

OCCASIONAL CONFUSIONS: THE INAUGURATION OF THE FRAZER LECTURES

JEREMY COOTE

THIS Journal used to run an occasional series of short articles entitled, 'Byways in Oxford Anthropology'. This short article could perhaps be the first (and last) in a series entitled, 'Dead Ends in Oxbridge Anthropology'.

While helping Godfrey Lienhardt prepare for publication the text of his contribution to the series of annual Frazer lectures (see *JASO*, Vol. XXIV, no. 1 (1993), pp. 1-12), I became intrigued by a difference between his account of the inauguration of the series and that provided by Robert Ackerman in his authoritative life of Frazer (Ackerman 1987), a work described by Lienhardt himself in the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'comprehensive' and as a 'lively and meticulously researched biography' (Lienhardt 1988).¹ Both Lienhardt and Ackerman refer to

I am grateful to the following for their assistance: Jonathan Smith, and his colleagues, at Trinity College Library; Aidan Baker, and his colleagues, at the Haddon Library, Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge; and Alex Slater at the Oriental Institute, University of Oxford. I am also grateful to Alan Macfarlane and Peter Rivière for helpful advice and particularly to Robert Ackerman himself for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. References to the Frazer papers at Trinity are given here as 'TCC Frazer...'.

¹ For the record, I have spotted two other errors in Ackerman's book, both even more trivial than the one that is the subject of this article. First, he states that the Reverend John Roscoe's return to Uganda in 1907 was for a *final* two years (Ackerman 1987: 210), when in fact Roscoe returned to Uganda in 1919 on the Mackie Expedition to Central Africa (on

Frazer being presented with a laudatory *Address* drawn up by the poet and classical scholar A. E. Housman, but while Lienhardt states that this took place at a ceremony in Cambridge, Ackerman has the presentation taking place at a ceremony in Oxford. As I was unable to resolve this matter to my satisfaction before the text of Lienhardt's Frazer lecture was due to go to press, I persuaded him to omit from the published version any mention of where the presentation took place: the published text thus reads: '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' (Lienhardt 1993: 1). I was not able to find the time to investigate the matter more thoroughly before Lienhardt's death in 1993, but I have done so now and as a consequence know more than I ever really wanted to know about the early history of the Frazer Lectures. Hence this article.

Ackerman's few words on the presentation are quite precise. He says: 'the ceremony at Oxford was an impressive one, the high point of which was a brief but eloquent address to Frazer written by his friend A. E. Housman and circulated to a distinguished gathering of friends, colleagues and well-wishers' (Ackerman 1987: 288). Apparently, this took place in the evening, for Ackerman goes on to say that Frazer's wife Lilly 'must have savored the evening deeply' (*ibid.*). And we get an even clearer picture of the event from Ackerman's subsequent comment on a later ceremony held at the Sorbonne, at which Frazer was awarded an honorary doctorate, about which he says 'the event was even more glittering than the one at Oxford in that it was not merely a public occasion but a state occasion as well' (*ibid.*). So in Ackerman's version of events the presentation took place in the evening in the presence of a distinguished gathering at a glittering public occasion in Oxford. Looking back, it was the apparent detail of Ackerman's account that led me to doubt Lienhardt's assertion that the presentation had taken place in Cambridge and to persuade him to let me alter—or, at least, neuter—the text of his lecture. It seemed that Ackerman must have drawn on a previous account, perhaps even that of an eyewitness, though he acknowledges no authority or source at this point in his text.

