

American Wights

by
Svartesól

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
or by any means without the permission of the author.

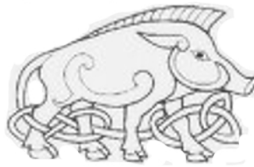
© 2009 Svartésól.

Printed in cooperation with
Lulu Enterprises, Inc.
860 Aviation Parkway, Suite 300
Morrisville, NC 27560

American Wights

by
Svartesól

GULLINBURSTI



ÞRESS

To Lars
and his kin,
wherever the rest might be.

-S.



Table of Contents

The Problem with Wight-Worship in North America... 1

Why Worship the Wights?... 4

The Care and Feeding of Your House-Wight... 6

My Journey... 10

Living with the Land... 13

What Can Go Wrong... 16

In Conclusion... 20

The Problem with Wight-Worship in North America

It is my understanding that most polytheist religions involved some sort of reverence for nature spirits, however this book only deals with the issue in the context of Heathenry, that is to say a religion involving the Gods, folklore, and customs of Northern Europe.

One of the laments of modern Heathens is that the worship of the Gods seems to take precedence above and beyond the reverence of land-spirits. I am of the opinion that it is just as important to cultivate a good relationship with your local land-wights as it is to develop relationships with the Gods. After all, we live here. However, I believe the emphasis on the Gods has no small part in difficulties surrounding connecting with the American wights and maintaining good terms.

Superstitions regarding the spirits of place survived long after the conversion of Scandinavia. They are called *landvættir* in Old Norse and *landwihta* in Anglo-Saxon, *wight* in Middle to Modern English. For the sake of coherency, spirits of place will be addressed in this book as "wights" rather than *vættir*.

It has been argued whether a land-wight is a different kind of elf, or a different kind of giant, but I think that the land-wights are a "species" all to themselves. For one thing, they are not under obligation to take a humanoid form just to make us feel comfortable. They don't ever have to "appear" outside of inhabiting a tree, or a rock, or a field of grass, but that doesn't mean they're not there. Their spirits are more "primitive" than even the most elemental Jotnar or the elves of light or elves of darkness. They are the spirits of the stones and soil and

everything upon it, the "humming" that many sensitives can hear of the Earth. The Earth itself is alive, a microcosm of the Universe itself. In every forest there is a small Universe, but also in every desert, every tundra, even in the cities. The stones and soil and growing things are not just "there", but sentient guardians.

It's my personal opinion that regardless of what classification a land-wight may or may not fall into, any being that is really really old and is a force of nature - which would be most land-spirits - is more powerful than my puny human self, and deserves reverence.

One of the problems befalling Heathens in North America is that many Heathens have a tendency to relate to the spirits of place in a strictly Northern context, despite the fact that Europeans have only been in the Americas a relatively brief time, the land-wights were here before us, and the tribes who were here before us had specific ways of honoring them. I know it is important to treat my Gods in the way They were historically accustomed to being treated, or find an acceptably similar modern substitute. Why do we lower our standards when dealing with the local wights?

It is important to differentiate between giving offerings to spirits of place that they were known to enjoy, that were not historically given in the Northlands, versus pretending to be Native American and putting on a pseudo-shamanic ceremony, which insults the wights as well as those who went before. In order to do this, it is necessary for Heathens to think outside the box and not classify wights as being merely elves or dwarves or Jotuns or trolls. There are more types of wights than that.

Some wights do transcend cultural boundaries and seem to be universally attached to a type of tree or land formation or biome. In my experience, all oak tree spirits are dryads, and all

creek guardians feel like nymphs, even though I am not Hellenic. Gnomes really do hang out in gardens. Wildflowers attract small, winged bright spirits. The spirits of greenwights and rocks, as mentioned earlier, may not even have to take humanoid form. However, the land spirits in the Americas are different from the land spirits in Northern Europe. The terrain is wildly different, for starters. There is different flora and fauna. And as such, not every anthropomorphic "wild man" that lives in the woods is a Jotun, and not every cranky mountain-dweller is one of the Duergar. As a prime example of this, the times I have been through the desert in Southern California, I felt the land spirits were inhospitable to me, did not want me there. They felt very, very old and very hostile. However, I have also done astral journeying through the Nine Worlds and have encountered fire giants. The beings in the desert were not fire giants as I understood them. They felt fiery, for sure, but physically smaller than that, for starters, and their energy was far less wild and chaotic.

