

Songs of Power and Appeasement: The Magic/Religion Distinction in Cherokee Songs and Prayers

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I began my study of religion as a hobby years before I formally entered the academic world. During my informal studies I never gave much thought to just what religion is. I gleaned the bookstore shelves in sections marked “Religion,” never considering why some books appeared on these shelves and others appeared on the “New Age and Occult” section. My study of religion was simple — my conceptions were dictated by the bookstore shelves. Upon entering college to study religion formally, I still had not given this question much thought until a class on Native American traditions challenged me to consider how “religion” is classified. Religion suddenly became much more complicated.

In my research on the Cherokee tradition, I found myself having to explain why I was including such “secular” activities regarding love and medicinal practices in an essay on religion. Love and medicine in modern Western conception are almost entirely secular. If someone has an illness and wants to be healed, they usually do not go to their local religious leader. Nor does one go to a religious leader for help in attracting a member of the opposite sex. However, within traditional Cherokee culture, a religious leader was often approached for just these purposes. So it was necessary for me to find theories that justify placing “magic” within the interpretive paradigm of religious studies.

In his book *The Golden Bough* (1890), James G. Frazer postu-

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lated a theory of magic and religion, the difference between the two, and an evolutionary model for their development. He cited examples from a wide range of cultures throughout the world to support his argument, including a few examples involving the Cherokee people of North America. In this essay, I will examine the use of particular songs and prayers by the Cherokee to see how these practices correlate with Frazer's interpretation of magic and religion.¹ It turns out that when applied to the Cherokee, Frazer's distinctions between magic and religion are permeable and, therefore, offer weak support for his evolutionary model. This model is a product of a specifically Victorian anthropological paradigm, which held that all aspects of human culture became more sophisticated and complex through the passage of time.

According to Frazer, the difference between magic and religion lies in how unseen forces govern the world, and how people treat those forces. Within the magical worldview, animate and inanimate impersonal forces govern the world. A survey of cultures where magic prevails reveals that these supernatural forces are thought to be embodied in various sites, ranging from rocks and trees, to rivers and mountains, to heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, stars and sky, and to humans and spirits.² Frazer writes that magic "assumes that all personal beings, whether human or divine, are in the last resort subject to those impersonal forces which control all things, but which nevertheless can be turned to account by anyone who knows how to manipulate them by the appropriate ceremonies and spells."³ In contrast, he defines the religious worldview as "a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and human life."⁴ That is, instead of impersonal forces that govern the world through magic, there are personal and conscious forces operating in religion. Thus, magic encompasses a belief in supernatural powers that can be *controlled by humans*, while religion encompasses belief in superior powers that control the world and practices that sought to *appease those powers*.

The late nineteenth century was witness to an influential theory in Western science, Darwin's theory of natural selection. Though Darwin dealt specifically with biology, other disciplines soon embraced

the evolutionary model. Based upon this theory, it became a widespread belief that not only did humans evolve biologically from primitive origins, but so too did culture and society, including human belief systems. This model inevitably placed Western culture, practices, and belief systems at the apex of the evolutionary ladder. All other peoples were regarded as inferior in some way. This fundamental assumption was operating when Frazer developed his evolutionary model of magic and religion.

Frazer's evolutionary theory can be depicted as a rather short ladder: two rungs and a top step. On the bottom rung is magic, the least advanced form of human thought. As time progressed, people began to notice that the associations made by magic were false, for they yielded no results.⁵ Eventually, humanity advanced in its thinking and moved up a rung to religious belief. According to Frazer, belief in personal spiritual agents and gods was more advanced than a mere association by similarity; even beasts associate things by likeness. The apprehension of personal spiritual agents who governed the world, therefore, required a "far higher degree of intelligence and reflection."⁶ From this rung the next logical step was to the top of the ladder, scientific thought. This top rung served as the basis for modern Western civilization and, naturally, the ivory tower from which Frazer gazed down in judgment.