On reflection, however, it does seem very unlikely that any such event would have taken place in Oxford rather than Cambridge, for not only was the series founded by Cambridge University, with which Frazer was closely associated, but Frazer had few connections with Oxford, even though the University had

which see, for example, Roscoe 1922). Later, in discussing Frazer's inaugural lecture of May 1907 as Professor of Social Anthropology at Liverpool University (a post he occupied for only some six months, though he did not actually resign from it until 1920), Ackerman claims that 'the lecture is one of few pieces he chose not to collect and reprint' (1987: 213). It was, however, not only published as a stand-alone essay (Frazer 1908) but also reprinted in his *Psyche's Task and the Scope of Social Anthropology* (Frazer 1913).

conferred an honorary doctorate of Civil Law on him in June 1899.² It is true that Oxford is one of the four universities that host the Lectures (along with Cambridge, Glasgow, and Liverpool). It is also true that Oxford was to host the first lecture in the series in April 1922, but this would seem to have made it even more unlikely that Oxford would have also hosted a separate inaugural event. Concerning the first lecture, Ackerman remarks (*ibid.*), following Dawson (1932: x, n. 1), that 'it was doubtless academic courtesy that impelled Cambridge to inaugurate the series at Oxford'. That may be so, but I doubt that even in the early 1920s academic courtesy stretched so far as to lead the Cambridge authorities to agree to any proposal that Oxford should host both an inaugural event and the first lecture. On the face of it, it is surely more likely that any such special 'inaugural' event took place in Cambridge, where Housman lived—in Frazer's old rooms as it happens (Downie 1940: 9; see also Page 1983: 102)—and where Frazer was still a Fellow. Lienhardt clearly thought it did. Indeed, in conversation he was specific about the venue: the Old Combination Room at Trinity College.

Looking back at Ackerman's text, I realised how at least part of the confusion had arisen. He had simply failed to distinguish between the occasion at which Housman's address was presented (if there were such an occasion) and the occasion at which the first lecture took place. His account of the presentation, indeed, follows on directly from an account of the setting-up of the series and of the first lecture, and is to be taken as an account of the event at which the first lecture was given. There can, however, be no doubt that the presentation and the first lecture took place on separate occasions a year apart. If there were a presentation, it took place in April 1921. The typescript copy of Housman's *Address* in the library at Trinity College, Cambridge is dated April 1921 (TCC Frazer 28: 42),³ while

² The Lectureship was established by Grace 5 of 26 November 1920 (Cambridge Historical Register 1922: 25). There are a number of published accounts of the background to the founding of the Frazer Lectures. Warren R. Dawson provided one in his introduction to the publication of a collection of the first eleven lectures (Dawson 1932), as did Frazer's sometime secretary R. Angus Downie in his *Frazer and the Golden Bough* (Downie 1970: 28–9), while Ackerman himself has provided two (see Ackerman 1974: 340, 1987: 258–60). A subscription was organized to establish a fund in honour of Frazer soon after the completion of the third edition of *The Golden Bough* in 1914, and an announcement to that effect was printed in *The Times* (see Anonymous 1914). The first suggestion, apparently, was for a portrait, the second to fund fieldwork expeditions. The matter was not resolved until after the Armistice, however, when it was recognized that the fund would not be sufficient to fund expeditions and that a lectureship in Social Anthropology should be established instead. A committee of the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Glasgow, and Liverpool was set up and the necessary arrangements made.

³ It seems that Housman was not exactly thrilled to be asked by F. M. Cornford (one of the prime movers of the scheme to honour Frazer) to compose the Address. He wrote to Cornford: 'I suppose I shall make myself unpopular if I refuse the...request which is made of me, so I will try to write something for Frazer. But oh, why was I born? This is a rhetorical

Frazer's published *Reply* to it is dated 30 April 1921 (see also Frazer 1927: 365 and Dawson 1932: xii–xiii). The first Frazer lecture, however, took place in May 1922 (Hartland 1922). It is, of course, not impossible that there was a presentation in Oxford in April 1921 and then a lecture in Oxford in May 1922, but it does seem more likely that if there had been a presentation of some sort it would have taken place in Cambridge in April 1921, a year before the lecture took place in Oxford in 1922. There can be no doubt that there was a lecture in Oxford in 1922,⁴ but I began to wonder if a presentation had actually taken place. Is there any evidence that it did?

