The Golden Bough Study Guide

The Golden Bough by James Frazer

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

The Golden Bough Study Guide....1
Contents....2
Introduction....3
Author Biography....4
Plot Summary....5
Characters....8
Themes....13
Style....15
Historical Context....16
Critical Overview....18
Criticism....19
Critical Essay #1....20
Critical Essay #2....23
Critical Essay #3....30
Critical Essay #4....39
Topics for Further Study....46
Compare and Contrast....47
What Do I Read Next?....48
Further Study....49
Bibliography....50
Copyright Information....51

Introduction

Ever since its first edition in 1890, *The Golden Bough* has been considered a major influence in the development of western thought. In this book, Sir James G. Frazer, a Cambridge researcher trained in classical literature, outlines ancient myths and folk legends, proposing that all civilizations go through three stages of development: belief in magic leads to organized religion, which eventually leads to faith in the powers of science. Frazer's literary style raised interest in the ideas of other world cultures at a time when western societies considered the peoples of Africa and Asia to be the products of "primitive" thought. In addition, his attempts to identify the basic story motifs to which all human beings respond was carried forth in the twentieth century by psychologists such as Carl Jung, who developed the idea of the collective unconscious, and by such literary masters as James Joyce and T. S. Eliot.

Frazer went on to expand the original book, first to a two-volume set and then to a total of thirteen volumes, before editing it down to one concise volume, which is the one that is most commonly read today. Over time, the book's reputation has changed. While it was once considered to be an important study in comparative anthropology, many social scientists later found fault with the methods that Frazer used in collecting materials: he never spoke directly to people of the cultures about which he wrote, but instead he relied on other researchers' findings and on questionnaires that he gave to people who traveled to other lands. Frazer's conclusions are generally considered unreliable because he did not follow sound scientific procedures, but *The Golden Bough* is still revered as a wellwritten introduction to the subject of comparative religion.

Author Biography

James George Frazer was born on January 1, 1854, in Glasgow, Scotland. As he grew up he developed an interest in classical literature, which was his major when he enrolled in Glasgow University at age fifteen. After graduating Glasgow he received a scholarship to Trinity College at Cambridge, where he was given a teaching position in 1879. For the rest of his life, except for one unsatisfying year at Liverpool University in 1907, Frazer was associated with Trinity College.

In his early years at Trinity, Frazer formed a relationship with William Robertson Smith, who at that time was assembling the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Smith asked Frazer, who had recently become interested in the cultures and stories of primitive people, to write an article about totemism for the encyclopedia. Frazer was a dedicated writer, spending twelve and fourteen hours a day researching in the library; when his finished entry proved too long to include in the encyclopedia, he published it as his first book, *Totemism*, in 1887.

Soon after that, Frazer started on what was to be the defining work of his lifetime, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*. A two-volume edition was published in 1890; it was expanded to a three-volume edition that was published in 1900. Between 1911 and 1915 a thirteen-volume edition came out. In 1922, Frazer edited the twelve books down to one abridged edition. A revised abridged edition was released thirty-seven years later, in 1959, long after his death.

Most of Frazer's other writings revolved around anthropological themes that were introduced in *The Golden Bough*. These include *The Scope of Social Anthropology* (1908); *The Worship of Nature* (1926); and *Myths of the Origin of Fire* (1930). In 1914 he was knighted in recognition of his work.

Frazer died in 1941 in Cambridge, where he taught. He is credited by many with being one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1-2

The entire line of inquiry of *The Golden Bough* is developed from one particular ritualistic practice that Frazer describes in the book's early pages. In Italy, he explains, there is a wooded area on the shore of Lake Nemi, which is dedicated to the memory of the Roman goddess Diana. By tradition, each priest of Diana who guards the forest, known as the King of the Wood, gained his position by murdering the priest who held the position before him. Tradition held that the King of the Wood must be killed by an escaped slave who would beat the king to death with a golden bough taken from a tree that grew in the grove. Frazer was curious about several elements in this tradition. He wondered why the priest is referred to as a king, a practice he learned was fairly common. Next, he wondered about the probability that the priest would spend much time worrying about would-be assassins ready to take his position from him. Finally, Frazer wondered why the golden bough was so important to the ritual and why there was an assumption that the branch of gold would always be available. Frazer's search for more information generates a long inquiry into myths and beliefs of various cultures.

Chapter 3-15

For an extended section near the beginning of his inquiry, Frazer looks at concepts associated with magic and how magic evolved into religion. He shows how kings were thought to have magical powers and how that idea translated throughout the ancient world into the idea of the king as a religious figure, sometimes equated with a god. At the same time, he also explores how trees, particularly oaks, came to hold special significance in agrarian societies.

Chapter 16-28

After establishing the connection between secular rulers and religion, Frazer looks at the ways in which this relationship endangered those important personages. He discusses taboos at length, drawing from a variety of cultures to establish that taboos occur both as primitive superstitions and as beliefs in modern, cultivated societies. Once he has described forbidden acts and how they fit into the established social order, Frazer brings in examples where the forbidden actions actually become part of the social code, focusing on the taboos that limited the actions of the king and/or priest. The discussion then leads to cultures that practice the killing of kings (so that their divine powers will not be left to wither with age) and the killing of sacred trees.

Chapters 29-49

Tying in myths that are related to the story of Diana, such as those involving Adonis, Attis, Osiris, and Demeter and Persephone, Frazer shows how various deities in world religions have been connected to the agricultural cycle of life and death. Each of these myths involves an important figure who is identified with the growth cycle, a figure who dies or is stolen away to the underworld but then is allowed to return to the earth for limited stretches of time, illustrating the idea that the deaths of gods are not catastrophic, but instead are considered to be part of the process of nature.

Chapters 50-61

Frazer explores a variety of methods of sacri- fice throughout time and in different lands, including ritual killing of sacred animals in order to honor gods and killing animals as a way of symbolically killing evil. This discussion presents the concept of the scapegoat, which was originally an actual goat meant to represent evil but later came to be a human being who represented evil and was killed for the same purpose. Frazer draws connections between the idea of murdering kings in order to retain their divine power while it is still at its peak and the idea of killing people who can then take evil to the grave with them, and he speculates that the two practices became joined as one.

Chapters 62-67

In theorizing about why the golden bough is so important to the tradition of succession of the King of the Wood, Frazer connects gold, the sun, fire, and power. Trees that had been hit by lightning were, for example, often seen as especially significant because they were thought to have even more fire in them than ordinary trees that were burned for fuel. Frazer speculates that the golden bough may be an ancient name for mistletoe, which grows as a vine on oak trees, turns yellow or golden while the rest of the tree remains green, and is thought in several cultures to have mystical properties. Connecting the magical power of the kings with the magical powers ascribed to mistletoe, Frazer identifies the belief that the soul of a person could be put into some object for safekeeping and the belief that important persons could only be killed by something that was already a part of them: thus, if the power of the King of the Wood was already in the mistletoe, it would make sense that the bough would be the only thing needed to kill him.

Chapter 68-69

In the last two chapters, Frazer returns to the question of why the priest of Diana must be killed and why by the particular prescribed method. One conclusion to be reached from this inquiry, he says, is that the process of civilization leads from a primitive belief in magic to a more orderly belief in religion to, ultimately, a belief in science. Though confident that this is the natural progression for any society, he reminds readers that

science is not necessarily the end of human growth and that there may be other systems of belief that will supplant it in the future.

Characters

Adonis

In addition to his story being a fixture of the Greek tradition, the legend of the Greek god Adonis, also known as Tammuz, has roots stretching back to Babylonia and Syria. As both Tammuz in Babylonia and Adonis in Greece, he was a god of vegetation and was seen as the embodiment of masculine beauty. He was loved by Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, who hid him in a gold chest, which she gave to Persephone, the queen of the underworld, for safekeeping. When Persephone peeked in the chest and saw Adonis, she was captivated with his beauty and refused to give him back to Aphrodite. Zeus settled the dispute by giving him to each goddess for part of the year. The change of seasons was explained in connection to the place where Adonis was during each part of the year, since Aphrodite, lamenting when he was gone, refused to help plants or animals grow, marking winter in climates where it did not snow.

Aeneas

Aeneas is a central figure of Roman mythology. He is the title character of Virgil's masterpiece *The Aeneid*, which recounts his seven years of travels after the Greeks' siege of Troy. His journey ended when he landed in Italy and founded Rome. According to legend, Aeneas, before going to the underworld, was told that he must take with him a golden bough from an evergreen oak tree that grew in the grove of Diana, to give as a gift to the Queen of the Underworld.

Artemis

See Diana

Attis

Like Adonis, Attis was a god of vegetation, worshipped in Phrygia. He was a shepherd, famed for his good looks and beloved by Cybele, the goddess of fertility. His death is explained in different ways in different versions of his story, and he is said to have been turned into a pine tree, linking him to the tree mythology that drives the story of *The Golden Bough*. In a similar way to the story of Demeter and Persephone, Attis' death caused Cybele to grieve so much that the earth was thrown into a famine, and it is for this reason that annual rituals were performed in the fall to mourn the loss of Attis and in the spring to celebrate his return from the underworld.

Balder

In Scandinavian mythology, Balder the Beautiful could be harmed by nothing on heaven or earth except a bough of mistletoe. Frazer supposes that Balder was a personification of the mistletoe that grows on the oak tree, which was worshipped as sacred by the Scandinavians. This mistletoe is considered to be a possible source for the idea of the golden tree bough referred to in the book's title, thereby connecting the ancient Roman ritual practiced in Italy with the religious practices that developed in the countries of northern Europe.

Demeter

Demeter is the Greek goddess of the harvest. The story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, one of the oldest Greek myths, has parallels in many ancient cultures. According to the myth, when Persephone was carried off by the lord of the underworld, Demeter refused to help the harvest, causing famine across the Earth. Zeus, the king of the gods, returned Persephone to her but ruled that she could only spend two-thirds of the year with Demeter and had to return to Hades for four months of the year. For the four months annually that she is gone, Demeter is said to mourn, accounting for the lack of vegetation in the wintertime. Frazer's analysis of the story centers on the poem *Hymn to Demeter*, by Homer. Elements of her story are found throughout the world, traced through the "corn-mother" goddess worshipped by Cretans during the Stone Age and similar stories about characters identified as corn spirits.

Diana

One of the most important figures in classical mythology, Diana is the Roman goddess of the hunt and of childbirth, associated with the Greek goddess Artemis. Her association with childbirth and fertility, as well as with hunting, led to the belief that she was also the goddess of wood, and in particular of oak, which is specified in the rituals that Frazer examines in *The Golden Bough*. The temple of Diana of the Wood, near the village of Nemi in Italy, is guarded by a priest who has earned his position by killing the previous priest, a ritual on which Frazer builds the book.

Dionysus

Dionysus is the god associated with the grape and, by extension, with wine and drunkenness. A religion was formed around the worship of him, celebrating the irrational over the rational, countering the focus on reason that characterized Greek culture. He is related to the book's focal story about the golden bough because, in addition to being god of grapes, he is considered god of all trees. Moreover, the practice of sacrificing goats in ceremonies to honor Dionysus resembles the ritual sacrifice of the King of the Forest in the golden bough tradition.

Egeria

Egeria is a water-nymph who is important in the sacred grove at Nemi because, like Diana, she can give ease to women in childbirth. Sometimes Egeria is considered to be another form of Diana.

