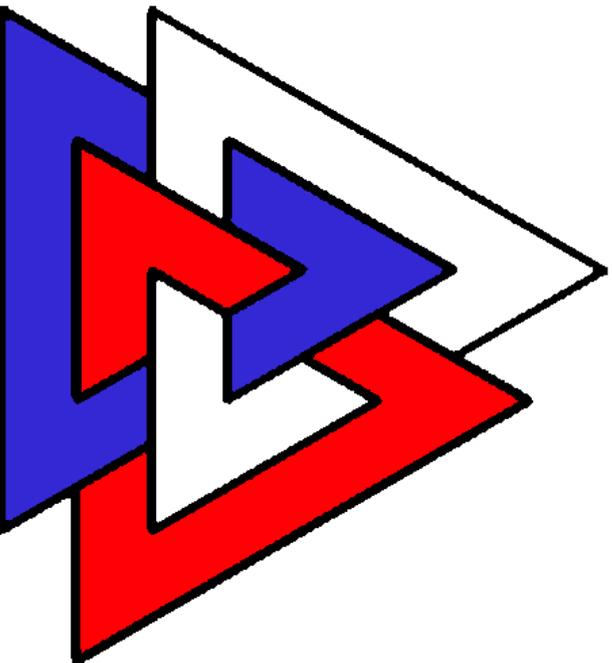


Traditionalistic Asatru



Esoteric Heathenry

Roy

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Introduction

In recent years it seems as if 'Traditionalism' is on the rise, the same goes for 'paganism' (or whatever term you prefer) and here and there there even seems to be a combination between these two. In general, I have the idea that most pagans are not interested in or aware of esotericism and that 'esoteric pagans' are more occultists with a pagan jacket:

I will tell you a short story, or two actually. One story is about a religion based on an ancient one. The other story is that of true esotericism. The nice thing is that these two have common ground and because this might not be very well known, I decided to write this essay.

What you will read in the following pages, is not supposed to be a blueprint for esoteric heathery, neither do I intend to start a new movement or current or reform existing ones. In fact, as you will see, I am not even competent or able to fully expose this 'system'. What follows will at best be inspiration to those with the means to continue or to put people on a certain path.

Traditionalism

Let me start with a subject that you might not be very familiar with, that of 'true esotericism' or what is sometimes called the Traditionalistic School. In a way people use that last description to refer to the Guénonian 'line of thought' (René Guénon 1886-1951). There were writers who knew each other, shared ideas, wrote books about different subjects, but with a similar starting point. They never really came together to form a "school" of any kind, neither do I have the idea that many of them founded a group or school to instruct students, however some taught at universities. Traditionalists come in many shades, Guénon was very radical in his ideas, the famous scholar in comparative religion Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) is sometimes referred to as a "soft Traditionalist"¹ and the notorious and very political Julius Evola (1898-1974) was in my opinion not a 'real' Traditionalist, but he definitely fished in the same waters and his radical ideas sometimes show very well what we are talking about.

The idea behind the Traditionalistic way of thinking is as simple as the results of this way of thinking are complex and far-reaching. Since Ginnungagap, God, or whatever term you prefer, is One and everything emanates from It, everything has the same source. Nobody will blink twice when pondering about this in materialistic terms of a big bang and the so-called evolution. Other people will put up a smile and conclude that all religions are essentially one, while yet others will find it all ridiculous. In my opinion, it is very true.

With the rise in popularity of the idea, differences occur. First, a multitude of terms starts to arise. Terms like the Hindu "Sanātana Dharmā" (often

¹ See Mark Sedgwick *Against The Modern World* p. 109, 111, 122

translated as something like "eternal law"), "Philosophia Perennis" ("eternal philosophy"), "Prisca Philosophica" ("first philosophy"), "Primordial Tradition" or simply "Tradition" and several others are used as synonyms by some, while others write lengthy texts to explain why these terms differ and why they prefer one of them. What is more, people who call themselves "Traditionalists" have quite different ideas about what that "Primordial Tradition" (or whatever term they chose) actually is. I have read people claiming that this "Primordial Tradition" can be "produced" by cross-studying different aspects of it (i.e. different religions and traditions), while another sees the Tradition as 'less Divine' as Guénon, while yet others will quote all kinds of *philosophers* (rational thinkers) on the subject. Of all I read, I can only agree with Guénon and it are mostly 'his ideas' which are the form of "Traditionalism" that you will find within these pages. Guénon was a true esotericist and his focus was always on the metaphysical even when writing about 'earthly subjects'. Even within nowadays Traditionalistic currents, I have the idea that this esoteric side is often forgotten (even more so in modern heathery) and the main focus lays on the anti-modernistic (anti-Western?) side of the current with its stress on "the decline of the West".

René Guénon

There are plenty books and places on the internet to find information about the life and work of René Guénon, but in summary, this Frenchman was born on 15 November 1886 in a Catholic family. At the age of 18 he studied mathematics and philosophy in Paris. Soon he got acquainted with occultists and esotericists alike. He was supposedly initiated (a subject that I will come back to) into six esoteric groups, among which Hindu (Vedanta), Arabic and (pseudo-)Masonic groups. His early writings are about the far East and against those other esoteric investigators of the East: the "Theosophists" of Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) and the like. Guénon called this current "Theosophism" to distinguish it from the genuine Theosophy of 16th and 17th century. Later subjects such as initiation, symbolism and Freemasonry were written about. Guénon was very radical in his ideas and his pointing-finger writing-style does not make his books easy-reading. Either or not caused by this, later in his life he retrieved to Cairo where he died as Abd al-Wahid Yahyâ, the name that he was given at his Arabic initiation in 1911.