Frazer begins his explanation of magic by identifying two fundamental principles that are characteristic of magic: the law of similarity, which operates in sympathetic magic, and the law of contact, which underlies contagious magic. Each of these principles operates on an assumption that these laws are universal and are not limited to human actions. In general, sympathetic magic is based on the principle that a cause produces a like effect. This law of similarity also characterizes Western scientific reasoning. Both magic and science attempt to control the world, but Frazer argues that magic is a false science, or science's "bastard sister." "The fatal flaw of magic lies not in its general assumption of a sequence of events determined by law, but in its total misconception of the nature of the particular laws which govern that sequence."⁷ Magic is distinguished from science in that magic makes mistaken associations of cause and effect. The control that it attempts

is based on “false laws” rather than the “natural law” of science. An example of a magical association would be for a person to attempt to produce rain by imitating the sound of rain. According to Frazer, this principle of association is essential to the operation of human thought, however, it is a false association. If it were true, magic would then become a science.⁸

At the heart of the law of similarity lies an emphasis on metaphor and imagery to enact an effect. According to Frazer, the mistake made is the assumption that objects which resemble each other are connected, indeed, that they are the same.⁹ Applying the principle that “like produces like,” the manipulation of one object will, likewise, have an effect on the other. The most familiar version of this type of imagery is in the use of effigies to cause injury to a person, what is commonly referred to as the “voodoo doll.” Western Cherokee Alan Kilpatrick provides a further extrapolation of Frazer’s law of similarity as “a set of mimetic actions designed to transfer the empowering supernatural properties of plants, animals, or inanimate entities to other human beings.”¹⁰

The law of contact operates on the principle that “things which have once been in contact continue ever afterwards to act on each other.”¹¹ A popular example of this principle is the belief that a connection exists between a person and severed body parts, such as hair and nails. This connection allows the one in possession of the severed parts to manipulate the person to whom the parts belonged. The voodoo doll is also an example of contagious magic since body parts are often used in its creation.

Frazer further categorized these forms of magic by dividing them into positive and negative forms. The positive forms are called charms, which operate on a principle of acting in order to cause a desired reaction. That is, charms produce a desired effect. Taboos are the negative forms which are intended to avoid an undesirable event: “Don’t do this lest so and so should happen.”¹²

Sympathetic magic is not limited to use on humans and objects; it can also operate on spirits. Based on the laws of magic, Frazer treats spirits in the same manner as animate and inanimate objects: sympathetic magic “constrains and coerces” the spirits to do the bid-

ding of the practitioner.¹³ Many elements of sympathetic magic, especially the coercion of spirits, are present in Cherokee songs and prayers known as *idi:gawe:sdi*, or literally “to say, one.”¹⁴ These are songs which are vocalized in a manner that adheres to strict wording and form. According to Cherokee conception, words have an inherent power, especially those in the Cherokee language. In the context of *idi:gawe:sdi*, the fundamental “likeness” necessary for sympathetic magic is conveyed through verbal expression. When expressed as an incantation, the incantator crafts an image in his mind, of the target of the incantation, the spirits involved, and the subsequent result.

Within the Cherokee worldview the principle of sympathetic magic is ever present, for every action has a direct consequence, and “[n]o action, not even a thought [goes] without some consequence or reaction.”¹⁵ That even thought has a direct consequence is important for understanding Cherokee conceptions of causation, for human thought is the primary means of transmitting power in much of the Cherokee literature. It is believed to “become supremely powerful if it can be focused and directed at some target.”¹⁶ Words allow the incantator to focus his thought and increase its power, thereby increasing its effectiveness. The *idi:gawe:sdi* serves as a vehicle for the creation and direction of the incantator’s concentrated mental energy. Like Frazer’s general principle of magic that requires strict adherence to its governing laws, an incantator is also not at liberty to change the syntactic structure or wording of an *i:gawe:sdi*. The language of *idi:gawe:sdi* is verbally specific, and the reciter must follow a strict adherence to word usage and form. “[*Idi:gawe:sdi*]...are bound to form rather than content. The desired result is held to be brought about, not by the meaning of the words used, but merely strict adherence to the wording and the form.”¹⁷ This is consistent with Frazer’s observation that a practitioner of sympathetic magic can use his power only so long as he strictly adheres to the laws governing his art. Though the words form images which allow the incantator to focus his thoughts, it is the correct adherence to word form which is believed to cause the desired result.

