

FRAZER'S ANTHROPOLOGY: SCIENCE AND SENSIBILITY

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LAST year saw the seventieth anniversary of the inauguration of these Frazer Lectures when Frazer was presented with a laudatory address drawn up by A. E. Housman on behalf of a large number of his friends and admirers. Frazer, who was then 67 years old, a Fellow of the Royal Society and soon to receive the Order of Merit, replied with the rather grand modesty that was one of his conspicuous characteristics:

I can only hope that, if posterity should concern itself with my writings, it will not reverse the verdict which you have passed upon them.... It is my earnest wish that the lectureship should be used solely for the disinterested pursuit of truth, and not for the dissemination and propagation of any theories or opinions of mine. (See Frazer 1927a: 365; Dawson 1932: xii)

The truth is that his lasting influence has been in the literary rather than the academic world, while social anthropologists had for the most part distanced

Revised text of the Frazer Lecture in Social Anthropology for 1991, given at the University of Cambridge on Thursday, 5 March 1992, and prepared to mark the centenary of the publication in 1890 of the first edition of *The Golden Bough*. I am grateful to the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, for permission to quote from a few of the letters to Frazer held in the College's Wren Library, in particular those from Sir Arthur Keith, William Steed, the Revd Montague Pollock, R. R. Marett, Sir Francis Galton and Mr J. Parrott. I am also grateful to Steven Seidenberg and Jeremy Coote for their help in preparing the text of the lecture for publication.

themselves from his theories and opinions during his own long lifetime. Some thirty years after Frazer died at the age of 87, his one-time secretary, R. A. Downie, was provoked to defend him against presumptuous younger critics, among whom he singled out the Professor of Social Anthropology at Oxford, E. E. Evans-Pritchard. 'But anthropologists are a queer tribe,' Downie wrote, 'and since 1948, when Evans-Pritchard gave his lecture on *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk*, it has become almost traditional in Frazer Lectures to take some idea of Frazer's and pull it to pieces' (Downie 1970: 29). Downie exaggerates, though it is true that some later lecturers have followed a brief conventional acknowledgement of Frazer's undoubted eminence with papers that implicitly raise doubts about why or even whether he deserved it.

But even now, a century after *The Golden Bough* was first published, and half a century after Frazer's death, 'Frazer of *The Golden Bough*' still remains, if only by name, by far the most widely known of all British social anthropologists. Whether they like it or not, Frazer's popular reputation remains part of their own, and since he raised the question of posterity, it seems appropriate to take the occasion of these anniversaries to look back on some of the verdicts that have been passed on his work.

There was no full-scale biography of Frazer until 1987. Robert Ackerman's *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work* draws upon most of the published and many of the hitherto unpublished sources to bring to life Frazer's character and intellectual interests (he had few, if any, which were not), in relation both to his own times and to ours. If I add here little more than a few asides from my own anthropological viewpoint, I have two excuses. The first is that my D.Phil. thesis was examined and approved by the Revd E. O. James (1888–1972), who is described by Ackerman (1987: 124) as probably 'the last of the true-believing Frazerians' and who was kind enough to suppose that at heart I shared his faith. The second is that before Ackerman thought of writing his book, I had taken an interest in some unpublished letters to Frazer, when they first began to arrive in Trinity College, Cambridge, jumbled together in a few old cardboard boxes, including a few to which Ackerman does not refer. Handling those personal letters gave an intimate impression of the fascination Frazer's work had exercised over correspondents of all kinds from all over the world; and the respect and deference, even veneration, accorded this shy, reclusive, and personally far from charismatic scholar seemed to call for some explanation. Even as first-year students of anthropology in the mid-1940s we were allowed to assume that Frazer, to put it bluntly, was a bore, if on a grand scale; and he certainly wrote at inordinate length, as you may judge from one or two passages I am bound to quote.