Most of his books Guénon wrote in French, but in recent years a large number of them have been made available in English translations and the books are not very hard to find nowadays.

Since in the works of Guénon I can find most of what I need for my current study, I will not rattle up a large number of Traditionalists to make my point. Guénon is enough a starter for our study.

Guénon and some of his ideas

Modern civilization appears in history as a veritable anomaly: of all known civilizations, it is the only one to have developed in a purely material direction, and the only one not based on any principle of a higher order.

This opens *Symbols Of Sacred Science* (1977 *Symboles de la Science Sacré*). When we look at various traditions, we notice that they all have a decline where us Western people see evolution. In four eras, the world goes from glorious bliss to the pitch black times in which we now live. The gold, silver, bronze and iron ages of the Romans, the Satya, Treita, Dvapara and Kali yugas of the Hindus and the spear-time, sword-time, wind-time and wolf-time of the ancient Northern Europeans. With each new period our world drifts away further from the Source and the inevitable Ragnarok will make an end to our world so that it can be renewed and the cycle can begin again.

This idea is probably the most popular Traditionalistic idea today. Anti-modernistic and anti-Western sentiments thrive among certain groups and Guénon, but also Evola, have spent many pages to describe the atrocities of our age. However, as you can see, there is an "Asatru" parallel here (of course), this idea is of minor interest for our current study.

[...] the great primordial tradition from which all the others are derived by adaptation to time and place and which, like Truth itself, is one.²

With Guénon I think that all has one Source. This Source has many names, but many terms that you might think refer to this Source actually speak about an entirely different level. Ginnungagap is a good way to show what we are talking about.

Young were the years when Ymir made his settlement
there was no sand, nor sea, nor cool waves
earth was nowhere nor the sky above
chaos yawned, grass was there nowhere

This of course comes from the *Völuspá* (verse 3, Larrington's translation) and the "yawning chaos" or "yawning gap" in other translations is Ginnungagap, the Nothing that contains All. As you probably know, within Ginnungagap fire and ice arose and from the reaction between these two, eventually the world was formed. Speaking with Pythagoras, Ginnungagap is 0 from which the 1 emanates, duality emerges (fire and ice, but Ymir is also a candidate here), the three Principles (Odin, Vili and Vé) come forth and the four (elements if you like) that form the world.

² *Perspectives On Initiation (Aperçus sur l'Initiation 1992)* p. 243

Now you can say that everything comes from Ginnungagap, but not everything comes *directly* from Ginnungagap, since it might have come from something else, that came from something else, etc. (like the four come from the three). Still, the only way to connect to the Source is through a direct link. This is when Guénon's most radical and most far-reaching idea comes around the corner.

We have previously stated that initiation is essentially the transmission of a spiritual influence, a transmission that can only take place through a regular, traditional organization, so that one cannot speak of any initiation outside an affiliation with an organization of this kind.³

Since unimaginable times, a 'sacred fluidity' ("spiritual influence" in the translation above) is passed on by what Guénon calls an affiliation and it is easy to understand, that somebody who does not 'possess' the fluidity, cannot pass it on. This transmission is done through initiation, a subject that Guénon has written about at great length, especially in a book of which a few quotes here are from. Still there are many people speaking about self-initiation or establishing modern mystery schools. The idea is clear, the result of it, as I said, is far reaching, since it undermines the larger part of what we nowadays call "esoteric" or "initiate".⁴

So, you might ask, what groups do have this unbroken chain, what groups can provide genuine initiation in our own time and day?

There are scarcely any initiatic organizations in the West that can still claim an authentic traditional affiliation (outside of which condition, let us recall once more, there can only be a question of pseudo-initiation) other than the Compagnonnage and Masonry [...].⁵

It is even worse than what that already sounded like:

Let us open yet another parenthesis regarding this last remark. If it happens that some 'philosophical' or more or less 'rationalistic' ideas infiltrate an initiatic organization, this must be seen only as the effect of individual or collective error on the part of its members due to their incapacity to understand the true nature of the organization and thus to secure themselves from all profane 'contamination'. [...] One of the strangest phenomena of this kind is the penetration of 'democratic' ideas into Western esoteric organizations (here we are naturally thinking of Masonry above all, or at least of certain of its factions).⁵

³ *Ibid.* p. 48

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 96

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 80

There you have it, not something to become happy about, but since I find Guénon's initial idea the most logical, I will have to accept the consequences of this way of thinking.

One of the major objections of Guénon against Freemasonry is that many brethren join (often too easily), receive their initiation (which is a start, not an end!), which he calls the "virtual initiation", but fail to "realise" it. The "virtual initiation" is very much genuine. The initiate receives the "sacred fluid", he dies and relives, but there the path only starts. Many Masons of today stick to seeing Masonry as some social organisation, a group it can be helpful to be a member of for their careers within (there are many grades in some rites) or outside of the fraternity, but fail to become the real initiates who can initiate new students. This means that within a short amount of time, there might not be any genuine esotericism left in the West.

