

Creation Is No Myth

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Periodically, on many Asatru newsgroups and lists, a connection is made between some or many aspects of Asatru and some craft. Typically, it is a craft in which that the person is proficient; spinning, weaving, sewing, knitting, woodworking, cooking, poetry, jewelry, blacksmithing and the like are all common. Most kindreds have a member or two who can do one of these things quite well, and it tends to underline some aspects of Asatru, or their heathenry shines through this craft. There may be some connection to all these "artsy" crafts, and why they strike the fancy of so many Asatruar (or heathens in general, for that matter). As for me, mine seems to be pottery. I'd like to talk about what I think pottery is all about in the context of my spiritual views.

While pottery is not really physically strenuous, it does require a high degree of focus. I generally do what is called "throwing," which is to spin clay on a wheel to form it (to differentiate from "slab-building" and "sculpting"). I think it's a blast, and I have no real skill for free-hand work. You basically take a portion of clay and knead it like dough to get the air bubbles out. This is called "wedging." You then form the piece into whatever shape by whatever means, and set it aside to dry. While it is drying out, it is called "greenware." Then you bisque the piece (put it in a kiln and fire it at low temperature for a short period of time) to drive all the water out so that when you glaze it, you don't trap any water which would vaporize and blow up the piece during firing. Then you glaze it, by painting on with or submerging the piece in a glaze wash -- borosilicates, minerals and metals in powdered form, mixed with water. They dry almost instantly, and then you put it in the firing kiln (High-fire, low-fire, or Raku). During the firing process, the glaze melts into glass, and the metals vaporize, leaving colors behind in the glass. The work is allowed to cool, then you have your piece.

First off, it seems to be a very Vanic thing. What I mean by "Vanic" is that it's very solid, very real, very earthy, very crude and unfinished, yet very beautiful by it's nature. It's dirty, it's messy, it's fun -- just like sex, eating, cooking, and most physical contact sports. Anyway, the way I look at it is the union between a parent and a child, where both are a together in a mixture, but one and the other interact to change the properties of the whole. First you have the union to start with -- earth and water. I look at this as being Frey and Njord. Without the water, the clay is just dirt, and without the dirt, the clay is just water. Together, they form something which is greater than the sum of their parts. The act of forming the clay into its final piece is a feeling of creation, of influence, of direction. I've noticed that pottery is like many other crafts -- you can't command the material to become something, but rather, you influence it to become something like what you were looking for. This draws many parallels to the parent-offspring relationship -- You don't make your kid into something, you just give them direction and hope everything turns out for the best. So I just work with the clay until a form starts happening, and let it do its own thing, guiding rather than controlling, and then the piece lets me know when its done. I can play with it more, but it never really seems to do any good.

The primal combination of life and death in the forms of water and earth are found in the clay. You need the water (life) to form the clay, and then you fire it away (death). The glaze is the same way -- it is mixed with water to be formed, and leaves when it is no longer needed. The removal of life by fire, to me, is very symbolic. It's like the transition from life to death by the incineration of a corpse. As a matter of fact, the very first glazes used were made of ash and water mixed, and it was said that ash from the deceased relatives were the most striking glazes. The water, in both cases allows the piece to be formed and colored, then leaves as the piece is

moved into maturity. Without the water, the piece would just be a pile of dirt. Even more interesting still, the piece can now hold water, is waterproof, and is much more durable. The firing is the catalyst that passes the piece from one form to another, the gateway to a different existence, in which, the earth and the water begin a different relationship, each relying on the other to make something greater than the sum of their parts.

The person who suggested I write this article commented that the connection between Njord and Nerthus or Njord and Skadhi seems more obvious, but I don't think it's a male-female or part-counterpart relationship. It seems to be more of a formational one, with the water allowing the dirt to be formed. Granted, water by itself is just water, and dirt is just dirt, but the dirt is the base and the water is the catalyst, because when you're done, there is no water except what you may pour into your mug. To me, this outlines the stages of life -- greenware is the childhood, where the water is most needed to help form the piece. Then the bisque is the passing into adolescence, where the water is needed only to change the hue of the piece, rather than changing its form or shape. Finally, the high fire is the passing into adulthood, where the water is not necessary, but its presence is desired, because just as nature abhors a void, an empty beer mug is tragic, indeed. The vessel now has no other purpose than to hold the water. It was formed by water, and is now a legacy to that water, serving the function to hold it.

While this seems a bit trivial, it's pretty important to me. This sort of thing allows me to help determine if I projected these properties onto my work, or that I'm sensitive enough to pick up these nuances from the medium with which I work. A direct parallel can be drawn to my spirituality, and this tool can be useful to you, as well: Is your spirituality, your work, if you will, something that you have created in your mind and projected onto coincidence, mishap, and boon alike, objects, wants, needs and desires? Or is it truly a collection of beliefs, morals and ideals created from a sum of observations concerning the actions of the gods and other somewhat intangible beings? To me, the answer is the latter; I believe gods, wights, giants, and all that stuff and all those trappings exist, in real space-time, and are tangible and real. Of course, I also believe that my working with clay is precisely that: working WITH clay, not controlling it, but merely influencing it. To you, it might be something you wish to knock off your boots. To me, it is alive. I think that what I have observed of my interaction with it comes from that interaction, rather than the projection of my own internalized rules upon the medium. If you work with a craft, you may do well to determine what your relationship to it is as well, and perhaps it will give you insight into your spirituality.