The general length of these *idi:gawe:sdi* varies tremendously, from very brief to very long. However, some general patterns emerge from

the incantations:

1. An exclamation of warning to attract the attention of the spirit addressed.
2. The spirit's name, sometimes his color; the place where he has his abode.
3. Some expression extolling his power.
4. A statement as to the cause of the disease, the identity of the disease causer, or the reason for which the spirit's help is invited.
5. Some deprecatory remarks to the address of the disease, of the disease causer, of the enemy against whom the incantation is being recited, etc.
6. Some specific reason why the spirit is expected to effect relief in this particular instance.
7. An emphatic statement that relief has been effected.
8. A final exclamation.¹⁸

This is a generic structural pattern, and many of the *idi:gawe:sdi* do not incorporate all eight points. Most of the *idi:gawe:sdi*, however, will contain some combination of them.

The following *idi:gawe:sdi* is characteristic of the type used by Cherokee healers known as *Dida:hvwi:sgí*, or literally, "he cures them."¹⁹ The general procedure for acquiring the services of the healer was as follows. Once someone was discovered to be ill, a member of the family was sent to retrieve a healer. The healer then used the beads and cloth given to him as payment, as a divination tool to determine whether treating the patient would be successful. This divination could also be used to determine who or what sent the illness. If the prognosis was positive, and the healer was able to heal the patient, he then proceeded by using a variety of tools at his disposal. When using an incantation, the healer might chant or sing it, but during its recitation, he "mumbled [the words] under his breath, and at a very fast tempo, so that neither the patient nor anyone of his household [managed] to catch a single word."²⁰ With the exception of hunters who used hunting *idi:gawe:sdi* to kill game, these songs were not common knowledge to the average

Cherokee. It was possible, however, to purchase some of these incantations, especially those used for romantic purposes, from a local healer. As a rule, the content of these songs were closely guarded. Not only did this protect the power of the *idi:gawe:sdi*, but it also ensured the authority of the healer.

This *i:gawe:sdi* was used for an illness caused by a ghost snake, in which the healer called upon a snake spirit and two other powerful spirits to drive away the offending ghost snake:

Ya!

Ha! Now, Black Snake, they have caused thee to come
down it seems.

The snake is only a ghost, it seems.

They have caused thee to come down, it seems.

The ever-living bones, the ever-living teeth it has ad-
vanced towards him, it seems.

It was only a black snake that laid itself about the trail,
it seems.

But right now, it feigned to bite thee, it seems.

Its track would never be found.

But now the ever-living bones have been made weak;
thou art now in such a condition.

There has been hesitation it seems.

Ha! Now thou hast become faltering.

But at this very moment you Two Little Men, you Two
Powerful [*Ada:we:hi*], they have caused you two
to come down.

It was a black snake, it seems, but the snake is merely a
ghost, it has feigned to put the disease under
him, it seems; its track would never be found.

But now you two have come to take it away.

Where the black boxes are, you two have gone to store
it up.

As soon as you have turned round, relief will have been
caused at the same time.²¹

Here, a ghost snake is thought to have sent a nightmare, which resulted in some form of real eating irregularity. Animal ghosts are different from animal spirits in that the latter are the prototypical animals, “far more considerable in size, power, swiftness, and all other qualities than their earthly successors.”²² The animal ghosts are the “souls” of individual animals that have been slain. The incantation offers an etiology for the disease: it is the result of being bitten by a snake, whether physical or ghostly. Frazer would interpret this etiology as an instance of the law of similarity: the dream of a snakebite is similar to an actual snakebite. To effect a cure, this incantation relies upon the Cherokee “policy of equilibrium” whereby “every spirit [had] one or more antagonists that are appealed to in order to undo the work and to combat the nefarious activities of their opponents.”²³ The petitioner calls upon the Black Snake spirit to remove the ghost from the victim.