Asatru

I do not suppose I have to tell readers of this journal what Asatru is, but perhaps it is wise to still let you know what I mean with it. I prefer the term "Asatru" over the more general terms "paganism" or "heathenry", since "Asatru" is more specific for Northern-European paganism. The term "Asatru" itself is flawed in the sense that it seems to imply that there is only one 'set of Gods', while there are also Vanir and besides Gods there are other deities that form part of the religion. Some say that "heipn" is a term that was used by our heathen forefathers to distinguish themselves from the Christians. I like the term, it is not too well-known and I think "Asatru" fits the need for now. I do want to stress that it seems that for example in the USA the term "Asatru" is used by certain heathen groups to distinguish themselves from other heathens, such as Pheods, Odinists, etc. When I use the term, it is in such a general way that such groups all fall under the umbrella.

A little bit of history

Mankind can be divided into 'families', Indo-European, Uralic, Dravidic, etc. These terms were invented by linguistics to describe families of languages, but nowadays they are used by scholars or a variety of directions. The Indo-European language family is divided further in smaller families: Slavic, Roman, Indo-Iranian and Germanic languages. The Indo-European family is of big interest to us. Many people have broken their heads over the question where the Indo-Europeans originated, what the "proto-Indo-European" language was like, how it spread over such a gigantic area as the very far East to Ireland and how peoples are related. Personally I do not have a very large interest in these details. What concerns me most is that scholars in the field of comparative mythology also look at the Indo-European family and found striking similarities between the mythologies, religions and the structure of these of Indo-European peoples. This is not only extremely interesting, but also very helpful when you want to use an old religion such as "Asatru" as a

living faith. Gaps and holes might be plastered with information of kindred mythologies.

The nicest thing is that within the Indo-European family, not only the oldest, but also the most complete written sources are to be found. The Hindu Vedas make a great example. The Vedas were written 1500 to 1000 BCE. In many ways the Vedic texts show familiar themes and structures, but they are more complete than our Icelandic and Teutonic sources and therefore helpful to make cross-references or even suggest solutions for gaps. This of course sounds much easier than it is. Not every Hindu text conforms with the Vedas nor with the texts that were left for Northern Europe. The idea is clear though, 'family traditions' are informative and helpful excursions. Further relatives are too, but less strongly.

Indo-European structures

A famous scholar on Indo-European religions and traditions was the Frenchman Georges Dumézil (1898-1986). By studying all Indo-European religions and traditions, comparing them, putting the magnifying glass on elements, etc. he came to the conclusion that all these religions have a common structure. Initially Dumézil spoke about a dual structure, later he came to the conclusion that this concerns a tripartite structure with a dual structure incorporated. The idea is as follows.

Within the myths and therefore also in society, Indo-European cultures have a structure of three "functions". In myth this concerns a sovereign class, a warrior class and a fertility class. The first is a double function, with an opposing sovereignty being law and order (Tyr/Tiwaz, or Mitra with the Hindus) and mendacious and dark magic and contracts ("binding gods") (Odinn/Wodan, or the Hindu Varuna). The second function is for the thundergod porrr/Donar or Indra. The last function is manned by twins (the Nasatya of the Hindus) or in the Northern case, a brother and sister (Freyr and Freya). When we look at society, we see either a "priest-king" or a king and priestly class, soldiers and farmers (common man in large). Especially for the first function we have to go quite a bit back to find it in Northern European society.

I find this a good structure to work with. Of course there are books that 'unmask' the theory as wishfull thinking, saying that it forces a structure where there is none, especially now that Dumézil is quickly loosing popularity among scholars in his field, but even though there are indeed arguments against the rigid division of Dumézil, I think that a structure in my way of thinking helps to put things in a place. In particular the Northern European myths make it difficult to resolutely force this structure on. Is Odhinn not both a God of magic (first function) and war (second function)? Is Tyr not mostly a God of war (second function) in the texts that we have and is porr not a God of war (second function) and fertility (third function)? Sure, Dumézil has even said

that in the Norse myths, the structure has dropped half a function and therefore they overlap. It does not really matter who is right and who is wrong, but the structure of Dumézil makes a good start to investigate things, to look at characters in myths and compare different mythologies and it prevents us from starting to compare Týr with the Nasatya twins, since they are 'too far apart'.

The Northern myths have a magnificent symbol and images in the myths on which this structure works perfectly. The Valknut ("knot of the slain/fallen") consists of three triangles. Being a knot, the Valknut refers to the "binding God" Óðinn and indeed, we see the symbol always in combination with this God. It is called "knot of the slain", because Óðinn takes the best fighters for his army in Valhalla ("hall of the slain"). There is more about this symbol that you do not really read in the texts that we have (old or new). Three triangles make of course nine angles and could therefore very well refer to the nine worlds: three times three worlds. These nine worlds are subject of ongoing discussions, because the texts nowhere clearly tell us which worlds these are. I have done some investigations and come to the following hypothesis which for me is very plausible:

In the texts we have "gardr" ("gardens") and "heimr" (worlds), words which are often used as synonyms. Personally I prefer to refer to three gardens, being "Asgardr" (first function), "Midgardr" (second function) and "Útgardr" (third function). This is the rough division into three worlds, the three triangles. Each of these gardens consists of three worlds:

Asgardr - Asaheimr, Vanahheimr and Gladsheimr
Midgardr - Mannahheimr, Alfheimr and Svartalfheimr
Útgardr - Muspellheimr, Niflheimr and Helheimr

I did not invent any of these terms, but I did have to collect them from several texts. "Asaheimr" is of course the home of the Æsir, the term comes from the *Ynglingasaga* in Snorr Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. The same goes for the term "Vanahheimr", "Gladsheimr" is a term that I found in the *Grimmsmal* where it says: "Gladsheim a fifth is called, there gold-bright Valhall rises peacefully, seen from afar". Valhall is a part of Gladsheimr, the place where dead warriors and initiated/divinised men go. A good solution for me.