Hippolytus

See Virbius

Isis

Sister and wife of Osiris in Egyptian mythology, Isis was given dozens of different personalities throughout the years. Frazer speculates that one of her original functions in mythology was that she was thought to be the goddess of corn and barley, having discovered them and given them to mankind. Over time, her image changed from that of the plain corn-mother (a function shared by the Roman goddess Diana) to a glamorous beauty, and as this transformation occurred she grew to be the most popular of all Egyptian deities.

King of the Wood

The King of the Wood is the traditional priest of the Arician grove. Frazer recounts how this position has been handed down, generation after generation, since antiquity. The book's title, *The Golden Bough*, refers to the tradition that states that the King of the Woods must be killed by an escaped slave, hit with a golden bough from a tree that grows there. The person who kills him then becomes the new King of the Wood. He is thought to represent a worldly husband to the goddess Diana. Throughout the course of the book, Frazer speculates about various theories explaining how the king's ritual murder came to be custom. The history of the position, as well as similar rituals in other cultures, is explored. Using this particularly significant ritual, Frazer examines the implications of hundreds of beliefs and their evolution over the centuries.

Numa

Numa was a wise king who was a husband or lover of Egeria. Since the legend of Egeria is closely associated with that of Diana, Frazer speculates that Numa has a place in the cult at Nemi that serves as a basis of the book. Numa is often thought to be another form of the King of the Wood.

Osiris

Osiris is an ancient Egyptian god whose death and resurrection were celebrated each year. Osiris was the most popular of Egyptian deities, and he was worshipped for centuries. As an Egyptian king, he is credited with having taught the Egyptians how to cultivate fruit from trees, while Isis, who was both his sister and his wife, taught the people how to plant and harvest grains. Osiris traveled the world, teaching people of foreign lands how to grow crops. When he returned to Egypt, though, he was ambushed by a cadre of forty-seven conspirators, led by one of his own brothers; they tricked him into a box and, sealing the lid, sent it floating off down the Nile. Isis found his body downstream and buried it, but Osiris lived on as the lord of the underworld.

Orestes

A very famous figure in Greek mythology, Orestes is thought, according to one legend, to have started the cult of Diana of the Woods. After killing the King of the Tauric Chersonese, Orestes is said to have fled to Nemi, the place where the golden bough ritual is followed, thereby introducing Diana to that part of Italy.

Persephone

Greek myth explains how Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, was playing in a field one day and was carried off by the Lord of the Underworld, Pluto. When Demeter's grief threatened to destroy the world with famine, Zeus arranged for Persephone to return to the surface world for two-thirds of the year, but for the last third she always had to be Pluto's bride again in Hades. She also figures into the story of Adonis, with whom she fell in love and whom she tried to keep in the underworld with her, although Zeus allowed him to return to the earth's surface for several months each year to be with Aphrodite, who loved him first.

Tammuz

See Adonis

Virbius

Bearing the Roman name for the Greek hero Hippolytus, Virbius was Diana's lover and showed no interest in other women. When the goddess Aphrodite tried to take Virbius for herself he spurned her advances, and in her humiliation she persuaded his father to kill him, but Diana brought him back to life and hid him at Nemi. Among the rituals that make up the focus of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer includes the ban on horses at Nemi, which is thought to have started in recognition of the fact that Virbius was said to have

been killed by being dragged behind horses. He is considered to be the founder of the sacred grove and the first king of Nemi.

Themes

Search for Knowledge

The central subject of this book, and the source of its title, is the ritual replacement of the priest of Diana at Aricia through murder. Frazer was so curious about this myth that he examined it with meticulous attention to detail. Hundreds of pages filled with thousands of examples from cultures throughout history are devoted to exploring myth. *The Golden Bough* contains sections that seem unrelated to Diana and the King of the Wood. Readers who do not follow the book from its beginning might wonder, for example, how it could possibly lead from Roman mythology to eighteenth- century Irish Christmas rituals or the custom of people of New Hebrides who throw their food leftovers into the sea.

Despite its strange and twisting side trips, though, this book returns to its main point often enough to assure readers that it is, in fact, about that one specific myth. In addressing the question with such a tidal wave of information about a variety of cultures, Frazer illustrates something about knowledge and how it is acquired. The message that is embedded in his method is that knowledge is not simple or isolated but is instead only relevant when it is connected to related facts, which are themselves related to other facts.

Search for Self

In the course of discussing one academic question that leads him to a myriad of exotic, ancient cultural traditions, Frazer ends up showing how remote practices relate to modern times. With books about psychology or contemporary life, it is easy for readers to connect to their own lives, but *The Golden Bough* is burdened with the added responsibility of subject material that its author considers important precisely because it does not seem to directly affect his life or the lives of his readers. From the very beginning of the book, he does nothing to tell readers why they should care, leaving it to their own intelligence to deduce what the practices of dead civilizations have to do with the state of humanity today. Still, the personal relevance of everything in the book is hard to miss. The cold approach that Frazer takes toward the many cultures that he mentions in this book might be seen as a way for readers to distance themselves from his subjects, but then again, it is more likely to make readers see their own lives from the outside, through the objective eyes of the scientist.

The taboos of other cultures are different, but similar in structure, to modern cultural standards. The values of hunters and farmers, so strongly based in the cycles of the moon and the seasons, regulate modern life, from the holidays of the Judeo- Christian tradition (which coincide with pagan calendars) to the nine-month schedule of the U.S.

school year. The tradition of sacrificing powerful priests and kings tells readers much about the otherwise contradictory ways celebrities are treated. In all of the traditions that Frazer has included in *The Golden Bough*, there is a common thread. He emphasizes this commonality by drawing his examples from as wide a pool as possible, in order to show that his ideas are not limited to just a few societies that happen to be similar. Frazer presents enough examples to make a convincing argument that what he says applies to the basic human situation.

Style

Archetype

An archetype is a model or type in literature that is considered to be universal, occurring in all cultures at all places and times. The story of the King of the Wood that Frazer focuses on in *The Golden Bough* has details that are specific to its context that do not appear in other circumstances, and so it cannot be considered archetypal. However, in trying to trace the source of this unique myth, Frazer finds that it derives from many other archetypes that gather together. Some examples of these are the stories of gods who bring on winter by descending to hell for several months a year; corn mother myths; ritual murder of scapegoats; and the reverence for the oak tree in societies where it grows. These archetypes are familiar, in some form, to all cultures. Some twentieth-century psychologists have speculated that archetypes are embedded in the genetic code of humans.

Folklore

The word "folklore" refers to the beliefs and traditions of groups of people. Usually, these cultural aspects are not formally recorded by the culture itself, which might be unaware of them; they are more likely to be recorded by an outside anthropologist. At the time that Frazer started to work on *The Golden Bough*, interest in the beliefs of the common people of a given culture was just starting to gain recognition: the word "folklore" was coined in 1846, just a few decades before Frazer's first edition.

Objectivity

One of the most notable aspects of Frazer's style is the dry, scientific tone of his writing. He never conveys an opinion or any feeling about the stories he relates. Given the volume of information that he presents, this objectivity can make it difficult for readers to absorb what he has to say: because the work shows no variance nor any emotional involvement of any kind, readers are left to determine the importance of each piece of information for themselves. Even though this characteristic makes the book less interesting to read, Frazer's objective tone is necessary. This book's main purpose is to be educational, not entertaining, and the objective tone assures that he is taking a properly neutral stance toward what he is reporting.

Historical Context

Frazer published the first edition of *The Golden Bough* in 1890, just eight years after the death of Charles Darwin. Darwin, a British naturalist, considered to be one of the greatest scientists of the nineteenth century, developed a theory of evolution, which he outlined in his 1859 book *On the Origins of Species*. This work popularized the phrase "survival of the fittest." According to Darwinian evolution, the species that were best fitted to their environments were the ones that were bound to survive, while the ones that were not well adapted tended to die off and become extinct. Within a species, genetic adaptations were achieved when those organisms that had the traits that were most important for their survival, such as speed or strength, were the ones that lived long enough to reproduce with other survivors, and the offspring of such unions inherited advantageous traits, making each generation more likely to mature and reproduce than the previous one.

Darwin also argued that all organisms were descended from one single source and that they changed as they adapted to different situations. This idea, developed further in 1871 in *The Descent of Man*, met with much stronger opposition than the idea of natural selection and is contested to this day by some religious fundamentalists. Still, even his detractors would be forced to admit that Darwin was one of the most influential scientists of his day.

In *The Golden Bough*, readers can get a feel for the enthusiasm that Darwin's theories inspired in scientists of the late nineteenth century. Frazer's explanation of how cultures inevitably develop from primitive belief in magic to more complex belief in religion and then, finally, to a reliance on science shows an unwavering faith in the idea that, over time, entire systems of belief evolve from one form to another. It is a supposition, like Darwin's evolutionary scale, that would have seemed impossible to an earlier generation. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, sciences had shifted their focus from examining isolated events to studying events in respect to their relationship to similar events. Like Darwin, who had studied the different adaptations in similar species that had evolved in different climates, Frazer speculated about the ways that different story motifs appeared in altered but recognizable form in different cultures.

Frazer's belief in society's inevitable growth toward faith in science—which, today, is the theory of his that is most often rejected—can be seen mirrored in the works of the most well-known economic writer of his time, Karl Marx. In his 1848 tract *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx proposed that all world governments would pass through specific, predetermined periods of growth before ending up with Communist political structures. Like Frazer, Marx believed that there was just one logical outcome to the growth of society, and he believed that he could determine it scientifically.

While his theories about cultural progression were challenged from the very first publication of *The Golden Bough*, Frazer is still acknowledged as a highly influential anthropologist. His work generated a new interest in comparative anthropology, influencing a generation of late nineteenth-century psychologists, including Sigmund

Freud (whose theories often alluded to stories from ancient myths) and Carl Jung (whose theory of the collective unconscious seems to explain Frazer's ideas of universal myths). *The Golden Bough* also influenced literature, particularly the work of James Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Within its own field of anthropology, however, Frazer's work has not been very influential, owing to the fact that he did not gather his information directly from the people about whom he wrote. All of his work is based on secondhand information rather than field work, and as a result the value of his writing is considered marginal.

Critical Overview

When it was first published, *The Golden Bough* was considered an insightful work that tied together the widely divergent canon of anthropology into one cohesive theory. The book was praised for its thoroughness and accepted as a major scientific accomplishment. A 1890 review in the *Journal of American Folklore*, for instance, proclaimed the anonymous reviewer "grateful" to Frazer "for the exhibition of materials so rich, and for the literary skill with which he has made accessible observations so important to the central ideas of our modern thought." As time passed, however, questions arose about Frazer's methodology, which consisted of combining works that were gathered through non-scientific methods. His use of hearsay and third-person accounts of cultural practices made anthropologists doubt the value of his work as science.

Still the book's reputation as a work of literature grew. It was recognized as having influenced such important twentieth-century thinkers as Freud, Anatole France, Arnold Toynbee, Margaret Mead, and Oswald Spengler. In 1941, noted anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski noted an inconsistency in Frazer's impact on the intellectual community when he stated that "Frazer was and is one of the world's greatest teachers and masters" but that, despite his enormous following, "[h]is inability to convince seems to contradict his power to convert and to inspire." His point was that other writers followed Frazer for his vision and for the far-reaching thoroughness of his theories, even though they did not believe in the actual theories. By the second half of the century, critics found little sense in dwelling on shortcomings in *The Golden Bough* and instead accepted its impact. Stanley Edgar Hyman, for instance, wrote in 1962 that the book is "not primarily anthropology, if it ever was, but a great imaginative vision of the human condition." He saw no problem with reading this book, which was meant to be a scientific work, as a work of literature, noting that the author was trained in literature and not in anthropology: "It is in his original field of classical studies . . . that Frazer may have produced his greatest effect." Since then, many critics have joined Hyman in accepting *The Golden Bough* as an important piece of literature, but not as an important scientific achievement.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at College of Lake County. In this essay, Kelly considers whether the reputation that Frazer's book has maintained since its first printing will carry on into the future.