As we can see, wight worship in a Heathen context in the Americas has some difficulties, and I hope to provide solutions in this book, for an easier time of it.

Why Worship the Wights?

"Worship" means is "to worth", and as such, giving worth to the local spirits through offerings, attention, and care is necessary for a good relationship, so that your days may go well on the land.

The fact is, so long as you are living on Earth, you depend on soil that can grow things for food, clean air to breathe, and clean water to drink and nourish plants. You are dependent on the elements "behaving themselves". If one of your neighbors has a fire, there's a chance your house may burn as well. If a tornado comes through your neighborhood, everyone will be affected. Same if there is a drought, or toxins going into the ground and/or water. Being mindful of the land-wights and being friendly with them does not ensure 100% protection against the elements or destructive humans, but it does have notable affects.

For example, having a good relationship with the land-wights can be helpful if you are growing things (e.g. a garden and/or small farming), or live in an area known for high crime and/or natural disasters (earthquakes, flooding). The land-wights can assist if you are in bad health or injured and need a "boost", as well as protect you in your comings and goings.

I believe beyond the land-wights in your own backyard (or by the nearest tree, if you don't own property), it is also important to establish a working relationship with the land-wights within two miles of your home. Ideally, you would want to be mindful of the wights whenever you go, as they can react badly to deliberate littering, destructive behavior (e.g. throwing rocks at animals, carelessly killing bugs or plants), and loud noise. But most people will form the closest relationships with

the wights in their immediate locale, and this is right and necessary to assist with living well.

You should honor the land-wights not just because it's "proper Northern custom", but because it helps your own behavior in being more environmentally-aware, it seems to have a direct effect on the land itself. Scientific studies have shown that plants that receive attention more than just food and water -- being talked to, or played music, or prayed over -- do better than plants given "average" care; areas of heavy pollution and/or human development tend to have higher rates of sickness, injury, and violence than rural areas or cities that make the extra effort to be "green".

Honoring the land spirits is good for the soul, contributing to a more wholistic spiritual practice. It is especially valuable to do this when working with the Vanir primarily, who have strong ties to the land and believe the land as well as home and hearth should be cared for and defended as necessary. It helps to keep mindful of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things.

Finally, it's good manners. It may be very difficult for a poor urbanite to live "green", but it is not impossible to make contact with the land spirits, to pick up litter in the immediate locale, and pray for the land spirits' well being. Regardless of where you are, the spirits of the land anywhere in the world are much older than your current human incarnation. They have seen plenty of growth, life, death, decay, and back again, and they deserve your reverence. Man does not have dominion over the Earth, but rather nature always has the final word. To be on good terms with nature is good insurance, and to reduce damage and even help heal the Earth is a necessary thing in these times.

The Care and Feeding of Your House-Wight

Gifting the house-wight is an extension of working with land-spirits, as it recognizes that the home is a sacred place, to eat, and rest, to spend time with family and maybe friends, and to enjoy the bounties of the Earth. By Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon folkloric custom, the house-wight is seen usually as a small elderly man, bearded, dressed in farmer's clothes. He is, however, also believed to shapeshift, and can make himself invisible at will. He is a protective and caring spirit but he is also very easy to offend. In the days when most people lived on farms, he would, if angered, slap the people in the home, or kill livestock, or bring ruin to the farm. The wight does not like changes in the ways things are done, whether at the farm or in the home. He is also extremely offended by rudeness, which includes not warning him if things are spilled or dropped on the floor.

In order to keep the wight happy, it is necessary to placate him with gifts. In Scandinavia the *tomten* are usually given a bowl of porridge on Christmas Eve. He prefers his porridge with a pat of butter on top. If he's not given his payment he will leave the farm or house, or work mischief therein.

Origins of the farm-wights are unclear. It is thought that in regards to the *tomten* they are the soul of the first inhabitant on the farm. Some also feel that the *tomten* have things in common with the land-spirits, who are not the same as the dead, and the two types of beings may be related. My personal gnosis regarding the matter is that whether of a farm or a regular house, or apartment, or even a business -- these are land-spirits who decided to inhabit a building.

