

Innangard and Utangard



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The concepts of the Innangard and the Utangard are fundamental concepts well known to modern germanic heathens, originally formulated by Vilhelm Gronbech in his epochal "Culture of the Teutons", the terms have in recent years come under attack from the various currents found principally in universalist paganism ¹ and also those popular academics like Jackson Crawford ², attempting to dissuade people from adhering to precepts which might lead to folkish thought.

Let's take a look at the concept and why we know that such a thing, counter to claims, would have been familiar to our distant pagan ancestors and are a legitimate aspect of heathenry, along with its implications for our modern perspective and beliefs.

It is true and accurate to say that there is no absolute linguistic evidence for the words "Innangard" and "Utangard" found in old Norse, with the earliest explicit mentions of these terms derived from Norwegian lawcode in the post pagan period. The terms are not modern inventions persay, but derived from old Norse words meaning "inside/outside the fence" respectively. In this sense, these words would be linguistically understandable to an ancient Norseman if spoken to them.

The modern perception of these words derives from the work of Gronbech who, in his brilliant sociological examination of ancient Germanic society, formulated this concept to define the, as he saw it, obvious divide our ancestors had between "us and them" not only materially and sociologically, but also cosmologically. Gronbech describes the concept here in his *Vor Folkeatte I Oldtiden* (the original title of *Culture*) from which we shall publish a new translation soon:

"In sharp contrast to the fear of that world's wilds stands the joy of Midgard. With glad eyes, people look over the field. In Beowulf, it is said about the human world:

"One who knew the destinies of men, from times of old, he said, that the Almighty created the earth, the shining plains, washed by waters; the victorious one set sun and moon to light for the people of the earth, adorned the earth's lap with branches and leaves in contrast to the monster's domain, where only a narrow path winds through steep gorges, where unknown paths go down over precipitous cliffs, with many a troll's lair; over the gray stone leans cheerless forest; in the water, strange worms tumble, and trolls stretch on the headlands." This is the Germanic contrast between land and no-land.

In this context, it does not matter much that the poet characterizes the "land" in foreign terms, and glorifies its gentleness by describing it as founded on an outsider god's decision, beautified by bearing the reflection of his creative will; here we are only talking about the crucial difference: one place is desolate, home to evil and misfortune, the other a dwelling for the multitude, living in "luck," in "peace," in "honor." Instead of the Anglo-Saxon poet's "shining plains," we can simply use the Norse sober "multi-useful earth," fjölnýt fold. About the other, it is said: Even the deer that flees through the forest from the dogs would rather give up its life than venture into that lake; that place was not, was it? We might as well let the old word "heore" stand, for any modern substitute would need to be laden with explanations to have the right weight. The word "heore," modern German "geheuer," in Old Norse "hýrr," denotes the mild, the gentle, pleasant, safe; and the opposite "unheore," "úhýrr" is not something harsh, unpleasant, but the eerie; a place, a state, an atmosphere lacking everything humans need to live; the luckless air that suffocates them. "Hyre" is, in other words, the "lucky" in the old sense, and does that need to be said any further? That place is "unhyre"; this place, the home of humans, is called "joyful dwelling." The forest hanging over the marsh is called "cheerless, joyless," devoid of the joy that is so plentiful among humans. Joy is the hallmark of human life; to depart from here, the Anglo-Saxons call "giving up joy," the joy of humans, the joy of the world, the joy of the hall; it is to leave the joy of kin, the joy of honor, of the earth, one's ancestral land, the joyful dwelling.

Strangely enough, one might think. There was no lack of eeriness here in Midgard. Both trolls and witchcraft made themselves quite regularly known. Right into the fair earth, into the most beautiful and greatest of all royal halls, where the shouts of joy rang the highest, among the bravest of men, the most life-loving and death-defying, one day the "unhyre" emerges, in the form of Grendel. There stands witchcraft with everything the brave fear above all else: death in dishonor, in cowardly terror, in ugliness, namely without battle and without a proper funeral.

The ancients are right in their way when they say the world is vast, that one must travel both day and night to enter the very eeriness and realm of death; but they also know that the world is not so vast that boundary powers cannot reach inward at times. Most peoples have their Hades heroes, who venture so far that they are completely swallowed by the giant world and

return to the tribe as from a foreign land; so the Norsemen were likely not alone in the Germans in telling such far-tales. But these tales got their interest and their reality from everyday experience. That "no-land" could be encountered a mile or two from home; and precisely because every member had to experience something "unfortunate," he could assess the veracity in the explorer's sober account of his journey.