There is every reason in the world to believe that Sir James Frazer's name will be remembered for many years, due to the resounding importance of his masterpiece, *The Golden Bough*. The book had a powerful impact when it was first published in 1890, reaching beyond the usual academic audience that reads such scholarly works and finding a place in the public consciousness. Between then and his death in 1941, Frazer kept the work in the public eye with subsequent additions and expansions. Since then, the book has never gone out of print.

On the other hand, it would be easy to believe that *The Golden Bough* has outlived its usefulness. Frazer's rich, airy, academic writing style, which once may have served to impress and attract nonacademic readers, is now considered to be hard work for the average person. The book's vast, encyclopedic catalogue of cultural practices, gleaned from years and years of meticulous research, may have once been thought of as the best single source of facts on its subject, but now the Internet has made even more cultural information available in one location, much of it from primary sources. Modern readers, attracted to the ease of finding information and put off by Frazer's difficult, antiquated language, might bypass the experience of reading *The Golden Bough*, drawn instead to more accessible sources for the same ideas, so that in time the unthinkable might happen, and James Frazer, once considered among the most influential writers of the twentieth century, could drop from memory.

From the start, *The Golden Bough* was accepted as both a scientific and literary achievement. It was central in getting Frazer, who was trained in classical literature, appointed a professorship for a year (in 1907) in social anthropology at Liverpool University. Such a casual crossing between the realms of science and art would be impossible today, when college education is more accessible. Today one could hardly be considered an expert in any field without at least having a degree in that area. At a time when demonstration of knowledge was more important than credentials, though, Frazer easily proved himself to be one of the most knowledgeable people in the world regarding social anthropology. Any reader of *The Golden Bough* can tell that Frazer weaves its fabric from such diverse strains of cultural practices because he is so entirely familiar and comfortable with such a wide variety of them. He has a point to make and thousands of examples to draw from in the course of making it.

It was his ability to weave a coherent tale that expanded Frazer's appeal beyond academics, making the book a success in the general population. There had been studies of folklore before, books and journals about obscure beliefs and practices. Studies of the myths of Greek and Roman mythologies had absorbed many academic careers. The greatest achievement of *The Golden Bough* was that it not only explained ideas from diverse areas of the globe but that it gave them meaning in relation to one

another. The facts of, for example, a Scandinavian tradition, a Pakistani custom, and a pagan European ritual might be interesting to someone who has a background in such matters, who can put each piece of information into a context with others that one knows from experience. To an outsider, though, they are just unrelated facts. What Frazer did was, in effect, to make his readers feel like they are insiders. His narrative, starting with one fixed but somewhat arbitrary point, provides a context that all can absorb, which gave all his readers the chance to participate as if they are part of the panel of archeological experts.

One of the most important things that *The Golden Bough* illustrates is an attitude to take when comparing cultures. In its broad scope, the book recognized the diversity of cultural ideas. Reading it line by line, though, readers gain a sense of the sameness of all of cultural beliefs. Frazer provides a smooth ride through ages and across the globe, softened by his measured, objective tone. The book's authorial voice speaks with such firm confidence that it is difficult to disagree. Even in the 1800s, most of his readers would not have seen Joseph Mallord Turner's 1834 painting, which hung in London's National Gallery, but Frazer managed to draw them in, not alienate them, just as he has drawn in generations with his opening question, "Who does not know Turner's picture of the Golden Bough?" The discourse that follows the question could be considered a triumph of rhetoric, as he manages to hold the whole story of humanity together with sheer verbal dexterity. Now and then he brings the discussion back into focus with phrases such as "With these explanations and cautions I will now adduce some examples of gods" to remind readers of how one diversion or another fits into the larger picture. The persuasive power of using such a cultivated voice to address matters considered "primitive," such as magic and pagan religions, should not be underestimated either, as readers for more than a century have felt secure that *The Golden Bough*'s narrative would lead to the satisfactory conclusion that there is indeed order in the development of belief systems.

And, in fact, the book went on to become one of the most influential books of the twentieth century. T. S. Eliot acknowledged the influence of *The Golden Bough* on his 1922 poem *The Waste Land*, which is generally considered to be one of the most significant texts of the modernist movement. D. H. Lawrence is said to have studied the book's accounts of Aztec sacrifices when he was working on *Women in Love*. Joseph Conrad's Kurtz, who rules a remote jungle tribe in *Heart of Darkness* with a magical sort of charisma, shows the influence, if not directly of Frazer, then of someone who is familiar with his work. The poet Robert Graves was a follower. And, of course, all of the writers whom these writers influenced can be said to owe something to Frazer, whether they have read his work or not.

But with each generation, fewer and fewer read the book. The decline started within Frazer's lifetime, as questions were raised about his methods. When the book first came out during the Victorian era, it was an impressive enough feat for a writer to gather a broad sampling of information and string it together. The early twentieth century was an age of specialization, though. Industries, most notably automobile manufacturers, developed the system of division of labor that had each worker on the assembly line concentrate on one small aspect of the overall production. In the spirit of this division of

labor, the scientific method of collecting information was brought under tighter scrutiny. Just as support for Sigmund Freud's far-reaching conclusions was dampened by his personal relationships with his patients, so Frazer's work came to be viewed with skepticism because of his way of gathering information. His research was done in the library, not the field: many of the customs he reported were not observed firsthand but were instead retellings of stories reported from travelers. The possibilities of error in this method are obvious and have been often reported. Because his findings were not based on observations from anthropologists trained to understand what they were seeing, scientific interest in his writing declined.

Still, it is as a work of literature that *The Golden Bough* has come to readers today. As such, it has been free of the strict rules of scientific data gathering. Literary interpretation is not as concerned with whether the sources Frazer used are true as it is with how he explains the relationship between them. In that regard, no one can challenge his intellectual achievement. The trouble is that, as a piece of literature, the book can be exceedingly boring.

There is no rule that says that good literature should not be boring, and the idea of boredom is entirely relative: usually, the things that fascinate people in adulthood are the things that most bored them when they were children. Still, there is also a good chance that a work written for an earlier age can lose interest for all but the most narrowly specialized. What *The Golden Bough* accomplished, in terms of information, worldview, and style, was what the world needed then. But with the information either discredited or available elsewhere more easily and his unified worldview so prevalent that it is taken for granted, all the modern reader is left with is an antiquated Victorian prose style. The book will always have its fans because every field has its fans of esoterica, but in all likelihood future readers of *The Golden Bough* will pride themselves for having absorbed Frazer's story in the same way that collectors of such things take pride in the ownership of a rare old book.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on *The Golden Bough*, in *Nonfiction Classics for Students*, Gale, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, McKenna shows how Frazer's assumed cultural superiority over and distance from his subjects in The Golden Bough *distinguish the work from a literary standpoint.*

Literary critics have traced the influence of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* through the works of authors as diverse as Scott Fitzgerald and Sigmund Freud. Almost no modern writer has escaped the scrutiny of comparison. However, only a few scholars have subjected *The Golden Bough* to the scrutiny of critical evaluation, and their studies are mostly responses to the "hostile scrutiny" of anthropologists and classical scholars who find fault with *The Golden Bough*'s theoretical framework and methodology. Their objections are twofold: On one level they find fault with Frazer's lack of field experience —he gathers his information only from secondary sources; on another level they object to Frazer's interpretation of this information— he can find no value for the myths and customs within their society. Yet, despite its failings as an anthropological text, *The Golden Bough* has considerable value precisely because of its sense of assumed superiority and consequent isolation, and no critic has adequately examined its structure based on these principles.

After reviewing the intricacies of Frazer's argument it becomes clear that he is schooled in the vocabulary of dominance and cannot escape its instruction. This does not simply mean his education at the University of Glasgow and Trinity College, Cambridge. It means that he approached his analysis from a position of superiority and refused to yield equality or even legitimacy to the objects of his study. The method of his examination can be discerned as a three-part process. First, there is an attempted contact. Unfortunately, the contact is often attempted through a medium that belies intimacy—the second part of the process. The medium could simply be the mistaken notion that human relations can be achieved solely through intellectual means, but it is more likely that some quality of his analysis made contact impossible. The result is limited communication—the method's final stage. This process manifests itself on many levels of *The Golden Bough* beginning with Frazer's chosen sources, continuing through his method of examining those sources, and proceeding through the results of his analysis—the discovery of lost traditions harboring secret associations, the origins of the Nemi ritual, a cycle of death and regeneration modelled on the seasons, and a hierarchy of religious and societal progress.

On its most basic level, Frazer's analysis requires an association with the wider world; in order to report various traditions he must become intimate with a diversity of cultures. He seeks to prove that certain "motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generally alike." His study examines the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians; and various "barbarian" tribes—the Celts, Gauls, and Germanic people. In addition he bends his gaze towards corners of a world contemporary with his analysis—modern Europe, Africa, Asia, the Levant, the Americas, and Australia. The scope of his

analysis succeeds in incorporating a diversity of cultures representing a global society throughout time.

Yet Frazer chooses incorporation through the distorted glass of imperialist perspective. His sources read like a canon of empire and dominance ranging from Julius Caesar to the Spanish Conquerors to the travellers and military expeditions contemporary with his study. His is the view of "Lieutenant Gamble" and "Colonel Dodge," "Captain Moseby" and "Captain Bourke." The survey begins and ends with the "Afghan Boundary Mission"; a "Jesuit" or other "Christian missionary"; and "the United States Polar Expedition"—all of whom saw non- Western peoples and lands as threatening, pagan, and hostile. The result is association simultaneous with disassociation.

He is able to see the alien society, able to gain some understanding of its practices, yet the understanding is distorted and facile. Quaint histories result with reports of "a sect in Orissa who worship the Queen of England as their chief divinity." Then there is

> a sect in the Punjab [who] worshipped a deity whom they called Nikkal Sen. This Nikkal Sen was no other than the redoubted General Nicholson, and nothing that the general could do or say damped the enthusiasm of his adorers. The more he punished them, the greater grew the religious awe with which they worshipped him.

Frazer and Nicholson present themselves as superior and stand amazed and contemptuous when their superiority mirrors itself in the behavior of the observed. There is affiliation—the contact of the adored or of the scientist hovering above his subjects—but the observer is distant and apart. He separates himself from the objects of his study and reports a people who are less than human, or at least less than English.

The canon of the uncivilized reads like a litany of Britain's late Victorian prejudices—prejudices that Frazer does not hesitate to carry through when he interprets his sources. It includes not only the obvious "barbarous" races—the "bush negroes of Surinam," the "heathen Syrians," the Jews, and the Catholic Irish. It also includes "the semi-barbarous nations of the New World" in addition to French, Swedish, and Austrian peasants. In short, anyone outside the British aristocratic and merchant classes is seen as a quaint storehouse of antiquated beliefs and traditions. It is the world of Kipling□ characters from *Kim* and *The Jungle Book* who hold the secrets of the dark natural world, and it is the theater of Boucicault□the blacks of *Jessie Brown* or the stage Irishman happy in his drunken ignorance.