Then we come to Midgard. I have not been able to locate the term "overgheimr" (world of the dwarves) and "álfheimr" isn't an often-used term either, but it is named in the *Gylfaginning* (17). Sometimes Alfheimr is divided in light and dark elves worlds, like in Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* (p.366):

The above-named döckalfar (genii obscuri) require a counterpart, which is not found in the Eddic songs, but it is in Snorr's prose. He says, p. 21: 'In Alfheim dwells the nation of the ljosálfar (light elves), down in the earth dwell the döckálfar (dark elves), the two unlike one another in their look and their powers, ljosaálfar brighter than the sun, döckálfar blacker than pitch.'"

This comes from *Gylfaginning* 17, earlier the same chapter says: "It is said that to the south and above this heaven is another heaven, which is called Andlang. But there is a third, which is above these, and is called Vidblain, and in this heaven we believe this mansion (Gimle) to be situated; but we deem that the light-elves alone dwell in it now."

Some people say that the light-elves are elves and the dark-elves or svartalfar are called dwarves. Svartalfheimr is a 'heimr' that is mentioned frequently, but I haven't been able to trace the source of it. It is supposed to be located in the earth.

Mann(a)heimr obviously means 'world of men' and can be found in the *Ynglingasaga* 9: "To Saeming Earl Hakon the Great reckoned back his pedigree: This Swithod they called Mannheim, but the Great Swithod they called Godheimr; and of Godheim great wonders and novelties were related."

In "Útgardr" we find the two worlds of two kinds of giants (fire- and frostgiants), Muspellheimr and Niflheimr; together Jotunheimr. Muspel- and Niflheimr are also mentioned in the story of creation to be found in the first chapters of the *Gylfaginning*.

Helheimr is the place where dead people go to and where Hel, a daughter of Loki rules, an 'underworld' pre-eminently.

The above is an example of how Dumézil's theories can bring structure to the information that we have.

Deutsche Mythologie

I strayed off the path a bit, but however Guénon and Dumézil do not seem to share many ideas, both are very important in the way I look at things. Let us get back to the 'Deutsche Mythologie' in more general terms, so I can make the bridge to my next point.

There are quite many sources nowadays to learn about the history and myths of Northern Europe. Famous works such as of the earlier mentioned Grimm (*Deutsche Mythologie* 1835), but also the famous and hard-to-get *Allgermanische Religionsgeschichte* (1956 and reworked and republished in 1970) of Jan de Vries (1870-1964) were published in a fruitful century with a whole range of other interesting studies. Many of these scholars aligned with the wrong side during WWII and therefore not only they and their works have become suspicious, but also the subject of their studies itself has a 'brown edge' in the eyes of many to this very day. I think that this is also one of the main reasons why De Vries' book has not been reprinted for decades, while it is still the most important work on the subject. Other works (that I will come to later) suffer the same fate. For the purpose of this book we do not need to

rewrite any of such works and I take it that you have a bit of background as you might have noticed. I will roughly scetch what we are talking about.

Most of the larger books about 'Deutsche Mythologie' start with saying what is mythology, what we know about it and what are our sources. These sources can be texts, but also archeological findings or anthropological or linguistic investigations. After that you will be quickly guided through the stone, bronze and iron ages to give the grounds of the investigations. However since in the age of the mass migrations the peoples were geographically shaken up, this might bring only shaky foundations. Still a lot can be gathered from ancient rock carvings and decorated spearheads. I will not tell anything new when I say that the Northern European peoples are for a large part a mix of autochthone tribes and Indo-European settlers who came from the East. That they went from being so-called "hunter-gatherers" to farmers will be something that you learned at school as well. Being farmers and living close to nature, the people followed nature's rhythms of day and night and the seasons. All kinds of beings said to exist, something which many scholars still like to see as human-formed ("anthropomorphised") versions of forces of nature, something that I do not agree with. In any case, elves, dwarves and giants formed an important part of the Northern European mind. A bit 'higher up the ladder' were Gods, skygods, earthly Gods, Gods of fire, Gods of water, Gods that had to be pleased for a good harvest or a healthy newborn. These Gods are quite a bit alike in different parts of Northern Europe, but it is too easy to just say "Wodan is the same as Odhinn" since each tribe had their own Gods and Goddesses and their own accents. Wodan comes with many names and each every time he is a little bit different. Fortunately the structure remains roughly the same. There is no need to go into all these Gods, structures and local myths in great depths. There are plenty of works about that.

What concerns us here is that not all myths have to be explained in ways that we often see. The story of Balder's death is not just that of a God of the crops who dies as seed and is reborn as corn. There is a deeper meaning to all of the myths. Balder could be the initiator, but also the initiate, an 'Odinic' initiate even, just think of the spear-death. Also elements of Germanic society are explained too easily in my opinion by scholars of the past and present (but mostly the latter). Some scholars have rightly found stories of initiation in for example the mentioned story of Balder, but they see it as *rites de passage*, rites in which a boy becomes a man or a girl a woman. Undoubtedly these rites existed in the societies that we talk about, but what but few people dare to admit, is that there was also a deeper level of initiation, that level that I spoke about when dealing with René Guénon.