Frazer could scarcely have hoped for a more sympathetic biographer than Ackerman, but even he introduces his subject with the intentionally challenging statement, 'Frazer is an embarrassment' (ibid.: 1); and Ackerman knows that this has been particularly true for British social anthropologists, who have to agree that Frazer was and remains the most famous of them all, while also dissociating themselves from much that he wrote. He embarrasses us now partly for the very

reason that gave him his wider popular appeal—his apparent sympathy with the assumptions and values of his own times and social class. Though he often appears to accept those values while at the same time obliquely suggesting their limitations, he never (unlike Matthew Arnold, whom he in some ways resembles) directly confronts them. It is not necessary, therefore, to read very far in his work to find examples of the imperialism, paternalism, 'colonial mentality' and now, certainly, 'élitism' that some critics of British social anthropology still detect in his successors, like the sins of their colonialist fathers inexorably visited upon their children, innocent though they may claim to be. And, of course, those peoples whose grandparents Frazer constantly refers to as 'savages'—'your dear savages', as one of his clerical admirers called them—do not like it the better for knowing that Frazer included not only his own remote ancestors in that category, but also most of his living fellow countrymen. The masses everywhere, he wrote, constitute 'a solid layer of savagery beneath the surface of society' (cf. e.g. 1931: 129, 141). When Frazer died in 1941, Professor Fleure's obituary for the Royal Society tried to allow for some of Frazer's comments on the common people, which might be misunderstood in the more democratic atmosphere of the nation at war. As an example he quoted a Frazerian passage that ends with a reference to 'empty husks of popular superstition on which the swine of modern society are still content to feed'. We are not quite reassured, I think, when Fleure then adds, 'needless to say, "swine" is used here without any touch of unkindness' (Fleure 1941: 902). Frazer was in principle sympathetic towards the underprivileged, but he could never resist a turn of phrase or a biblical allusion.

These are questions of a change in general social sensitivities between Frazer's time and ours; but among the literary and academic public, who take Frazer's social attitudes for granted as part of a history of ideas familiar through their own parents or grandparents, the part assigned to Frazer in the history of twentieth-century ideas and sentiments—in the history of modern 'Western' sensibility, to use the word in my title—is disproportionate to the much smaller part he soon came to play in the history of social anthropology. And as his influence on so many of this century's creative writers shows, he provided general readers with more food for the imagination, and more colourful and stylized prose, than his successors usually had to offer.

Some thirty years ago, when I lectured on Frazer at the Jung Institute in Zurich, I criticized Frazer's interpretations of primitive religion more dismissively than I would now, suggesting that his ideas of primitive psychology were little more than plausible constructs of his own Victorian rationalism. The lecture was not at all well received by the students and members of the Institute, who preferred to admire him as a guide to the understanding of the human psyche, an imaginative pioneer in the exploration of Jungian archetypes. T. S. Eliot similarly found *The Golden Bough* psychologically complementary to the work of Freud, 'throwing its light on the obscurities of the soul from a different angle' (quoted in Vickery 1973: 235). I should have been better advised in Zurich to remember the line of Yeats, whose interests in Frazer were similar to those of the psychoanalysts: 'Tread

softly, for you tread on my dreams'. For Frazer in several passages sees himself as Prospero, appealing to his readers' sense of the illusions, transience and mystery of dreams. Compare, for example, the famous opening of the abridged version of *The Golden Bough* with that of Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders*, published in the same year. Frazer begins by promising his readers 'a voyage of discovery', from 'Turner's dream-like vision of the little woodland lake of Nemi—"Diana's Mirror", as it was called by the ancients' and so on to the secret of the King of the Sacred Wood. Radcliffe-Brown begins with a short geography lesson: 'The Andaman Islands are part of a chain of islands stretching from Cape Negrais in Burma to Achin Head in Sumatra.' Having myself started a book in the approved Oxford style of Radcliffe-Brown, I now think there may be some happy medium between the sensibility of the one and the science of the other.