Frazer's vocabulary of association betrays the same type of prejudices and implies a systematic, if half-conscious, demeaning of non-English cultures. Images of "rude peoples all over the world" are paraded before a reader. We are shown examples of "primitive superstition and religion" taken from the "Old Heathen days." We see the representatives of the "savage hordes," and the "unfortunate beings" who are still taken by the "quaint superstition" and the "antique fancies" of "savage philosophers" that are nothing more than "cobwebs of the brain." The language implies a crude and simple culture populated by ignorant and brutal people whose form of worship is nothing more than a wasteland because it lacks a Christian framework. By today's standards Frazer's

methodology for examining the subjects of his analysis seems absurd, but this tendency characterized cultural studies in the late nineteenth century.

It distorts the objects of Frazer's study just as his choice of sources does. However, Frazer is aware of the possible harm of such an approach. He warns that "in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to give them the benefit of that indulgence which we may one day stand in need of ourselves." Frazer begs indulgence for an inferiority he has conjured from the Victorian framework of analysis. He calls ceremonies rude if "no special class of persons is set aside for the performance of the rites," if "no special places are set apart" for the rituals, if "spirits not gods are recognized," and if "the rites are magical rather than propitiatory." It seems that difference implies inferiority and that these practices are only valued for their influence on civilized religion and have no import in and of themselves.

Yet there seems to be another value, produced as a consequence of the distortions and prejudices, only implicit in Frazer's analysis—the value of lost traditions harboring secret associations. He seems to relish "the days when Diana and Virbius still received the homage of their worshippers in the sacred grove." Even though "the temple of Diana . . . has disappeared, and the King of the Wood no longer stands sentinel over the Golden Bough," Frazer muses that "Nemi's woods are still green, and at evening you may hear the church bells of Albano, and perhaps, if the air be still, of Rome itself, ringing the Angeles." The old gods are still summoned, and Frazer's work is a type of summoning—an effort to conjure the sublime. It is as if the primitive and savage races can tap into a hidden power of the world, as if they can find a communion with nature that is beyond Frazer's grasp. He is like William Sharp who needed to conjure Fiona Macleod to contact the natural world, but, for both men, the posturings of assumed superiority distort the contact.

There is a sense of loss in Sharp and in Frazer, a sense of disconnectedness. Each wants to "partake of the new corn sacramentally" but can only do so through what they see as an inferior—a woman or a savage people. *Le roi est mort*, but there is no new king. There are only the delusions of the heathen the "primitive man" who "fancies he can make the sun to shine, and can hasten or stay its going down," or "the savage" who "commonly explains the processes of inanimate nature by supposing that they are produced by living beings working in or behind the phenomena." The world is alive, is animate, for the uncivilized—for "the prettiest girl" in "the south-east of Ireland [who] on May Day . . . used to be chosen Queen of the district for twelve months. She was crowned with wild flowers; feasting, dancing, and rustic sports followed, and were closed by a grand procession in the evening." However, for Frazer, a world of emptiness and isolation dominates.

In 1909 he would write, in the preface to a volume of biblical passages selected for their literary interest, that

though many of us can no longer, like our fathers, find in its pages the solution of the dark, the inscrutable riddle of human existence, yet the volume must be held sacred by

all who reverence the high aspirations to which it gives utterance, and the pathetic associations with which the faith and piety of so many have invested the familiar words.

The words are seen as fragments of a lost tradition, of a lost contact. Frazer cannot see that it is his distortions, his assumed superiority, that has caused the separation and the consequent isolation.

There are other possible reasons for the sense of disconnectedness in his work. Among them is Frazer's method of examining his information. All of it is, somehow, made to support some aspect of the Nemi tradition. A world of customs and practices is laid out before him. His survey begins with "The King of the Wood." This does not necessarily mean the king of the Arician woods; any king or queen will do. Specifically, he mentions Diana and others. They have the attributes of a tree spirit or sylvan deity—they can control the weather or the state of wildlife and vegetation. Frazer then goes on to show that there is a sympathetic connection between the king and his kingdom. The ruler is subject to restrictions to help preserve it. If he should hurt himself the kingdom would suffer. Therefore, people would often subject their ruler to occasional trials, tests of wit and strength. If the king failed, his soul and the soul of the forest would be transferred to a successor; the king's soul would often be kept in some object for safekeeping until the trial was over. Numerous examples are cited, including Osiris and Dionysus. Their deaths and regenerations are supposed to be modelled on the pattern of the seasons. After superficial consideration, his study seems to develop fascinating relationships between a diversity of cultures.

However, each of these points simply develops a part of Frazer's Nemi thesis; they have limited value independently. Diana and the sylvan deities are mentioned because Aricia is a wooded area, and the King of the Wood is a manifestation of the tree spirit. The sympathetic connection between the king and his kingdom is important to the Nemi tradition because its king must survive occasional trials by combat to ensure his health and the consequent health of the woods. The notion of the external soul supports Nemi because the golden bough itself is the mistletoe where the king's soul is kept. These are the primary relationships between the plethora of cultural practices. All other connections are incidental to the Nemi tradition.

Consequently, on one level Frazer's study is simply a collection of fragments designed to serve Nemi. Certainly *The Golden Bough* represents much more than that; therein lies the danger of his approach. The various customs and individuals are dispossessed from their culture. Their relationship and unity must rely on the validity of Frazer's thesis because they cannot rely on the validity supplied by their respective societies. Obviously, a tradition cannot stand on its own merits if examined out of context. In subsequent editions of *The Golden Bough* Frazer downplays the role of Nemi and discredits his thesis, but his analysis retains the same structure. It continues to serve Nemi even after Nemi is removed. A collection of lost fragments remains to serve an invalid hypothesis.

The major component of this lost service is the cycle of death and rebirth modelled on the seasons:

The annual death and revival of vegetation is a conception which readily presents itself to men in every stage of savagery and civilization; and the vastness of the scale on which this yearly decay and regeneration takes place, together with man's intimate dependence on it for subsistence, combine to render it the most striking annual phenomenon in nature, at least within the temperate zones. It is no wonder that a phenomenon so important, so striking, and so universal should, by suggesting similar ideas, have given rise to similar rites in many lands.

This motif rises again and again throughout Frazer's study. It appears in the Arician grove; in the persons of Attis, Adonis, and Osiris; in the corn spirit; and in the folk-tales and folk-customs of Europe.

However, Frazer destroys this continuity by classifying and ranking the various traditions. He feels that "the spring and harvest customs of our European peasantry deserve to rank as primitive," that "the writings even of these town-bred and cultured persons afford us an occasional glimpse of a Demeter as rude as the rudest that a remote German village can show," and that "the Indians of California, who, living in a fertile country under a serene and temperate sky, nevertheless rank near the bottom of the savage scale." Just as J. A. Cramb and the members of James Hunt's Anthropological Society distorted Darwin to create a human hierarchy, Frazer distorts an evolution in beliefs—a simple alteration of customs in response to environmental stimuli—to create an image of progress.

This classification results in Frazer's isolation. He stands on top of an evolutionary pyramid. Below him is the history of the world. Above him is an abyss of future uncertainty. Around him is the British Empire spread out in its imperial assurance. Specifically, Frazer outlines the progress from magic to religion to science. He sees magic "as the hope of directing the course of nature by his [mankind's] own unaided resources." Religion occurs when man "looks more and more to the gods as the sole repositories of those supernatural powers which he once claimed to share with them . . . Therefore, prayer and sacrifice assume the leading place in religious ritual." "Still later, the conception of the elemental forces as personal agents" gives way "to the recognition of natural law." The former unity of worship of the death and regeneration of the seasons has given way to the rigidity of superiority.

Like a young Rajah, Frazer travels through the capitals of the world's major religious movements— the tribal villages of Africa, the primeval forests of Europe, the pastoral landscapes of ancient Egypt, the temples of classical Greece and Rome—classifying and organizing them into his complex framework and analysis. Darkest Africa and the Australian outback continue to function on the level of magic. Societies involved in totemism, like the Indians of the Americas, do have a "religion," but it is the most primitive type because it entails worshiping trees or wild animals. Communities that worship cattle or other domesticated creatures have "graduated" to a pastoral religion. The highest form of primitive worship is practiced by the agricultural societies, but even this final stage has two parts. On one level gods are seen as imminent spirits residing in cultivated plants, especially corn. On the second level, the Deists, spirits are transcendent like the gods of Greece and Rome. Christianity comes next. It retains

some barbarous elements—the transubstantiation of the Catholic Mass, the sacrifice of the son of God—but is, for the most part, civilized. All these movements culminate in science and scientific reasoning. Frazer assembles and disseminates the world, tracing the origins of cultured society.

However, like the Germany of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, Frazer keeps the world a "country of the mind." With rare exception he relies on the work and the stories of various scholars and colonial representatives. As he recognizes the danger of judging "rude and savage races," Frazer acknowledges the danger of not considering living testimony. He writes that "compared with the evidence afforded by living tradition, the testimony of ancient books on the subject of early religion is worth very little." However, just as his judgments on prejudice fail to permeate the depths of his analysis, Frazer's observations fail to escape "the course of" his "reading." He takes the field work of Mannhardt and Tyler, or Wilken and Gregor, and shapes it to his specifications for the history of religion and worship.

Consequently, his vast storehouse of information contains fragments of traditions that tend to support late Victorian conventions. Frazer assembles his catalogue of religious practices in such a way as to position the scientific and cultural achievements of the late nineteenth century as a point toward which all converges. Certainly, such notions of superiority are not limited to Frazer. In 1866 Luke Owen Pike posited the English at the top of an evolutionary hierarchy in *The English and Their Origin*. In 1870 Sir John Lubbock, in a book titled *The Origin of Civilization*, traced a progressive evolution similar to Frazer's. Victorian scientists and scholars accepted as fact the belief that man evolved from savagery to barbarism to civilization. Consequently, Frazer and his colleagues stand in self-imposed exile, isolated by the burdens of assumed superiority.

Obviously, both the method and the object of Frazer's inquiries find many models in the world he knew. The longing for a communion with a wider world, a world animate and alive, consumes vast portions of late Victorian society. Oscar Wilde asks to be taken from darkness—

Come down, O Christ, and help me! reach thy hand,
For I am drowning in a stormier sea
Than Simon on thy lake of Galilee.
Gerard Manley Hopkins asks his God to notice
banks and brakes
Now, leaved how thick! laced they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

In addition, the rise of psychical research and a fascination with the occult are widespread, taking in both the uneducated and the highly educated. People are looking for lost gods, lost meanings, lost contacts. In a passage reminiscent of Frazer, Yeats writes that he

planned a mystical Order which should buy or hire the castle, and keep it as a place where its members could retire for a while for contemplation, and where we might establish mysteries like those of Eleusis and Samo-thrace . . . I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries.

In many ways *The Golden Bough* is an altar prepared for the sacrifice waiting for its priest, and Frazer's worldwide inquiries are a searching or a summoning. However, as with Tristan, the cry comes back, "*oed' und leer das Meer.*"

The origins of the lost connections lie deep in the Victorian consciousness. They can be discerned by examining the elements that keep Frazer at a distance from the objects of his inquiries—the assurance of empire, the certain superiority, the systematic demeaning of other cultures, and the manipulation of countless societies and traditions. There are Darwin and the industrial revolution making the old gods obsolete; there are Nicholson and Cardigan leading countless to a death for Queen and country, and for a peerage; and there is the Earl of Lucan insisting that "the population must be reduced" as skeletons and typhus grow in Ireland. Contact exists, but it is the contact of the master and the lash.