Northern European Mysteries

The Dutch author Frans Eduard Farwerck (1889-1969) has spend his life investigating the mystery-religion of Northern Europe. Starting with writing

books about better-known mysteries from the Mediterranean area, the deeper meaning of ancient and folkart and building symbolism and Freemasonry (Farwerck reached the very peak of the Dutch Masonic piramid of his time, only to be expelled later for joining the Dutch national-socialist party, from which he was expelled too for his past as a Mason), he worked towards his final work and 'grand opus' *Noord-Europese Mysteryën En Hun Sporen Tot Hedert* (*Northern European Mysteries and their Traces to the Present*) (1970).

In his book Farwerck starts with describing "religious and mythical conceptions of the Germans concerning rites of initiation". Death and the underworld, burial practices, life after death, imaginations of the dead. This is all information you can also find elsewhere, but it of course sets the tone, since the next part is about candidates for the Germanic God of initiation.

Wodan/Odin is the most likely candidate, but Donar/Thor with his sanctifying hammer is too or what about Tiwaz/Tyr, the ancient skygod, or Balder? Farwerck would not have been Farwerck if he did not brighten up his scribblings with a multitude of photos that he collected during his lifelong journeys, photos from churches, Tiwaz and his bitten-off-arm in a monastery, bound wolves, men with strange postures. I, of course, cannot just reproduce these images so you have to take my word for it that however the images are not in the famous Viking books, they surely make their point.

Inspite of Tiwaz' offer and Donar's hammer, Farwerck finds Wodan (for most mysteries) the most probable God of initiation. His spear, eight-legged stallion, self-offering and winning of the runes, offering of an eye, etc., etc. he is clearly the God of the dead and a warrior-God. Also from information about offering habits, we can tell that the concerning God was Wodan, the dark magician. People were offered to Wodan, mostly by hanging. People even offered themselves to Wodan to avoid dying a 'straw-death' and not being allowed to enter Walhalla. Farwerck found information about old people hanging themselves until very recent times, some even marked themselves like Odln was marked with a spear when he hung down the windy tree, a mark that we will hear more of. It may have been the manel haz-rune. Probably the clearest indication that we are on the right track is that Wodan's warriors in Walhalla, the Einherjar, were a group of initiated warriors who also travelled with Wodan and his eight-legged stallion through the air in the Wild Hunt during the Yule-period (similar stories can be found from France to Norway and from Slavic countries to Ireland). Einherjar in the sagas were also living elite warriors with magical powers. Farwerck found many images that refer to the Einherjar, or at least bear-men (and also wolf-men) around the whole area of Northern Europe.

As we have the Einherjar in Walhalla, there were also secret men's societies on earth. There were many of these bonds who were concerned with battle, but also with rituals and offering celebrations. Both dead and fertility celebrations were dedicated to Wodan. Also at certain times of the year, the

'normal people' could interact with the ancestors and in that period also fall the Yule celebrations.

Männerbünde

And so we come to the subject of the 'men-bonds', often given the German term "Männerbünde", even in English books. The subject has been popular for a while, but with the gaining of the bad name of the field of investigation and especially the easy link with certain ideas during WWII, there have been hardly any investigations into this subject for quite some time. Recently it seems that the timidity is crumbling and new literature comes available. This is a relief since the old literature is even harder to get than De Vries' work. The idea concerns that besides the common *rites de passage* in "primitive societies" there were also other initiations. The *rites de passage* are ritual transitions from one phase to another, such as birth/namingiving, marriage, death, but of course more appealing, from child to woman or man. Mircea Eliade had written about these *rites de passage* extensively. Many authors mix up these *rites de passage* with initiations, but Eliade understood the difference. We do not need to dwell on the *rites de passage* too long, as long as you understand that a ritual that turns a boy into a man, is not necessarily the same as him taking into a Männerbund. Not necessarily because there are many examples where this is the case.

A scenario that can be found Africa, the far East, in fact in most parts of the world is that a group of boys as soon as they have reached a certain 'ripeness', is kidnapped by a 'monster' or a group of 'monsters' and taken into the woods. Their mothers are told that they are killed. After a (often long) period with all kinds of tests, trials, etc., the boys return to their families as completely new people (*rite de passages*) or they remain in the 'outlaw' group of the Männerbund (initiation). The latter case often includes a death-and-resurrection ritual and/or the killing of an enemy or beast for the candidate to prove himself worthy. There are many different aspects that are interesting to the subject, such as hairgrowth, clothing, skin-colour, etc., but for the moment this should be enough to get the idea.

You may wonder about the girls/women. Girls have a much more natural moment as a marker, the first menstruation. Since this cannot be planned, girls tend to have more individualistic *rites de passage*. As women they might have joined cooking of weaving 'clubs', but there is not much information about women's secret societies, so I will stick to the men's.

Germanic Männerbünde

Many books have been written about mystery-religions of the Mediterranean area, Egypt, the near and far East, but to this very day, most scholars assume that there have been no initiations or no mystery-religion in Northern Europe. In spite of the relatively much information about Männerbünde and the

reconstructed initiation rituals, this seems to remain the leading idea. Let me first tell you a bit about these Germanic Männerbünde and later find out what we know about the initiation of candidates into them.

