



FIRST BOOK



The Arousing of Thought

AMONG other convictions formed in my common presence during my responsible, peculiarly composed life, there is one such also—an indubitable conviction—that always and everywhere on the earth, among people of every degree of development of understanding and of every form of manifestation of the factors which engender in their individuality all kinds of ideals, there is acquired the tendency, when beginning anything new, unfailingly to pronounce aloud or, if not aloud, at least mentally, that definite utterance understandable to every even quite illiterate person, which in different epochs has been formulated variously and in our day is formulated in the following words: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the name of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

That is why I now, also, setting forth on this venture quite new for me, namely, authorship, begin by pronouncing this utterance and moreover pronounce it not only aloud, but even very distinctly and with a full, as the ancient Toulousites defined it, “wholly-manifested intonation”—of course with that fullness which can arise in my entirety only from data already formed and thoroughly rooted in me for such a manifestation; data which are in general formed in the nature of man, by the way, during his preparatory age, and later, during his responsible life engender in him the ability for the manifestation of the nature and vivifyingness of such an intonation.

Having thus begun, I can now be quite at ease, and should even, according to the notions of religious morality existing among contemporary people, be beyond all doubt assured that everything further in this new venture of mine will now proceed, as is said, “like a pianola.”

The Arousing of Thought, 3-9

Common Presence

Among other convictions formed in my common presence...

Throughout *The Tales*, Gurdjieff uses such terms as “common presence,” “common cosmic harmony,” and so on as if they are terms which the reader is familiar with when they are not. The casual reader is likely to gloss over such terms without considering the meaning. In this example, “common presence” describes objectively the normal presence of man as being common between his three brains.

Indubitable Conviction

an indubitable conviction...

The tendency to pronounce aloud “*In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the name of the Holy Ghost. Amen.*” when commencing something new is not a common habit. Such a pronouncement is a Christian practice, generally known as the Trinitarian formula. Clearly, it invokes the Holy Trinity—one God existing as three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Ghost (or Holy Spirit).

This behavior is used in many different contexts, both formal and informal:

The Sign of the Cross: This is the most common use. Many Christians (especially Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, and Lutheran) say these words while touching their forehead, chest, and shoulders, as a personal prayer, a blessing, or at the beginning and end of a prayer.

Baptism: It is the essential formula for a valid Christian baptism. Jesus instructs his disciples in the Gospel of Matthew (28:19) to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This is the origin of the Trinitarian formula.

Beginning and Ending Prayer: It is often used to open or close both personal prayers and formal liturgical services, such as the Catholic Mass.

Blessings: A priest or minister will often use this formula when giving a final blessing to the congregation.

Sacraments: It is used in other sacraments, such as during the absolution of sins in Confession.

The trinitarian formula dedicates the action being started (whether it's a prayer, a baptism, or simply starting a task) to God. It sets the moment or act apart as something holy—done for God's glory.

Oddly, Gurdjieff writes the formula incorrectly, thus:

“In the name of the Father and of the Son and in the name of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

– adding an additional and unexpected “in the name of.” He clearly did so deliberately, perhaps simply to startle the reader.

Ancient Toulousites

as the ancient Toulousites defined it, “wholly-manifested intonation”...

There is little historical record of Toulouse prior to 118 BCE, when it became part of the Roman Empire. That status continued until 418 CE, when Visigoths took charge of the area. They were succeeded by Merovingian Franks then Carolinian Franks. All were Christian cultures in some form, as was the Cathar religion, which dominated Toulouse for a while in the 13th century.

Catharism was deemed heretical by the Catholic Church, and Pope Innocent III launched a crusade, known as the Albigensian Crusade, with the intention of wiping out

Catharism completely. This culminated with the surrender of Montségure, the last major Cathar stronghold, after a lengthy siege by French royal forces that had begun in May 1243. Subsequently, 200 Cathars who refused to renounce their faith were burned to death. It is said that they Cathars threw themselves into the flames singing hymns. This could be what Gurdjieff is referring to as a “wholly manifested intonation.”

This crusade also had a political dimension, as it offered a pretext for French Crown and northern French barons to conquer the wealthy, culturally distinct, and politically independent lands of the Languedoc. The lords of the Languedoc, particularly the Counts of Toulouse, were accused of being too tolerant of (or even protecting) the Cathars.

The etymology of the word “define” is worth noting:

define: late 14c., *deffinen, diffinen*, “to specify; to fix or establish authoritatively.” From Old French *defenir, definir* “to finish, conclude, come to an end; bring to an end; define, determine with precision,” and directly from Medieval Latin *diffinire, definire*, from Latin *definire* “to limit, determine, explain.”