Among later well-known social anthropologists, perhaps only Lévi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* (itself a romantic, indeed deliberately poetic title) and Margaret Mead, in their very different ways, have invited their readers to share their personal anthropological experience, in a voyage of self-discovery. Both, like Frazer, are very self-conscious writers, and write with an eye to the reader's own self-consciousness. It is clear that Frazer's wider public often read him less for anthropological knowledge of very foreign peoples than because he encouraged them to think about themselves, and to discover themselves more interesting and exciting than they had supposed themselves to be. When he received an honorary degree at Manchester University he told the Mancunians that in their city 'the pulse of life, the pulse of Empire beats more strongly than in the peaceful, the cloistered seclusion of our ancient Universities.... Manchester ranks with Athens and Alexandria in antiquity, and with Florence in the Middle Ages' (see Frazer 1927a: 357). When Rudyard Kipling invited Frazer to accept yet another of his honorary degrees, from the University of St Andrews in 1923, he addressed him as 'one to whom our civilization owes so much of its knowledge of itself'; and in marking the recent centenary of *The Golden Bough*, some well-known modern writers and critics have on the whole confirmed Kipling's judgement, with reference to Frazer's influence on 'thinkers' and creative writers during this century, some of it of a kind he would probably have preferred not to acknowledge (see e.g. Fraser (ed.) 1990). D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, had he taken any interest in them, would have shocked or baffled him, and he soon found Eliot's *The Waste Land* incomprehensible (see Downie 1970: 21, 60). With his fear of working-class 'Bolshevism' and his primness about sex, he would have been dismayed to find himself remembered in the company of Marx and Freud as 'one of the makers of our modern consciousness'. But there are many other representatives of our modern consciousness (Mrs Whitehouse, for example) with whom he would have felt quite at home. He denounced 'an age like ours' (this was in 1920) when marriage and family ties counted for nothing, sexual communism was commonly taken for granted, and the very distinction between the sexes was being obliterated. At such a time, he suggested, we should do well to contemplate the domestic virtues of the poet William Cowper, in order to 'repel and refute those

shallow sophisms which, addressed to the basest of human passions, would subvert the fabric of civilization and plunge us back into that savagery from which it has cost mankind so many generations of patient effort to emerge' (see Frazer 1927a: 364). Downie, by contrast, mentions that a passage in Frazer suggesting that science itself might be superseded by some quite different approach to intellectual and moral enlightenment had been quoted by 'the drug culture' of the 1960s as 'a prophecy of psychedelic insight' (Downie 1970: 47). It is ironic that Frazer, a model of middle-class morality and social conformity, should have become accepted as a herald of later intellectual and emotional emancipation.

For social anthropologists Frazer began to belong to the past at almost the same moment as these Frazer lectures were established. In 1922, simultaneously with the publication of the first abridged edition of *The Golden Bough*, came Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders*, the first outstanding products of the British field research tradition that Frazer had very actively encouraged. As every first-year student knows, these monographs began to point students towards empirical studies of Frazer's 'savages', who, when spoken to in their own homes and languages, were found to have much more of interest to say for themselves than Frazer had to say about them. The central theme (or, as he thought, theory) of *The Golden Bough*—that all mankind had evolved intellectually and psychologically from a superstitious belief in magicians, through a superstitious belief in priests and gods, to enlightened belief in scientists—had little or no relevance to the conduct of life in an Andamanese camp or a Melanesian village, and the whole, supposedly scientific, basis of Frazer's anthropology was seen as a misapplication of Darwin's theory of biological evolution to human history and psychology. This is, of course, an absurdly simplified account of what happened with the change from library research to field research, but it is enough to suggest why, among social anthropologists, Frazer's reputation declined so rapidly after he had first achieved it. For a younger generation there were, of course, other more personal reasons. As Evans-Pritchard explained:

I began to vary the tedium of the History School [at Oxford]...by taking an interest in books like Tylor's *Primitive Culture* and Frazer's *Golden Bough*.... But there was here a snag. I did not want to become, I was going to say, just an intellectual. I wanted a life of adventure too, and fieldwork seemed to be the solution to combine both. (Evans-Pritchard 1973: 18)

Frazer's immediate successors were still as committed as Frazer himself was to establishing the scientific credentials of their subject, but though their science was to be a *social* science (for Malinowski a 'science of culture', for Radcliffe-Brown a 'natural science of society') their model for this science, like Frazer's, was taken from the natural sciences. 'The great thinkers, the Newtons and Darwins of anthropology, will come after us,' Frazer had written. They are still awaited, though Radcliffe-Brown sometimes seemed to hope that he might be one of them. It must be remembered, of course, that funding for research was

more readily forthcoming in the name of the sciences than in the name of the arts, and a scientific knowledge of social processes seemed to promise the power to control them.

