, particularly involving exchanging sex for an item of great power. Freya wears a necklace, Brisingamen, which is made of gold and amber and embodies the power of fertility and the life force itself, for which She slept with four dwarves as payment. It is likely that Freya is the same Goddess as Gefion who created the Danish island of Zealand through ploughing, especially as Gefn is one of Freya's bynames in the Edda.

Freya is said to have taught seidhr to Odin, which was also said to be in common practice among the Vanir. She travels the Nine Worlds in a chariot pulled by grey cats when not using Her falcon cloak to get around. Freya is associated with Witches and Witchcraft, particularly of a sexual nature, as well as prophecy and oracles.

In lore, Freya agreed to stir up strife between kings, provided She collected half the slain, in exchange for the return of Her Brisingamen when stolen. It is likely that before ever joining the Aesir, Freya was noted for battle magic and vengeance. Many Goddesses who are connected with love are also Goddesses of war, and the two seem to be inextricably bound. Those who have worked with Freya have reported She has a fierce temper, and likely hates as strongly as She loves.

That being said, Freya is most noted for being beautiful, and making the world more beautiful. She is fond of flowers, and historically love songs and poetry were composed under Her patronage.

Freya's sacred animals are the boar (Hildisvin) as well as the cat and the falcon, and She is connected with the colours red, gold, green, and white. Symbols associated with Her are the necklace, amber and gold, and feathers.

Some activities suggested for connecting with Freya include flower gardening, making jewelry, dance, poetry, song, sexual activity, birding, and spending time with cats.

Nerthus

Nerthus (also known as **Hertha** and **Erce**) is mentioned by Tacitus, who includes the Angles as a tribe honoring Her, and Her holy tide is described as Her image being carried on a wain by a priest specifically devoted to Her, at which time all weapons would be laid down and the communities would feast and rejoice, their lands the more prosperous for it. At the end of the Nerthus tide, slaves would wash Her in a lake and be drowned afterwards. (N.B.: Nerthus is probably one and the same as the Erce mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon charm of Acerbot, and Hertha in German folklore.)

It seems that the occasion for celebration and peace with Nerthus' travels through the land was not just rejoicing in the fertility She brought to the soil, animals, and people, but the knowledge that She is holy and we all are Hers in the end, given back to the Earth, whether buried in a mound or scattered ashes on the ground. We live, die, and are recycled out again. The mystery of Hertha is that we must enjoy the gifts of the Earth, because they can be taken away at any time. Life itself is too sacred to be consumed by petty jealousies and fighting; we must be mindful that She is all around, and She is holy.

We honor Nerthus/Hertha as the unnamed (but mentioned) sister-bride of Njord, and mother of Frey and Freya, in full knowledge of Her terrible holiness.

Nerthus' sacred animals are the boar (carried as the battle standard by tribes who honoured Her), and cattle (cows, oxen). She is connected with the colours white, deep blue, scarlet (or similarly bloody/royal colours) and earth tones. Symbols associated with Her are the wagon, the horn of plenty, and the veil.

Activities suggested for connecting with Nerthus include growing food, herbs or flowers, spending time in nature (particularly forested areas, marshes or lakes), learning the native species and places of your local habitat, cleaning up parks and other natural places, being mindful of your impact on the environment,

and offerings left in water (always make sure that they will not harm any creatures or plants that live in or drink from that water). For those so inclined, donning a veil or mask may also help you connect to She who is Hidden.

Njord

Njord rules the sea and is a patron of fishermen and those involved in international commerce.

Njord was powerful among the Vanir, enough that He was given to the Ese/Aesir as Their hostage in the truce following the Aesir-Vanir war. Odin, being as thirsty for knowledge as He is, knew He could learn things from the Vanir, and as there is never any mention of Njord breaking out of Asgard we can assume that 1. He would not want to break the hold-oath, 2. He must have gotten along well enough with the Aesir.

Njord is mentioned as a “priest of the sacrifice” along with His son, and we can see here that the offerings we make to the Gods are part of an exchange — we gift Them, and They gift us. Njord and Frey having inborn Vanir generosity would be the best ones to process the exchange of energy between Gods and man.