Given that Ackerman's account is confused, what other evidence is there? There is the account given by R. Angus Downie, Frazer's sometime secretary:

In 1921 Sir James was paid a singular (and spontaneous) compliment when the Frazer Lectureship in Social Anthropology was founded in his honour at the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow and Liverpool. The occasion was marked by an Address to Sir James Frazer, composed by A. E. Housman and subscribed by over two hundred leading figures in the world of learning. (Downie 1970: 28)

There is also H. J. Fleure's account in his obituary of Frazer: 'In 1921 there was founded the Frazer Lectureship in Social Anthropology in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow and Liverpool, and this was made the occasion of an address to Frazer by A. E. Housman, specially printed' (Fleure 1941: 18). The hardest other evidence seems to me to be provided by the published versions of the *Address* itself and Frazer's *Reply* to it. The *Address* was drawn up by Housman and 'signed' (at least in the sense that their names were 'subscribed', i.e. printed under it), by 237 supporters.⁵ Rather than 'being circulated to a distinguished gathering of friends, colleagues, and well-wishers', then, the *Address* was drawn up on

question, and does not expect an answer' (Housman to F. M. Cornford, 3 May 1920; see Ackerman 1974: 359).

⁴ For a contemporary report on the inaugural lecture of 1922, see Anonymous 1922.

⁵ Dawson (1932: xii) gives the figure as 175. I do not know how he arrived at this. I can only assume that in attempting to count the number of names he turned over two pages, missing 64 names—there are 32 to the page (while managing to add another 2!). The *Address* and the *Reply* were both privately printed at St Dominic's Press, Ditchling, the *Reply* being loosely inserted into copies of the *Address* (see Besterman 1934: 51). The text of the *Address* was published in *The Frazer Lectures 1922–1932* (see Dawson 1932: xi–xii), in Downie's *Frazer and the Golden Bough* (Downie 1970: 28–9), and in an edition of Housman's letters (Housman 1971: 184). In none of these published versions was the list of subscribers included. A copy of the original, privately printed version with its list of subscribers is held by the Haddon Library, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge (call number P621F). Interestingly, there is no indication on this original, privately printed version that Housman wrote the *Address*.

their behalf. My understanding is that these 237 supporters were in fact the people who paid for the establishment of the fund that was used to found the Frazer Lectures. I doubt they ever actually 'gathered'; indeed, fourteen of those whose names appear would have found it difficult to do so as they were dead by April 1921, each of their names in the list being marked with an obelus. For example, Durkheim's name appears even though he had died in November 1917; I imagine he would have been one of the first to contribute to the fund after its establishment in May 1914 (see note 2 above).

My first conclusion, then, was that both the *Address* and the *Reply* were prepared, privately printed, and distributed without the necessity of any 'event' as such, or at least not a large-scale, public, glittering event. The *Address* may indeed have been physically 'presented' to Frazer, perhaps at his rooms in London's Temple, or at a small party at Trinity College, but there is no reason to suppose that this presentation constituted any sort of 'event'. It is difficult to imagine, but a possibility worth considering, that there was no presentation at all and that the *Address* was merely delivered by hand by Housman or a colleague; but perhaps it was. Perhaps, indeed, it was sent by post, which would make the fact that the text of the *Address* has been published in an edition of Housman's letters less peculiar than I first thought (Housman 1971: 184).

For a while I entertained such possible alternative versions of history. Quite why I was so reluctant to accept Lienhardt's assertion about a presentation taking place in Cambridge I do not now know, but I thought I had found conclusive proof that Lienhardt's conversational assertion that it had taken place in the Old Combination Room in Trinity College, Cambridge, was an error when I came across a letter written by Housman to Percy Withers on 28 December 1920. Housman remarks there that the Combination Room is likely to be out of commission during the spring of 1921 due to delays in reconstruction work (see Housman 1971: 183). Moreover, further research revealed that a grand Frazerian event had taken place in the Old Combination Room at Trinity six years later in March 1927. This comprised a gathering of anthropologists, brought together in Frazer's honour—and apparently at his invitation (TCC Frazer 24: 72, 74, 75, 76), organized to coincide with the 1927 Frazer Lecture given in Cambridge by R. R. Marett; indeed Marett gives a brief account of the event in his biography (see Marett 1941: 246; see also Anonymous 1927a, 1927b, 1927c, 1927d). I thus concluded that while Ackerman had compounded into one event any presentation that might have taken place in April 1921 and the first lecture of May 1922, Lienhardt had compounded any presentation that might have taken place in April 1921 and the Frazerian gathering of 1927. This conclusion was strengthened in my own mind when I began, with Ahmed Al-Shahi, to prepare for posthumous publication an essay by Lienhardt on Frazer and Evans-Pritchard (Lienhardt 1997). For in this Lienhardt quotes from the