As a consequence, emptiness remains. As in Eliot's wasteland, there is talking but no communication. There is "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead trees give no shelter, the cricket no relief, / And the dry stone no sound of water." Only F. Scott Fitzgerald's "valley of ashes" is left—

a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ashgray men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air.

The wastelands of the twenties were bred in the Arden and the Somme, but their tragedy was simply the final scene in the final act of the play of empire.

Source: Bernard McKenna, "Isolation and the Sense of Assumed Superiority in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*," in *Nineteenth-Century Prose*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Summer 1992, pp. 49-59.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay excerpt, Manganaro "adopts current textual approaches to anthropology in an effort to understand the rhetorical power behind Frazer's masterwork."

For well over half a century literary audiences have listened to modern artists and critics speak of Frazer's literariness and its salutary effects upon Modern art and criticism; Eliot found Frazer's literary "vision" and style an essential component of the emerging Modernist temperament, and by the early sixties Frye and Hyman brought to a culmination the literary usefulness of Frazer's graceful text for myth and ritual studies. Typical of interdisciplinary relations, however, was the lag between social scientific production and aesthetic appreciation and appropriation: Eliot's plaudits for Frazer in 1922 (in his Notes to *The Waste Land* as well as the famous review of Joyce's *Ulysses*) coincided with the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, a model for the emerging functionalist monograph that would have little use for Frazer's self-confessed brand of literary social science. Malinowski's work, however, hardly constituted a radical break with a dominating Frazerian school; in fact, Frazer's method and ideas had been roundly attacked by leading anthropologists since the turn of the century. Leach's condemnation of Frazer in 1966, then, was anything but a novel statement in anthropological circles; in fact, the position required such a restatement only because a colleague had attempted a positive reappraisal of the author of *The Golden Bough*.

Though the sixties and seventies witnessed a thorough historical mapping of Frazer's literary influence (as seen primarily in studies by Stanley Edgar Hyman and John Vickery), the death of myth criticism in the 1960s signaled a waning of interest in Frazer on the part of literary theorists. Anthropological reality, it appeared, had finally arrested the literary world's fascination for *The Golden Bough*. However, Frazer's text, like the seasonal gods that populate it, will not stay in the ground. The definitive critical biography of Frazer, by Robert Ackerman, has just appeared, a sure sign of increasing interest in Frazer studies. More broadly, recent theories arguing for the metaphorical nature of anthropological writing, made possible by literary criticism's questioning of the easy referentiality of language, encourage new readings of Frazer's already "literary" anthropological corpus.

This essay adopts current textual approaches to anthropology in an effort to understand the rhetorical power behind Frazer's masterwork. The anthropological authority operating in Frazer's text, I maintain, had significant repercussions in Modernist writing broadly conceived. That rhetorical authority, rooted in an alluring brand of literary comparativism, exerted a powerful influence upon the intricately linked poetics and politics of much Modernist writing. The analysis of *The Golden Bough*'s textual strategies, then, will not stop with Frazer's study, but will broaden to the ways in which its rhetorical tactics, and the ideologies underlying them, were duplicated in the texts of a major literary High Modernist—T. S. Eliot—and a prominent myth critic—Stanley Edgar Hyman.

The harshest anthropological attacks leveled at Frazer generally have centered on his reputation as the premier "armchair anthropologist," the scholar who plundered the various travelers' reports that made their way into his study in order to draw gross evolutionary comparisons between the present-day "savage" and our Western ancestors. For anthropologists after Malinowski it was precisely the gap between Frazer the theorist and his "man on the spot" fieldworker that posed an insurmountable obstacle to ethnographic accuracy, to capturing the "native" in the pure state.

But as James Clifford and George Stocking have shown, modern ethnography closes this gap by creating the narrator-persona of the anthropologist fieldworker, a dominating figure whose "field" experience supposedly shapes the text. According to Clifford, the "presence" of the writer in the field creates in the reader a strong sense of the anthropologist- author's "ethnographic authority," the rhetorical command that field-based anthropologists construct for themselves in the creation of ethnographic discourse. Primarily through the claim "I was there" (on the cultural "spot"), the modern ethnographer becomes the voice of culture, effectively consolidating the power to represent cultures by shutting off other sources. Drawing his terms from Mikhail Bakhtin, Clifford describes how modern ethnographic discourse almost instantly becomes monologic, or single-voiced, since its single narrative point of view inevitably subsumes all "other" voices—most notably those of the native subjects. Clifford's description of the modern ethnographer's strategies emphasizes the Bakhtinian notion of the closing off of voices: "The tasks of textual transcription and translation along with the crucial dialogical role of interpreters and 'privileged informants' were relegated to a secondary, sometimes even despised, status."

Textualists of anthropology are attempting to shatter the illusion of post-Malinowskian ethnography as a transparent window to the anthropological subject, an illusion whose empowering metaphysics of presence has made orthodox the "realist" or representational fieldwork account known as the monograph. According to Clifford, the modern ethnographer's insistence on disregarding previous written accounts bolsters his authority by insisting upon a logocentric transformation of native "experience" into First Text: "The fieldworker, typically, starts from scratch, from a research *experience*, rather than from reading or transcribing. The field is not conceived of as already filled with texts."

The monographic denial of prior texts seems a deliberate reversal of what one could call the essential intertextuality of *The Golden Bough*, which is literally bursting with previous texts and points of view. Now this plurality of voices in *The Golden Bough* hardly means that Malinowski completely silences all other voices while Frazer permits total freedom of voice and self-representation to "native" and source. But the ethnographically unfortunate gap between Frazer and his informants does create a rhetorical situation in which the author *depends* upon other sources to an extent not usually found in a modern monograph. Indeed, for Frazer texts are his only "field." The result is anything but what Clifford calls the "integrated portrait" that the modern ethnographer wrests from "the research situation's ambiguities and diversities of meaning." Rather, *The Golden Bough*, published in various versions from 1890 to 1922, necessarily opens itself to other "voices" in ways that suggest the polyphonic in

anthropology. And yet, as this essay hopes later to demonstrate, deeper analysis of Frazer's anthropological (as distinguished from "ethnographic") authority reveals a plurality that functions as ploy: indeed, the Frazerian text gains its power to appropriate and control cultural subject and reader from the illusion itself of openness, from the pretense that the text functions as an objective, noninterpretive, polyphonic "arena of diversity."

In any ethnography, the controlling authors to some degree translate the voice of sources into their own words. But these voices, however much the ethnographic authoritarian tries to contain them, bleed out onto the margins of the page. The other voice always has its say if one listens. Clifford, alluding to Malinowski, states that "one may also read against the grain of the text's dominant voice, seeking out other, half-hidden authorities." But in Frazer's case the background noise is deafening, due to the sheer multitude and variety of cultural accounts that he draws, in encyclopedic manner, from historians, mythographers, missionaries, fieldworkers, translators and native informants, often quoting them at great length.

Frazer himself articulates those instances where polyvocality was most possible in *The Golden Bough* as moments of weakness. Whenever he gives in to the impulse to play tale-teller or ventriloquist, he then openly rationalizes and publicly defends his indulgence. For example, a fundamental organizational oddity in *The Golden Bough* is the imbalance between the great multitude of legends, stories, songs and reports, and the theory on Arician priesthood that supposedly unites the whole work. It is incredible to see Frazer proclaiming, in the opening of the first two-volume edition (1890), that he is providing these literally thousands of cultural accounts spanning the globe and the centuries for the purpose of answering two questions: "first, why had the priest [at Nemi] to slay his predecessor? And second, why, before he slew him, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?" Having stated his purpose, Frazer states that "it remains to try whether the survey of a wider field may not yield us the clues we seek"—and he tries, in ever-expanding editions, over the next quarter-century.

This imbalance did not go unnoticed. In 1901 a reviewer of the second edition of *The Golden Bough* quipped that the Golden Bough itself (that originary mistletoe, that Ur-branch of his fifteen-volume effort) was "too slender a twig to sustain the weight of learning hung upon it." A generation ago Stanley Edgar Hyman, in *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud as Imaginative Writers*, commented on how Frazer "tells myths, legends, folk tales, and similar stories on every occasion, whether or not they are relevant." And in his recent biography Ackerman consistently recounts Frazer's "excessive use of examples that only tenuously exemplify."

In one sense, Frazer simply could not maintain control over his line of argument, could not keep the myriad legends and fieldwork accounts tied to his thesis or in line with his method. This of course did not stop him from retelling those tales, but at least he felt some remorse over his compulsion. Ackerman documents Frazer's apologies and justifications in the correspondence with his publisher of fifty years, George Macmillan, concerning what Ackerman refers to as the "pattern of uncontrollable swelling" that "became the rule in all his best-known works." Frazer's prefaces to the multiple editions

of *The Golden Bough* well illustrate his varied attempts to justify the ever-increasing multitude of accounts. In the preface to the original edition, for example, he comments that "a justification is perhaps needed of the length at which I have dwelt upon the popular festivals observed by European peasants," and rather lamely, he provides one: "despite their fragmentary character" they are "the fullest and most trustworthy evidence we possess as to the primitive religion of the Aryans."

The digressiveness that more fastidious critics castigated and Frazer himself felt compelled to excuse nonetheless had a powerful rhetorical effect upon Frazer's readership, a magnetizing pull that Frazer clearly was not willing to sacrifice for the sake of efficiency and concision. As Frazer spins out myth after myth, gradually the reader's attention shifts from whatever generalization ostensibly brought forth the need for illustration and onto the various stories themselves. Their intrinsic interest justifies their presence. Ackerman holds that the "labyrinthine quality" of Frazer's text is due to Frazer's "unbridled willingness to digress": the resultant "profusion of data" creates a rhetorical context "in which virtually any topic, as in a dream, may turn into any other." Indeed, Frazer's tellings can at times resemble a Lacanian fantasy: a mad jostling of signifiers, each linked by a thread to the one before and after, but often with no firm connection to the supposed purpose for the chain.

For example, in the opening section of *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul*, Part II of the twelvevolume third edition, Frazer's chronicle of "Royal and Priestly Taboos" leads him to consider "taboos observed by African kings"; which leads him to discuss the prohibition upon the king "to see the sea"; which leads to observations of how "Egyptian priests loathed the sea"; which leads to sources commenting on how the Indians of the Peruvian Andes, "sent by the Spaniards to work in the hot valleys of the coast," were horrified at the specter of the ocean opening before them; which leads to "the inland people of Lampong in Sumatra," who "are said to pay a kind of adoration to the sea, and to make it an offering of cakes and sweetmeats." In richly descriptive swells, Frazer has surged his way from taboos on kings to sea-worship. And crammed at the bottom of the page we find the sources for these (for Frazer) compelling narratives, including a Chief Native Commissioner for Mashonaland, the renowned van Gennep, a Father Porte from the *Missions Catholiques* and Plutarch.

Frazer's discontinuousness, however, cannot be attributed simply to bad organization. On the one hand, he was caught up in the stories he read, consumed by the voices he had heard, and he marched out justification, excuse and rationalization to legitimate his re-telling, or more accurately his re-writing. On the other hand, clearly Frazer realized the rhetorical effects of this at least seeming inability: the steady sale of his books, for one, clearly indicated that a reading public enjoyed participating in Frazer's obsessive, polyphonic discursiveness.