It is said that Njord is Blameless Ruler of Men and that He can still the storms at sea as well as fires, ergo we see where Frey got His frith-weaving qualities from, and we honor Njord as a peacemaker, including helping us find our own calm center in the ebb and flow of the tides of life.

Njord's sacred animals are the fish and all sea creatures, and the swan (said to be at His home, Noatun). He is connected with the colours blue and white. Symbols associated with Him include the ship, the fishing hook, and seashells.

Suggested activities for connecting with Njord include visiting the ocean or other bodies of water like a lake, fishing, sailing, eating fish and other seafood, travel (especially for business), and feeding His birds (seagulls, swans).

Other Deities Speculated to be Vanir

Byggvir and Beyla. Byggvir possibly means “barley”, and Beyla means “bee”. Whether these two names translate exactly or not, They are a couple who travel with Frey, and are in charge of taking care of His household. They may actually be Vanes by lineage, but are suspected by some to be elves.

Eir is one of the healers of Lyfja Mount, under Mengloth, as well as one of Frigga’s handmaidens, as well as one of the Valkyries. It is said She is “the best” physician – not merely “a really good” physician, but “the best”.

Frodi is one of the elder Vanes, father of Njord and grandfather of Frey and Freyja (it would seem that Frey was named for Frodi). He is mentioned by Saxo as keeping a great mill where 'frið' is ground by the giantesses Fenja and Menja. It would seem that the symbolism behind the story is the aggressive nature of the etins being “ground” into work – and very hard work at that – to keep the peace of the land, including keeping the prosperity.

Gerda’s name is closely cognate with “garden”, which nicely complements Frey, a God associated with agriculture. Gerda is a Jotuness, daughter of Aurboda and Gymir, who turned down Idunna’s apples and Draupnir before conceding to marry Frey. While many Heathens do not give honor to Gerda, it seems there is precedence historically to suggest She had a cult of Her own; there is mention through the Lore of Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr, sister of Irpa, a Goddess mentioned in three different Sagas who is called upon for protection, and appears in giantess/troll form, scaring away those who would attack Her devotee. “Thor” is closely related to the word “thurse” and the name Thor seems to itself mean “giant”, in this instance “Thorgerda” would mean “Giant-Gerda”, which, of course, Gerda is a giant and not one to be trifled with! H.R. Ellis Davidson

mentions that Olaf I of Norway dragged out an image of Thorgerdr after Haakon's death and had it burned next to an image of Frey, which would definitely support the worship of Thorgerdr as Gerda's cultus in Heathen times.

Gullveig is also one of the elder Vanes, who went to the Æsir and was burned three times, resurrecting herself each time. As a result of this attack, the Vanir went to war with the Æsir until a truce was formed. It is said in the *Völuspá* that she was also named Heid, or "glory" (a possible candidate for Bede's *Hreðe* in *Hreðemonað*).

Herne is thought by many Vanatruar to be a proto-ancestor of both the Vanir and some of the Celtic Gods (note: this does not make the Celtic Gods the same as the Vanir, just related, as it would seem these Gods were extant before Germanic and Celtic tribes were clearly defined). He wears a torc, is portrayed seated and cross-legged (which many scholars have interpreted as meditative or shamanic), and associated with the stag and serpents.

Holda is also thought to be Vanic as She is mentioned to do things such as stir up snow from Her featherbed, is connected with lakes, drives about in a wain, helps peasants, rules the nature-spirits, is a psychopomp for dead children, rules over the cultivation of flax, and is associated with witchcraft.

Idunna is counted among the Aesir. But Her origins are foggy, and many are inclined to believe She is of Vanir origin, albeit one who lives among the Aesir in Asgard, and works for Them. For starters, Idunna is far more reserved and even humble than the other Goddesses, preferring to work in Her orchard in nature rather than preside over a great hall. She has a sacred duty to grow the apples that keep the Gods healthy. While Eir is the physician to the Gods, it is Idunna's apples that keep Them hale and only in occasional need of Eir's services (thus freeing Her to work for Mengloth and as a Valkyrie). However, we can see from Idunna Herself being

kidnapped by Thjazi that the apples don't "work" without Idunna Herself working Her charms upon them. Finally, Idunna is thought by many to be one and the same as Eostre/Ostara, the Germanic Goddess of spring and the dawn, which would further relate to a Vanir connection.