There must have been people who investigated the subject when in 1934 Otto Höfler (1901-1987) published his (uncompleted) *Kultische Geheimbünde der Germanen (Cultic Secret Societies Of The Germans)*. Höfler undertook some groundbreaking investigations and his book is still the standard work on the subject today. Of course his investigations drew the attention of the Nazis and Höfler worked for the Ahnenerbe spoiling his name, but apparently the work was still republished in 1993. This reprint is just as expensive and hard to get as the old pressings though. Höfler's theories were used in the famous *Allgermanische Religionsgeschichte* of Jan de Vries (1890-1964), the recent work *Odin, the one-eyed God and the Indo-European Männerbünde* of Kris Kershaw (2000) but also by Farwerck.

Chapter IX of De Vries' *Allgermanische Religionsgeschichte* is called "Das Heilige und die Kultformen" (the sacred and the cults) in which he describes the term "hellig" (sacred) and continues with practices around sacrality. For the subject of this essay, it becomes most interesting when from priesthood on, De Vries goes to cults and cultic customs, especially around Yule. The famous Wild Hunter(er) that goes around in these days is likely a mysticised version of a Männerbund going around through villages during the 12-days celebration.

More often with the subject of Männerbünde you will read about elite soldier groups that bite their shields and fight naked, "Berserk" (bearskin wearers) and "Ulfrædnar" (wolfskin wearers) are the most famous of these, but names that are often taken as tribes, are by some seen as similar groups, such as Tacitus' "Haril" and "Chaiti". Members of these groups were not just warriors. Their initiation into these groups was seen as joining the (dead) ancestors⁶.

As previously mentioned, the Männerbünde were often elite warrior groups. Farwerck describes that when *not* at war, members of these groups had all kinds of special privileges. Some of which I include here: the right of reprimand, the right to steal, etc. They also had certain dances, festivities, dressing (such as animal clothing) and special roles in public ceremonies for fertility or seasonal feasts. Many things suggest that members of these groups fulfilled a special role in society, a role which even came with obligations such as that of secrecy and several duties. Farwerck shows what he found around these subjects and continues to show that such groups have survived much longer than we may expect. They were cultic groups that survived the coming of Christianity by remodeling to Christian groups that we came to know as guilds. Besides such 'religious guilds', there were of course the famous workers guilds of the masons, the timbermen and the tanners, groups that have remarkable similarities to the Männerbünde of old.

⁶ *Allgermanische Religionsgeschichte* p. 454

Farwerck sums up a staggering amount of folkloristic habits and other remains that are unmistakably connected to these groups. All kinds of saints seem merely Christianisations of pagan deities and the traditions around them have but a thin layer of varnish. Horn- and Morrisdances, Mummer's plays, sword dances, *Schembartlaufen* and *Klausjagen*, Farwerck lets a lot of these nice folkloristic feasts pass the reader. It is amazing how the steal/right or the right to repimand are still rights of youth-groups as late as the early 20th century, groups that have some watered-down element of wearing animal skin and certain dances that have been performed in churches until the Reformation or old people who hung themselves and/or marked themselves to avoid dying a 'straw-death'. Of course much information comes from Christian sources trying to ban these pagan practices, but this often did not work too well so they were tried to be Christianised.

Reconstruction of ancient initiations

Chapter 10 is dedicated to the summing up of information that Farwerck has been able to find to see if he can reconstruct the rites. He starts with the possible places where the ceremonies would be held. Of course lakes, Forrester, hills, etc. were the sacred places for Germans and Celts alike. There are many toponyms (place names) that suggest certain ceremonies. Murder pits, wolf pits, devil's hills, even "woensbergen" ("berg" is "hill" or "mountain") or places named "Woenseel" (now part of the city of Eindhoven) and "Woensrecht" all clearly refer to Wodan and in the case of the murder pits, could death-and-resurrection ceremonies have been held there? There are also toponyms that seem to refer to (sacred) meals (cultic meals?), so called "troja burchten" (constructions or drawings in the form of a spiral) about which a lot is to say (Farwerck uses 24 pages). Then we have the sacred times of the solstices and equinoxes around which (folk)stories exist that suggest cultic rites vague shadows of which have been kept in folklore and recent festivals. After this Farwerck comes to clothing, sacred weapons, certain songs and dances, hangings and spear-woundings, travails to the underworld and resurrections therefrom, new names, the sacred potion (usually something made with honey) and old and less old references to brotherhoods of all sorts.

Farwerck continues with guilds. Since they are fairly recent there is more information available about their structure, habits, legal status, etc. Not only workers-guilds are spoken about, but also for example shooting guilds, a beloved subject for people who want to find the traces back to a further past. With "building huts" and building guilds we are a step closer to our own time, because you will probably know that they are well represented in the history the Freemasons give themselves. Different kinds of guilds have all kinds of secrets that are both practical and religious. You can read all about it in the popular histories of Freemasonry, but Farwerck presents a nice overview and very interesting details. Now also follow more photos that Farwerck took in churches with faces with a hand below their chin, supposedly a secret sign of master masons. Of course there are also the master-signs (some sort of

signatures) that often remind of runes, but we are already talking about the 17/12th century here. Quite some information about these guilds seems to come directly from Masonic writings, but of course, Masons says that these guilds are their predecessors. Then we get photos of all kinds of strange ornaments in churches with one-eyed figures (Wodan?), mockeries of the church, pictures of men in strange postures and all kinds of suggestive scenes that seem too unchristian to be built into a church.