In answer to doubts raised about the empirical foundations of his 'structuralism' Lévi-Strauss has said recently that 'the great speculative structures are made to be broken' (see Smyth 1991), but I cannot think that he now regards all structuralist interpretations to be entirely misconceived. In a paradoxical way, for an influential anthropologist to make such a statement disarms particular criticisms of his work, and Frazer was, if unconsciously, a master of such tactics. He often reminds his readers that all theories, magical, religious, or scientific, were in the last analysis only 'theories of thought', as though it mattered little whether they were mistaken or not. I doubt if Frazer meant to erect his 'speculative structure' of the whole evolution of the human intellect, from savagery to civilization, for the scientific satisfaction of seeing his successors demolish it, but by insisting that all theories of the nature of the world and the universe are merely of notional significance, that only facts really count, he appeals to his readers' inclination to accept at their face value the choice and arrangement of the facts by which he supports the theories.

And he does so with overtones particularly calculated to appeal to his contemporaries, brought up on sermons, the Bible, and a biblical view of human ignorance in relation to divine omniscience. All our human theories were after all, he wrote, 'merely hypotheses devised to explain that ever-shifting phantasmagoria of thought which we dignify with the high-sounding names of the world and the universe' (Frazer 1900, iii: 460), all 'fated to be washed away like childrens' castles in the sand by the rising tide of knowledge' (see Frazer 1927b: 280). It would seem impertinent to ask him what the low-sounding names of the world and the universe might be, or whether 'scientific', economic or political theories, applied as they have been with disastrous consequences, were *really* no more important than sand-castles. These are typically Frazerian images, and typically he uses them not because they are good to think with, but because they were good for his readers to feel with. The anatomist and physical anthropologist Sir Arthur Keith wrote to Frazer, after he had heard Frazer's Huxley Lecture, that in him 'without doubt the "kirk" had lost a tip-top preacher as well as a scholar'. Frazer was brought up in a tradition that took sermons seriously, and John Dwyer's recent book, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (1987), often reminds one of this and other characteristics of his—the cultivation of a spirit of melancholy and of rational fellow-feeling, along with admiration for Addison, Hume, Adam Smith and Malthus. He certainly derived some satisfaction from his sad reflections on the human condition, spending so much time on that 'melancholy record of human error and folly', as he called *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1900, iii: 458).

For many modern readers, the voice of the preacher, often echoed in Frazer's writings, must sometimes seem incongruous with the voice of the scientist. In what he called 'the scientific spirit', he wrote: 'we must endeavour to investigate

the beliefs and customs of mankind with the same rigorous impartiality with which, for example, the zoologist investigates the habits of bees and ants' (see Frazer 1927b: 27). But when he develops his well-known analogy between the magician and the scientist, both attempting to control nature by the application of immutable laws, the voice of the preacher carries him away. Take, for example, the following passage where, however, a consciousness of human weakness is complemented, as often in sermons, by a message of hope:

Both of them [the scientist and the magician] open up a seemingly boundless vista of possibilities to him who knows the causes of things and can touch the secret strings that set in motion the vast and intricate mechanism of the world... They lure the weary inquirer, the footsore seeker, on through the wilderness of disappointment in the present by their endless promises of the future; they take him to the top of an exceeding high mountain and show him, beyond the dark clouds and rolling mists at his feet, a vision of the celestial city, far off, it may be, but radiant with unearthly splendour, bathed in the light of dreams. (Frazer 1900, i: 62-3)

One can almost hear the announcement of the hymn that will follow; but for readers accustomed to the language and sentiments of the scriptures, and trying to reconcile them with the scientific authority of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, this amalgamation of the scientific quest and *The Pilgrim's Progress* offered a comforting literary resolution. Frazer was awarded a Civil List pension in 1905 'in recognition of his literary merits and of his anthropological studies' in that order, and his literary and biographical essays (on Condorcet, for example, and Renan; see Frazer 1927a, 1931) are admirable for their style and content, but it was the more homiletic and prophetic style of *The Golden Bough*, in which he presented his wide range of learning, that gave him his credence among the general public and brought him a repletion of high academic and official honours.