Clifford, in his effort to conceive the anthropologist as polyvocalist, cites Dickens' line "He do the police in different voices" to exemplify the novelist as Bakhtinian "ventriloquist" or "polyphonist." Now Frazer is *not* the anthropological polyvocalist pure and simple, but in some respects Frazer's digressiveness historically has opened the door for "other" textual voices, for Clifford's "more radical polyphony that would 'do the

natives and the ethnographers in different voices."' T. S. Eliot, for instance (whose use of *The Golden Bough* in *The Waste Land* helped lead an entire generation of starry-eyed literary critics into a profound misunderstanding of myth), publicly acknowledged and was grateful for the heterogeneity of Frazer's text. Two years after the publication of *The Waste Land*, Eliot gave recognition to the apparent openness and variety of Frazer's text, celebrating Frazer as the greatest of the anthropologists because he is essentially a non-interpretive reporter, having "withdrawn in more and more cautious abstention from the attempt to explain." Frazer's work is seen as having "perhaps greater permanence" than Freud's "because it is a statement of fact which is not involved in the maintenance or fall of any theory of the author's."

Indeed, Eliot here echoes Frazer's own defense against a number of attacks upon his theories of "primitive mentalities." His many prefaces to the various editions and volumes of *The Golden Bough* are filled with seemingly humble statements that downplay his own abilities and inclinations as "authority" by making the value of his work dependent upon the reliability and usefulness of his sources: "My contribution to the history of the human mind consists of little more than a rough and purely provisional classification of facts gathered almost entirely from printed sources." In fact, Frazer's defense often takes the form of a grandiloquent gesture of humility, such as the following, taken from the Preface to *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul:*

The facts which I have put together in this volume . . . may perhaps serve as materials for a future science of Comparative Ethics. They are rough stones which await the master-builder, rude sketches which more cunning hands than mine may hereafter work up into a finished picture.

John Vickery acutely sees in Frazer's call for the "master-builder" the implication "that perhaps in some unforeseeable, miraculous fashion someone in the future will be able to master and utilize the quantities of data he has amassed"; but he does not discuss Frazer's minimizing of his own accomplishments as a stance that attempts to enshrine while it humbles, plotting the anthropologist-author a place in history by unassumingly constructing a history in which he himself would unquestionably have value (in which the "master" is, after all, a projection of himself). Similarly, Ackerman rightly points out how Frazer's "willingness to change his mind and his continual emphasis on the provisional nature of his findings combined to produce the most modest of professional personae," but the biographer does not make explicit how Frazer's rhetorical authority could be bolstered by professing flexibility and uncertainty; rather, he concludes that Frazer personally was "as far as possible from the dictator laying down the orthodoxy that must be followed at all costs . . . the opposite of prepossessing."

Frazer's "facts" are those observations culled, arranged and edited by the armchair anthropologist from "sources," primarily fieldworkers such as Spencer and Gillen. According to Frazer, what results is a compendium of facts, an open storehouse of cultural nuggets that is destined to stand the test of time well after the more contrived "theories" have fallen:

In this as in other branches of study it is the fate of theories to be washed away like children's castles of sand by the rising tide of knowledge, and I am not so presumptuous as to expect or desire for mine an exemption from the common lot. I hold them all very lightly and have used them chiefly as convenient pegs on which to hang my collection of facts. For I believe that, while theories are transitory, a record of facts has a permanent value, and that as a chronicle of ancient customs and beliefs my book may retain its utility when my theories are as obsolete as the customs and beliefs deserve to be.

We can accept Ackerman's claim that Frazer the man "was genuinely humble before his facts and those who supplied them," but only if we appreciate the rhetorical advantage of that humbling gesture. We must remember that the master's bow of humility was accompanied by an insistence on the separation of fieldwork and theory, the latter of which, Frazer states, ought "regularly and rightly [to] be left to the comparative ethnologist." And there is no doubt that, despite his disclaimers to the value of theory, a theorist was what Frazer wanted to be. The reasoning Ackerman gives for Frazer's refusal to learn the language of the "natives" (he was a proficient linguist and classicist) sheds much light on Frazer's professional and discursive ambitions: "Knowledge of such a language would (or might) imply a specialization that he explicitly rejected. The role he assumed from the start was that of the generalist, one with the entire ethnographic world spread before him."

Frazer wanted it both ways: the status of the theorist, the controller, the author, but also the humble position of fact-collector. In his prefaces the pose is that of a student modestly accruing "facts"; but the result is a mammoth text brimming over with sources and voices, bearing the signature of the acclaimed author. The lesson was powerfully attractive to the literary Modernists. It is utterly signifi- cant that Clifford's choice as the epitome of polyphony, Dickens' line "He do the police in different voices," was the original subtitle of *The Waste Land*. And it is hardly fortuitous that in both Eliot's poem and *The Golden Bough* a virtual panoply of voices/sources emerges to complicate, at the very least, the notion of a controlling persona. That the ventriloqual is felt in the babble of voices in *The Waste Land* is indisputable, just as we can say that in Frazer's text the voices or script of "others" are heard both despite and because of the author's intentions.

Important recent criticism on *The Waste Land* revolves precisely around the issue of the freedom of its voices, with some extremely conflicting and useful responses. Calvin Bedient's recent book (entitled, not surprisingly, *He Do the Police in Different Voices*) sees *The Waste Land* as essentially polyphonic, but interprets the voices at work in the poem as babble that transcends signification and aspires toward the ineffable Absolute. Bedient opposes Terry Eagleton's view that the obstruction of meaning in the poem, the difficulty we have linking signifieds to signifiers, is actually a way to preserve surreptitiously the poem's "meaning," which Eagleton sees as the paradoxical attempt to preserve and valorize "Culture" as conceived by Eliot. One view sees in the multiple voices an escape from cultural experience; the other insists upon an ideological, and ultimately monologic, underpinning.

The "mad signifiers" that refuse to connect in Frazer's rambling accounts may strike us as liberated from author-authoritarian, just as the babble in *The Waste Land* gives at least the illusion of freedom from controlling protagonist. At first glance, Eliot's praise of Frazer as reporter of "facts" is oddly juxtaposed against the verbal and cultural "ruins" of *The Waste Land*. But those "facts" make a certain sense as the "fragments" that the poem's persona, Tiresias, has "shored against [his] ruins," nuggets of cultural verities representing the minimal stand of "meaning" against the onslaught of chaos.

Eliot, following Frazer, marched out the pure minimal authentic, the cultural "facts" ("despite their fragmentary character," Frazer reminds us) which apparently first emerged straight from the cultural fount, and at the affordable expense, so we are to believe, of the authoritative author. Frazer's valorization of the "fact" is hardly surprising, for he was a central figure in what Ackerman calls the attempts "to raise [the social sciences] to the standards already achieved in the natural sciences." Eliot recognized the power of the "scientific fact" for a Modern literature that had few powerful literary predecessors and desperately needed to bolster the legitimacy of culture in general and literature in particular. And it was Eliot of all Modernists who was most concerned with establishing a highly respected cultural orthodoxy that had literary art at its center. As writers on a mission to salvage the wreck of Culture, however, the methods of Frazer and Eliot soon diverge. Eliot stands back from his text like a Joycean God, Ezra Pound paring his friend's poetry and fingernails; but as Frazer strains desperately, particularly in the later editions, to justify his work, he emerges as a kind of beleaguered Tiresias himself, amassing bits of cultural "facts" to "shore against [*his*] ruins" in a last-ditch attempt at salvaging the wreck of his gargantuan text.

And tentative though he was on theory, Frazer did hold his "facts" very tightly in his fist, not recognizing them, publicly anyway, as the highly skewed representations that they were. The generation of anthropologists after Frazer would roundly criticize him for failing to weigh the integrity of the various sources that reported his supposed "facts." Quite typical of a modern anthropological perspective is Leach's criticism that in Frazer's text "the most trivial observation of the most ignorant traveller is given the same weight as the most careful assessment of an experienced ethnographer." In the preface to the second edition of *The Golden Bough* Frazer admitted his cultural interpretations were "light bridges" that "sooner or later break down," but he still had faith in the text as "a repertory of facts"; he did *not* anticipate the criticism that the foundations of "fact" connected to those bridges had already been irrevocably weakened by contact. (Eliot did, doubting on several occasions whether social scientists *can* separate the "description" or "fact" of "primitive experience" from their own "interpretations.") Frazer's voice of authority, priding itself on its capacity to gain esteem by a calculated disavowal of its own authority, was in fact losing a critical defense: its sources.

Hyman writes that when Frazer decided in the culminating third edition of *The Golden Bough* that "gods were not the embodiment of fertility rites but deified real men," he "stopped taking any theory seriously" and "went back to being a literary man." That Frazer presented the third edition as a "work of literature" finds support in the preface to

the first volume which, typically, promotes the work's "artistic" qualities while at the same time doggedly insisting upon its "scientific" integrity:

By discarding the austere form, without, I hope, sacrificing the solid substance, of a scientific treatise, I thought to cast my materials in a more artistic mould and so perhaps to attract readers, who might have been repelled by a more strictly logical and systematic arrangement of the facts.

That the third edition marks *the* moment at which Frazer transformed his persona from anthropologist to author is overstated, but the core of Hyman's point is well taken: as his work came increasingly under attack, Frazer did gradually shift his authorial perspective once more—from the gaze of the social scientist to the vision of the creative writer. Ackerman supports this notion of increasing literariness, citing "the increasing attention to the scenic element" in the third edition and in general claiming that "Frazer has now found a justification for enlisting his literary penchant in the service of the immensely enlarged third *Golden Bough*, his *magnum opus*." Typical of Frazer's strategies is his tactic, described by Ackerman, of claiming geography's relevance to religion "as a license for him to work up, out of his reading and imagination, the brilliant descriptive set pieces . . . that so characterize the third edition."

The relation between the move from anthropologist to author and Frazer's earlier shift from "theorist" to "collector of facts" is significant: both promote at least the illusion of greater latitude on the part of the writer. The move toward "fact collector" presumably lessens overt authorial control while allowing for the entry of more voices. And the shift to "author" inaugurates the notion that the work is henceforth excused of the need for scientific validation: as a "work of literature" *The Golden Bough* provides the author room to "play" with possibilities. The following statement is a disarmed and disarming example of Frazer's new attitude: "I put forward the hypothesis for no more than a web of conjectures woven from gossamer threads of popular superstition." Textual complexity and ambiguity is foregrounded; verification of theory is shuttled off to the background.

Frazer's tactic of posing his anthropological text as a beautiful, many sided literary artifact helps to explain the attraction that *The Golden Bough* had for midcentury myth critics. The literariness of Frazer, after all, was further illustration of how the rituals of culture did indeed ultimately weave Art, a mistaken notion passed on from Frazerian anthropology to the Cambridge Hellenists (such as Jane Harrison and Gilbert Murray) and then to critics such as Hyman, Lord Raglan, Phillip Wheelwright and Richard Chase. The impact of Frazer's ideas upon ritual studies is fairly well documented; less discussed are the ways in which the stylistic and rhetorical features of Frazer's work have been replicated in those who espoused ritualist views. Hyman's *The Tangled Bank* is an ideal text for such discussion, since it is, first, written by a leading myth and ritual critic and, second, concerns Frazer himself as an imaginative writer.

Frazer's rhetorical figures, such as those "threads of popular superstition" that are part of his encompassing trope of the "web" of culture, were powerfully attractive to myth criticism as well as to the New Criticism, both of which solidified *The Golden Bough's*

reputation as anthropological arche-text. A good example of the critical replication of Frazer's web-and-thread pattern can be found in *The Tangled Bank*, where Hyman alludes to his own title in his description of Frazer's web: "Frazer's common image for culture is of a great fabric, an orderly tangled bank. He writes of having touched only the fringe, having 'fingered only a few of the countless threads that compose the mighty web.'"

