

Fourth Folklore Society / Royal Anthropological Institute Joint Seminar
**Folklore and Anthropology in Conversation:
'Revisiting Frazer, Lang, and Tylor'**
25 October, 2018

10 – 10:15 Welcome

10:15 – 10:45 Paper 1

Dr. Paul Cowdell

'Critical Reception and Critical Rejection: Frazer, Folklore and Folklorists'.

10:45 – 11:15 Paper 2

Docent Dr Iliya Nedin

'The influence of Frazer, Lang and Tylor in Eastern European Folklore Studies: the example of Bulgaria'.

11:15 – 11:45 Tea

11:45 – 12:15 Paper 3

Kate Smith

'A Historiography of Selected Aspects of Frazer's *Golden Bough*'.

12:15 – 12:45 Paper 4

Frederico Delgado Rosa

' 'Off With His Head!' : Wilhelm Mannhardt's *Wald- und Feldkulte* at the roots of *The Golden Bough*'.

12:45 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 2:00 Paper 5

Paul-Francois Tremlett

'The Survival in E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*: From Memes to Dreams and *Bricolage*'.

2:00 – 2:30 Paper 6

Dr Efram Sera-Shriar

Notebook of a Sceptic: E.B. Tylor and His Investigation of Modern Spiritualism

2:30 – 3:00 Tea

3:30 – 4:00 Paper 7

Chloe Metcalfe

Douglas Kennedy and the 'Sharing of the Movement-ecstasy'

4:00 – 4:30 Paper 8

Professor Theresa Buckland

Ritual Moves: Circulating Narratives of Origin for Dance

4:30 – 5:00 – General discussion

Paper 1.

Paul Cowdell paul.cowdell@talk21.com

Critical Reception and Critical Rejection: Frazer, Folklore and Folklorists

J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* remains one of the most popular and easily available folklore titles in Britain, quite often the sole folklore title to be found in stock on bookshops. Since its publication it has fuelled a series of popular approaches to folklore that are misleading and almost wholly unrepresentative of the work of academic folklorists. Its continued high profile is misleading both to a fascinated lay public and to colleagues in other disciplines unaware of the theoretical developments within folklore since Frazer.

This high profile (and the relative marginalisation of folklore within academia) also misrepresents Frazer's position as a folklorist at the time of publication. He was respected, but his work was not universally accepted. The Folklore Society assigned no fewer than eight reviewers to study the expanded second edition of *The Golden Bough* on its publication in 1901, devoting 24 pages of *Folk-Lore* to comment from some of the discipline's leading theoreticians. Scholars like George Laurence Gomme, Moses Gaster and Andrew Lang acknowledged the work's magnitude and scholarship, but they did so with some keen methodological criticisms which have been somewhat overlooked since. Frazer's great felicity and scholarship placed him as a central figure in folklore's popularised success, although its rather different direction to academic folklore scholarship saw critiques being set aside.

I will review here some of the earlier criticisms of Frazer made by folklorists, and the significant summary of those criticisms made during the most successful post-war championing of folklore as an academic discipline, Richard Dorson's establishment of the Folklore Institute in American academia. As anthropologists are encouraging a critical reclamation of some aspects of Frazer's work, and lay folklore enthusiasts are still perpetuating an uncritical recycling of it, it is worth considering folklore's continued problematisation of what does not work.

Paper 2.

Docent Dr Iliya Nedin, South-West University, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria

'The influence of Frazer, Lang and Tylor in Eastern European Folklore Studies: the example of Bulgaria'

One of the main points that I shall reinforce in my paper is that prior to the First World War, European intellectuals were in active and frequent communication with each other. The founder of Ethnology and Folklore Studies in Bulgaria, Ivan Shishmanov (1862-1928), was exemplary in this regard. He first to make reference to the epistemological models developed by the 19th century British Folklorists and Anthropologists. In his seminal study, "The Importance and the Task of Our Ethnography", published in 1889 in the very first issue of the multi-volume series *Miscellany of Folk-Lore, Scholarship and Literature*, produced under his editorship, Shishmanov explores the term "folklore" as coined by William John Thoms, defining it as a "type of culture", and outlines a future programme of ethnography/ethnology as a discipline. It is clear that Shishmanov was well acquainted with the development of folklore research in Great Britain and Europe, and was influenced by the works of many western anthropologists.

For instance, Shishmanov was in correspondence with Andrew Lang, responding to Lang's request for information regarding fire-dancing in Bulgaria. It is also clear that Shishmanov was familiar with the works of Edward Tylor and John Lubbock, as well as the Folklore Society, although he surprisingly does not mention James Frazer.