The words of this *i:gawe:sdi* are an example of how the practitioner gains coercive control of the spirits. “Ha! now...” states the practitioner: the Black Snake has come to assist in the removal of the ghost. The words coerce rather than persuade, they do not ask the spirit but tell it that the task is done. The reiterated phrase “it seems” might appear to subvert the coercive character of this incantation. However, there appear to be two implied meanings for the phrase. The first is something like “You are a powerful spirit, yet I have control — it seems that I am more powerful,” as in lines two and four; and the second is “It seems to be a snake but it is not — it is a ghost,” as in line three, where the incantator’s power lies in his ability to reveal the snake’s true identity.

The name “Two Little Men” is a “ritualism” for the Sons of Thunder, the Cherokee archetypal hunter and powerful healer.²⁴ “Ritualisms” are the use of alias names for deities and spirits in magical texts in an attempt to disguise the content of these texts from others who are nearby. This is important since the power of the *idi:gawe:sdi* was not regarded as permanent, for it can be dissipated and weakened by misuse or overuse.²⁵ It is possible, therefore, to render an *i:gawe:sdi*

ineffective if it were known and used by too many people.

The most striking example of the control of spirits comes with the commands to the “Two Little Men.” The Sons of Thunder, like their father, are also powerful healers, which accounts for why they were called upon; but it is the reference to them as *Ada:we:hi* that most reveals the magical power of this incantation and the healer. The translation of the text uses the word ‘wizard,’ but the original word, *ada:we:hi*, is no ordinary ‘wizard.’ *Ada:we:hi* is a term reserved for “a being, spiritual or human, of boundless powers.”²⁶ So in the use of this incantation, the healer commands some of the most powerful spirits to aide in healing the patient. The Sons of Thunder are commanded to remove the snake ghost and store it in the “black boxes,” or coffins.

The scattered corpus of Cherokee *idi:gawe:sdi* also contain many examples of word images which concentrate one’s thoughts to enact an effect on a fellow human. This is particularly evident in much of the erotic magic. Like the hunting *idi:gawe:sdi*, the erotic incantations could also be purchased from a healer. Though this form of magic frequently commands a spirit to assist the incantator, the following *i:gawe:sdi* lacks this component and is directed specifically at the target of the incantator’s affection:

Now! Listen!
You and I are truly set apart!

It was Decided that you think of me.
You think of my entire body.
You think of me from your very soul.
You think of me, never to forget that I walk about.

This is my name, _____.
I am a man!

The mourning doves will be calling: “*Gu:le! Hu:! Hu:!
Hu:! Hu:!*”
You say, you woman, that your name is _____, that
your people are _____.²⁷

Like the previous healing incantation, this one uses spoken words to form an image of the desired outcome, namely the woman's attraction to the man. But the spaces for names are also an important component of this *i:gawe:sdi*. Since words serve to concentrate thoughts in Cherokee sensibility, the act of naming the target here provides a more precise image for the incantator to visualize the result of his magic. For the Cherokee, a name is not simply an identity tag, but part of a person's essence. By mishandling the name one can affect the person as if there were physical contact. In this *i:gawe:sdi* both parties, man and woman, are named to ensure that a mental image of the desired relationship is formed: "You will be attracted to *me* alone." The calling of a mourning dove, a symbol for love and bliss, draws the attention of the beloved.²⁸

This *i:gawe:sdi* contains another characteristic that is mentioned in an inscription that accompanies it: it is used to "remake" tobacco. As with many other Native American nations, tobacco plays an important role and is powerful for the Cherokee. To "remake" tobacco involves singing or praying over the tobacco in order to infuse it with a specific power when smoked. The incantator applies this *i:gawe:sdi* when he sings the words and directs his thoughts to the tobacco. Here the incantation empowers the tobacco with the ability to win the affections of the woman. The man then smokes the tobacco in the direction of the woman he has targeted, and the woman will subsequently become enamored with the man.

