

The Arousing Of Thought 9-15

Mullah Nassr Eddin

Since Gurdjieff wrote the parenthesized words, Mullah Nassr Eddin has become far better known. There are now a number of websites devoted to collections of the Mullah's sayings, and also several books devoted to him by Idries Shah.

Mullah Nassr Eddin (also spelled Nasreddin, Nasrudin, and many other variants) is primarily considered a legendary or folkloric figure, though there is a strong tradition—particularly in Turkey—that claims he was a real historical person.

The most widely accepted version for his historical existence places him in 13th-century Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). It suggests he was born in the village of Hortu in 1208 and died in Akşehir in 1284. He is said to have been an educated Imam, and a qadi (judge). There is even a tomb in Akşehir that is attributed to him. It has a locked gate but no surrounding walls, a visual joke that fits the legend.

Irrespective of the truth of this, scholars have no doubt that the vast majority of the thousands of stories attributed to him are folklore that has accumulated over centuries.

Mullah Nassr Eddin represents the “wise fool,” an archetype found in many cultures and also, a notable character in some of Shakespeare's plays.

Hodja

“Hodja” is an honorific title, that means “master” or “teacher,” similar to “professor” or “reverend” in the West. It comes from the Farsi word *khwāja*, which means “lord” or “master.” It is and was used widely through the Ottoman

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But the pot is not yet full! ... For I have not yet decided the most important question of all—in which language to write.

Although I have begun to write in Russian, nevertheless, as the wisest of the wise, Mullah Nassr Eddin, would say, in that language you cannot go far.

(Mullah Nassr Eddin, or as he is also called, Hodja Nassr Eddin, is, it seems, little known in Europe and America, but he is very well known in all countries of the continent of Asia; this legendary personage corresponds to the American Uncle Sam or the German Till Eulenspiegel. Numerous tales popular in the East, akin to the wise sayings, some of long standing and others newly

Empire and Persianate societies, and can be encountered across the Middle East, in the Balkans, and in Central Asia, and South Asia.

It should not be confused with the word “Hadji” (also Haji or Hajji) which is also an honorific title—an Islamic one—which comes from Arabic, and is a title of respect given to a Muslim who has successfully completed the Hajj, the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the five pillars of Islam.

The title for a woman who has completed the Hajj is Hajjah.

Uncle Sam

The name “Uncle Sam” was originally the nick name of a real-life meatpacker, Samuel Wilson. During the War of 1812, Wilson secured a contract to supply barrels of beef to the U.S. Army. The barrels were required to be stamped with “U.S.” to identify them as “United States” property. Some soldiers who knew Samuel Wilson referred to him as “Uncle Sam,” and joked that the “U.S.” stamp on the barrels actually stood for “Uncle Sam” Wilson. This caught on and the legend of Uncle Sam was born.

Uncle Sam is not generally regarded as a wise and humorous commentator like Mullah Nassr Eddin, but rather a personification of the US government. He is generally thought of as an older man with white hair due to the image depicting him on the famous First World War recruitment poster.

Till Eulenspiegel

The character of the German Till Eulenspiegel is closer to that of Mullah Nassr Eddin, although he has no religious significance at all. Instead, he is generally thought of as a wandering peasant, a trickster and a jester, who spends his time exposing the foolishness and hypocrisy of everyone from craftsmen and innkeepers to priests, nobles, and even the Pope.

The name, “Eulenspiegel,” literally translates to “owl-mirror.” He is an owl, holding up a mirror to society to expose its follies. The forename “Till” is a diminutive of the old Germanic Theodoric which means “ruler of the people.”

Like Uncle Sam, Till Eulenspiegel was quite likely a real person, who became legendary. It is said that he was born in Kneitlingen near Brunswick around 1300 and is believed to have died of the Black Death in Mölln, Schleswig-Holstein, in 1350.

The first known collection of his adventures was published in a German book in 1515. Since then he has been the subject of many books, plays and musical works, most famously the 1895 tone poem “Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks” by Richard Strauss.

In which language to write

Although I have begun to write in Russian, nevertheless, as the wisest of the wise, Mullah Nassr Eddin, would say, in that language you cannot go far.