Nehelennia (**Ellen** or **Elen** in Old English) has been speculated by some scholars to be one and the same as Nerthus, but 1. the names are not cognate, 2. anyone who looked upon Nerthus' face was subject to death (often by drowning); all of the altar stones of Nehelennia have Her face visible. Nehelennia appears to be a Germanic Goddess and not a Celtic or Roman Deity, even though there is some overlap between cultures. Obviously there is no extant folklore of Nehelennia, and we cannot definitively say to what tribe of Gods She belongs. That being said, there is a strong argument for Nehelennia as a Vanir Goddess. She is associated with ships and food, specifically apples and bread, and Her domains of prosperity/abundance and protection in travel for commerce (as opposed to protection in battle) would be very apt for a Vanic Deity.

It is said of **Sif** that Her lineage cannot be told (*Gylfaginning III*), which is another indicator that Her ancestors are among the eldest of the Vanir and Their names lost to time. She is called a sybil, or prophetess which is a common trait among Vanir women. She is the mother of Ullr (*Skaldskaparsmal*), a Deity almost universally regarded as Vanic. Finally, it is regarded by many that Sif's hair would be symbolic of the ripened grain, and indeed the nitrogen found in blasts of lightning is very good for the soil of growing crops. The connection with grain would be very Vanic indeed, and the chopping of Her hair by Loki (*Skaldskaparsmal*) may be symbolic of payment for the harvest. Sif's hair is an oft-noted kenning for gold (*Bjarkamal*, *Skaldskaparsmal*), and the Vanir are also closely connected with gold both as the material and as money. The incidence of Loki "harming" Sif's hair may also symbolize the burning of grain, a custom known to the Anglo-Saxon Heathens of England, who

preserved several customs purported to be Vanic in origin.

Skadhi was married to Njord for a time, and a common personal gnosis says that She took up with Wuldor afterwards. However, Skadhi is a force to contend with in Her own right, She who stormed Asgard for weregild for the killing of Her father, Thrym. Skadhi commands Thrymheim, Her father's home, and as weregild was given a husband and thus a voice among the Aesir. Skadhi can be seen as another patron for those who are on a warrior path, particularly women who are studying martial arts. Skadhi is also another Deity associated with the wilderness, particularly predators, and protecting these animals is one of the things She calls people to do in the modern day.

Sunna and Mani – who are mentioned in the Eddas as being Jotnar – are well-beloved of Vanaheim, precisely because the cycles of life are so dependent on Their tides. They are here for us all, and ask for little else in return but to watch us live, to drink in their light and move in Their sight upon the Earth.

Ullr probably had a much larger cult prior to the Viking/Lore Era, when much of His information was lost (example: there are place-names for Ullr in Norway and Sweden, with names Ulleråker (Ullr's Field) and Ullevi (Ullr's Shrine) surviving to this day). Ullr's hunting nature is emphasized over the warrior nature, although the shield is mentioned. Ullr is a "civilized" hunter, which would make Him fit in better with the Vanir (primarily agricultural, with supplemental hunting) than the Jotnar (primarily hunting, more brutal/primal). There is also an account of Ullr ruling Odin for ten years while Odin is away. It would be probable that this "substitute Kingship" would be best given to a Vane, particularly after the Aesir had been at war with the Vanir and traded sides.

Wayland was a master smith - smithing would be important to the people of the Vanic era, and from the perception of the Vanir, to

construct tools which are useful as well as aesthetically pleasing. Wayland is mentioned as being a chief among elves, but whether or not He Himself is an elf is rather ambiguous, and at the very least this relates to a close kinship with Frey who is the Lord of Alfheim. The Vanir also seem more likely candidates for marriage to Valkyries or swan-women, which Wayland was wed to.

The Elves

Of course no discussion on the Vanir would be complete without mentioning the elves. What we know from the lore beyond a doubt is that the Vanir are very closely aligned with the elves, but there is much confusion as to what an elf actually is, what their relationship is to the Vanir, and to mankind.