Though these two examples are far from exhausting all applications of *idi:gawe:sdi*, they represent how these incantations fit into Frazer's theory of sympathetic magic, particularly the law of similarity. Since using an *i:gawe:sdi* requires some sort of vocalization for recitation, i.e. "doing something," they could be categorized as positive magic, or charms. No form of negative magic, or taboos, will be found within the texts of the *idi:gawe:sdi* themselves. However, there can be any number of unwritten taboos surrounding the *idi:gawe:sdi*, such as a ritual fast before reciting the incantation.²⁹

Generally, the law of contagion, like taboo, is absent within the *idi:gawe:sdi*. This comes as no surprise, for much of contagious magic requires manual activity, and not just vocalization and concentration.

This type of activity is not often explicitly mentioned in the body of an *i:gawe:sdi*. But there are references to a magical influence of a person's saliva. Within the Cherokee worldview, a person's saliva is as important as blood, and is associated with the soul. Though there is a belief in a multiplicity of souls, the soul associated with the head and saliva is regarded as primary. There are also secondary souls associated with the liver, flesh, and bones. In the following incantation, the soul associated with saliva becomes the target and agent of transformation:

Listen! Now I have come to step over your soul.
 You are of the _____ clan. Your name is _____.
 Your spittle I have put at rest under the earth.
 Your soul I have put at rest under the earth.

I have come to cover you over with the black rock.
 I have come to cover you over with the black cloth.
 I have come to cover you over with the black slabs,
 never to reappear.

Toward the black coffin of the upland in the Darkening
 Land your paths shall stretch out.
 So shall it be for you.
 The clay of the upland has come.
 Instantly the black clay has lodged where it is at rest at
 the black houses in the Darkening Land.

With the black coffin and with the black slabs I have
 come to cover you.
 Now your soul has faded away. It has become blue.
 When darkness comes your spirit shall grow less and
 dwindle away, never to reappear. Listen!³⁰

The sinister tone of this *i:gawe:sdi* is no accident, for its purpose is to cause death. The color symbolism reflects this, since black is the color of death, and blue is the color of depression, failure, or a faltering spirit.³¹ This *i:gawe:sdi* requires the incantator to acquire some of his

victim's saliva. Once in possession of the victim's spit, the incantator could gain possession of the man's life. The spit combined with the dirt on the ground formed a clay which the incantator placed in a small tube. This tube was then buried under a tree that had been struck by lightning.³² Once this was accomplished, it was believed that the victim would soon die. His soul no longer had a path in this land, but his path was "stretched out in the Darkening Land, the land of death."³³

These examples show how Cherokee *idi:gawe:sdi* fit Frazer's interpretation of magic, and they do not fall within his definition of religion. The characteristics of the *idi:gawe:sdi* rely upon a belief in impersonal forces and a person's capacity to control them, not upon an attempt to appease the superior powers that control the world. So it looks like the Cherokee worldview would be best described as magical. However, there are also Cherokee songs and prayers with characteristics that Frazer would characterize as "religious," and the presence of these songs and prayers within Cherokee culture casts doubt on Frazer's strict distinction between magic and religion.

During the early nineteenth century an ethnographer named the Reverend Daniel J. Butrick, who lived with the Cherokee for almost 30 years, wrote a very extensive account of Cherokee beliefs and ritual practices which are now part of the *John Howard Payne Manuscripts* located in the Newberry Library at the University of Chicago. And many of the practices described by Butrick would have to be described as religious. For instance, Butrick's manuscripts record an important ritual song known as the *Yo:wa*. According to Butrick's informants, the Cherokee were commanded by a being named *Yi:ho:wa* to celebrate a feast known as First Fruits on the first new moon in August.³⁴ The song's name was a contraction for *Yi:ho:wa*, and was said to be created by *Yi:ho:wa* himself. He instructed them on how and when to use it. The song, like the name *Yi:ho:wa*, was not to be used in ordinary situations. It was only sung on specific occasions by specially trained singers.³⁵ The *Yo:wa* goes as follows:

Hi yo wa ya ka ni.