Not all buildings have wights. In Europe, most of the

farms and homes do have wights that have been there for centuries. Here in the United States, the majority of homes do not have wights "built in". The exception to this are places such as the 13 colonies where you have some houses dating back to the 1600s and many homes are over 100 years old in any case. Most of the older homes have wights whether they "jumped ship" with the immigrants to the New World, or were land-spirits already there who decided to "shack up" as they saw the changing times. In places like California where settlement by Europeans is mostly less than 200 years old and a 50-year-old building is considered "really old", there are few building-wights to be found naturally. In my own personal case, mine came with me on the plane when I moved out here: he attached himself to me when I was a small child and living in a place in Connecticut that was over 100 years old.

While the house-wight seems to be directly responsible for the peace, health, and luck of the household, that house is still on land --

If you are in a newer place that does not have a wight (e.g. an apartment in California), you can call one to you by working with the local land-spirits and leaving out offerings for one who might be interested in "cozying up". Of course you will have to make it an attractive prospect, so having your home reasonably attractive would help.

Even with the best intentions of honoring your house-wight, sometimes advice is needed especially if your house-wight is noticeably angry. I have found over the years that if you are "sensitive", and you are aware of your house-wight and he feels ignored, he can make your life interesting. Here are a few telltale signs that your house-wight may be displeased with you:

-- Things that you *know* you placed in a specific area, are not there anymore and turn up in completely bizarre locations

days after you gave up searching for them.

-- Things break randomly, like a glass just slips out of your hands and crashes to the floor.

-- You find yourself getting into quarrels with other people who live with you, over the stupidest things.

-- There are strange and even scary noises in the middle of the night and you are not sure what is causing them.

-- Your sleep is unrestful despite nothing physical or situational that could be affecting it.

If you treat your house-wight with respect, he is an asset to a peaceful, happy, healthy existence. He can ward property from vandalism and theft, ward people from physical danger, warn the house residents about problems (storms, fire), and contribute to a "warm, cozy" atmosphere. Having a happy house-wight is necessary for a happy home if you are working with a spiritual path that makes you at all sensitive to the spirits of place. Here are some tricks I've found in my own personal experience, to keep the house-wight happy:

-- Give him an offering at least once a week. Coffee is good. Porridge (oatmeal) would be best, but for moderns, bread with butter on it will suffice.

-- Give him shiny objects to play with. Marbles are good, as are little semiprecious stones, bells, skeleton keys. Those are favorites of most house-wights.

-- Candles are another good thing (keeping the house-wight "warm"), and some house-wights like various incense or herbal smells. Some even like smoking a pipe, so giving tobacco is good if your house-wight has requested it (when in doubt, ask).

-- You will want to cleanse your home from a psychic perspective at least once every 2 weeks, whether you sprinkle salt water around the place or do an herbal smudge, or a combination of the two. Please note that with the latter it is best to use plants that grow locally to you. Having lived in both the Northeast and Southwest United States, I have found in my own experience that evergreens work best as a smudge in New England, and sage works best as a smudge in the Southwest. The house-wight will assist in making the place "feel" better, but he must be consciously invoked in order to help. (NOTE: Behavior that your house-wight deems offensive in this regard, such as threatening land-spirits with a hammer, will not be received with appreciation.)

-- Be mindful of your tone of voice and treatment of other people who live with you. The house-wight does not like witnessing fighting, he finds it rude. If you must argue, take it outside.

House-wights as individual beings of course may have specific preferences regarding offerings, and behavior they find inappropriate. But this is a generalist list and applies to most.

When moving to a new place, it is important that not only the house-wight be propitiated, but the wights of the land directly around the home. In my personal experience, they respond well to having a special "building" made -- usually tree branches and stones found on the ground, arranged into a little structure for the wights to gather. This is a good place to leave offerings.

My Journey

In my childhood, I had odd mannerisms and eccentric behavior. One of my personal eccentricities was what can only be described as psychic abilities. I knew when people were going to die. I knew when women were pregnant, without them telling me. I was also able to literally see spirits of place. Growing up in New England, I saw what I would now classify as brownies, faeries, and gnomes, as well as some "rock, tree, and animal people".

