

**JAMES FRAZER:**  
**THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORK AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH**  
**ROMANIAN CULTURE**

James Frazer's work has always exerted a cultural attraction. The author's erudition, the novelty of the described deeds, the connections the English scholar made between the realities mentioned in his numerous studies, the diversity of them was the reason why I decided to write a thesis on this subject.

The fact that there are only two notable monographs in the literature, the first, strongly and illegitimately influenced by the personality of his wife, was another reason.

However, our thesis was not built as a classical monograph, although it has a chapter, the second, which can be accepted as a monograph, but rather an analysis of the posterity of this great anthropologist after a century since the writing of his great works, a century that he had biologically traveled only up to its half, which, in terms of epistemic changes, experienced the maturation of cultural anthropology as science, a century in which Frazer began as the god of science and died contested by all.

Most of the bibliography used in the thesis is in foreign languages, English and French, some of which, like the author's correspondence, which has an interesting history, is mentioned for the first time in Romanian culture.

The consistent quotations, which we have not translated in order not to add to many details to the thesis, which, however, contain many references, may be precious information not only for knowing Frazer's personality, but also for knowing the cultural epochs in which he lived.

Our approach was based on several centers of interest, the first center of interest being given by the presentation of the folklore and cultural anthropology research in England at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which we have covered in the first chapter of our thesis.

In this respect, the speciality works of the Italian researcher Giuseppe Cocchiara and those of the Frenchman Robert Deliège, the first in folklore, the second one in cultural anthropology, have been a real support for us.

The next chapter, the second, a larger one, was designed to look at the work of the great British anthropologist, being divided into several parts.

The first one considered the classification of his work. In general, we used the monograph of R. Angus Downie, from 1942, but especially Robert Ackerman's monograph, from 1987, which benefited from the study of all the Cambridge manuscripts.

Then we focused on Frazer's conception of folklore, and we started from some comments by Giuseppe Cocchiara, who claimed that on the one hand, Frazer had some reductions in the work of researcher Wilhelm Mannhardt, and on the other hand, that he took over some premises, especially with respect to the cult of trees.

We have tried to deny these claims, also benefiting from the latest monographic writing

The second part, as well as the most extensive part, refers to the anthropological work of the British scholar and is primarily concerned with the interpretative reading of the monumental Frazerian work, *The Golden Bough*. We have approached in this regard the five volumes of *The Golden Bough*, which represent the abbreviated version of the twelve, as they were at the beginning.

Methodologically speaking, I conducted an intertextual reading of this work by Frazer, reporting each time his statements or the conclusions he presents to others of some great names in world anthropology such as Émile Durkheim and, closer to our days, René Girard. However, the anthropological intertextuality is not the same as the literary one.

When we watched Frazer's approach to magic and religion, we also used a series of considerations on the religious phenomenon of Émile Durkheim, Mauss, and Malinowski. The terms sacred and profane were viewed from their perspective, but also from that of a historian of religions, such as Mircea Eliade. Similarly, when James Frazer glossed over magic, for a better understanding and reference to his considerations, we also linked with the work of names like those of Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert.

If, in Frazer's case, we were talking about evolutionism and comparisons, we ourselves were calling to the latter, comparing inter-textually the Frazier anthropological

text with texts by René Girard, Émile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Malinowski, and even closer to nowadays, Claude Lévi-Strauss or Edmund Leach.

The next part of this chapter is to present and analyze another book of the great anthropologist, one of utmost importance. This is a work titled *Folklore in the Old Testament*, translated also to us in 1995.

In turn, the vegetation myths will be approached with protagonists like Adonis, Attis and Osiris.

Also in Hebrew, Frazer noticed, that *adam* means *red*, from where the idea that the first man was made of red earth ... Reported to Saussure or Hermogenes, in the Platonic dialogue Cratylus, this mechanism rejects the theory of the linguistic mark denial, being closer to what they claimed Socrates and Cratylus.

In the chapter *The Fall of Man*, Frazer notes that Genesis does not specify whether man was created immortal or mortal. And he also thinks that the banned tree, the Tree of Knowledge, was actually the Tree of Death.

The comparative method, specific to evolutionary anthropologists, is applied by Frazer in its own way, in which the spectacle of erudition, intellectual trajectories, and fanciful projections merge in an unmistakable style.

The third chapter, entitled Cain's Sign, refers to the first murder recorded in Holy Scripture, and the author wonders how the killer was marked.