Freemasonry

And there we have it, Farwerck spends the last 150 pages of his book showing that "Freemasonry [is] one of the youngest descendants of the ancient men bonds". I have the little book of Stephen Flowers with the subject of the Northern European sources of Freemasonry, but Farwerck's information is much, much better. Having been a high-ranking Mason himself, he quotes all kinds of Masonic texts, rituals, etc. (but I think he tells us nothing he should better not) and compares them to what we find in myths, sagas, pagan art or folklore. The form of the temple, the place where the different officiants can be found, ritualistic symbolisms such as the limping or signs of recognition, symbolism on the "tableau", the three pillars, the large and the small lights, Masonic clothing (Thor's iron gloves and girdle), the consecrating hammer and even the opening and closing rites, they all seem to have Northern European origins rather than Jewish or Egyptian. I cannot reproduce Farwerck's arguments and proves, hopefully an interest will be raised in the book itself. Let me just give you a very clear example.

The oath of the Entered Apprentice⁷ goes:

These several points I solemnly swear to observe, without evasion, equivocation, or mental reservation of any kind, under no less a penalty, on the violation of any of them, than that of having my throat cut across, my tongue torn out by the root, and buried in the sand of the sea at low water mark, or a cable's length from the shore, where the tide regularly ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours, or the more effective punishment of being branded as a wilfully perjured individual, void of all moral worth, and totally unfit to be received into this worshipful Lodge, or any other warranted Lodge or society of men, who prize honour and virtue above the external advantages of rank and fortune. So help me, God, and keep me steadfast in this my Great and Solemn Obligation of an Entered Apprentice Freemason¹.

A strange punishment that seems to come straight from the Frisian law texts (of Wullemarus):

Anyone who breaks into a sanctuary and takes away one of the sacred objects, is brought to the sea, and on the sand, that is covered by the flood, his ears are cleft, and he is castrated and sacrificed to the god, whose temple he dishonored.⁷

⁷ "Qui fanum effregit, et ibi aliquid de sacris tulit, ducitur ad mare, et in sabulo, quod accessus maris operire solet, finduntur aures eius, et castratur, et immolatur. Dis quorum

There is a lot more to say, but here you have the red thread. In working to his conclusion, Farwerck sheds light on a great many elements of folklore and (folk) symbolism, giving new interpretations of tales, sagas and texts that we know, cross referencing different myths and different folktales and all together his book is a true goldmine and a just reason to have grown into being a cult book. This is the kind of book that I hope to run into some time again, but I doubt I ever will. Besides all the works that I own of Durnézi, Eliade, Guéron or De Vries, I often first check Farwerck, then the rest. Especially when I am looking for visuals I go to Farwerck, since his books are as stuffed with photos and drawings as they are with information and until this day, he has collected an unprecedented amount of visuals of details and symbolism. These alone are a reason to get the book.

Even when you are not interested in the Northern European history of Freemasonry (most people who buy this book are not), you will find enough information in the uplifted parts that Farwerck needs to present his proof. Personally I admire the book too for being a non-Traditionalist, he presents a story that almost no Traditionalist has ever told even though (s)he should have: the unbroken chain has been kept in the West though Western organisations until this very day.

Esoteric heathenry

Here comes a confession: I am not a mason, nor an initiate in any other organisation. I have received a few years of preparational education in a project that could have never become successful with the arguments above and indeed it was not. The conclusion is that I can only tell you a story, nothing more. I will try to give a bit more of an idea of how these two (Traditionalism and heathenry) could come together, but I can just show the door, no peek through it. Hopefully somebody with the ability to take all this further might read this and take up the task.

I have already said what I think is the Northern European equivalent of the Ultimate Source: Ginungagap. Ginungagap is the final naught, but perhaps it is but a name of the last 'breathing out'. In Hindu philosophy the great cycles are breathings of Brahma. Brahma breaths out, things come into being, Brahma breaths in, everything returns to its Source. In the end, does it matter if we can put a name on something which is way beyond our reach? Hindus speak of 'para-Brahma' ("greater than Brahma") just to make fun of people who think they 'know' God. "Ginungagap" is a perfect term in our case, everything comes from Ginungagap and it sounds probable that everything will eventually return into it.

templa violavit. ("Lex Frisiorum Tit. XI, "De Honore templorum", written down in the 12th century)

Ginungagap is an especially fitting term, because "yawning gap" definitely prevents people from getting a humanformed idea of God. God is not a manlike figure who played the earth. Odin, Vili and Vé do not represent the Ultimate Divinity in the *Eddas*. Ginungagap emanates, it comes *into being* and this according to a *Divine plan*. That plan is not something thought up by greater or lesser God(s), it is the groundstructure of all that came from Ginungagap. The Northern tradition has a perfect term for that idea: "Ørlög", which literally means: "primal law". I know that when you read the texts and especially when you read books about the Northern traditions, the term will be explained differently. Some see it as some sort of personal fate, others will (almost and usually implicitly) equate it with "heilagr", "sköp" or even the 'laws of nature', some see it as the sum of the past, present and future. Another thing that you will see often is the connection of Ørlög with the norms. In my opinion it is incorrect to think that the norms *made* Ørlög, they are rather the *expression* or *keepers* of it.

Walter Gehr wrote the very interesting (and again hard to get) book *Der Germanische Schicksalsglaube* (1939 *Germanic belief in fate*) in which he describes several terms for "fate" is both continental and Scandinavian sources. Gehr gives terms from different Germanic languages for the concept such as *gllagu*, *aldriagu*, *ealdorlegu*, *feorhlegu*, *lög*, *fordög* and *urlec*. The term "Ørlög" seems to be present in most (all?) of the Germanic languages. Gehr adds that it seems that the term "Ørlög" seems to have been the preferred word in mythological texts, while other terms are used in heroic epics. In many cases the context of the term does not seem to entirely correspond to my explanation, in other cases the explanation comes closer to my own. I am sure not every ancient German (or any?) would use my explanation for the term, so the above is more of an illustration of what is available and how I prefer to use the term.