Many Heathens are of the opinion that the Alfar are dead male ancestors. There does seem to be some evidence that the Scandinavians thought the nisse or tomten were spirits of the male ancestors guarding the farm, or the spirit of the farm's first inhabitants, and it is noted that Frey's followers were typically buried in mounds - which themselves were used for utisetá, often communicating with the ancestral dead - and He Himself was the Lord of Alfheim (see below). Just as Freya's title Vanadis correlates with Disir or female ancestors, it seems some would think the Alfar under Frey are male ancestors. But in general the accounts of elven-type spirits as the dead are not the majority (and this is without getting into the multiple accounts of elves intermarrying with humans and having half-elven children, e.g. *Thidrek's Saga*, and the *Saga of Hrolf Kraki*.)

Many also think there is not much distinction between the elves and Vanir, and that the Vanir are a "higher" form of elf. This has been posited by scholars such as Grigsby as well as Heathens. The confusion is deepened by the recurring phrase "Æsir and the elves", in the Eddas. Yet if we look at *Alvissmal*, where the dwarf Alviss is challenged by Thor to name each race of beings' words for things in the worlds and cosmos, the Vanir and elves are mentioned separately. However, their connection to the Vanir is shown by the mention of Frey being given Alfheim as a tooth-gift (*Grimnirsmal*), and the elves are generally thought to be spirits of nature which would fit in well with the Vanir as Gods of nature, particularly that tamed and cultivated by man.

It is possible that the elves and Vanir are related in the same

way the giants and Aesir are related: the difference is not so much that of lineage than of alignment and function. The Vanir would be the Powers of the forces of nature itself, and the elves would serve as *genus locii* - helpers of the larger Powers.

Whatever the case, it is important for anyone who wants to honour the Vanir to be on good terms with the land-spirits as well. This can be done by spending time outside in nature, observing the growth and activity patterns of flora and fauna, and the changes in the weather. One can make biodegradable offerings (such as food and drink) to the land-spirits, and even go as far as to adopt a 'sacred grove' such as a park or forested area where rituals are regularly held, and the land is tended to by those who adopt it by keeping it clean and safe.

Vanic Virtues

Anyone who has spent any time among the Asatru/Heathen community has most likely come across the code of ethical conduct known as the Nine Noble Virtues, or NNV. These nine concepts or statements are the backbone of Asatruar honor, and are treated with special reverence in the mainstream Asatru community. They are as follows:

NNV:

Courage – Bravery or boldness, the ability to stand and fight in the face of any threat.

Truth – Honesty and the ability to stand by what is true.

Honor – Reputation, renown. Your personal worth as well as that of your family.

Fidelity – Troth or loyalty to those around you be that family, friends, or fellowship.

Discipline – Self-control, the ability to be in command of one's own orlay, or the shape one's life takes.

Hospitality – The ability to make a guest feel welcome.

Industriousness – The ability to work hard in maintaining one's self and family.

Self-Reliance – The ability to rely on one's self without the aid of others.

Perseverance – Steadfastness, or the refusal to give up even when things are rough.

These virtues have been pandered about Greater Heathenry as The Ethical Code for Heathens, and many of them are indeed things to be valued and striven to embody. However, they are very focused on the individual, and individual responsibility and animacy, concepts that were generally foreign to most of the peoples Heathens draw from – the being of import was not the individual,

but the community. Thus, as the years went by, other formulations of virtues were assembled. The most complete, and more community-focused version of these comes from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of Theodism, the Twelve Ætheling Thews (an updated and revised version can be found in Eric Wodening's *We Are Our Deeds*) These thews, or customs, are an attempt at bringing modern Heathenry closer to the way our ancestors would have seen and functioned in the world. They include several of the NNV, but in slightly different focus:

Twelve Ætheling Thews (Wodening version):

Bisignes - Industriousness

Efnas - Equality, equal justice for all.

Ellen - Courage

Geférscipe - Community-mindedness, putting the good of the community above one's self.

Giefu - Generosity

Giestliðness - Hospitality

Metgung - Moderation or self control.