published *Report* of the gathering (Report no date [1927]), a photocopy of which he had among his papers.⁶

In the meantime, however, I learned from Jonathan Smith at Trinity College Library that while what are now the Combination Room and Parlour at Trinity certainly were out of commission between 1920 and 1922, the Old Combination Room was still in use during this time, so that there is no reason why there could not have been a presentation by Housman to Frazer in the Old Combination Room in April 1921. Whether or not I think there was I cannot decide. It is notoriously difficult to prove a negative, but having checked all sorts of potentially relevant records (the Frazer papers at Trinity College, Cambridge, the Cambridge Historical Register, the official index to *The Times* etc.), I am now more or less convinced that Frazer was not presented with Housman's *Address* at a public event. I am, however, aware that I have by no means trawled all the relevant potential sources of information on this point. This, though, is as far as I can go, so I shall leave it here.

Reflecting on all this now, I see how characteristic of Lienhardt it was to let me have my way and allow me to cut from his text the reference to the presentation taking place in Cambridge. Did he know all along that the presentation had taken place as he said he thought it had? Perhaps I convinced him that there was at least a legitimate doubt in the matter. Or perhaps he thought it too minor a point to bother about, a view that some readers of this article may well have already come to share. It would be appropriate to give Lienhardt the last word here. There is, however, someone else to whom it would also be appropriate to give it. For the confusions I have discussed seem to me to stem from the use of the term 'inaugural' and its cognates. It is surely a misuse of the word to claim that the series of Frazer Lectures was inaugurated by the occasion (if such there was) of the presentation of the address at a gathering in the Old Combination Room at Trinity College, Cambridge in April 1921. It was, rather, inaugurated on the occasion of the public event at the Examination Schools in Oxford on 17 May 1922, that is, the first Frazer lecture. The first Frazer lecturer, E. Sidney Hartland, thus got it right when he opened his lecture with the words (Hartland 1922: 1): 'We are met this evening to inaugurate a series of lectures on Social Anthropology...'

⁶ Incidentally, Frazer's speech at the gathering was published in the *Report* (see Frazer no date [1927]), a publication omitted from both the published bibliography of his works compiled by Theodore Besterman (1934) and Ackerman's 'Additions to Besterman's Bibliography' (see Ackerman 1987: 309–10). The photocopy of the *Report* in Lienhardt's papers was made from the copy of it held in the pamphlet collection in the Haddon Library, Cambridge (call number P520F). I have not been able to locate any other copies of the *Report*. Ackerman does not mention the gathering or the *Report* in his biography. It should also be noted that Marett's lecture was actually the *sixth* in the series, not the *fifth* as stated in the title of the *Report* (for a list of the early lectures, see Dawson 1932: xiii–xiv).