Hi te hu yu ya ka ni.

Hi wa ta ki ya ka ni.

Hi hi wa sa si ya ka ni.

Hi a ni tsu si ya ka ni.

Hi yo wa hi ye yo ya ka ni.

*Hi a ni he ho ya ka ni.*³⁶

There is no English translation for this song, for the Cherokee of the early nineteenth century had forgotten the meaning to the words. The song was sung in the “old language” whose archaic meaning had become lost a few generations before Butrick’s ethnography.³⁷ Regardless of what the words mean, we can still designate it within Frazer’s model of religion based upon the story associated with its origin. That is, this song was used not to command and coerce the spirits, but to appease *Yi:ho:wa*, who commanded the people to use it during an annual ritual.

Curiously the *idi:gawe:sdi* are entirely absent in Butrick’s ethnography. However, according to Mooney, the *idi:gawe:sdi* were passed on orally from “remote antiquity” until they were written down once the Cherokee alphabet was invented.³⁸ So the *idi:gawe:sdi* should have been present during Butrick’s stay with the Cherokee. Perhaps Butrick’s occupation as a minister and his motivation for working with the Cherokee can provide us with a clue about the absence of these incantations. Daniel Butrick was a New Presbyterian minister who was studying the Cherokee to gather information that supported a claim that they were one of the ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Being a Christian Reverend he meant to make a connection between the Cherokee *Yi:ho:wa* and the Judeo/Christian YHWH. (Here the Reverend, who subscribed to a religious worldview, ironically sought to connect the Cherokee with the distant tribes of Israel with his own brand of “contagious magic.”) Also, many of the Cherokee practices were thought to be similar to those contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. It seems likely that *idi:gawe:sdi* were used by his informants but Butrick left them out of his ethnography because he was looking for similarities with Judaism.

Butrick’s own religious commitments might cast some doubt on his reliability as an ethnographer, but whether or not *Yi:ho:wa* has any connection to YHWH, the practices he described are clear instances of attempts to appease a spirit, and thus would count as religion in Frazer’s sense. Actually, it is possible (though also a matter of some controversy) that the Cherokee did have prior contact with Chris-

tians — most plausibly, with the Spanish, decades before the English arrived in “Carolina” — and that the similarities between *Yi:ho:wa* and YHWH are a real result of this contact. In fact the Cherokee have constantly been able to syncretize their own traditions with European religious traditions. In my own fieldwork with the Cherokee I was able to learn this valuable lesson. The Cherokee have a variety of belief systems that frequently overlap: traditionalists, the Native American church, and different denominations of Christianity. One Cherokee healer was quoted as saying, “When I conjure, I go by the word of God...In ceremonies, I use the name of the Lord. When somebody’s sick, you take him to the creek and wet his breast by the heart. It’s like the spirit gives him strength, like baptism. He can feel it. . . . If it wasn’t [for] the power of the Creator, you couldn’t make anything move.”³⁹ Here what Frazer distinguishes as “magic” and “religion” are combined within an individual. Some of the *idi:gawe:sdi* are infused with phrases from Christianity like “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” which further confuses the distinction.⁴⁰ While Frazer admitted that magic and religion could co-exist in a culture, he did see them as opposing tendencies: the “magician” and the “priest” would always be at odds with each other. But this is not always the case. If Cherokee practices were not already infused with religious as well as magical elements, the Cherokee have certainly come to see these elements as not necessarily opposed.