Hyman's figure for Frazer's design tells us as much about then-contemporary critical discussion as it does about an anthropological text of a halfcentury before. An "orderly tangled bank" is, after all, another variant of New Criticism's well-wrought urn: ornate, multifaceted, highly detailed, eminently ambiguous but ultimately encapsulated. The New Critical ideology of totalization that the orderly bank employs is explicitly pronounced in Hyman's introduction, where he states that "art" is "the work of the moral imagination, imposing order and form on disorderly and anarchic experience." (Hyman follows with a reference to Wallace Stevens' jar placed in Tennessee, an allusion that suggests the anthropologist-author making sense of the "primitive" wilderness.) Clearly, Frazer was being used to promote a critical ideology, but Hyman's appeal to Frazer's web is also testimony to the powerful duplicating effects of Frazer's own rhetorical strategies; it is the variability of Frazer's text, after all, that makes possible such a reading. . . .

Frazer's very inscribing of culture as woven "web," inscrutable as parts of that pattern might be, attempts to give "culture" a coherence. Frazer urges us to view his staking out of the term as a humble and hopelessly incomplete step toward knowing the unknowable. But reading against the grain of the text (as Clifford tells us we ought), we see not the humility and tentativeness of the anthropologist faced through a profusion of sources with his own overarching ignorance, but the rhetorical command of an author whose self-created network, those multiple threads of "unreadable" voices, sources and causes, derives from a principle of containment in which the anthropological subject (Frazer's frighteningly elusive "savage") must be safely (for us) enclosed, bracketed off within the text. Though we are told that the pattern cannot be deciphered, Frazer's forced figuration of "black" and "red" as "magic" and "religion" attempts to strangle the "savage" in the author's own "orderly tangled bank," a carefully wrought textual jungle of positivist straight lines and right angles. In "On Ethnographic Allegory" Clifford speaks of modern ethnography's "allegory of salvage," a "rhetorical construct" that perpetuates the value of the monograph by saying to its reader that "the other [the 'native'] is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text." Frazer's rhetoric of salvage is qualitatively different, for though he tells his readers that he collects the "facts" in order to help in the construction of a record, he admits to doing so precisely because the "savage" is still thriving within the city walls: Frazer is a salvager of Culture, not culture. His "facts," if read aright, ultimately serve to banish the "savage" from the republic.

Source: Marc Manganaro, "'The Tangled Bank' Revisited: Anthropological Authority in Frazer's *The Golden Bough*," in *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 39, No. 17, Fall 1989, pp. 107-26.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay excerpt, MacCormack identifies consistency and coherency in the method and structure of The Golden Bough, *a strategy that reveals Frazer's points of interest.*

The Golden Bough is a work of many tensions and contradictions, not the least of which is one which the author himself repeatedly pointed to, that is the tension between fact and theory, objectivity and subjectivity. Thus, in the preface to *Aftermath*, published in 1936, twenty-three years after work on the *GB* itself was completed, Frazer says:

Now as always, I hold all my theories very lightly and am ever ready to modify or abandon them in the light of new evidence. If my writings should survive the writer, they will do so, I believe, less for the theories which they propound than for the sake of the evidence which they record.

Elsewhere, Frazer describes his work as a repertory which may be used by subsequent scholars to sustain their own theories, and this was more than a polite disclaimer, since Frazer did not think that the discipline of anthropology had in his day reached a stage where it could maintain and prove any theory definitely. Thus, in 1905 he wrote, "The Newtons and Darwins of anthropology will come after us," and, more gloomily in 1914:

The longer I occupy myself with questions of ancient mythology, the more diffident I become of success in dealing with them, and I am apt to think that we who spend our years in searching for solutions of these insoluble problems are like Sisyphus perpetually rolling his stone uphill only to see it revolve again into the valley.

But at the same time, the *GB* does have a theoretical purpose, or rather, two interdependent theoretical purposes, the relation between which shifted in the course of the twenty-three years which elapsed between the publication of the first edition of the work in two volumes in 1890, and the publication of third edition in twelve volumes in 1913.

This shift is explained by Frazer himself in the prefaces to the three editions of this work. In 1890, he wrote:

For some time, I have been preparing a general work on primitive superstition and religion. Among the problems which had attracted my attention was the hitherto unexplained rule of the Arician priesthood; and last spring . . . I came across some facts which . . . suggested an explanation of the rule in question. As the explanation, if correct, promised to throw light on some obscure features of primitive religion, I resolved to develop it fully, and . . . to issue it as a separate study. This book is the result.

According to the rule of the Roman priesthood of Aricia which Frazer here refers to, the aspirant priest had to kill the incumbent of the office, having first—as Frazer interpreted

BOOKRAGS

the rule—plucked a branch from a tree in the nearby sacred grove. This rule still preoccupied Frazer deeply in 1900, when in the preface to the second edition of the *GB*, in three volumes, he reiterated: "this is not a general treatise on primitive superstition, but merely the investigation of one particular and narrowly limited problem, to wit, the rule of the Arician priesthood." By 1913, however, the position had changed. Frazer still begins and ends his work with the rule of the Arician priesthood, as he had done in 1890. But he viewed its role in his conclusions as marginal:

Should my whole theory of this particular priesthood collapse—and I fully acknowledge the slenderness of the foundations on which it rests—its fall would hardly shake my general conclusions as to the evolution of primitive religion and society.

In the outcome, then, the *GB* became the treatise on primitive religion which initially Frazer had planned to issue separately from his researches on the Arician priesthood.

As might be expected, considering both its scope and the complexity of its aims, the *GB* has been widely criticized by classical scholars, anthropologists and others for errors of fact, theoretical framework and emphasis, so that almost no aspect of this very long and complex work has escaped hostile scrutiny. At the same time, however, the book has been, and arguably still is, extraordinarily influential. Thus, what reader of the *GB* will not find one of that work's principal themes, that of the Dying God, the victim sacrificed for the good of the crops, hauntingly evoked in T. S. Eliot's lines:

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

Another of the many authors who was deeply imbued with Frazerian ideas was Freud, who thought, as did Frazer, that "long-forgotten important happenings in the primeval history of the human family" are in fact not simply forgotten, but are ever reenacted in new guises.

My purpose in the present study is to show that, despite its diverse themes, which, as we have seen, changed over time, the *GB* does have a fundamental methodological consistency and a coherent structure. This may help to explain the appeal which the work has exercised on its many readers. At the same time, it will be seen that the structure of the *GB* gives us an insight into Frazer's concept of the nature of human knowledge, and therefore into his aims in writing as he did.

To begin, then, with the structure of the *GB*. Throughout the book, Frazer expounds the rule of the priesthood of Aricia from two different points of view. Firstly, he examines evidence from ancient Greece and Rome in order to elucidate the workings of the rule, evidence, that is, which is *contiguous* in space and time. The parts of the *GB* which fall under this denominator are thus a historical exegesis□in the broadest sense of that term□of the rule of the priesthood. That is, they belong to the field of classical scholarship. Secondly, the rule of the priesthood is examined in the light of evidence drawn from all over the world and from all periods down to Frazer's own present. This second class of evidence is used because for various reasons it is *similar* to the

functioning of the rule of the priesthood. These parts of the *GB* can be classified, in the nineteenth-century sense, as ethnography, a discipline which at that time drew widely on cross-cultural comparisons to reach its results.

In terms of the scholarship of his own day, therefore, Frazer used the comparative method, which had been advocated as applicable to the study of human society by, among others, Lang and Tylor, in two respects, which converge on each other. That is, Frazer used the comparative method in the narrow sense by applying to the priesthood of Aricia *contiguous* evidence coming from the same civilization, that is, Rome, and from a geographical and culturally related one, that is, Greece. He then proceeded to apply the method to its fullest extent by bringing in materials from all periods and places on the ground that they were *similar* to the issue on which the *GB* revolves.

Expressed in Frazer's own terms, he applied to the solution of his chosen problem the two methods of human thought which he considered basic, that is, the association of ideas by contiguity, and the association of ideas by similarity. "The principles of association are . . . absolutely fundamental to the working of the human mind," he says. These two ways of association of ideas, according to Frazer, form the foundation of any advancement of human knowledge there can be, for it is by means of them that hypotheses and theories are formulated, so as to then be tested and accepted or rejected on the basis of "facts." There is a tension here in Frazer's thought between "facts" and hypotheses, to which we will return.

At present, we will examine Frazer's explanation of the rules of magic because he argues that they follow the same two basic laws of thought whereby ideas are associated with each other according to contiguity and similarity. The rules of magic are a fundamental theme in the *GB*, the theme which, along with the rule of the Arician priesthood, gives the work its continuity. Frazer classifies magic into two branches:

If we analyze the principles of thought on which magic is based, they will . . . resolve themselves into two: first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance. . . . The former principle may be called the law of similarity, and the latter the law of contact or contagion.

Now, magic, according to Frazer, is one of the ways in which man attempts to control his environment, and as such it is brought to bear on interpreting the rule of the priesthood of Aricia.

The priest of Aricia is viewed as, in origin, one of those "departmental kings of nature" whose professional knowledge of magic—for, Frazer holds, magicians were the first professionals in human society—enables him to cause the crops to grow, because, according to the citation above, an effect resembles its cause: the crops will be encouraged to grow by the rule of similarity, i.e., by imitative magic, whereby a rain-making ceremony produces rain. But, if similarity operates on the basis of cause and effect, so does contagion: that is, the priest-king must die when his strength fails lest his weakness— on the principle of contagion—contaminate the course of nature and cause

the crops to fail. Hence the priest of Aricia must at some point be slain, the *GB* argues, by a stronger rival.

With this, it may be seen that the *GB* displays a coordinated pattern of meanings built up on three levels: first, it is stated that the human mind works by associations built up by means of the principles of contiguity (contagion) and similarity; second, the comparative method which Frazer uses to adduce his material is structured by the same principle, and third, magic, the *leitmotiv* of the work, is, by virtue of also being a product of the human mind, structured analogously. With this, I have of course said nothing about the truth or falsity of these propositions, or of the conclusions which arise from them. Rather, the purpose of raising the propositions was to show how the *GB*, despite its vast diversity, does have a coherent structure. On the one hand, it studies the workings of the human mind, and on the other, it is itself an exemplification of these workings. The argument of the *GB* thus revolves around two themes: there is, on the one hand, the story of the Arician priesthood, and on the other, there is the human mind. And, as we have seen, the relationship between these two themes changed in the course of Frazer's researches.

But what of the essential truth or falsity, or even, simply the substantive content of a book which is constructed in this way? Are we dealing with a vicious circle, or with a work which does advance the enquiry it posits? I will argue that the *GB* does the latter.

Frazer began his literary career in 1879 by writing an essay entitled *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, which he published unaltered in 1930. In it, he was looking for a theory of knowledge. The reasons for which he rejected Plato's theory of knowledge and the theory of forms are crucial for an understanding of what is said, and how it is said in the *GB*. In *The Growth of Plato's Ideal Theory*, Frazer first argues that the ideal theory was derived from Socrates' theory of knowledge, and that Plato then turned it into a theory of being in such a way that knowing and being become the same thing. Frazer calls this "the gigantic yet splendid error which converted a true theory of knowledge into a false theory of being . . . knowledge into ontology." Later in the book comes a statement which is crucial for our present purposes:

[Plato] mistook the method and scope of physical enquiry. What a physical philosopher does is this: he puts himself in the most favourable position for watching the phenomena . . . ; then he registers the sequence . . . then, observing . . . he infers that this sequence is universal. . . . [The resulting] extended inferences are called laws of nature. They really are, however, nothing but inferences as to the sequence of our sensations. The philosophy of nature is after all the philosophy of mind.

