

PAGANISM

Column: Wyrd Will Weave Us Together



By **Karl E. H. Seigfried** | May 28, 2016

The Wild Hunt is exclusively supported by readers like you. No advertising. No corporate sponsors. Your support helps us pay our writers and editors, as well as cover the bills the keep the lights on. We cover the community because of your generosity. Consider making a one-time donation – or become a monthly sustainer. Every amount helps. Thank you for reading The Wild Hunt!

Click here to donate [_ \(https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=2EZJFEHL3E4QN&source=url\)](https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=2EZJFEHL3E4QN&source=url)

Wyrd is a concept at the theological heart of Ásatrú (<http://www.norsemyth.org/2013/09/asatru-definition-for-journalists.html>) and Heathenry. For many of those who practice one of the modern forms of the Old Way, wyrd is a core element of worldview. It stands behind, runs through, and supports our words and deeds. It connects each individual's present moment to her past actions and to the actions of those around her. It forms a constantly shifting matrix that connects us all as we move through our intersecting lives.

The word wyrd itself comes from the Anglo-Saxon. In the main volume of An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary by Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller (<https://archive.org/details/anglosaxondictio00tolluoft>), the first translation given for wyrd is "what happens," followed by "fate, fortune, chance." In the dictionary's supplement, additional translations are presented: "what is done, a deed, an action."

The Old Norse cognate for the term is *urðr*, which An [Old] Icelandic-English Dictionary by Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~kurisuto/germanic/oi_cleasbyvigfusson_about.html) translates as "a weird, fate." The same word is used in medieval Icelandic literary sources as the name for one of the three Norns who sit at the well under a root of the World Tree and "shape men's lives."

The Oxford English Dictionary (<http://www.oed.com/>) entry for weird gives a wide range of definitions, including "the principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined," "that which is destined or fated to happen to a particular person," "what one will do or suffer," and "a happening, event, occurrence."

Taking the Old English, Old Icelandic and Modern English translations and definitions together, there is a curious combination of action and fate. These two concepts seem quite different on the surface level, as those of us raised in a modern western worldview tend to make a distinction between (1) the actions we take of our own free will and (2) the futures that are fated to occur by some deity or supernatural force.

However, for Heathens who believe that "we are our deeds," the two ideas are inextricably linked. What actions you have taken in the past determine what fate awaits you in the future. This is not mystical predetermination at the whim of an omniscient and omnipotent deity but rather a system of cause and effect determined by actions here on Midgard, the world we inhabit.

This is also not an ideology of rugged individualism in which each Romantic hero singlehandedly determines his own destiny in a triumph of the will. Although your actions add color, weight and strength to the thread of your life, that thread continues to tie you back to your beginnings at birth. As you move through time, your thread is woven together with those of many others to form the tapestry of *wyrd*. Together, these two basic concepts underscore the connectedness that is at the heart of a Heathen worldview.

Before the first mooring of your thread occurs, it is important to choose your parents wisely. In the United States, we embrace the myth of the American Dream and pretend that every individual has an equal chance of success in worldly things. *Wyrd* tells us something else entirely, and it is more honest about the realities of this nation.

The actions of your parents shaped your *wyrd* long before you were born, as the actions of your parents' parents shaped theirs. A child born to a crack-addicted and HIV+ mother in a poverty-stricken neighborhood has a much different *wyrd* than does one born to an automobile executive or a real estate developer with a deep portfolio of profitable investments. No matter how hard the first child struggles to take control of her own destiny, she will have to trudge a long and difficult uphill road filled with obstacles before she reaches even the starting point of the second.



"The Norns" by Charles E. Brock [Public Domain]



"American Progress" by John Gast [Public Domain]

Much of what we tell ourselves about level playing fields and the benefits of a traditional work ethic is designed to obscure this basic truth of the functioning of *wyrd*. We seek to deny that past actions have future consequences as we embrace fictions of forgiveness that forward the idea that our deeds can be erased from existence.

Whatever we want the world to be, whatever we will ourselves to be, the past continues to exert its influence on the present. It is this power that is expressed in the idea that *wyrd* represents "the principle, power, or agency by which events are predetermined."

This predetermination is not predestination. As you live your life and make constant large and small decisions about what actions to take, those actions slip into the past and affect your present. The thread of your *wyrd* does not snap and separate from what has been spun in the past, but – with enough effort on your part – it can take twists and turns that change its orientation in the tapestry.

The weaving of the tapestry occurs when the deeds of others intertwine with your own. Your *wyrd* crosses that of everyone with whom you come into contact – family, friends, classmates, and colleagues. Your deeds affect their *wyrd*, and theirs affect yours. The more contact you have, the more actions you have taken together, the more closely intertwined your threads in the fabric.

This is not necessarily a matter of choice. If a student in your class who has never spoken to you has been abused by a family member to the point where he snaps, brings a rifle to class, and puts a bullet in your brain, his *wyrd* has profoundly affected yours – regardless of your own will and desire.

Truthfully, his abuser's *wyrd* has affected yours, and the *wyrd* of those who drove the abuser to abuse have affected yours. At any moment in time, webs of *wyrd* spread out from that moment into countless strands tied to past deeds.



"Woman Weaving" by Oszkar Glatz [Public Domain]

The farther you move from this moment into the past, the greater the number of individuals that have influenced the present reality.

Taking this thought to its logical conclusion, it is clear that we are all connected. Every day, your *wyrd* is affected by people you will never meet. An IRS agent in Washington flags your tax returns for auditing because your name reminds him of a college admissions officer who treated him unfairly when he applied for financial aid. A FedEx driver loses the CV you overnighted for a job you really need because she didn't sleep the night before due to a fight

with her father over end-of-life care. A factory owner in China produces a plastic bowl that leaks toxins into your child's oatmeal because the governor pressures him to ignore safety rules in order to remain competitive in the American market.

In each case, you are deeply affected by an action that is taken by someone with whom you have no personal connection, and their acts are connected to the actions of still others behind them. We cannot pretend that our free will is the sole determiner of our individual fate. We are all connected by the workings of *wyrd*, even if we staunchly deny its power.

Yet you are not the passive recipient of the *wyrd* of others. You are not the victim of powers beyond your control. As the deeds of those around you affect your *wyrd*, your own actions affect their *wyrd*. The closer your relationship to a person, the more impact you have on her life. Your deeds also spiral out from you, intersecting and interweaving with the actions of others, affecting innumerable individuals whom you will never meet face-to-face.

Despite the Romantic impulse to see ourselves as sovereign individuals and the nationalist impulse to divide ourselves into separate tribes, we are all connected. Together, our individual threads make up one great human tapestry, and each of us has a responsibility to always strive for right action. *Wyrd* will weave us together.