Frazer addresses his readers directly, in a tone of gentle but entirely assured authority, as though no reasonable person could possibly disagree with him, and even those social anthropologists who had been among the first to criticize his ideas had to come to terms with an uneasy sense of his superiority. With reference to the Frazer lectures Max Gluckman, for example, said that though we no longer found his basic ideas useful, that we read him, if at all, for antiquarian interest, and often found him dull, we were still 'perched upon his shoulders, dwarfs on a giant' (Gluckman 1962: 16). Though it must seem unlikely to those who remember Gluckman that he could ever regard himself as a dwarf, either physically or mentally, it is more than conventional praise. Again, Evans-Pritchard, in spite of his criticisms of Frazer's imaginative construct of 'divine kingship' (Evans-Pritchard 1948), later paid him much the same sort of tribute as Frazer's own contemporaries, describing *The Golden Bough* as 'among the great achievements of English literature and scholarship' (Evans-Pritchard 1986: 132). As late as 1965, Edmund Leach, one of the most impatient critics of Frazer's overblown prose and literary embellishment of his sources for dramatic effect, concluded an almost entirely hostile account of Frazer's (and Malinowski's) anthropology with

the highest praise: 'It is because each of us can recognize in their pages the savage within us that we feel the excitement of insight, the unverifiable validity of a statement of genius' (Leach 1965: 36). Again, the primary interest of 'the savage' would seem to be to heighten our own self-consciousness. Leach, however, had a sharp, advocate's mind, and might equally well have argued for the prosecution, along with Wittgenstein, that 'Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages' since 'his explanations of [their] observances are much cruder than the sense of the observances themselves' (Wittgenstein 1979: 8e).

Frazer, like Wittgenstein, was a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and therefore perhaps should have known better, but Frazer received his honorary DCL from Oxford in the company of Cecil Rhodes and Lord Kitchener, and was writing for a general public that, like them, had very much cruder notions of 'savages' than those which, largely as a result of his own work, began to be entertained after the Great War. (Though to be fair, and as Brian Street has shown (1975), Frazer earlier played a part in introducing a somewhat more enlightened view of 'savages' into the works of such popular writers as Rider Haggard.)

There are now very few social anthropologists who remember from their own direct experience how and why Frazer came for a time to be so highly regarded that any criticism of his work seemed a bold act of impiety (only Andrew Lang among his contemporaries openly made fun of him). Whatever others may have thought of his ideas or personality, for them he was still an authority to be reckoned with, and an original source of their own anthropological interests and knowledge. By now he seems a remote, ancestral figure, and *The Golden Bough* has become little more than an intellectual ancient monument—'one of the most beautiful ruins in the history of thought' Lord Annan called it even some thirty years ago (Annan 1959: 11); and if we are to understand how Frazer, whose work scarcely any student of social anthropology in the last fifty years has actually read, came to be so eminent, we can do so only by excavating that ruin, in a version, perhaps, of what Michel Foucault has termed an 'archaeology of knowledge'. What fragments of 'discourse', one may ask, does one discover at the foundations of Frazer's great reputation for authority among scholars and men of letters, poets and novelists, statesmen and politicians, liberal churchmen and free-thinkers, and general readers from all walks of life?