Like a Pianola

according to the notions of religious morality existing among contemporary people...

The word “morality” refers to the principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior. Etymologically, it comes from the Late Latin word *morālītās*, which meant “manner, character, proper behavior.” The contemporary religious morality Gurdjieff invokes here is the Christian view, which he implies means that his writing of books will proceed “like a pianola,”—meaning “as if by clockwork.”

Pianola: A pianola, more commonly known as a player piano, is a self-playing piano. The original such automated musical instruments contained a pneumatic or electro-mechanical mechanism that read music from a perforated

paper roll (often called a “piano roll”). As the roll unwound, the holes in the paper passed over a sensor bar, which triggered the mechanism to strike the corresponding keys on the piano.

This is clearly meant ironically since the writing of a book consciously could never be achieved in a mechanical fashion.

Gurdjieff's Use of Quotation Marks

Gurdjieff used normal English punctuation conventions to denote speech, alternating from double quotes to single quotes when there is speech within speech (i.e., when Beelzebub is speaking but relating what someone else said).

Quotes are also often used by Gurdjieff when giving names to things in a list, as in the following excerpt.

...These new movements of painting are known there by the names of 'cubism,' 'futurism,' 'synthesism,' 'imagism,' 'impress- ionism,' 'colorism,' 'formalism,' 'surrealism,' and many other similar movements, whose names also end in 'ism.'

We suspect that, in this instance, the quotes could have been left out from this sentence without damaging the meaning that Gurdjieff intended. However, in other situations, the quotes are there for a different purpose. It can be regarded as bad style to emphasize a word using quotes – boldface or underlining is more normal – but Gurdjieff, and/or his editors, chose to use quotes frequently for that purpose. When he uses quotes in that manner, he is indicating that we should pay specific attention and not apply our mechanized associations in assigning meaning to it.

There is potential for confusion in this between these two uses of quotes and that may be intended, because it obliges the reader to pay attention all the time. In many situations it simply is not obvious why he uses quotes. For example, in *Chapter 42, Beelzebub in America*, we read the following:

“In general he always drank more than enough of the ‘alcoholic liquids’ existing there;

We are obliged to wonder what he means by applying quote-marks to “alcoholic liquids.” The first time we encounter such quote-marks we might simply think of it as aspect of Gurdjieff's quirky writing style, but if we are familiar with English punctuation we will realise that they are scare quotes.

Scare quotes: Scare quotes, which are also known as sneer quotes or shudder quotes, signal that the writer is distancing himself from the normal meaning of the word or phrase enclosed in the quotation marks. It's a way for the writer to show they are using a term with skepticism, irony, or to imply it's a term, the meaning of which the reader should ponder. For example, the writer may use quotes to show that this is what other people call something, not what the writer calls it.

In any case I have begun just thus, and as to how the rest will go I can only say meanwhile, as the blind man once expressed it, “we shall see.”

First and foremost, I shall place my own hand, more-over the right one, which—although at the moment it is slightly injured owing to the misfortune which recently befell me—is nevertheless really my own, and has never once failed me in all my life, on my heart, of course also my own—but on the inconstancy or constancy of this part of all my whole I do not find it necessary here to expatiate—and frankly confess that I myself have personally not the slightest wish to write, but attendant circumstances, quite independent of me, constrain me to do so—and whether these circumstances arose accidentally or were created intentionally by extraneous forces, I myself do not yet know. I know only that these circumstances bid me write not just anything “so-so,” as, for instance, something of the kind for reading oneself to sleep, but weighty and bulky tomes.

However that may be, I begin . . .

But begin with what?

Oh, the devil! Will there indeed be repeated that same exceedingly unpleasant and highly strange sensation which it befell me to experience when about three weeks ago I was composing in my thoughts the scheme and sequence of the ideas destined by me for publication and did not know then how to begin either?

This sensation then experienced I might now formulate in words only thus: “the-fear-of-drowning-in-the-overflow-of-my-own-thoughts.”

To stop this undesirable sensation I might then still have had recourse to the aid of that maleficent property existing also in me, as in contemporary man, which has become inherent in all of us, and which enables us, with-

Hand on Heart

The gesture of placing one's right hand on one's heart generally implies honesty, sincerity, and truthfulness.

Gurdjieff's Accident

In 1924, G.I. Gurdjieff was in a near-fatal car accident in France while driving from Paris to his institute at the Château du Prieuré in Fontainebleau. He was driving his Citroën, reportedly at high speed, when he lost control and crashed violently into a tree. He was found unconscious and suffered severe injuries, including a serious concussion, remaining unconscious for several days.