My maternal grandmother's parents came to the United States from Norway during the Great Depression. What was considered dirt-poor on their family farm was actually rich by the standards of the time, and they were able to buy land for a song in Western Massachusetts. As it's been told through the generations, my great-grandmother (who was a midwife and also possessed prophetic abilities) decided to bring the farm *nisse* on the boat, bribing him to come along. Once on the farm, she regularly put out milk and pastries for him and "the other little people".

Flash forward to the early 1980s. My maternal side of the family broke down into dysfunction after coming to America, and without knowing any of my family history, I frequently saw a little man who can only be described as a gnome, running around the apartment. When he found out I could see him, he entertained me.

Everywhere I moved, from a house to other apartments, he came with me. After hearing stories of the family history, I assumed this was the farm *nisse* from Norway, who had been "inherited", especially as we were the only descendants who were not fundamentalist Christians in the habit of "praying

against spirits" and banishing such beings.

I was an animist before I began identifying as Pagan. While some of my childhood eccentricities went away, many persisted into my teenage years and adulthood. My ability to see the spirits was one of the traits that kept on. I was often chased home from school and beaten up by bullies, and I learned to hide in the woods as a survival mechanism. It was here that I began talking and singing to the trees, and would sometimes save part of my lunch to give to the woods as an offering, as well as pennies and marbles. I felt the land spirits all around me, giving me comfort and love when nobody else in my life was doing so.

When I did start identifying as Pagan, I was often called upon by other Pagans for readings, known as being an accurate diviner through runes and Tarot. One of my friends noticed my uncanny ability to predict the weather, even outguessing the forecasters on the news, and decided to ask me about a "haunting" at her house. I agreed, and when entering a trance state, I found that it was not a ghost at all, but rather a land spirit that had been traumatized by the bad behavior of the previous owners, and wanted assurance that he would not be hurt. I gave my friend some suggestions including feeding and talking with the land spirit, and the eerie noises and random loss of objects stopped.

This was in 1999, and over the next ten years I did many jobs like this, including for friends in California who were in a similar position of inheriting a *nisseman*, who was upset by recent loss and wanted some "goddamn attention", as he put it. I have a reputation as being a "wight whisperer", but I do not do it for money or for fame, rather because I have seen so much damage humans have done to the spirits of land and I feel this is my part in re-weaving the web of Wyrð, so to speak.

My relationship with my own family's *nisse* developed

over the years, and when I was set to move to California, I asked the *nisse* if he wanted to come with me. I knew he didn't like my mother, but he did like me, and I did not want to leave him with my mother. He agreed to come, but he was afraid of the thought of flying, still upset by the boat ride across the Atlantic Ocean seventy-odd years ago. I put a small box in my carry-on bag which I lined with a piece of fabric, and put in some candy. He was still reluctant to go in. After singing to him and giving him tender words of assurance (as well as threats of staying with my mother, being starved and ignored and forced to go live in the wild, away from any of the family line), he finally got in the box, and one of my first actions upon arriving in California was to make sure the *nisse* got out of the box and was able to walk around.

A year and a half after I moved to California, my partner and I became owners of a condominium with three bedrooms and two bathrooms. I set up a shrine to the house-wight in the kitchen. By now he was tired of moving around, and was quite cantankerous the first month into living in the new place, despite having more room and a nicer area to boot. But, he was won over, and so much that he told me I could call him Lars, after referring to him as "my house-wight" or "that gnome" for all of my life.

Living with the Land

In the Americas, the land-spirits seem to universally appreciate tobacco, and often corn. Despite the tendency of Heathens to use alcohol, especially mead, for everything, it is a bad idea to give alcohol in the US, due to what happened when it was introduced to the Natives, unless the land-wights specifically ask for it - an example would be if you have an orchard and make liqueur from its fruit, offering some of the liqueur back to the land-wights may be in order. In any case it's important to ask, not assume, and one of the problems with wight worship in the Americas is offerings are given on assumption, of how it was traditionally done in Europe. Once again, Europe is not the Americas.