The question: “In which language to write?” is likely to surprise the reader. Which author, other than Gurdjieff, would even ask such a question? Only a handful of authors would be capable of writing in more than one language, and any that were would most likely choose the one where they had most practice.

Those who are monolingual, might even wonder whether it could make any difference. Only a multilingual person would know that some ideas that can be easily expressed in one language can sometimes not be expressed well in another that lacks the appropriate vocabulary. Gurdjieff provides his considered thoughts on the matter and clearly expects the reader to consider this question as well.

arisen, were ascribed and are still ascribed to this Nassr Ed-din.)

The Russian language, it cannot be denied, is very good. I even like it, but ... only for swapping anecdotes and for use in referring to someone's parentage.

The Russian language is like the English, which language is also very good, but only for discussing in "smoking rooms," while sitting on an easy chair with legs outstretched on another, the topic of Australian frozen meat or, sometimes, the Indian question.

Both these languages are like the dish which is called in Moscow "Solianka," and into which everything goes except you and me, in fact everything you wish, and even the "after-dinner Cheshma"¹ of Scheherazade.

It must also be said that owing to all kinds of accidentally and perhaps not accidentally formed conditions of my youth, I have had to learn, and moreover very seriously and of course always with self-compulsion, to speak, read, and write a great many languages, and to such a degree of fluency, that if, in following this profession unexpectedly forced on me by Fate, I decided not to take advantage of the "automatism" which is acquired by practice, then I could perhaps write in any one of them.

But if I set out to use judiciously this automatically acquired automatism which has become easy from long practice, then I should have to write either in Russian or in Armenian, because the circumstances of my life during the last two or three decades have been such that I have had for intercourse with others to use, and consequently to have more practice in, just these two languages and to acquire an automatism in respect to them.

O the dickens! ... Even in such a case, one of the aspects of my peculiar psyche, unusual for the normal man,

¹ Cheshma means veil

Russian and English

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Gurdjieff compares Russian and English. Russian is the dominant Slavic language, and English is the dominant Germanic language. They employ some different sounds, they have quite different alphabets. They exhibit very different grammars and sentence structure and they have very few common words. Nevertheless, from Gurdjieff's perspective they are alike in their limitations as suitable languages in which to write *The Tales*.

The reference to parentage is, perhaps, "tongue in cheek." All Russian names consist of three distinct parts, used in the following specific order:

1. The Given Name. The "christian name" given at childbirth: Ivan, Vanya, etc.
2. The Patronymic. This indicates the father's first name: The ending of the patronymic is gender-specific: For example, Ivanovich means son of Ivan, whereas Ivanovna means daughter of Ivan.
3. The Surname (family name). Most Russian surnames have gender-specific endings. So Mr. Dostoevsky for the male becomes Ms. Dostoevskaya for the female.

The standard formal and polite way to address colleagues, elders, or anyone you don't know well is to use both the Given Name and the Patronymic (e.g., "Ivan Ivanovich" or "Vanya Ivanovna").

Anecdote: This comes from the Greek word ἀνέκδοτα (anekdota), which literally means "things unpublished": *an-* ("not") *ekdotos* ("published" or "given out"). In general, anecdotes are simple but interesting stories.

So, an anecdote was originally something "not given out."

English smoking rooms were a feature of the Victorian and Edwardian era, which persisted in the pre-war era in upper-class houses. They were specially designed rooms for smoking pipes and cigars. After dinner, gentlemen would congregate away from the ladies to have intellectual conversations. In general, these rooms were furnished with velvet curtains and decorated in a masculine way. Gentlemen would even change into a velvet smoking jacket and cap (velvet absorbs smoke).

Gurdjieff describes the posture (sitting on an easy chair with legs outstretched on another) of casual conversation and pontification, rather than any meaningful exchange. Wrapping "smoking rooms" in quotes suggests that any venue where casual intellectual conversation takes place applies. The "Indian question" and "Australian frozen meat" were issues of the day that English intellectuals chatted about in the 1930s.

The Indian question: Having conquered India, the British had the problem of administering it. It was the "jewel in the crown" of the British Empire. As well as spices, jewels and textiles, India had a huge population that could and did provide manpower for many things, including soldiering. The Indian question was whether Britain had a right to rule India and whether it could continue to maintain the ability to exploit and administer such a large population (hundreds of millions). It was even argued that Britain was "civilizing" India and had a duty to do so "for the Indians' sake." Such an idea is now laughable.