Two well-written books that offer perspectives and details of this event are: *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* by Fritz Peters, and *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* by Thomas and Olga de Hartmann. Gurdjieff claims that because of this accident, he has been forced to write and confesses that he has no desire to do so. Although he doesn't directly state it, the implication is that events have forced him to pass on knowledge through writing rather than through other means that he had planned.

Bulky Tomes

I know only that these circumstances bid me write not just anything “so-so,” as, for instance, something of the kind for reading oneself to sleep, but weighty and bulky tomes.

The reader is clearly aware that *The Tales* is a long book split into three volumes. Whether Gurdjieff wrote this sentence before he knew how lengthy his book would be is impossible to know, as it is well recorded that he wrote and rewrote this first chapter many times.

Tome: The word tome has its roots in the act of “cutting.” It traces back directly from the Middle French *tome*, which was taken from the Latin *tomus*. The Latin *tomus* was borrowed from the Ancient Greek word *τόμος* (*tómos*), which meant “a piece cut off,” “a section,” or “a part of a book.”

The connection is that in the ancient world, large works were often written on long papyrus scrolls. A single, complete work might be too large for one scroll, so it was “cut” into several smaller, more manageable rolls. Each individual scroll or “section” of the larger work was called a *tómos*.

How to Begin

This sensation then experienced I might now formulate in words only thus: “the-fear-of-drowning-in-the-overflow-of-my-own-thoughts.”

Since Gurdjieff has taken *ALL and Everything* as the subject as his book, it seems likely that he could become overwhelmed with ideas of what to write and how to write it, to the point where where and how to begin is a challenge.

out experiencing any remorse of conscience whatever, to put off anything we wish to do “till tomorrow.”

I could then have done this very easily because before beginning the actual writing, it was assumed that there was still lots of time; but this can now no longer be done, and I must, without fail, as is said, “even though I burst,” begin.

But with what indeed begin . . . ?

Hurrah! . . . Eureka!

Almost all the books I have happened to read in my life have begun with a preface.

So in this case I also must begin with something of the kind.

I say “of the kind,” because in general in the process of my life, from the moment I began to distinguish a boy from a girl, I have always done everything, absolutely everything, not as it is done by other, like myself, biped destroyers of Nature’s good. Therefore, in writing now I ought, and perhaps am even on principle already obliged, to begin not as any other writer would.

In any case, instead of the conventional preface I shall begin quite simply with a Warning.

Beginning with a Warning will be very judicious of me, if only because it will not contradict any of my principles, either organic, psychic, or even “willful,” and will at the same time be quite honest—of course, honest in the objective sense, because both I myself and all others who know me well, expect with indubitable certainty that owing to my writings there will entirely disappear in the majority of readers, immediately and not gradually, as must sooner or later, with time, occur to all people, all the “wealth” they have, which was either handed down to them by inheritance or obtained by their own labor, in the form of quieting notions evoking only naive dreams,

A Preface

The word “preface” comes from the Old French *preface*, which in turn comes from the Late Latin *praefatia*. This Latin word is a compound of two parts: *prae-*: meaning “before,” and *fari* (or its noun form *fatia*): meaning “to speak.”

So, the literal etymological meaning of “preface” is “something spoken before.” It was originally used to describe the introductory part of a prayer or speech, and later came to mean the introduction to a book or other written work.

Gurdjieff’s Use of Capitalization

With both the words Nature and Warning, Gurdjieff capitalizes the first letter. This is unusual and should be noticed by the reader.

Proper nouns, i.e., names for languages, nationalities, days, months, laws, planets, countries, towns, streets and people, should be capitalized in normal written English. Aside from these, and adjectives deriving from them, the only other grammatically sanctioned uses of capitalization are at the beginning of sentences and in the use of common nouns when they are used to denote an entire class of things as in: “What a piece of work is Man.”

“So Gurdjieff’s use of capitalization violates the usual rules of grammar. In *The Tales* he capitalizes words to emphasize their meaning, seeming to imply that they relate to a spiritual level rather than a mundane level. This in these two examples Nature could be thought of as Nature in its sacred role as part of the creation, and Warning could be construed as a warning to the higher part of your psyche. Later in the Tales we will note the capitalization of Being, and Reason and note that these two words are not always capitalized.

It is also notable that Gurdjieff capitalizes all the neologisms (new words) he invents and uses through *The Tales*, and, of course, names for the absolute, such as OUR ENDLESSNESS, are fully capitalized.

not as it is done by...

I have always done everything, absolutely everything, not as it is done by other, like myself, biped destroyers of Nature's good.

This is the first time that Gurdjieff points out his tendency to behave in creative and original ways. In making this claim, he also makes his first direct criticism of man, as a destroyer of Nature's good.