Selfdóm - The ability to be an individual, true to one's self.

Sóð - Truth, Honesty.

Stedefæstnes - Steadfastness

Tréowð - Troth or loyalty.

Wisdóm - Wisdom

The notable addition here is the inclusion of moderation, which is a long-neglected virtue in mainstream Heathenry, though the *Hávamál* spends several stanzas on the concept. The Thews also include the concept of mutual reciprocity, which was one of the paramount honorable actions among the ancient Heathens.

However, as valuable as these two lists are, they are somewhat limited in their scope. The NNV considers the individual human as the pinnacle of importance in terms of Heathen conduct, and thus are good for tempering and ennobling the self; the Thews

take this further, and speak to one's conduct towards those of the immediate community/kin-group, and action as part of a greater whole. But there is a whole world out there that is not human, and to which we all are intimately connected, and we have no code for dealing with it, no handy list of concepts that we can refer to when dealing with non-human entities.

Few Heathens would dispute the importance of dealing fairly and justly with the wights and other creatures of the world, but most approach it from the human angle. We who follow the Vanir, however, are in many ways closer to the reality of the non-human worlds – thus, I have formulated a list of virtues that speak to a Vanic understanding of our place in the worlds:

Vanic Virtues:¹

Cyrtenes (Beauty) – the pursuit of beauty and elegance in thought, form and speech.

Ellen (Courage, Passion) – zeal, vigor; the strength and courage that comes from a life worth living.

Londrihtnes (Land-rightness) – the recognition of nature and the environment as worthy of respect, care and reverence.

Efenmód (Even-mood) – harmonious and balanced thought and action; tranquility, calm, serenity.

Næmelnes (Openness) – the quality of being receptive to the world around one, non-judgmental and open.

Wóðnes (Wildness, Ecstasy) – music and dance; the nurturing of inner wildness and childlike being, being “fey”

Lufu (Love) – the all-encompassing force; love for family, for kin, for humanity, for all beings.

Fréod (Frith) – the peace and goodwill between people bound

1 *Nicanthiel*: Being an Anglo-Saxon heathen, I have followed Wodening's example and used Old English terms. Rough Mod. English translations are included.

together; loyalty and the keeping of one's word.

Léafulness (Faith, Piety) – the trust that the Gods exist and are worthy of our worship, and Their ways worth following.

Giefu (Giving) – the binding of two parties into one common bond, generosity and hospitality.

Wénnmód (Joy) – wonder and innocence, the recognition that life is worth living, and worth living well.

Gebróðorscipe (Brotherhood) – the recognition that we – humans, animals, plants, spirits – are all part of the grander scheme of life, and we share a common heritage, as children of the Earth.

Obviously, some of these can be found on the other lists. There are five, however, that I feel need further examination – beauty, land-rightness, piety, wildness and joy. All of these speak inherently to the Vanir, as they embody these principles in the Worlds – they are breathtakingly beautiful; they are contagiously joyful and fiercely wild and enchantingly fey; they are receptive to the needs and desires of others while holding true to who they are; they are in symbiosis with the world around them, and careful to not upset the delicate balances of life and death and re-life; and they consider us worthy of interest and communion.

All lists such as these but touch the surface of what good and right living entails, but hopefully, you have a better idea of what a Vanic life might look like.

Vanic Ritual

If you've decided you'd like to honour one or more of the Vanir in a formal ritual, most Pagan and Heathen ritual structures seem to follow this format:

- **Hallowing** – dedicating the ritual space as holy for the duration of the rite. Wiccans do this by casting a circle; Asatruar usually wield a hammer and ask it protect the space. Many Vanatruar have found going around the parameter of the site with an antler (sacred to Frey) works.
- **Acknowledgment** – Asking the spirits of the land to use their space. This is particularly important when worshipping the Gods of nature.
- **Invocation** – calling upon the Gods you wish to be present in the rite. These words should be spoken from the heart, and naming the Deity's attributes and spheres of influence seems to add might to the invocation, acknowledging Their power. (Note: one does not summon the Gods.)
- **Blessing** – This is tributing the Gods in some way, whether with words or song, thanking Them for Their gifts.
- **Offering** – Making a drink libation or giving gifts of food, personal items, handcrafts, etc, returning it in some way to the earth and thus to the Gods of earth. In the case of consumable gifts it is appropriate to share by eating and drinking a portion of it yourself before offering.
- **Closing** – Signalling the end of the rite, thanking the Gods for Their presence, and returning the holy space to normalcy.