Australian frozen meat: From the late 1870s onwards, Britain shipped refrigerated meat from Australia and New Zealand. Both countries had small populations and could produce far more meat than was needed locally, while Britain's population was expanding and required a good deal of imported food. Shipping frozen meat halfway

round the world seemed like an odd and imperfect solution, but it worked for many years.

Solianka,

Both these languages are like the dish which is called in Moscow "Solianka," and into which everything goes except you and me, in fact everything you wish, ...

Solianka is a thick spicy and sour Russian soup. It is the kind of dish to which leftovers are added. So, aside from the main ingredients,¹ anything unused in the kitchen is added to the pot.

Gurdjieff uses the metaphor of Solianka to make the point that the English and Russian languages notably exclude words and concepts that are required for discussing "you and me."

Cheshma

... and even the "after-dinner Cheshma" of Scheherazade.*

[* Cheshma means veil.]

Cheshma does not mean veil, as Gurdjieff suggests in his footnote.

Cheshma: The word "cheshma" (also spelled chashma or cheshmeh) originates from the Classical Persian language. Its etymology links directly to (*čašm*), the Persian word for "eye." The derived word, *cheshma*, acquired the primary meaning of a "spring" or "fountain"—conceptually, a place where water flows from the "eye" of the earth.

Scheherazade

Scheherazade is referred to several times in *The Tales*. Aside from page 10, her name is found on pages 251, 273, 351, and 617. Her name (from middle Persian) means "noble lineage" and she is the central character in *The 1001 Nights*.

In brief, the story is as follows:

¹ Pickled cucumbers, pickle brine from the jar, olives, capers, tomatoes, onions, ham, sausage and other meats. It is served with sour cream. Can also be fish based.

King Shahryar discovers one day that his wife has been unfaithful to him. He has her executed and, having lost faith in the fidelity of all women, he decides to marry a new virgin each day and then behead her the following day, so that no wife will ever be unfaithful to him again.

After he has killed an untold number of his one-day brides, Scheherazade, the vizier's daughter, volunteers to become his next wife. When she enters the king's chambers that night, she asks if she might bid one last farewell to her beloved sister, Dunyazade. The name Dunyazade means "child of the world." At Scheherazade's instruction, Dunyazade comes to the royal bedchamber each night and requests that her sister tell "one last story."

The king is spellbound by Scheherazade's first story, but the night is over before she completes it. He asks her to finish, but Scheherazade says there is no time because dawn is breaking and the king spares her life so that she might finish the story. The next night Scheherazade finishes the story and then, at her sister's insistence begins another exciting tale, which she again fails to finish. In this way the king keeps Scheherazade alive until 1000 stories have been told over 1001 nights. At that point Scheherazade tells the king that she has no tales left to tell him, but by then the king has fallen in love with her. He spares her life and makes her his queen.

The story of Scheherazade itself can be viewed as an allegory of the intellect's relationship to the higher emotional side.

The meaning of "after-dinner Cheshma"—the tears of Scheherazade perhaps—is not clear. The implication may be that these languages are good for formulating imaginary ideas about the inner world of man.

Whether that is the case or not, the text of *The Tales* was eventually rendered in English. However, Gurdjieff invented many new words (neologisms) to express concepts for which, we presume, there were no English words, or even appropriate phrases.

Fate

... if, in following this profession unexpectedly forced on me by Fate, I decided not to take advantage of the "automatism" which is acquired by practice, then I could perhaps write in any one of them.

Fate: late 14c., "one's lot or destiny; predetermined course of life;" also "one's guiding spirit," from Old French *fate* and directly from Latin *fata*, neuter plural of *fatum* "prophetic declaration of what must be, oracle, prediction," thus the Latin word's usual sense, "that which is ordained, destiny, fate," literally means "thing spoken (by the gods)."

Gurdjieff states that the profession of author was forced on him by "Fate." (Note that "Fate" is capitalized for emphasis.) If we accept this declaration, then it seems to follow that his car accident was also fated.