Triples

In the text, throughout *The Tales* Gurdjieff mentions three term groups (we refer to these as triples). He begins with Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and on this page he refers to:

my principles, either organic, psychic, or even "willful,"

Meaning, persumably of the body or the mind or the emotions. Note that willful is wrapped in quotes. Later (on page 8) he includes another triple:

"psycho-physico-astrological" investigation

The Warning

The Warning is clearly an outlandish exaggeration.

... both I myself and all others who know me well, expect with indubitable certainty that owing to my writings there will entirely disappear in the majority of readers, immediately and not gradually, as must sooner or later, with time, occur to all people, all the "wealth" they have, which was either handed down to them by inheritance or obtained by their own labor, in the form of quieting notions evoking only naive dreams, and also beautiful representations of their lives at present as well as of their prospects in the future.

While it is true that most if not all readers of *The Tales* encounteriung the book for the first time are imbued with quieting notions and unrealistic representations of both their current and future existence, no book is going to puncture

that fantasy instantly or even quickly. Nevertheless, reading *The Tales* can and in some cases does have a devastating effect on one's world view.

and also beautiful representations of their lives at present as well as of their prospects in the future.

Professional writers usually begin such introductions with an address to the reader, full of all kinds of bombastically magniloquent and so to say “honeyed” and “inflated” phrases.

Just in this alone I shall follow their example and also begin with such an address, but I shall try not to make it very “sugary” as they usually do, owing particularly to their evil wiseacring by which they titillate the sensibilities of the more or less normal reader.

Thus . . .

My dear, highly honored, strong-willed and of course very patient Sirs, and my much-esteemed, charming, and impartial Ladies—forgive me, I have omitted the most important—and my in no wise hysterical Ladies!

I have the honor to inform you that although owing to circumstances that have arisen at one of the last stages of the process of my life, I am now about to write books, yet during the whole of my life I have never written not only not books or various what are called “instructive-articles,” but also not even a letter in which it has been unfailingly necessary to observe what is called “grammaticality,” and in consequence, although I am now about to become a professional writer, yet having had no practice at all either in respect of all the established professional rules and procedures or in respect of what is called the “bon ton literary language,” I am constrained to write not at all as ordinary “patented-writers” do, to the form of whose writing you have in all probability become as much accustomed as to your own smell.

In my opinion the trouble with you, in the present instance, is perhaps chiefly due to the fact that while still in childhood, there was implanted in you and has now become ideally well harmonized with your general psyche, an excellently working automatism for perceiving all kinds

Wiseacre

Prior to Gurdjieff's writing, this word “wiseacre” was not frequently used. It's an old English word dating back to the late 1590s, and it has Dutch origins. It was borrowed from the Middle Dutch *wijssegger*, which meant “soothsayer” or “prophet” (literally, a “wise-sayer”). The Dutch word itself was likely a modification of the Old High German word *wizzago* (or *wissago*), which also meant “prophet” or “wise person.” This root is related to the Old English *witan* (“to know”), which also gives us the word “wit.”

However, English speakers, borrowing the unfamiliar Dutch *wijssegger*, corrupted the ending to -acre, and assigned it a different meaning. While the original Dutch and German words meant “wise person,” the English word was always used contemptuously to mean “one who pretends to be wise,” a “know-it-all,” possibly a racial insult to the Dutch.

The not so “sugary” address

My dear, highly honored, strong-willed and of course very patient Sirs, and my much-esteemed, charming, and impartial Ladies—forgive me, I have omitted the most important—and my in no wise hysterical Ladies!

This is direct sarcasm. Most “Sirs” are neither strong-willed nor patient and the “Ladies” women unlikely to be impartial and likely to be hysterical at times. Readers who are unfamiliar with Gurdjieff may already be getting the impression that Gurdjieff is high-handed and arrogant. And it is likely that he wished to make such an impression, to alienate those who would anyway find *The Tales* too difficult to navigate. From the very beginning this book requires an unusual level of effort from the reader.

Grammar and Gramaticality

While, in ancient times grammars were created both for Sanskrit and Greek they mainly focused on simply defining parts of speech. Modern grammars have their origin in Latin grammar that was formulated in the Middle Ages in Europe.

Latin grammar came into existence in an effort to standardize on the use of the *linguae*, which was no longer a spoken language anywhere. Nevertheless it was very much a written *linguae* and problems arose because it had become the written language of academia, and it was extensively used by the Catholic church. There was a great deal of diversity in written Latin, to the extent it could easily be misinterpreted.

So, the adoption of a formal Latin grammar sought to resolve that problem, and it did. Grammar-schools, first founded in the late 14th century were originally schools for learning Latin.