An intertextual reading was also done here, referring to this episode presented and interpreted by René Girard in his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*,

where he notices that the fratricide is actually a founding murder, Cain laying the foundation of the cainite culture Yahve "marks" him in order to stop the circular, satanic violence, enunciating the law against murder. A different interpretation, from that of Frazer, suggests that the angry soul of the murdered man would have revenged the murderer...

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The second part of this book begins with a chapter about the Abrahamic Alliance and continues with Jacob's Inheritance, also taking into account the situation of ultimogenification, the lastborn in Jewish families.

The third chapter of the second part of the book is titled *Jacob and Goatskins* or *Renaissance*, and contains a series of glosses about the peculiar qualities of the blacksmith and about the rebirth ceremony, a complex ceremony.

The fourth chapter, entitled James at Bethel, will intertextually confirm René Girard's glosses about violence, mime rivalry and enemy siblings. In history, the edifying examples were Eteocles and Policles, Romulus and Remus, and here Jacob and Esau.

The third part of this book will present Moses' history, one closer to folklore than history, in James George Frazer's opinion.

The story of Samson and Dalai, of King David, and other pages dedicated to the invocation of the dead will be the subject matter of the following chapters. Like the theme of the holy trees, included in another chapter.

The ninth chapter of the third part is titled *Silent Widow*, and Frazer again calls on etymology, pointing out that in Hebrew the vocabulary for the "widow" means "silent woman." Something to understand, the researcher believes, because there was a custom that forces her to a total silence after her husband's death. Semitic speaking, Frazer discovers here the interpreter, the sign that translates the sign.

In the last part of the book, in the chapter Place of the Law in the History of Jews, the author will refer to the importance of the so-called "high places" containing shelters abolished with time. The next chapter will refer to some interdictions, the third to the so-called bloody mourning, and the fourth, as a curiosity somehow, to the crimes committed by animals. Finally, the last chapter is titled *The Golden Bells*, whose sound was to be heard at the entrance to and exit of the priest in the temple...

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Further, in the analysis of James Frazer's work, we stopped on his other writings, in a special subchapter in which we considered the following works: *Totemism and Exogamy*, *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of Dead*, *The Worship of Nature*, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* and *Devil's Advocate*.

An intertextual reading was also done here, referring to this episode presented and interpreted by René Girard in his book *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, where he notices that the fratricide is actually a founding murder, Cain laying the foundation of the cainite culture Yahve "marks" him in order to stop the circular, satanic violence, enunciating the law against murder. A different interpretation, from that of Frazer, suggests that the angry soul of the murdered man would have revenged the murderer...

The fourth chapter of our work is entitled *The Influence of Frazer's Work on the Romanian Folklore School*. Here we have not followed from the very beginning the direct influence of the author in question, but first we have noticed that the foliage-green syntagm from the Romanian folk song can send to the thoughts about the vegetation myths studied so much by Frazer. Then I took in account a popular Albanian ballad titled *The Fir Tree and the Vineyard*, analyzed by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu in his book *Folklore*, in the first volume. I have also noticed here the violence that René Girard has criticized in his books, but also a certain resemblance to the vegetation myths analyzed by Frazer.

Otherwise, Hasdeu noticed the similarity between this Albanian ballad and the Romanian folk ballad *The Ring and the Kerchief*. Both are about conflict and revenge, and implicitly, of sacrifice and sacrificial. I have also followed here the scientific solidarity Hașdeu - Frazer.

The lover from *The Fir Tree and the Vineyard* tries, through gifts, to gain the trust of his beloved family. Everything will be futile, but then, desperately, he will kidnap her. The two will eventually be slain by the angry relatives. From their tombs will spring forth the fir tree and the vineyard.

Things will happen in a similar way in the *The Ring and the Kerchief*, the boy's father does not accept a poor daughter-in-law...

Some observations of Hasdeu will even refer to the comparative method of evolutionists like Frazer. And the study of 1866 by Lazar Sineanu, titled *Jelele*. A study of comparative mythology will invoke the comparisons even from the title. Both Ovidiu Bârlea and Octavian Nistor confirming this method used by the author. Another important Romanian folklorist, Simeon Fl. Marian, published in 1890, in Bucharest, the study *Wedding in Romania*, with the subtitle *Historical-Ethnographic Comparative Study*. Also confirmed by Ovidiu Bârlea in his book entitled *The History of Romanian Folklore*. Similarly, Frazer is quoted in the book of Pompilius Caraion *The Sacred Genesis*, published in 1967, also confirmed by Romulus Vulcanescu in the *Heavenly Column*, a book published in 1972, especially on the theme of the sacred tree. Also, let's not forget that Mircea Eliade himself was a comparative researcher, and Lucian Blaga remembers Frazer in the study of the Magical Thought included in his *Trilogy of Values*.