Shishmanov was also acquainted with the studies of Alfred Nutt, G. L. Gomme, and W. R. I. Ralston. Significantly, Shishmanov's work (and especially his emphasis on folklore as a type of culture) continued to dominate the methodological framework of Bulgarian ethnology/anthropology and folklore studies, even during the Communist period, thus functioning as an alternative to the Soviet epistemological models. Another great name in Bulgarian folklore studies was Shishmanov's talented disciple Mihail Arnaudov, who cited Frazer in many of his works. After Shishmanov and Arnaudov, evolutionist theory came to influence Bulgarian Folklore and Ethnography, and for complex political reasons the next generation of Bulgarian scholarship did not acknowledge functionalism and structuralism.

Paper 3.

Kate Smith K.Smith7@hull.ac.uk

A Historiography of Selected Aspects of Frazer's *Golden Bough*

This paper presents a historiography of selected aspects of Frazer's *Golden Bough*. The impact of Frazer's major publication continues to be felt; by examining the way in which his suggestions about pre-historic custom and belief are told and re-told as explanations for contemporary phenomena, the limitations – and the appeal – of his theories become clear. I will track iterations of Frazer's theories in the ways that social historians, folklore enthusiasts and others have written about the culture of Hull's former fishing community. Drawing on my recent experience of working with cultural geographers to try and understand why the descendants of that community are resistant to incentivisation, I will argue that scholars of all kinds are ill-served by the Frazerian legacy. Seen against the dynamic backdrop of critical cultural anthropology, much of Frazer's work becomes problematic – we can and should do better. I will conclude by arguing that, as folklorists and anthropologists, we have an ethical obligation to re-appraise our own practice so that we know from whence our ideas come: we may not need to set down the *Golden Bough*, but we certainly do need to reflect on the way it may have closed our ears and eyes to other, less totalising explanations for the curious behaviours we see around us.

Paper 4.

Frederico Delgado Rosa fdelgadorosa@fcsh.unl.pt

'Off With His Head!': Wilhelm Mannhardt's *Wald- und Feldkulte* at the roots of *The Golden Bough*

Wilhelm Mannhardt (1831-1880) is an excluded ancestor par excellence. Never translated, seldom read, his work is only mentioned in passing, as a source of data for *The Golden Bough*. In spite of James Frazer acknowledging his major debt to the German mythologist and folklorist, in particular to his *Wald- und Feldkulte* (1875-1877) – but also to previous (much less voluminous works), *Roggenwolf und Roggenhund* (1865), and *Die Korndämonen* (1868) –, historians of late Victorian anthropology, including specialists of Frazer, have not paid much attention to the originality of Mannhardt's themes and theories. A pathetic figure, suffering since childhood from a disease that gave him the size of a midget, he died aged 49, but that is only one of the reasons for the oblivion in which he fell. The paper is a contribution to fill this surprising historiographic gap through a minute and comparative reading of Frazer, Mannhardt and some of their shared sources. It recaptures the

intellectual biography of a man who became a specialist of the prehistoric tree cult in Europe, but most of all highlights his import as a major source of inspiration of Frazer's *magnum opus*, including its leitmotiv: the killing of the tree spirit's human representative. In the end, the originality of *The Golden Bough* is both put in perspective and better understood.

Paper 5.

Paul-Francois Tremlett paul-francois.tremlett@open.ac.uk

The Survival in E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture*: From Memes to Dreams and *Bricolage*

The standard account of Tylor's *oeuvre* situates the survival as a key element of a comparative anthropology saturated with evolutionist, rationalist and utilitarian assumptions about progress, reason and human nature. The influence of this canonical Tylor on contemporary currents in the anthropology of religion has tended to gravitate rather narrowly to the recapitulation of classical debates around the origins and definition of religion but with the caveat that Tylor framed his work in terms of an historical anthropology that today lacks any theoretical or empirical credibility, and in terms of an epistemology saturated by the presuppositions of gendered, white, Protestant colonialism. Yet some of his ideas prefigure in important respects assumptions shared by contemporary anthropologists, evolutionary psychologists and cognitive theorists. As such, the first part of this paper will explore the standard account of Tylor's survival with a particular interest in his theory of diffusion to open out the extent of its anticipation of, for example, Dan Sperber's mobilization of the concept of 'epidemiology' and Richard Dawkins' theory of memetics to explain the transmission and distribution of individual units of culture and religion. The second part will be concerned with the de-stabilization of the canonical Tylor. Not because the canonical account is wrong but rather because Tylor's *Primitive Culture*—like all texts—possesses at best only the illusion of conceptual unity. The survival is an organizing element of Tylor's theoretical system but by unsettling it, an alternative Tylor—or perhaps an altered Tylor—can be glimpsed. This alter-Tylor's imaginative account of animist cognition evokes Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss while the centrality of the dream to the origins of religion suggests the survival represents less an element of a linear sequence that leads backwards in time to a putative moment of origin than a mode of production perhaps best described as *bricolage*.