Academically, the idea that all languages needed grammatical rules caught on and thus, by the late 16th century, academics began to formulate grammars for other languages, including English. We can note here what the elderly Persian says in *Meetings With Remarkable Men* (p10) which is as follows:

‘Strange as it may seem to you, in my opinion a great deal of harm to contemporary literature has been brought about by grammars, namely, the grammars of the languages of all the peoples who take part in what I call the “common malphonic concert” of contemporary civilization.

‘The grammars of their different languages are, in most cases, constructed artificially, and have been composed and continue to be altered chiefly by a category of people who, in respect of understanding real life and the language evolved from it for mutual relations, are quite “illiterate”.

So academics started to apply grammar to German, French, English and other languages. The problem with applying rules to how a language is spoken or written is that such rules are unenforceable. People don't obey the rules and the language evolves under the force of its usage.

Gurdjieff advised: “Know and use not the language of grammar, but the language of psychic associations.” It seems from the text of *The Tales* that this is the grammar that Gurdjieff uses, in the sense that many of his long paragraphs introduce unexpected and yet meaningful associations.

The Bon Ton Literary Language and Patented Writers

“Bon ton” is a French phrase that means “good tone” or “good style.” It normally refers to the fashionable, sophisticated, and “well-bred” manners and tastes of high society. When applied to literature it generally refers to modes of writing that are elegant, polished, sophisticated, witty, and articulate. As with most other things writing styles are subject to fashion.

We can take “patented writers” to indicate authors who establish a subjective style which appeals to the modern reader. If their books sell, they are likely to repeat and repeat, exercising their patent.

An Objective Assertion

In my opinion the trouble with you, in the present instance, is perhaps chiefly due to the fact that while still in childhood, there was implanted in you and has now become ideally well harmonized with your general psyche, an excellently working automatism for perceiving all kinds of new impressions, thanks to which “blessing” you have now, during your responsible life, no need of making any individual effort whatsoever.

The assertion that Gurdjieff makes here is likely to be correct in respect of every reader. And he is warning the reader that effort is going to be required to read this book.

of new impressions, thanks to which “blessing” you have now, during your responsible life, no need of making any individual effort whatsoever.

Speaking frankly, I inwardly personally discern the center of my confession not in my lack of knowledge of all the rules and procedures of writers, but in my nonpossession of what I have called the “bon ton literary language,” infallibly required in contemporary life not only from writers but also from every ordinary mortal.

As regards the former, that is to say, my lack of knowledge of the different rules and procedures of writers, I am not greatly disturbed.

And I am not greatly disturbed on this account, because such “ignorance” has already now become in the life of people also in the order of things. Such a blessing arose and now flourishes everywhere on Earth thanks to that extraordinary new disease of which for the last twenty to thirty years, for some reason or other, especially the majority of those persons from among all the three sexes fall ill, who sleep with half-open eyes and whose faces are in every respect fertile soil for the growth of every kind of pimple.

This strange disease is manifested by this, that if the invalid is somewhat literate and his rent is paid for three months in advance, he (she or it) unfailingly begins to write either some “instructive article” or a whole book.

Well knowing about this new human disease and its epidemical spread on Earth, I, as you should understand, have the right to assume that you have acquired, as the learned “medicos” would say, “immunity” to it, and that you will therefore not be palpably indignant at my ignorance of the rules and procedures of writers.

This understanding of mine bids me inwardly to make the center of gravity of my warning my ignorance of the literary language.

In self-justification, and also perhaps to diminish the

The Three Sexes

The insistence that there are three sexes continues throughout the book. (Male, female, and those who are neither one nor the other sex.)

Sleep with half-open eyes

... especially the majority of those persons from among all the three sexes fall ill, who sleep with half-open eyes and whose faces are in every respect fertile soil for the growth of every kind of pimple.

What Gurdjieff means by “sleeping with eyes half-open” is not clear. A more common expression is “sleeping with one eye open” implying that the person is never fully relaxed and feels the need to be vigilant. Sleeping with eyes half open might also refer to the waking sleep in which man spends most of his life.

The words “whose faces are in every respect fertile soil for the growth of every kind of pimple” implies masturbation.

Some “instructive article” or a whole book

The urge to write novels (or instructive articles) in 1930s America was more common than in preceding decades. It was fueled by a unique combination of mass literacy, a deep national crisis that demanded explanation, a captive audience with time to read, and, for the first time, a government program that financially supported writing as a job.

It is reasonable to characterize such activity as a disease, since the vast majority of such books are never published or are self-published out of vanity and rarely read.