It is true that Frazer’s model of sympathetic magic is useful for understanding Cherokee religious practices involving the *idi:gawe:sdi*. It is a definition that some Cherokee anthropologists, including Alan Kilpatrick, are comfortable with. Few can deny its applicability in this context. But beyond this context, the usefulness of Frazer’s distinction is far less clear. Frazer never left his armchair in the library, for he learned about other cultures in the same way I began, by gleaning the bookshelves. The obvious problem with this is that cultures and religions are much more complex than what can be learned solely from books and especially unreliable ethnographies. The distinction between magic and religion may be clear in theory, but in practice the line between them blurs and often fades to nothing. After all, “magic” and “religion” are Western categories imposed upon other cultures. When

asked “what is the Cherokee religion?” the Cherokee themselves often reply, “*being* a Cherokee.” For in the Cherokee language there is no word for “religion.” Likewise, the Western distinctions between “magic” and “religion,” or between “secular” and “sacred,” were not historically made within their culture. These issues also pertain to many other cultures mentioned in *The Golden Bough*. Perhaps Frazer would have become aware of these issues had he left his armchair in the library, learned other languages, and spoken with some of the people he commented upon. This is not to say that we should abandon these categories, but it should remind us that they are *our* categories.

And what of the evolutionary model? I cannot fault Frazer for proposing his theory, but he lacked the fieldwork needed to support it in application. Like so many other Victorian comparativists, he assumed that Western scientific civilization was the most advanced, so naturally the others must fall somewhere behind. Yet it is difficult to understand why he thought religion, which affirmed the existence of superior powers that controlled the world, was any more “advanced” than the magical worldview, which sought to control the world. In his model, magic and science, the lowest and the highest rungs, shared similar concerns with controlling the natural world. The religious worldview, then, seems anomalous in this evolutionary narrative, a kind of digression. And since we have seen that his basic distinction between magic and religion can vanish in application, the theory has a shaky foundation at best.⁴¹

Nevertheless, there is evidence that the Victorian evolutionary paradigm still prevails. Its influence can be seen in the “World Religions” textbooks which begin their survey with “primitive” indigenous religions and work their way towards the “advanced” monotheistic traditions. Though I am impressed with his voluminous work *The Golden Bough*, Frazer’s evolutionary theory should be seen for what it is, an antiquated theory that justifies Western ethnocentrism. But while we as scholars may claim to be “beyond” this paradigm, we are essentially subscribing to it by even making such a claim. We should not say that we are more “advanced” than the Victorian anthropologists. Instead, scholars need to work to eliminate this paradigm on two fronts. First, we need to develop a different model of classification for cultural be-

lief systems, one that represents other cultures with greater integrity. Second, the labels on the bookstore shelves suggest that as scholars we need to expand our influence outside the academic circle and into the rest of our society.

NOTES

¹ The songs and prayers that I have chosen to examine belong to only one genre within Cherokee culture. All of the songs in this essay, except one, are currently published in English. Though at one time they were considered powerful and were closely guarded, they are now considered “ritually dead.”

² I acknowledge that terms such as “animate” and “inanimate,” and distinctions such as “supernatural” and “superior powers” are problematic. These are Western terms used to differentiate forces and objects that are quite natural for other cultures. However, because both Frazer and Cherokee anthropologist Alan Kilpatrick use these terms, I will also rely on them.

³ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (MacMillan, 1942), pp. 51-52.

⁴ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 50.

⁵ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 57.

⁶ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 54.

⁷ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 49.

⁸ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, pp. 49-50.

⁹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 12.

¹⁰ Alan Kilpatrick, *The Night Has a Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery Among the Western Cherokee* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 21.

¹¹ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 11.

¹² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 19.

¹³ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, p. 51.

¹⁴ Kilpatrick, *Naked Soul*, p. 13. *Idi:ḡawe:sdi* (plural) or *I:ḡawe:sdi* (singular) are often translated as “magical text,” but they are incantations, either spoken or sung. It is believed that a direct result will occur by speaking or singing the words of these texts. By the mid 1830’s, a Cherokee named Sequoyah developed a written alphabet for the Cherokee language known as Syllabary, and within a few years, many Chero-

kee became literate. By the late 1800's, many of these *idi:gawe:sdi* were written down. They cover a variety of purposes, from healing and protection, to hunting and romance. *Idi:gawe:sdi* have been found in notebooks, on the back of grocery lists, and on scraps of paper.