Why Vanatru?

two personal stories

Svartesól: In 2003 I began to have intense encounters with Frey, and as time went on and I got to know Frey, I understood that we actually did have a lot in common, mainly a need to connect with nature as sacred, and protect it. Following my oaths to Frey, I did the rounds of getting to know the rest of His family - the Vanir. I had tried in vain to connect with the Aesir - Thor and Tyr and Frigga and Heimdall - just to feel like They weren't paying attention to me, for whatever reason, and could care less about my attempts to honour Them. The Vanir, on the other hand, were ever-present, and I felt more at home with Them - like They were, in fact, my Elder Kin - than the Aesir.

The Vanir appealed to that part of me that wanted to commune with nature. I saw this in Freya, both being a Goddess unafraid to wield Her sexuality, and using that sexuality to create beauty in the Worlds. I saw this in Njord, at the ocean, finding peace in the ebbing and flowing tides, and encouraging others to make peace for someday you too will be washed away by the tides of time. And finally I saw this with Frey, both as Green Man of growing things and Golden One of the harvest. Over time I met the other Vanes, including Nerthus and then those Deities I strongly suspect to be Vanir, such as Ullr. Indeed, They all had connections to nature, tamed and untamed, and it spoke to those parts of my soul that embraced nature as a solace in my youth. The wights were important to Them, as well as the elements, the flora and fauna, both of Vanaheim as well as all the other worlds, including and especially Midgard.

As time went on and my involvement with 'the Heathen community' increased, I discovered the word 'Vanatru' and felt that to be an accurate descriptor for my religion. I also found there to be strong opposition to using the word; it was and is the norm in American Heathenism to treat all Germanic Gods more or less the

same, that the Aesir and Vanir are one collective pantheon and like all the same offerings and Their rituals to all be done the same way. My experience was rather different - that the Vanir were and are a separate pantheon of Gods, with Their own workings in the worlds and Their own mysteries, and ways each individual God prefers to be honoured.

Eventually, my experience with the Vanir led me back to Wicca, where I had first started out, and which I see as being highly compatible with Vanic ways. (I have known of Witches who worship the Aesir, especially Odin who has connections with magic, but it fits Vanir worship better.) The names Frey and Freya literally mean 'Lord' and 'Lady'. The Great Rite, whether performed literally or symbolically between the priest and priestess, is a beautiful expression of the celebration of sex and the fertility that Frey and Freya give to the worlds. Many of the Wiccan Sabbats are based in English folk customs that ultimately seem to have their origins in Vanic customs (e.g. the Maypole). Nothing seems more Vanic than honouring the elements and the directions of the Land. The pentacle can be seen as representing the Vanic lore of Star Mother (the star) mating with Herne (the circle) and making the world/s².

It is by returning to Wicca that I have been able to concentrate on the family of the Vanir – my family. I feel at home with Them, and have found healing for my soul.

Nicanthiel: I've always been more of the inside type of person, sticking my nose into books and letting the words carry me off to distant (and most certainly Not Here) worlds and places. But then, I found Paganism, and felt the call of the outdoors tugging on my soul.

Later, in college, I met others who were exploring paganism, and with increased topical reading and Internet usage, I found myself being drawn in further and further down that long, grassy path. I found that many other people loved nature as much as I did,

2 <http://vanirhearth.weebly.com/herne-and-star.html>

and that there were other things to believe in than what I had been exposed to in childhood. And, slowly, I began to talk to these people and things. Having discovered a deep and abiding love for all things Irish and Celtic, I naturally drifted toward Druidry.