Disease

Currently, the medical world does not believe that pimples are a consequence of masturbation. The hormones, testosterone and progesterone, can increase oil production which can clog pores, but there is no proven link between testosterone or progesterone levels and masturbation.

In any event, Gurdjieff's assertion makes metaphorical sense in this context, as aspiring authors who have little to offer in their writings are most likely devoted to self-aggrandizement . . .

This strange disease is manifested by this, that if the invalid is somewhat literate and his rent is paid for three months in advance, he (she or it) unfailingly begins to write either some "instructive article" or a whole book.

invalid: "infirm or sickly person," 1709, originally of disabled military men. As an adjective, "not strong, infirm from sickness, disease, or injury," 1640s, from Latin *invalidus* "not strong, infirm, impotent, feeble, inadequate," from in- "not" + *validus* "strong."

The manifestation of the disease is that someone becomes an aspiring author if they have some literary skill—skill in the use of the "bon ton literary language"—and have no immediate need to earn money. The quotes around "instructive article" are clearly ironic.

Well knowing about this new human disease and its epidemical spread on Earth, I, as you should understand, have the right to assume that you have acquired, as the learned "medicos" would say, "immunity" to it,

"medico": "medical practitioner," 1680s, from Spanish *médico* or Italian *medico*, from Latin *medicus* "physician; healing."

"immunity": late 14c., "exemption from service or obligation," from Old French *immunité* "privilege; immunity from attack, inviolability" (14c.) and directly from Latin *immunitatem* "exemption from performing public service or charge, privilege," from *immunis* "exempt, free, not paying a share." Medical sense of "protection from disease" is from 1879, from French or German.

Gurdjieff's preference for the quoted "medico" rather than physician is interesting. The quoting of "medico" and "immunity" probably indicates a metaphorical use of the

words, as what he is describing is not a disease in the normal sense of the word.

and that you will therefore not be palpably indignant at my ignorance of the rules and procedures of writers.

This understanding of mine bids me inwardly to make the center of gravity of my warning my ignorance of the literary language.

palpable: late 14c., "that can be touched," from Latin *palpabilis* "that may be touched or felt," from Latin *palpare* "touch gently, stroke." Figurative sense of "easily perceived, evident" also is from late 14c.

indignant: 1580s, from Latin *indignantem* "impatient, reluctant, indignant," present participle of *indignari* "to be displeased at, be offended, resent, deem unworthy," from *indignus* "unworthy."

Gurdjieff employs many words to warn the reader that the book they are about to read is going to have an unfamiliar style and will not be like anything they would normally encounter. On the first reading of *The Tales* in these early pages, this warning is likely to be skipped over and not taken in. However, as the reader advances, it becomes clearer and clearer that this book is not easy to read.

In self-justification, and also perhaps to diminish the degree of the censure in your waking consciousness of my ignorance of this language indispensable for contemporary life, I consider it necessary to say,

censure: late 14c., "judicial sentence," originally ecclesiastical, from Latin *censura* "judgment, opinion," also "office of a censor," from *census*, past participle of *censere* "appraise, estimate, assess." General sense of "a finding of fault and an expression of condemnation" is from c. 1600.

This is curious. Gurdjieff rarely if ever cared what others thought of him, and thus these words have the character of intentional inexactitude, which should make us pay greater

attention. From the context, “waking consciousness” seems to refer to our normal mechanical consciousness.

with a humble heart and cheeks flushed with shame, that although I too was taught this language in my childhood, and even though certain of my elders who prepared me for responsible life, constantly forced me “without sparing or economizing” any intimidatory means to “learn by rote” the host of various “nuances” which in their totality compose this contemporary “delight,” yet, unfortunately of course for you, of all that I then learned by rote, nothing stuck and nothing whatsoever has survived for my present activities as a writer.

rote: c. 1300, “custom, habit,” in phrase “by rote,” “by heart,” of uncertain origin. Possibly Middle English, from Anglo-French, of Germanic origin; akin to Old High German *hruozza* “crowd.” Alternatively, sometimes said to be connected with Old French *rote* “route” or from Latin *rota* “wheel.”

nuance: 1781, from French *nuance* “slight difference, shade of color” (17c.), from *nuer* “to shade,” from *nue* “cloud,” from Latin *nubes* “a cloud, mist, vapor” (source also of Latin *obnubere* “to veil,” Welsh *nudd* “fog,” Greek *nython*, in Hesychius “dark, dusky”). Possibly a reference to “the different colors of the clouds.”

delight: c. 1200, *delit*, “high degree of pleasure or satisfaction,” also “that which gives great pleasure,” from Old French *delit* “pleasure, delight, sexual desire,” from *delitier* “please greatly, charm,” from Latin *delectare* “to allure, delight, charm, please,” frequentative of *delicere* “entice.” Spelled *delite* until 16c.; the modern unetymological form is by influence of light, flight, etc.