Paper 6.

Dr Efram Sera-Shriar e.sera-shriar@leedstrinity.ac.uk

Notebook of a Sceptic: E.B. Tylor and His Investigation of Modern Spiritualism

In the early 1870s, there were numerous reports among spiritualists in London, that the young medium, Florence Cook (1856-1904), was able to produce a full physical manifestation of a spirit known as 'Katie King.' It was not long before other mediums claimed to be producing various sorts of similar spirit phenomena at séances. These reports regularly appeared in published spiritualist sources, and formed the foundation of many studies that aimed to prove the existence of spirits and psychical forces. Amazed by what he had been reading in these published accounts, the ethnologist-turned-anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), decided that he had to see for himself whether there was any truth to these unbelievable claims. As an ardent secularist, who argued that a belief in spirits was a cultural survival of primitive thought, Tylor doubted the validity of these reports. In November 1872, he travelled to London so that he could undertake a period of ethnographic investigation into the modern spiritualist movement. Fundamentally, Tylor's

trip to London was all about establishing himself as a credible observer of spiritualism, who could dispel with certainty the legitimacy of the spirit hypothesis. Yet, as this paper will show, it became far more complicated for him. He was unable to explain easily how all of the various phenomena at the performances and séances were produced, and his views on spiritualism changed considerably as a result. He remained a sceptic, but not an unfaltering one. Tylor admitted that some of the feats, which he had observed during his trip to London, sensitised him to the spiritualist appeal, inasmuch as he was willing to consider future evidence that could prove the reality of the spirit hypothesis.

Paper 7.

Chloe Metcalfe chloe.e.metcalfe@gmail.com

Douglas Kennedy and the 'Sharing of the Movement-ecstasy'

This paper explores concepts of folk inheritance in the published writings of Douglas Kennedy (1893-1988). Kennedy was the director of the English Folk Dance and Song Society from 1925-1961 and president of the Folklore society from 1964-1967. Stemming from my PhD thesis on social folk dance in England this paper focuses specifically on Kennedy's ideas on the purpose and meaning of social folk dance examining work published from the 1940s onwards. In this paper I will draw attention to some of Kennedy's ideological referents which have Frazerian precedents. This will include examining the idea that social dancing originated in ancient pre-Christian practice. I will consider the sources from which Kennedy drew his inspiration, touching upon the position of Cecil Sharp (1859-1924), founder of the English Folk Dance Society and the musicologist and dance theorist Curt Sachs (1881-1959). That this particular interpretation of (folk) dance had widespread contemporary approval is demonstrated using examples published within Physical Education guidance by the Board of Education from 1933 -1988. I will conclude by exploring the extent to which ideas of Kennedy's continue to affect perceptions of English social folk dancing. Predominantly I will focus on the idea of 'naturalness', considering the impact that this dominant paradigm has on attitudes towards the formalisation of (folk) dance teaching.

Paper 8.

Theresa Buckland Theresa.Buckland@roehampton.ac.uk

Ritual Moves: Circulating Narratives of Origin for Dance

During the second half of the twentieth century, Frazerian-inspired interpretations of dance as a universal development from so-called 'primitive' ritual were emphatically, if somewhat belatedly, challenged in academic publications. Across anthropology (see, for example, Kealiinohomoku 1970, Hanna 1979, Williams, 1991 and Grau, 1993) and in folklore studies (see, for example Buckland 1983, Boyes 1987-88, Forrest, 1999 and Corrsin 2008) scholars of dance eschewed earlier issues of origins, raising new research questions more in accord with contemporary scholarship. Beyond academia, however, adherence to survivals theory and belief in the origins of dance in an unrecorded mystical past of ritual continued to, and indeed still, circulate across popular imagination. Often promoted by the media, tourist agencies, oral transmission and dancers themselves, this 'feedback factor' of earlier exegeses of dance, developed by late Victorian scholars such as Tylor, Lang and Frazer, among others, has received some scholarly attention as both an historical and contemporary phenomenon (see, for example, the work of Hutton, 1995 and Buckland, 2001-02).

This paper will look more closely at the scholarly and social contexts in which these influential thinkers worked in order to explore Victorian fascination with questions surrounding ritual and in which dance was considered to be enmeshed as a crucial constituent in the projected evolutionary development of religion and the arts. Following recent work on dance and evolutionary thought in late Victorian discourse (Buckland 2014), I will examine the scholarly treatment of dance in early issues of *Man* and in *Folklore*, alongside more popular writings on dance and ritual in periodicals, the press, and emergent professional organisations on dance. Examples will be considered in relation to the intellectual and social backgrounds of late nineteenth-century theorists in folklore and anthropology in order to ask why such racialized and gendered authority by non-dance specialists exercises a legacy of enchantment.