To say a little more about "heilagr", let me give a translation of a Dutch text of Stefaan van den Eynde:

Heilagr is a transcendental concept that manifests on various levels, including the personal. We can describe it as a non-physical Divine substance that can make part of every human and which can live on after the carrier dies. The force and radiation of someone's personal heilagr is proportionate with the degree of his living conform the Primal Order [i.e. "Ørlög"]. [...]

The individual heilagr moreover, is indissolubly connected with the jointly heilagr of the family – the family heilagr [...]. It will be clear that the heilagr of a king should radiate over his entire domain.⁸

So "heilagr" is some sort of 'spiritual substance' that you can 'gain' personally, with your kin, country or even mankind as a whole. "Heilagr" is gained by

⁸ *Asatru, inleiding tot een traditionele religie* ('Asatru, introduction to a traditional religion') by Stefaan van den Eynde. Werkgroep Traditie vzw, first version 2003

living according to Ørtög. "Do your duty" is the device of a man I knew well: "live your fate". Is this fate then an unchangeable preset plan for all of us? Perhaps, but man's freedom exists in performing his duty and since we do not know our fate in detail, does it really matter if we chose something ourselves or if it was 'chosen for us'? Besides, there is a free will after all. You can choose *not* to live according to Ørtög, break down your own "heilagr" and that of those close and less close to you. It is actually a *choice* to "live your fate".

The stories from for example the *Eddas*, but in fact all myths and many sagas and folkstories can be interpreted in different ways, on different levels if you like, and all interpretations can be true. A simple example is Santaklaus. To a child you can say that Santaklaus is a happy fellow with a red and white suit who flies through the air on a sled drawn by reindeers. This is true! It is but a way of explaining things. When the child grows up, the parents usually say that Santaklaus is many different people dressed up and that the presents are given by the parents themselves. Of course this is very factual. Some parents may say that the dressed-up guy actually represents Odin/Wodan who was adored in the winter period by our ancestors. This is also a way of explaining the symbolism of the Christmas-period. Then, of course, there is the 'esoteric' interpretation that might connect Odin with the Wild Hunt, the elite warriors of Odin, the quest of man for the essence of being, or the 'scaring away' of the 'old self' of the old year. All three explanations are true, all three explanations are valuable and depending on what glasses you wear when reading our texts of old, different explanations will occur.

Several stories of the *Eddas* can be read as initiation stories. I have already given the example of the story of Balder who died, ends up in Hel and rearses after Ragnarok. Another example is the story in which Thor and Loki travel to the castle of Utgarda-Loki. If the Northern Gods are taken as aspects in the constitution of man, it would not be too strange to say that Loki represents our ego, Thor our will and Odin our higher Self. In this story only the two lower parts take a journey, pretty much as in 'real life'. Just think about it, how many people live purely by ego and lower desire and how many genuinely spiritual people do you know? The story seems to represent the state that most of us live in. We live our lives by our lower aspects and forget to bring our Odin. On their travels Thor and Loki spend the night at a farm where they eat Thor's goats. When Thor revives his goats, one of them is lame at one hoof, a loss that is compensated by the farmer's two children Thiafi and Roskva. The party sets on travelling, crosses the waters, which means that they travel to 'the other world', through a gigantic forest, which could be a test and they are surely tested by the giant in the forest and in the castle Ugarda-Loki and in the end they 'wake up', hopefully renewed. The tests themselves and also the disappearing castle of Utgarda-Loki can also be explained as Thor and Loki failing to see that they live in a world of illusion ("Maya" the Hindus call this). Alternally, we can read the story as an initiation of Thiafi who is picked up by elders, dragged into a forest and tested.

How 'esoteric' is all that? Not at all if you do not project such a story on yourself. Our texts can be read with a meaning or even preparation for the 'greater work', but this itself will of course not 'open your third eye'. That needs *Tradition*.

Conclusion?

Like I said: no blueprint, just pointers. With all information above, the conclusion seems to be that we have but a few choices: 1) Take all this for granted and keep doing what we were doing; 2) try to make our (personal) religion at least a *bit* more esoteric, give it back its foundations; 3) to go out and look for a good and proper Masonic lodge that supports 'the heathen past' and *really* get to work. Perhaps in the further future there might be really heathen Freemasonry, but seeing the decline of the order, I do not really see that happening and I fear that wolftime will catch up with us, destroy the little that is left and prepare us for Ragnarok. Good to know perhaps, is that there are many "rites" within Freemasonry (but in my own country there is only one). Some French branches supposedly are not entirely negative towards non-Christian religions and there are even Freemasons who acknowledge the (partly) Northern European history of the craft, so there could be hope. Be sure to look only at "regular" Freemasonry if you want to live up to Guénon's ideas (and beware of what Guénon calls "counter-initiation" since that includes all pseudo-masonic and quite some masonic organisations) and be aware that one lodge is not the next. You may have to look around or be prepared for a lifelong search. Personally, I have visited some lodges and temples but never had the idea that I would fit in, so I currently go for option 2, I try to enrich my religion.