The land-spirits may also respond well to portions of food given as an offering, if you're eating it yourself and sharing. In my part of Southern California the land spirits seem to prefer sweet fruit, and bread, which was apparently a traditional offering given by some of the Native tribes (the one closest to me was known to make acorn biscuits).

Sometimes the land spirits will appreciate crystals and coins other small, shiny objects left for them, although it is important to be careful that they're not ingested by local animals passing through.

Regular offerings are important to maintain a relationship, no less than once a week, and preferably every day or every other day. It doesn't have to be big: a piece of bread, or fruit, or a little sprinkling of tobacco or cornmeal will usually suffice. Picking up litter, growing plants, and feeding local animals is another way to please the land spirits.

When you give the offering, you will want to speak kindly to the wights. By which I mean, do not introduce yourself to the wights saying "THIS IS MY LAND NOW AND YOU BETTER BEHAVE", much as some Heathen land-takings seem to go. It's good to acknowledge that this is *their* land and you want to live peacefully with them, and come to be friends with them. Once you've established a relationship, it's good to maintain a relationship with praise as you give an offering, prayers like:

*Thank you for the land on which I live,
for the health of the soil, and the grass, and the trees,
the birds and the beasts that come by.
Thank you for the health I enjoy,
and for protecting me and mine.
I appreciate our friendship,
and bless you now, in good will.
May your home be a place of peace and beauty,
may your home be kept holy.*

You may, after giving the offering, want to let yourself feel strong feelings of love and appreciation, and send that into the ground around you. It helps to be effective at energetical wards, which will not only be sent out to protect the people in your area (even if you don't like your neighbors), but also the plants and the animals and the entire area, with every spirit dwelling within.

If there is a natural disaster, such as a flood or fire or tornado, besides evacuation, an effort should be made to try to contact the land spirits, to "blend your mind with theirs" and see if they will listen. Chances are if you are doing regular work with the land-wights of your immediate locale, you may notice a drop in the amount of these things nearby, but sometimes the

Earth has to do its thing and destroy to make way for new life. Another time to especially propitiate the land spirits is if there has been violent crime or a bad accident in your neighborhood. These things disturb the land-wights and can even make them angry and agitated, so offerings should be given in abundance and with care, and words chosen to soothe the land-wights and make them feel better.

What Can Go Wrong

Thus far, we've talked about why it's important to worship the wights, and how best to do so in North America. Now would be a good time to discuss when things can go wrong, as they sometimes do.

One of the myths of our Gods is of the marriage of Njord and Skadhi. Njord is king of the Vanir, a sea God. Skadhi is a mountain Goddess, who loves winter weather and hunting. Skadhi came to the Aesir seeking payment for her father's death, and one of the ways She was paid was taking Njord as a husband. Njord tried to live with Skadhi in the mountains, and Skadhi tried to live with Njord at the sea, but neither of Them could stand it and after a time They went Their separate ways.

This is a story of the lives of our Gods, which helps us to see They are very much like us, and that we are not alone in our struggles. In this particular case, I have found the myth of Njord and Skadhi to be especially relevant to my own makeup and dealing with the spirits of place.

I was born and raised in New England, and moved to southern California when I was twenty-six. The Southwest United States is about as far as you can get from the Northeast United States both in terms of landscape and culture. I experienced major shock, but one thing that comforted me was living a twenty-minute drive from the Pacific Ocean. I have never lived more than forty-five minutes away from the ocean on either side of the country, and when I go to the ocean I notice the sea comes right up to me even if it's low tide; being in the salt water energizes me like nothing else. It is, for me, the best high in the world.

In New England, you get snow in the wintertime, and plenty of it. In my part of southern California it doesn't really snow. My partner decided to take me to the mountains after I had been there a couple of years, so I could see snow for the first time since leaving Connecticut. There was snow, which we played in, lots of beautiful evergreen trees, and a feeling of vastness. I thought it was gorgeous. However, I wouldn't want to live there.

On the drive up to the mountains, we briefly passed through the desert. Each time I'd been through the desert, both low desert and high desert, I felt a sense of panic I couldn't explain. I decided to reach out with my mind and "feel around" to connect with the wights, and the desert wights felt very hostile... at least as far as where I'm concerned.