The last chapter of our work was about the work of James Frazer in the context of anthropology becoming a science, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the actuality of his work. From the beginning we have here considered two lines of force in our scriptural approach. The first regards making anthropology a science, its metamorphoses in different schools and orientations, and the second was the attitude of the various schools and various anthropologists and thinkers about the work of James Frazer, Mauss, Malinowski, Leach, Freud, and Girard and the second targets the attitude of the various schools and various anthropologists and thinkers about the work of James Frazer, Mauss, Malinowski, Leach, Freud, and Girard.

We considered a particular sequence of this chapter, made up of how Frazer was received by the most important anthropologists of the first half of the twentieth century.

*This sequence is the first of its kind in Romanian anthropology and contributes decisively to the shaping of Frazer's cultural profile, to his position within modern anthropology.*

We also analyzed Leach's programmatic text about the two and the two models of anthropology he propagates, but also the way in which Freud used Frazer to build his theory of the psychotic origins of culture. I concluded with an analysis of the work of the last "frazierian", R.Girard.

Finally, we considered it necessary to approach the way in which Romanian literature has an interest in the Frazier themes.

That's why we built a special chapter, but as it could not be genetically linked to Frazer's work, we decided to position it as an Annex.

The meaning of our decision is that anthropology and literature are "mirrors" of reality, and that the existence of themes that seemingly can establish relations of parentage proves nothing but that both literature and anthropology are irrevocably encountered in the surprise of what the human species essentially has.

Moreover, an anthropologist of beginnings, with an impressive work in size, Frazer literally transforms this ritual-magic matter that he should have addressed scientifically.

The separation of this chapter from the body of the thesis also emphasizes the fact that we try rather to apply a new Frazier reading grid and not to establish filiation between the analyzed works and the work of Frazer. Beyond the purely intellectual temptation, there is the conclusion, anthropologically acquired, that beyond cultural diversity we are confronted with a series of mental constants that highlight man's unity as a civilizing species.

I had here three Romanian writers of great value, Mihail Sadoveanu, Tudor Arghezi and Stefan Augustin Doinaş, but also a great Romanian essayist and esoterist like Vasile Lovinescu. And, not in the end, a literary critic: Alexander Paleologu.

As for Mihail Sadoveanu, we stopped over three of his works, the two novels , *Golden Bough* and *The Hatched*, and also the initiating novella, *Bear Eyes*. Alexandru Paleologu was one of the few critics who, in Sadoveanu's case, the nostalgia of the

original as a theme. But he had made it clear that, at the time he wrote the *Golden Bough* novel, Sadoveanu did not know Frazer's book, but he could read the sixth Eneide's song.

The descent into the Inferno of the magician Kesarion Breb (the Inferno being the corrupt Byzantine!) Is similar to that of Enea, helped by the golden bough that is, the mistletoe! Coming to *The Hatched* novel, the same critic observed in Mihai Sadoveanu's book *The Stages of the World* or Mihail Sadoveanu's path towards himself, that Vitoria Lipan's story in search of the remnant of the murdered husband resumed the story of Isis in search of Osiris's dismembered body. Gheorghita is analogous to Horus, the myth, and his dog, Wolf, to Anubis. The myth of Osiris is, as we have seen, a myth of vegetation, and hence Frazer's indirect influence is already on record. More specifically, the *The Hatched* novel can be read with great utility through a Frazier reading grid.

Vasile Lovinescu was an esotericist, an initiator who often seemed to oppose James Frazer's ideas. But, in fact, it complements it, even when its interpretation of vegetation myths is considered to be insufficient. He, like René Girard, sees in fairytales some remnants of esoteric traditions, but at one point even comes to consider the hypothesis of a concordance between them and the initiatory doctrine he masquerades. In fact, Vasile Lovinescu's interpretations refer to what he esoterically names *Tradition*, and for him the golden bough is nothing but intellectual light, maintaining the "real presence of the luminous heavens and of the Tree of the World."

The last author to whom we stopped was Stefan Augustin Doinaş with the poem *The Wild Boar with Silver Tusks*. We meet here what can be called, with a phrase taken from Mircea Eliade, "ritual hunting". Let us observe, of course, that the hunting prince was from Levant, that is, from the area of the myths of vegetation, the myths of Attis and Adonis, and moreover, he passed through the "black heart of the forest", a reflection of the Nemi forest image from Frazer's monumental book, *The Golden Bough*.