I have chosen here only a few such fragments, of which the most complete comes from the address presented to Frazer by A. E. Housman to inaugurate these lectures some seventy years ago. Housman made some play with the idea that Frazer himself was a magician, the King of the Wood and the custodian, as well as the author, of the Golden Bough. There, Housman continued, is to be found

learning mated with literature, labour disguised in ease, and a museum of dark and uncouth superstitions invested with the charm of a truly sympathetic magic. There you have gathered together, for the admonition of a proud and oblivious race, the scattered and fading relics of its foolish childhood, whether withdrawn from our view among savage folk and in different countries, or lying unnoticed at our doors. The forgotten milestones of the road which man has travelled, the mazes and blind

alleys of his appointed progress through time, are illuminated by your art and genius, and the strangest of remote and ancient things are brought near to the minds and hearts of your contemporaries. (See Dawson 1932: xii-xiii)

It is some indication of the impression Frazer made on his readers that this eulogy takes on the cadences of Frazer's own rhetorical language. Housman spoke on the whole for the educated middle class connected with the older universities (though by no means all academics) and his praise reflects their interests—their respect for learning, their literary culture, their national pride, their relationship with colonized peoples and with their own working classes, their belief in progress, their concern with their own social origins, their taste for historical legends and classical mythology. Frazer wrote of the magician as the wisest and most intelligent of his tribe, who was, therefore, chosen as its leader. His admirers fancifully cast *him* in that role, as the repository of their myth and legend, a magician, a seer or a prophet, and Frazer was happy to accept it.

As early as 1901, Wickham Steed, who was to become editor of *The Times*, wrote to Frazer after meeting him in Rome. William James, who had met him there at the same time, had found him 'a sucking babe of humility, unworldliness and molelike sightlessness to everything but *print*' (quoted by Ackerman (1987: 175); original emphasis), but Wickham Steed saw him differently. 'My dear Frazer,' his letter begins, 'It seems rather like a profanation to drop the "Mr." to an arch-magician like you.' And R. R. Marett went further, referring, if mischievously, to the very formidable Lady Frazer as the *flaminica dialis*, the wife of the priest of Jupiter. Jane Harrison spoke for the avant-garde classicists—Gilbert Murray, and later E. R. Dodds, whose interest in what was to become his *The Greeks and the Irrational* was in part suggested by reading Frazer. The classicists were blind, Jane Harrison wrote, until Frazer came 'to light the dark wood of superstition with a gleam from *The Golden Bough*...at the mere sound of the magical words "Golden Bough" the scales fell [from our eyes]—we heard and understood' (Harrison 1925: 82-3).

And many less academic readers found inspiration in *The Golden Bough*. In his obituary Fleure went out of his way to mention a miner in South Wales for whom it was a treasured possession (Fleure 1941: 899), while Downie quotes Jane Harrison's account of meeting 'a cultured policeman, a member of the Working Men's College, who said 'I used to believe everything they told me, but, thank God, I read *The Golden Bough*, and I've been a free-thinker ever since' (Downie 1970: 64). On the other hand, a liberal clergyman, the Revd Montague Pollock, wrote to Frazer that *The Golden Bough* was 'wonderfully confirmative of one's faith in the inner validity of the Holy Scriptures...only to him who like yourself can see and hear', he told Frazer, 'is the deep truth revealed'. In relation to Frazer's anti-clerical and basically anti-religious views, Sir Francis Galton congratulated him on 'the cleverness with which you indicate without expressing conclusions at all to wound the feelings of simple orthodox persons'. For Frazer was all things to all men. Hard-headed, if liberal-minded, colonial officials welcomed his anthropology as a contribution to humane and well-informed

administration. 'Statesmanship may profitably go to school with anthropology', said Sir Frederick Whyte, the President of the Indian Assembly; and much of the British field research in the first half of this century was carried out under the auspices of such as General Smuts, for example, and Sir Hubert Murray, Gilbert's brother, the Governor of Papua. To these proconsuls, Frazer was able to argue persuasively in their own terms for the funding of anthropological research as a moral duty of imperial rule.

Very different from such men of affairs were provincial antiquarians, represented at their most charming in a letter from a Mr J. Parrot of Stockton-on-Tees, written in 1901. With the death of Queen Victoria in January of that year, the crisis of a royal succession, central to *The Golden Bough*, filled the British newspapers of the time, but for many the letter may still strike a sympathetic note:

Dear Sir,

Your books always fill me with an indescribable rest—carry me away from 'all the dreary intercourse of daily life'. Not that my life is unhappy...it is increasingly joyous since that event which your first edition of *The Golden Bough* came to commemorate—my marriage. That was the opening of the Golden Gate into the most delightful portion of my life.