I have a friend who grew up in the Southwest and thinks the desert is the most beautiful place on Earth. I also know of some folks who moved to the desert from elsewhere, such as the Midwest or the Northeast, and felt like they had truly come home. Conversely, I know of people who hate living by the ocean, or hate living in the mountains, or hate living in rural areas.

It seems that, for lack of better terminology, different people are "wired" to different "wavelengths". Besides their general outlook on life, taste in clothing, food, and music, what Gods they do or don't worship, it seems some people can live well in certain areas and not at all in others.

My advice to people who are "out of their element" living in a place they would rather not be, is if you have to be there for any length of time, it is best to go with the flow rather than lament how bad it is. Attempting to establish a relationship with the wights can help. But in some cases it can't, and in the cases where it can't and you are truly not meant to be living there,

don't take it personally. With most wights it is not so much a matter of like or dislike as it is they can pick up on these "frequencies" and if an inhabitant feels off, it is their job to drive them off the land, to protect themselves.

This is not just limited to cases of biomes like the mountains and the desert, the ocean and the forest, farms and jungle. There have been cases of houses where successive owners would meet with illness, injury, or insanity, and be forced to leave the property. In many cases, these homes were built on Native American burial ground, and I would chalk it up to angry dead people and angry land spirits protecting the dead. If you are living on what turns out to be burial ground, do not attempt to placate the spirits or think you have a chance. It is in your best interests to get off the property as soon as you can.

Where that isn't the case, the land spirits may be able to be appeased somehow, usually it will take time and lots of care, and patience. Some land spirits are not happy with the changes of "modern civilization" and would rather the humans disturbing their land go piss off, so to speak. Some will get adjusted, but grudgingly. A land spirit that was previously antagonistic and becomes an ally can be your most valuable ally, but you will always need to make sure you don't take that for granted, and do your part to maintain the relationship.

In a situation where you've tried for at least a year and the land spirit won't accept your offerings or words of peace, and things appear to be getting worse, you have one of two options: you can hire a specialist in the matter to talk with the wights, figure out what's going on and negotiate if need be; or get off the land. Because wight-specialists are few and far between (I am one of them, but don't travel much), it is usually safer to get off the land, especially because hiring a phony psychic to do a cleansing or exorcism can potentially anger the spirits and make

matters worse.

It sounds pretty harsh to say "just get off the land", but ancient folklore as well as modern legend has proven that angry land spirits will make for a bad living situation, and harm will come to those who don't abide. Just as man is not greater than a raging wildfire, blizzard, flood, earthquake, or tornado, man is not superior to the land spirits and cannot impose on their will. In Iceland, before any roads are built, a völvu is consulted and often roads will take strange patterns, to avoid building over mounds where elves and other wights may live. We don't have that here, because the United States did not start off as a nation embracing polytheism and folklore. We cannot undo all the damage done, or at least not right away and not without a catastrophe of some sort. However, it is far less inconvenient to move one's household if one has not been there for long, than deal with illness, injury, madness, and death. We can't really blame the wights - we have many angry wights whose homes have been invaded and often destroyed by thoughtless humans who felt it was their God-given right to use the land, rather than live in harmony with it. What we have sown, we are now reaping.

In Conclusion

In conclusion we can see that the key to wight worship in North America is to understand that it is important to a Heathen practice but cannot be done exactly as it was done in Heathen times, both with regards to the nature of the wights themselves and the offerings given. There is also the special issue of angry wights whose homes have been destroyed, as well as biomes where different humans will thrive or wilt, correspondingly.

This book is not meant to be the last word on wight worship in North America, but can help with the first steps into a healthy working relationship. Ultimately, knowledge of the do's and don'ts with your particular neck of the woods can't be found in a book, but must be gained via personal experience, and I encourage you to do so.



Svartesól is an artist and writer, Vanic Druid, and longtime devotee of Ing-Frey. An Aquarius and INTJ, Svartesól was born and raised in New England and now lives in Southern California with her life-partner and a temperamental house-wight named Lars. When not writing, Svartesól enjoys beading, sculpting, drawing, cooking, gardening, and talking about herself in the third person.

Visit her website: <http://www.svartesol.com>