One day, I stumbled upon *Ár nDraíocht Féin*, an American Druid organisation, and knew I was on the right track. My continued exploration, now accompanied by scholarly and advanced reading, led me deeper into Celtica, finally depositing me on the doorstep of Celtic Reconstructionism. Having always been one who tried to seek the truth in everything (to the point of being, yes, a geek), and having formed relationships with Irish deities deeper than most other Neopagans I knew, he knew that this was the place for him, at least for the moment. Not long after, while journeying, I was approached by a particular God, Who proceeded to woo me over the next few months before finally asking me to marry Him. And in the space of two seconds, my life changed forever.

A couple of years later, I encountered my co-author Svartésól (then Sigrún Freyskona), and was slowly but surely pulled into the Norse paradigm, while the Celtic deities with whom I had formerly been close receded into the background (with the exception of my Betrothed). Then, in late 2008, the Vanir claimed me as Theirs. Over the course of the next year, I began to draw it all together – a mixed bag of Heathenry, Druidry, CR and Feri – and forged my own path in the morass of modern paganism.

Thus, I find myself, a life-long introvert and intellectual, honoring and serving the Gods of nature, of ecstasy, of wildness and feyness. And I love every minute of it.

Recommended Resources

As this book is only meant as a brief introduction to Vanatru, further reading is required for those who would like to know more. Here is a list of books and websites that should be helpful with learning more about the Vanir and some beliefs and practices of Germanic Paganism overall.

Booklist

- Albertsson, Alaric. *Travels Through Middle-Earth*. Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2009
- Blain, Jenny. *Nine Worlds of Seid-Magic: Ecstasy and Neoshamanism in North European Paganism*. London, UK: Taylor & Francis, 2007
- Davidson, H. R. E. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1965
- . *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1968
- . *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe: Early Scandinavian and Celtic Religions*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988
- Fries, Jan. *Seidways: Shaking, Swaying and Serpent Mysteries*. Oxford, UK: Mandrake, 2009
- Frostdottir, Isa. *The Huntress Within: Finding Skadhi*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- Hrafnhild, Nicanthiel. *Boar, Birch and Bog: Prayers to Nerthus*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- Paxson, Diana L. *Essential Asatru: Walking the Path of Norse Paganism*. New York, NY: Citadel Press, 2006
- . *Trance-portionation: Learning to Navigate the Inner Worlds*. Newburyport, MA: Weiser Books, 2008

- Svartesól. *American Wights*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- . *Peace and Good Seasons: A Devotional for Ing-Frey*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- . *Vanirbok: Tales of the Vanagods*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- . *Visions of Vanaheim*. Mission Viejo, CA: Gullinbursti Press, 2009
- Wodening, Swain. *Hammer of the Gods: Anglo-Saxon Paganism in Modern Times*. Port Saint Lucie, FL: Global Book Publisher, 2003
- . *Germanic Magic: A Basic Primer on Galdor, Runes and Spá*. Charleston, SC: BookSurge, 2006

Websites (current as the time of this printing)

<http://www.vanatru.us>
<http://www.svartesol.com>
<http://vanirhearth.weebly.com>
<http://druidswell.weebly.com>
<http://gullinburstipress.com>



Nicanthiel Hrafnhild is an Anglo-Saxon tribalist who syncretizes traditional Heathenry with elements of pan-Celtic Reconstructionism and Feri Tradition witchcraft. He is primarily a Vanic mystic and thinker, runester, storyteller and poet. He has been involved in ADF, the Ekklesia Antinoou, and the Geferræden Fyrnsidu, but is now pursuing his own path, focusing on the deep, dark mystical and magical currents that underlie the Vanir cultus. His website, *Hearth of the Vanir*, and blog, *Boar, Birch and Bog 2.0*, can be found at

<http://vanirhearth.weebly.com>.

Svartesól is a Wiccan oathed to Frey and devoted to Freya. She has been Pagan for fifteen years, and has authored several books including the seminal Vanatru text *Visions of Vanaheim*; her work has also appeared in places like *HEX Magazine*. When not writing about religion, she can be found doing art, gardening, cooking, and playing with her



cat. She is a proud member of Vanaheim Fellowship, a devotional community dedicated to exploring the Vanir cultus, and more of her writings can be found at her website (<http://www.svartesol.com>).