The words “taught this language in my childhood” now betrays something unexpected to the reader, as the reader will surely know (and if he doesn’t he will soon discover it in the coming pages) that Gurdjieff did not learn English in his

childhood, only Armenian and Greek. So the “bon ton literary language” he is referring to is not specific to any particular language; it refers to a way of using words internally and applying that to whatever language one speaks.

The phrase: “constantly forced me ‘without sparing or economizing’ any intimidatory means to ‘learn by rote’ the host of various ‘nuances’ which in their totality compose this contemporary ‘delight’” may well have applied to Gurdjieff’s upbringing, but probably also applied to our own.

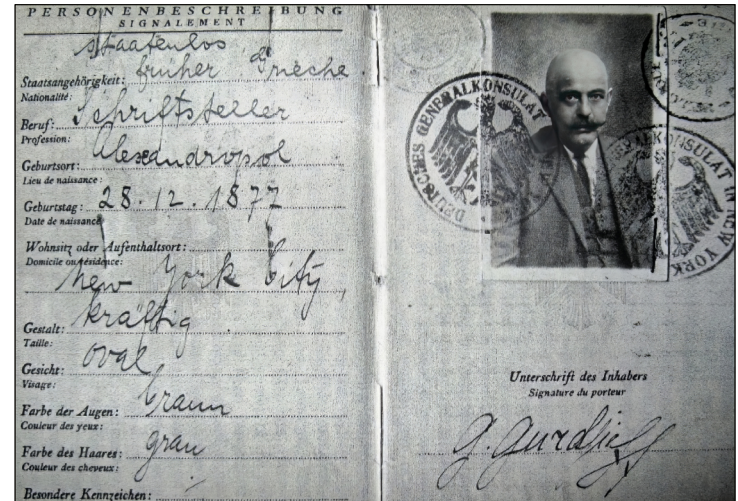
Almost all of us came to use our language in a similar way, being “corrected” by parents and teachers, expecting discourse to observe particular forms, expecting written works to follow particular patterns. We became habitual in this. Gurdjieff claims he did not.

degree of the censure in your waking consciousness of my ignorance of this language indispensable for contemporary life, I consider it necessary to say, with a humble heart and cheeks flushed with shame, that although I too was taught this language in my childhood, and even though certain of my elders who prepared me for responsible life, constantly forced me “without sparing or economizing” any intimidatory means to “learn by rote” the host of various “nuances” which in their totality compose this contemporary “delight,” yet, unfortunately of course for you, of all that I then learned by rote, nothing stuck and nothing whatsoever has survived for my present activities as a writer.

And nothing stuck, as it was quite recently made clear to me, not through any fault of mine, nor through the fault of my former respected and non-respected teachers, but this human labor was spent in vain owing to one unexpected and quite exceptional event which occurred at the moment of my appearance on God's Earth, and which was—as a certain occultist well known in Europe explained to me after a very minute what is called “psycho-physico-astrological” investigation—that at that moment, through the hole made in the windowpane by our crazy lame goat, there poured the vibrations of sound which arose in the neighbor's house from an Edison phonograph, and the midwife had in her mouth a lozenge saturated with cocaine of German make, and moreover not “Ersatz,” and was sucking this lozenge to these sounds without the proper enjoyment.

Besides from this event, rare in the everyday life of people, my present position also arose because later on in my preparatory and adult life—as, I must confess, I myself guessed after long reflections according to the method of the German professor, Herr Stumpsinschmausen—I always avoided instinctively as well as automatically

The Crazy Lame Goat



The passport shown above gives Gurdjieff's birth date as the 28th December 1877 — the year 1877 is one of the three birth years about which Gurdjieff's biographers debate. The two alternatives are 1866 and 1872 with the month and day usually given as January 13th. Some complexity is created by the fact that Gurdjieff reckoned dates by the Orthodox calendar rather than the European calendar.

January 13th is the date that most Gurdjieff groups choose to celebrate his birthday, for the simple reason that it is the date that Gurdjieff himself chose to celebrate his birthday. In *Meetings With Remarkable Men* on page 302 we read:

Today is the tenth of January. Three days from now, by the old style calendar, the New Year will be welcomed in at midnight, an hour which is memorable for me as the time of my coming into the world.

The text is ambiguous as it could mean that the hour of midnight is memorable or that midnight on January 13th is memorable. January 10th corresponds to 28th December in the Orthodox calendar.