Dickens

O the dickens! ...

dickens: The word "dickens," used by Shakespeare in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ("I cannot tell what the dickens his name is"), is most probably a shortened form of "devilkins," meaning "little devils."

has now already begun to torment the whole of me.

And the chief reason for this unhappiness of mine in my almost already mellow age, results from the fact that since childhood there was implanted in my peculiar psyche, together with numerous other rubbish also unnecessary for contemporary life, such an inherency as always and in everything automatically enjoins the whole of me to act only according to popular wisdom.

In the present case, as always in similar as yet indefinite life cases, there immediately comes to my brain—which is for me, constructed unsuccessfully to the point of mockery—and is now as is said, “running through” it that saying of popular wisdom which existed in the life of people of very ancient times, and which has been handed down to our day formulated in the following words: “every stick always has two ends.”

In trying first to understand the basic thought and real significance hidden in this strange verbal formulation, there must, in my opinion, first of all arise in the consciousness of every more or less sane-thinking man the supposition that, in the totality of ideas on which is based and from which must flow a sensible notion of this saying, lies the truth, cognized by people for centuries, which affirms that every cause occurring in the life of man, from whatever phenomenon it arises, as one of two opposite effects of other causes, is in its turn obligatorily molded also into two quite opposite effects, as for instance: if “something” obtained from two different causes engenders light, then it must inevitably engender a phenomenon opposite to it, that is to say, darkness; or a factor engendering in the organism of a living creature an impulse of palpable satisfaction also engenders without fail non-satisfaction, of course also palpable, and so on and so forth, always and in everything.

Adopting in the same given instance this popular wisdom

Popular wisdom

Sayings of popular wisdom persist in cultures by virtue of an oral tradition—one that is self-preserving. Because such sayings are short they are easily memorized and often repeated. Many use rhythm, rhyme (“Haste makes waste”), alliteration (“Live and learn”), or vivid metaphors (“Don't count your chickens before they hatch”). These literary qualities increase their stickiness.

They exist in all languages and cultural traditions, and are the primary vehicle for passing down a culture's core beliefs, ethics, and practical wisdom. They teach children about virtues such as patience (“A watched pot never boils”), hard work (“No pain, no gain”), or caution (“Look before you leap”).

When a person uses a proverb, they are not just stating their own opinion. They are summoning the collective, anonymous wisdom of their ancestors. This gives weight and authority to their argument, advice, or criticism.

A stick with two ends

... that saying of popular wisdom which existed in the life of people of very ancient times, and which has been handed down to our day formulated in the following words: “every stick always has two ends.”

The origin of the saying “every stick always has two ends.” is as stated part of the Russian oral tradition. Gurdjieff was not the first to commit it to writing. It can also be found in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* and was even used by Lenin once, in one of his political essays.

Gurdjieff then writes:

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This is a complicated set of words that is likely to cause the reader to puzzle over the meaning. In essence it states that in general events can have two outcomes, one positive and the other negative. This might also be viewed as a rough formulation of the Law of Three.¹

¹ *The Tales* p751

formed by centuries and expressed by a stick, which, as was said, indeed has two ends, one end of which is considered good and the other bad, then if I use the aforesaid automatism which was acquired in me thanks only to long practice, it will be for me personally of course very good, but according to this saying, there must result for the reader just the opposite; and what the opposite of good is, even every non-possessor of hemorrhoids must very easily understand.

Briefly, if I exercise my privilege and take the good end of the stick, then the bad end must inevitably fall “on the reader’s head.”

This may indeed happen, because in Russian the so to say “niceties” of philosophical questions cannot be expressed, which questions I intend to touch upon in my writings also rather fully, whereas in Armenian, although this is possible, yet to the misfortune of all contemporary Armenians, the employment of this language for contemporary notions has now already become quite impracticable.

In order to alleviate the bitterness of my inner hurt owing to this, I must say that in my early youth, when I became interested in and was greatly taken up with philological questions, I preferred the Armenian language to all others I then spoke, even to my native language.

This language was then my favorite chiefly because it was original and had nothing in common with the neighboring or kindred languages.

As the learned “philologists” say, all of its tonalities were peculiar to it alone, and according to my understanding even then, it corresponded perfectly to the psyche of the people composing that nation.