REFERENCES

- ACKERMAN, ROBERT 1974. 'Sir James G. Frazer and A. E. Housman: A Relationship in Letters', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. XV, no. 3, pp. 339-64.
 ... 1987. *J. G. Frazer: His Life and Work*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ADDRESS 1921. *Address to Sir James George Frazer, LL.D., D.C.L., Litt.D., on the Occasion of the Foundation, in his Honour, of the Frazer Lectureship in Social Anthropology*, no place [Cambridge]: privately printed.
- ANONYMOUS 1914. 'University Intelligence—Cambridge, May 20: A Tribute to the Author of "The Golden Bough"', *The Times*, no. 40,259 (Thursday 21 May), p. 15.
 ... 1922. 'The Frazer Lecture', *The Oxford Magazine*, Vol. XL, no. 20 (Thursday 25 May), p. 376.
 ... 1927a. 'The Frazer Lecture for 1927', *Man*, Vol. XXVII, no. 4 (April), p. 80.
 ... 1927b. 'The Frazer Lecture', *Cambridge Review* (25 February), p. 280.
 ... 1927c. 'The Frazer Dinner', *Cambridge Review* (4 March), p. 300.
 ... 1927d. 'The Frazer Lecture', *Cambridge Review* (11 March), p. 320.
- BESTERMAN, THEODORE (compiler) 1934. *A Bibliography of Sir James George Frazer O.M.*, London: Macmillan.
- CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL REGISTER 1922. *The Historical Register of the University of Cambridge: Supplement, 1911-1920*, Cambridge: University Press.
- DAWSON, WARREN R. 1932. 'Introduction', in his (ed.), *The Frazer Lectures 1922-1932*, London: Macmillan, pp. ix-xv.
- DOWNIE, R. ANGUS 1940. *James George Frazer: The Portrait of a Scholar*, London: Watts.
 ... 1970. *Frazer and the Golden Bough*, London: Victor Gollancz.
- FLEURE, H. J. 1941. 'James George Frazer 1854-1941', *Obituary Notes of Fellows of the Royal Society*, Vol. III, no. 10, pp. 897-914.
- FRAZER, JAMES GEORGE no date [1927]. [Untitled speech (No. III of 'Speeches at the dinner given by Sir James and Lady Frazer in the Old Combination Room, Trinity College, Cambridge, Tuesday, March 1st, 1927')], in *Report of Gathering in the Old Combination Room, Trinity College, Cambridge, March 1st and 2nd, 1927, on the Occasion of the Fifth Frazer Lecture Delivered by Dr R. R. Marett, March 2nd, 1927*, no place [Cambridge]: privately printed, pp. 12-17.
 ... 1908. *The Scope of Social Anthropology: A Lecture Delivered before the University of Liverpool, May 14th*, London: Macmillan.
 ... 1913. *Psyche's Task and The Scope of Social Anthropology*, London: Macmillan.
 ... 1927. *The Gorgon's Head and Other Literary Pieces*, London: Macmillan.
- HARTLAND, E. SIDNEY 1922. *The Evolution of Kinship: An African Study* (The Frazer Lecture, 1922), Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- HOUSMAN, A. E. 1971. *The Letters of A. E. Housman* (ed. Henry Mass), London: Rupert Hart Davis.
- LIENHARDT, GODFREY 1988. 'A Desk-Bound Adventure (review of Ackerman 1987)', *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 4427 (5-11 February), p. 131.
 ... 1993. 'Frazer's Anthropology: Science and Sensibility', *JASO*, Vol. XXIV, no. 1, pp. 1-12.

... 1997. 'Two Great British Social Anthropologists: Sir James Frazer and Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard', *JASO*, Vol. XXVIII, no. 1 (Special Issue in Memory of Godfrey Lienhardt; eds Ahmed Al-Shahi and Jeremy Coote), pp. 63–82.

MARETT, ROBERT RANULPH 1941. *A Jerseyman at Oxford*, London: Oxford University Press.

PAGE, NORMAN 1983. *A. E. Housman: A Critical Biography*, London: Macmillan.

REPORT no date [1927]. *Report of Gathering in the Old Combination Room, Trinity College, Cambridge, March 1st and 2nd, 1927, on the Occasion of the Fifth Frazer Lecture Delivered by Dr R. R. Marett, March 2nd, 1927*, no place [Cambridge]: privately printed.

ROSCOE, JOHN 1922. *The Soul of Central Africa: A General Account of The Mackie Ethnological Expedition. By the Rev. John Roscoe, Hon. M.A. (Camb.), Leader of the Expedition*, London: Cassell.