On this page (8) we encounter the words:

"... at that moment, through the hole made in the windowpane by our crazy lame goat, there poured the vibrations of sound which arose in the neighbor's house from an Edison phonograph, and the midwife had in her mouth a lozenge saturated with cocaine of German make, and moreover not "Ersatz," and was sucking this lozenge to these sounds without the proper enjoyment.

The crazy lame goat is a reference to Capricorn, Gurdjieff's star sign, whose symbol is the Sea Goat, a crazy lame goat of a kind. The hole made in the windowpane, in context, appears to mean the new year, which Capricorn (December 21st to January 20th) "kicks through," or ushers in every year.

The text, *there poured the vibrations of sound which arose in the neighbor's house from an Edison phonograph*, cannot have been factual. It can be taken as a reference to the fact that Gurdjieff was born in the same year that Edison invented the phonograph: 1877. In reality, the phonograph was not actively marketed until 1887.

The text, *and the midwife had in her mouth a lozenge saturated with cocaine of German make, and moreover not "Ersatz," and was sucking this lozenge to these sounds without the proper enjoyment*, is possibly a reference to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 between the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Orthodox coalition, led by Russia but including Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro.

That war which pervaded the area where Gurdjieff was born is thus designated as Gurdjieff's mid-wife. Russia declared war on 24 April 1877. The Russian army outnumbered the Turkish army, 300,000 to 200,000, but its weaponry was inferior. The Turkish army was armed with British and American-made rifles, which were superior in range to Russian rifles and it also possessed German-made (Krupps) artillery (the cocaine lozenge not properly enjoyed).

Despite their disadvantage, the Russians prevailed.

midwife: c. 1300, "woman assisting," literally "woman who is 'with'" (the mother at birth), from Middle English *mid* "with" + *wif* "woman."

ersatz: "inferior substitute," 1875, from German *Ersatz* "units of the army reserve," literally "compensation, replacement, substitute," from *ersetzen* "to replace," from Old High German *irsezzen*.

cocaine: alkaloid obtained from the leaves of the coca plant, 1874, from Modern Latin *cocaine* (1856), coined by Albert Niemann of Gottingen University from *coca* (from Quechua *cuca*) + chemical suffix *-ine*. A medical coinage, the drug was first used in the 1870s as a local anaesthetic for eye surgery, etc.

Herr Stumpsinschmausen

as, I must confess, I myself guessed after long reflections according to the method of the German professor, Herr Stumpsinschmausen

The German word "schmausen" means feast. The meaning of "stumpsin" is less certain. It is close to, but is not, "stumpfsinn," which means dullness or apathy.

and at times even consciously, that is, on principle, employing this language for intercourse with others. And from such a trifle, and perhaps not a trifle, I manifested thus again thanks to three data which were formed in my entirety during my preparatory age, about which data I intend to inform you a little later in this same first chapter of my writings.

However that may have been, yet the real fact, illuminated from every side like an American advertisement, and which fact cannot now be changed by any forces even with the knowledge of the experts in “monkey business,” is that although I, who have lately been considered by very many people as a rather good teacher of temple dances, have now become today a professional writer and will of course write a great deal—as it has been proper to me since childhood whenever “I do anything to do a great deal of it”—nevertheless, not having, as you see, the automatically acquired and automatically manifested practice necessary for this, I shall be constrained to write all I have thought out in ordinary simple everyday language established by life, without any literary manipulations and without any “grammarian wiseacings.”

An American advertisement

The modern era of illuminated advertising began in 1892 with the incandescent light bulb. The first illuminated billboard appeared in New York City, at the intersection of Broadway and 23rd Street, on the wall of the Cumberland Hotel near Madison Square. It was a real estate advert and used approximately 1,457 incandescent bulbs. It caused a sensation at the time, and was visible from far down Broadway.

Gurdjieff is not referring to neon signage which lights itself up. Neon signage was invented in France by Georges Claude in 1910 and didn't reach the U.S. until 1923.

Monkey Business

The Oxford English Dictionary, suggests the term is a “calque” (a direct loan translation) of the Bengali word *bādrāmi*, which literally translates to “monkey-behavior” or “mischief.”

The phrase first appeared in British print around 1835-1837. An 1837 letter by British Parliamentarian Thomas Perronet Thompson explicitly used the phrase in a colonial context, referring to actions that government officials wouldn't commit to, saying “no such 'monkey business' as the Indians call it.”

It may be the case that Gurdjieff designates Darwinian evolutionists as “experts in monkey business.”

Simple everyday language

I shall be constrained to write all I have thought out in ordinary simple everyday language established by life ...

While it may not be very grammatical, the text of *The Tales* does not correspond to ordinary everyday language.