In other words, Plato, according to Frazer, bestows objective existence on subjective abstractions.

Now, in the *GB*, Frazer repeatedly argues that savage philosophy, one product of which is magic, functions according to exactly the same error:

Few men are sensible to the sharp line that divides the known from the unknown. To most it is a hazy borderland where perception and conception melt indissolubly into one.Men mistook the order of their ideas for the order of nature and hence imagined that the control which they have . . . over their thoughts permitted them to exercise a corresponding control over things.

In other words, being and knowing, perception and conception, are viewed by savage man as being one and the same thing.

Two points arise with respect to magic. Firstly, if being and knowing are the same thing, as, according to Frazer, they are in savage thought, because the savage makes no distinction between perception and conception, then what is known in the mind actually is. We may illustrate this state of affairs from Frazer's analysis of savage thought on death and immortality.

At an early stage of his intellectual development man deems himself naturally immortal and imagines that were it not for the baleful arts of sorcerers . . . he would live for ever.Thus arguing . . . from his own sensations, he conceives of life as an indestructible kind of energy, which, when it disappears in one form, must necessarily reappear in another.

That is, for the savage, sensation expresses a permanent reality independent of the individual experiencing it. This reality, both in the mind and external to it, is ruled by the two laws of thought, similarity and contagion. Here we have the reason why a magical rite, when conceived and then performed, is, according to Frazer, considered by the savage to be efficacious in a predictable fashion, i.e., it is efficacious according to the laws of similarity and contagion.

In short, the magical rite is the cause of a specific effect. This relationship of cause and effect in magic as viewed by Frazer brings us to a further issue in his thought: his question why the "error" of magic turned out to be so durable:

The answer seems to be that the fallacy was far from easy to detect . . . since in . . . most cases the desired event did actually follow at a longer or shorter interval, the performance of the rite which was designed to bring it about. . . . Hence the practical savage . . . might well turn a deaf ear to the theoretical doubter, the philosophical radical who presumed to hint that sunrise and spring must not after all be the direct consequence of the . . . performance of . . . certain ceremonies.

Frazer then transposes the argument to his own England, confronting a scientific innovator with "the man on the street," where the latter takes the former to task for being a "theorist, splitter of hairs and chopper of logic" and ignoring the evidence of facts which are "patent to everybody."

If such reasonings could pass muster among ourselves, need we wonder that they long escaped detection by the savage?

In accordance with these ideas, Frazer, so as to distinguish magic from science, calls magic a pseudo- science. It is a science because by means of it, man seeks to control nature, but at the same time, it is a false science because it operates on the basis of an erroneous theory of cause and effect.

The means by which [magical rites] were supposed to effect [their] end were imitation and sympathy. Led astray by his ignorance of the true causes of things, primitive man believed that in order to produce the great phenomena of nature on which his life depended, he had only to imitate them, and that immediately by a secret sympathy or mystic influence the little drama which he acted . . . would be taken up and repeated by mightier actors on a vaster scale.

In short, magic would be an unimpeachable body of knowledge—unimpeachable because coherent and systematic—were it not for the crucial flaw that it is built up on a false premise.

A difficulty arises here which runs throughout the *GB*. This is that on the one hand, Frazer rejects the possibility of absolute definitive knowledge, and on the other, he posits that a true explanation and understanding of phenomena of whatever kind can be reached through sustained observation and correlation of fact with theory. Perhaps, seeing that Frazer insists that he was studying nothing other than the human mind, what elsewhere he calls comparative ethics, one may argue that he should have renounced his insistence on "fact," that is, on objectivity external to and independent of the individual's mind.

We may at this point compare Frazer's analysis of human thought to Hume's. Hume also describes human thought as proceeding by association of ideas, but instead of Frazer's two categories of similarity and contiguity, he has three, resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. Thus where according to Hume cause and effect can figure as a mode of thought, according to Frazer they are an objective "scientific" reality, a reality independent of any observer. In other words, in locating cause and effect not in the human mind, but in an environment independent of the human mind, Frazer did posit a reality external to and independent of man and his perceptions.

This view of Frazer's affected his interpretation of magic, for thanks to it, he could conclude that the premiss of magic as he understood it was indeed false. At the same time, Frazer regarded magic and the mode of thought it exemplifies as resolving an impasse, and that not only among savages. Of the Plato of the middle period, when the ideas, according to Frazer, first emerged clearly, he says:

The cause why Socrates sat and talked . . . was that it seemed to him good to do so. . . . And if good is the cause of my actions, it must be the cause of all things, of material things as well as of human actions. Now, it is quite true that every voluntary action of every man is directed to . . . something that seems to him good. . . . But from the fact that all our voluntary actions are prompted by this mental perception of an object, were we to infer that every change in physical things is prompted by a striving after the good, we would be committing the same mistake into which savages fall when,

from the analogy of their own acts, they ascribe the action of inanimate objects to a principle of life, thought and feeling inherent in these objects. However, we cannot suppose that Plato meant to suggest anything so extravagant.

Thus, according to Frazer, the predicament of explaining cause and effect is handled by Plato at this point in his thought in a fashion which is not altogether disconnected from how savages handle it. This is the "gigantic yet splendid error" we mentioned earlier.

The issue Frazer comments on in the above passage is how not only Plato (as he understands Plato) but also primitive man formulates a conceptual framework such as might render intelligible the reality which is external to man. This issue was carried over into the *GB*. Throughout the work, therefore, Frazer confronted the question of how effectively and durably a conceptual framework could be delineated by any one person or even, by any one generation of researchers and scholars. As in *Ideal Theory*, so in the *GB*, his estimate of the likelihood of success was cautious.

The task of the scientific discoverer is to trace the series of invariable antecedents and consequents, in other words, of physical, not final causes and effects.

Here also, cause and effect are realities independent of and outside the human mind. In principle, they may be definitively intelligible to human reason, but in actual fact, the advance of learning is at best exceedingly slow.

In reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages . . . we shall do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth, and to give them the benefit of that indulgence which we ourselves may one day stand in need of: cum excusatione itaque veteres audiendi sunt.

And at the end of the work we have a last image of the ancient quest for truth:

The advance of knowledge is an infinite progression toward a goal that forever recedes. We need not murmur at the endless pursuit:Fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
Ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.

Great things will come of that pursuit, though we may not enjoy them. Brighter stars will rise on some voyager of the future—some great Ulysses of the realms of thought—than shine on us. The dreams of magic may one day become the waking realities of science.

We have seen on what foundations the *GB* is constructed, and gone on to ask whether the work, in the light of its structure, can advance the enquiry it proposes, rather than merely create a vicious circle. To answer this question, we looked at how Frazer formulated his disagreement with Plato's theory of knowledge, and how he carried the results of the disagreement over into the *GB*. Put simply, Frazer concluded that in practice, knowledge is both finite and relative. But we also noted that Frazer very carefully stopped short of suggesting that the reality which according to him does exist outside the human mind must remain ultimately inexplicable.

Topics for Further Study

Look for a behavior that is apparent in everyday life but that people seem to do for no other reason than tradition. Try to discover what that behavior might have developed from. Another way to go about this topic is to think about the mythical history of some object that did not exist when Frazer wrote, such as computers or cars.

Make a chart or "family tree" of the mythical figures who are mentioned in *The Golden Bough*, showing their relationship to one another.

George Lucas has said that he based much of his *Star Wars* film saga on mythological motifs. Research which mythic stories Lucas had in mind, and find where they fit into the argument Frazer presents in *The Golden Bough*.

Choose one of the myths mentioned in the book and make your own picture of it, the way that Turner depicted the scene at the lake of Nemi.

Compare and Contrast

1890: People in Europe and the United States know little about non-Western culture; they refer to Africa as "The Dark Continent" and Asia as "The Mysterious Orient."

Today: Inexpensive travel and the Internet have made it possible for people all over the world to be aware of distant cultures.

1890: Greek mythology is studied in almost all schools and is generally well-known.

Today: More students know about the Greek gods from Disney movies than from studying them in class.

1890: A scholar like Frazer can make an international reputation for his theories by making assumptions about the results of other anthropologists' work.

Today: Leading scientists have research assistants who can assemble data under their supervision.

What Do I Read Next?

Joseph Campbell was arguably the most popular writer on myth in the late twentieth century. His most famous work is *The Power of Myth*, an overview of how mythology is relevant to contemporary life. The book was based on a six-part series that Campbell did for Public Television with Bill Moyers. It was published in 1991 by Anchor.

Readers who are interested in Frazer's historical place as a student of myths can find out the state of the discipline before him in *The Rise of Modern Mythology, 1680-1860*. In this 1972 volume, authors Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richards give biographies of and samples from the great writers about myth, from Bernard Fontenelle (1657-1757) to Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862).

In *Myth: Its Meaning and Function*, G. S. Kirk deals with weaknesses he found in works by Frazer and his followers: those of examining myths in relation to folktales and to rituals. This book was published by Cambridge University in 1970.

Schrödinger's Cat and "The Golden Bough" (2000), by physicist Randy Bancroft, attempts to tie together science, magic, and mythology for the modern reader. It was published by University Press of America.

Further Study

Bruner, Jerome S., "Myth and Identity," in *Myth and Mythmaking*, edited by Henry A. Murray, Beacon Press, 1960, pp. 276-87.

Bruner examines the psychological reasons why humans are attracted to myths.

Downie, R. Angus, *Frazer and "The Golden Bough,"* Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1970.

This study examines Frazer's entire career, including his influences, his methods, and his other writings.

Patai, Raphael, *Myth and Modern Man*, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972.

Patai, whose early career interests overlapped with Frazer's, examines mythological aspects in contemporary America in such chapters as "Madison Avenue Myth and Magic," "The Myth of Oral Gratification: Coke and Smoke," and "The New Sex Myth."

Vickery, John B. *The Literary Impact of "The Golden Bough,"* Princeton University Press, 1973.

The focus here is on works by Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce, all of which show Frazer's influence. Nearly a quarter of the book is about James Joyce.

Bibliography

Hyman, Stanley Edgar, "What Do You Dance?," in *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer, and Freud as Imaginative Writers*, Atheneum, 1962, pp. 212-32.

Malinowski, Bronislaw, "Sir James George Frazer," in *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*, University of North Carolina Press, 1944, pp. 177-221.

Review of *The Golden Bough*, in the *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 3, No. 40, October-December 1890, pp. 316-9.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Nonfiction Classics for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

©1997-2002; ©2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc.

Gale and Design® and Thomson Learning™ are trademarks used herein under license.

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any

form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

For permission to use material from this product, submit your request via Web at http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

Permissions Department
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535

Permissions Hotline:
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006
Fax: 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, The Gale Group, Inc. does not guarantee the accuracy of the data contained herein. The Gale Group, Inc. accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". © 1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Nonfiction Classics for Students (NCfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, NCfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NCfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NCfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NCfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NCfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NCfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Nonfiction Classics for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NCfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Nonfiction Classics for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Nonfiction Classics for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NCfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NCfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Nonfiction Classics for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Nonfiction Classics for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NCfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Nonfiction Classics for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Nonfiction Classics for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535