You will understand me better when I say that I am not a newspaper reader, and the flotsam and jetsam of public opinion passes without effect on me, for I would sooner be concerned with finding a new fact about primitive man and fire, or the discoverer of a fire-split flint, than share all the dreary intercourse of parliamentary, municipal and social life.

Naïve, perhaps, Mr Parrot's letter may seem, but it is revealing, for it touches upon a sense of discontent with modern civilization, a longing for other places and other times, which also troubled the poets of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Frazer understood this very well, and to some extent shared it. The language and apocalyptic vision of the Bible, he wrote, lifts us above 'the dull round of common life' (Frazer 1927a: 450), and he was always nostalgic for Cambridge, where 'remote from the tumult and bustle of the world with its pomps and vanities and ambitions, the student may hope...to penetrate through the little transitory questions of the hour to the realities which abide' (ibid: 441).

World-weary readers like Mr Parrot had already been well prepared for Frazer's 'voyage of discovery' by the poets they most admired: Wordsworth, for example, with his wish to exchange the worldly materialism of his own society for the spiritual vitality of 'a pagan, suckled in a creed outworn'; Matthew Arnold's Scholar Gypsy, escaping to the natural world of Bagley Wood from 'this strange disease of modern life / With its sick hurry, its divided aims / Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts...'; and Tennyson's unhappy hero in *Locksley Hall*, dreaming of the sensuous life of a tropical island:

There, methinks, would be enjoyment more than in this march of mind,
In the steamship, in the railway, in the thoughts that shake mankind.

There the passions cramped no longer shall have scope and breathing space;
I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.

Frazer himself, of course, had no appetite for any such exotic experience. Downie (1970: 18) tells one of several similar, probably apocryphal stories of how, as a child, Frazer had fled howling with terror from the Wild Man of Borneo at a fair, and in his prime he readily found good reasons for not accompanying A. C. Haddon on an expedition to New Guinea. But for those who felt, like Mr Parrot, alienated from their own civilization, *The Golden Bough* came as a compendium, and vicarious experience, of other ways of thinking and feeling, older, more deeply rooted in human nature, and rich in symbolic content.

Hence Eliot, Pound, Lawrence and Yeats, to mention only the best known, used Frazer's anthropology to criticize the spiritual impoverishment of a civilization dominated by applied science—'an old bitch gone in the teeth, a botched civilization', Ezra Pound called it. For them, what Frazer had intended as a sustained critique of human irrationality in effect helped to restore the irrational, or at least the non-rational, to its place in artistic creativity. Frazer, ambivalent as usual, had made allowance for such a reaction, contrasting Renan's understanding of religious emotion, for example, with the arid rationalism of the German theologian Feuerbach (see Frazer 1931: 227). There was something for everybody in Frazer's anthropology. It strengthened Yeats's magical and theosophical beliefs, deepened Eliot's understanding of Christian spirituality and, conversely, directed D. H. Lawrence away from his residual Christianity towards his search for his own dark gods. For Eliot, *The Golden Bough* was a great artistic expression of religious disillusionment, 'throbbing...with the agony of spiritual life' (quoted in Vickery 1973: 236). D. H. Lawrence followed Frazer's 'savages' to New Mexico, where they freed him, he wrote, 'from the...great era of material and mechanical development...the great psyche of materialism and idealism which dominated me' (Lawrence 1936: 142). There again, Frazer had anticipated those who might regret the replacement of the old gods by what he called 'certain abstract ideas of ethers, atoms, molecules and so forth': 'Thus instead of being peopled with a noisy bustling crowd of full-blooded and picturesque deities... animated with the warm passions of humanity, the universe outside the narrow circle of our consciousness is now conceived as absolutely silent, colourless, and deserted' (see Frazer 1927b: 213). The gods that Frazer felt sadly obliged to discredit in the name of science were restored by the poets in the name of sensibility—of Christian or pagan spirituality, of intuition, of imagination, and of instinct.

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