*It takes more than simple imagination and something other than construction skills to move into and feel at home in the old world, with its Midgard standing at the center of the universe. One cannot construct the given facts into an image, as the numerous failed attempts to map the Norse cosmos show. Reality does not match the clear black and white schema we get from it. Indeed, the giants lived beyond the horizon, but how do we reconcile that with the fact that they meddle right outside the house door at night? Midgard is actually only the world of day; as soon as the sun sets and humans retreat into their houses, the earth becomes wild and savage. In reality, the world is not the same by night and by day, just as a luckless man who walks around with a human face during the day and looks like everyone else, but at night creeps in wolf form and roams like a ravenous wild beast. All that is "unhyre," which the light binds during the day, rises as soon as the sun weakens and wanders about in giant power. "All hostile dead become stronger at night than in the bright day." Perhaps one can try to reconcile the chaos and save the system by letting thought cling to the world's stratification; Utgard - I use this late Norse name as an emergency measure, since words like "realm of death," "desert," "wilderness" each denote only one aspect of the unknown - Utgard extends beneath the earth, and countless openings allow it to shoot up into the middle of the world at any time. Certainly, the world is layered. Around lead gates down to the home of monsters. Perhaps it was through one of these doors that this or that bold hero penetrated to the innermost of the death realm; at least one could get as far that way as if one first traveled through the visual horizon. But the giant home under our feet is not a province of the main land beyond the horizon. Whether one can delve into the earth and continue the journey home around the earth's edge, who knows? No one denies it because no one claims it. If the question were posed, it would certainly draw a "yes" after it; but this "yes" is born from the thoughts the problem evokes, it is not given beforehand. The cave in the earth is Utgard itself, identical with the place beyond the visual horizon. And the monster's lair in the forest does not derive its existence from an underground connection with distant tribal lands."*³

Detractors might claim that this concept was merely invented by Gronbech more than a century ago, and thus dissuade people from utilizing it as an artifact of old scholarship no longer accepted by the broad swathe of academics. They would be wrong however, and we can cite this exact same approach towards the Utgard being utilized and found by reputable modern scholars as well, such as Eldar Heide in his "Contradictory cosmology in Old Norse myth and religion – but still a system?" wherein he writes in the synopsis of his work on the topic:

"This paper presents a new understanding of the cosmology of pre-Christian Scandinavian myth. The sources appear to give contradictory information; for example, the Æsir are located in different places: at the centre of the world, in the west, in the east, under the sea, and in the sky; Hel is placed both in the underground and beyond the sea. In recent studies, this has led to the conclusion that there is no system. The author argues that there is, and that we misunderstand the passages to other worlds.

The otherworld can be defined as 'the world beyond what we can access by natural means'. The starting-point is the realm that is physically accessible to humans, forming a compressed, wide 'bubble' around him/her and the local community, since our natural range is very wide in the horizontal plane in all directions, but very short downwards and upwards. Still, people have always imagined that it is possible supernaturally to transcend this 'bubble' through certain passages. These passages point in many directions from the middle of the 'bubble', but the locations of the passages are not identical to the location(s) of the other world(s), the passages being interchangeable with each other and often lead to the same (kind of) land/place. The other worlds have interfaces with this world and with each other, but have no geographical location in relation to this world or to the others – they are simply 'beyond the passages', 'on the other side'.

*Accordingly, the fundamental model may be construed as an opposition between 'us' and 'the others', with an ever-changing border. This system becomes clear when we examine not only the limited Old Norse sources, but consider them in the light of the abundant folktales and legends recorded in post-medieval times throughout Northern Europe."*⁴

Although Eldar Heide does not use the actual phrase Utgard or Innangard here we can find the exact same concept being expressed as a belief held by our ancestors, fully in line with that originally expressed by Gronbech a century earlier. We find a resolute distinction between "us and them", the familiar and the unfamiliar, such that there exists an ethical and cosmological significance to this that our ancestors associated with, as Gronbech calls it, the "unhyre" as similar to the modern phrase "the uncanny".

Notably now that we have ascertained the legitimate existence of this concept, we can journey on towards the question of why exactly this has been attacked as a concept in

reconstructive folkish heathenry?

The answer is fairly simple, that the concept of Utangard and Innangard is fundamentally damaging to the portrayal of our ancestors as rootless cosmopolitans, and the religious adherence to this engrained worldview is destructive to the notion of universalism and liberalism itself.

If your own backyard at night is uncanny and strange because it is not within your power and will, unfamiliar to you and beyond the grasp of normative society, then we now have the weltanschauung necessary for a religious exclusion of foreign peoples and a philosophical construction of perspective in which the folk and its normative possessions stand as the only true expression of Man, of Midgard and of the Gods. Through this we can say with finality that the notion that the jungles of the congo constitute Midgard is an anachronism derived from modern thought and cultural motifs, as is the notion that their native folk constitute "Man" as our ancestors understood the term religiously.

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- 1 <https://www.norsemyth.org/2020/09/innangard-and-utangard-problematic.html>
 - 2 [Jackson Crawford Video](#)
 - 3 Vilhelm Gronbech, "Vor Folkeatte I Oldtiden", Trans. Tristan Powers, Andre Melkvik, forthcoming translation
 - 4 Eldar Heide, "Contradictory cosmology in Old Norse myth and religion – but still a system?", Maal og minne, 2014

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