¹⁵ J.T. Garrett, *Meditations With The Cherokee: Prayers, Songs, and Stories of Healing and Harmony* (Bear and Company, 2001), p. 2.

¹⁶ Kilpatrick, *Naked Soul*, p. 26.

¹⁷ James Mooney and Frans M. Olbrechts, *The Swimmer Manuscript: Cherokee Sacred Formulas and Medical Prescriptions* (Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 99, 1932), p. 160.

¹⁸ Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 159.

¹⁹ Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 85. This term was a general category, which referred to a number of different classes of healers (*Swimmer*, p. 84). Although it was more customary to refer to healers according to their specialty, it is not the scope of this work to differentiate among them.

²⁰ Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 155.

²¹ Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 176. There is a curious difference in the style of the English translations of the *idi:gawe:sdi* between those translated by a European and those translated by a Cherokee. Cherokee translations tend to lack the use of archaic English, such as "thee," "thou," and "hearken." Traditionally, *idi:gawe:sdi* are rich with archaisms in Cherokee since these words are often viewed as being more powerful. But for many people today, English archaisms are "dead." However, some fundamentalist Christians prefer the archaic English of the King James Version of the Bible because it sounds more "godly."

²² Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 25.

²³ Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 43.

²⁴ James Mooney, "The Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees," *James Mooney's History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees* (Bright Mountain Press, 1992 [1891]), pp. 311-313.

²⁵ Raymond D. Fogelson, "Cherokee Notions of Power," in Raymond D. Fogelson and Richard N. Adams (eds.), *The Anthropology of Power* (Academic Press, 1977), p. 187.

²⁶ Jack Frederick and Anna Grits Kilpatrick, *Walk in Your Soul: Love*

Incantations of the Oklahoma Cherokee (Southern Methodist University Press, 1965), p. 9.

²⁷ Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick, *Walk in Your Soul*, p. 44.

²⁸ Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick, *Walk in Your Soul*, p. 44.

²⁹ Often the taboo is not directly associated with the *i:gawe:sdi* itself but functions as a compliment to the incantation. For example, hunters frequently used *idi:gawe:sdi* to attract game, but they would also undergo a ritual fast for purification prior to the hunt.

³⁰ Mooney, "Sacred Formulas," p. 391.

³¹ Kilpatrick and Kilpatrick, *Walk in Your Soul*, p. 8.

³² Mooney, "Sacred Formulas," p. 392.

³³ According to the traditional Cherokee worldview, life and death were not separated temporally but spatially. Thus when a person died the soul traveled to a physical place "out west" variously called the "Night Land," "Ghost Land," and "Darkening Land." Mooney and Olbrechts, *Swimmer*, p. 144.

³⁴ Butrick specifically uses the word "God" in this description.

³⁵ Butrick, MSS, 4:189.

³⁶ Butrick, MSS, 4:245.

³⁷ Butrick, MSS, 4:335.

³⁸ Mooney, "Sacred Formulas," p. 308.

³⁹ William G. McLoughlin, "The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794 – 1870" *Essays on Acculturation and Cultural Persistence* (University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 187.

⁴⁰ Kilpatrick, *Naked Soul*, p. 41.

⁴¹ There are numerous instances where other "primitive" cultures prove themselves to be more "advanced" in some ways than Western culture. As an example, there were Native American bodies discovered in the Southwest which possessed bullet wounds to extremities that were mended and healed at a time when American medicine could do nothing but amputate. And to this day, ethnobotanists are working with multiple "primitive" cultures to learn about the medicines they use. These medicines often turn out to be of benefit to Western medicine and sometimes become produced by pharmaceutical companies. The so-called "primitive" cultures and their belief systems turn out to be much more advanced than Frazer would allow.