But the change I have witnessed in that language during the last thirty or forty years has been such, that instead of an original independent language coming to us from the remote past, there has resulted and now exists one,

Consequences for the reader

... if I use the aforesaid automatism which was acquired in me thanks only to long practice, it will be for me personally of course very good, but according to this saying, there must result for the reader just the opposite; and what the opposite of good is, even every non-possessor of hemorrhoids must very easily understand.

Briefly, if I exercise my privilege and take the good end of the stick, then the bad end must inevitably fall “on the reader’s head.”

Gurdjieff concludes that he cannot write this book using his established habitual ability with languages, because it will not benefit the reader.

Gurdjieff refers to “hemorrhoids” three other times in *The Tales*, first describing them as a characteristic trait of contemporary actors, secondly as a consequence of using contemporary toilets and finally as a characteristic of humans who belong to the middle-sex.

The deterioration of Armenian

Gurdjieff criticizes the Russian language as unsuitable for discussing philosophical questions. He rejects Armenian as impractical for contemporary notions, lamenting that the language has deteriorated.

Philologically, the Armenian language is considered highly unusual by linguists for several key reasons. While it is classified as being part of the large Indo-European family (which includes English, Spanish, Russian, and Hindi), it is unique within that family, forming its own independent branch, with no close “sister” languages.

It has a unique alphabet, and includes unique sounds, particularly its use of ejective consonants. These are sharp, voiceless consonants formed by pushing air out using the vocal cords rather than the lungs.

which though also original and independent, yet represents, as might be said, a “kind of clownish potpourri of languages,” the totality of the consonances of which, falling on the ear of a more or less conscious and understanding listener, sounds just like the “tones” of Turkish, Persian, French, Kurd, and Russian words and still other “indigestible” and inarticulate noises.

Almost the same might be said about my native language, Greek, which I spoke in childhood and, as might be said, the “taste of the automatic associative power of which” I still retain. I could now, I dare say, express anything I wish in it, but to employ it for writing is for me impossible, for the simple and rather comical reason that someone must transcribe my writings and translate them into the other languages. And who can do this?

It could assuredly be said that even the best expert of modern Greek would understand simply nothing of what I should write in the native language I assimilated in childhood, because, my dear “compatriots,” as they might be called, being also inflamed with the wish at all costs to be like the representatives of contemporary civilization also in their conversation, have during these thirty or forty years treated my dear native language just as the Armenians, anxious to become Russian intelligentsia, have treated theirs.

That Greek language, the spirit and essence of which were transmitted to me by heredity, and the language now spoken by contemporary Greeks, are as much alike as, according to the expression of Mullah Nassr Eddin, “a nail is like a requiem.”

What is now to be done?

Ah ... me! Never mind, esteemed buyer of my wiscrings. If only there be plenty of French armagnac and “Khaizarian bastourma,” I shall find a way out of even this difficult situation.

Clownish potpourri

Pot-pourri: This word comes directly from the French *pot-pourri*, which literally translates to “rotten pot.” This was a direct translation of the Spanish *olla podrida*, which also means “rotten pot.” It was the name of a popular Spanish stew made from a wide variety of different meats and vegetables all cooked together for a long time. The “rotten” part likely referred to the slow-simmering process that broke down the ingredients. The idea that carried over into English was the idea of a mixture. Thus it came to mean a heterogeneous mixture of many different things in one pot. By the mid-18th century, this concept of a “mixture” was applied to the aromatic concoction we know today.

While most languages include loan words from other usually neighboring languages, the past 150 years introduced social and technological shifts that have had a profound and general impact on virtually all spoken languages.

While mass literacy and the printing press had the effect of standardizing languages, later technologies changed the speed and style of communication and lent new words to all languages to describe these new phenomena. For the first time, a single language—English—became the global lingua franca for business, science, and culture. This, combined with unprecedented levels of global migration, has led to two major outcomes:

- Nearly every language in the world has adopted a large number of English words.
- Human migration caused words from other languages to be added to the mix. English is particularly prone to adopting loan words.

Nail and requiem

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requiem: “mass for repose of the soul of the dead,” c. 1300, from Latin *requiem*, accusative singular of *requies* “rest

(after labor), repose,” from *re*, intensive prefix + *quies* “quiet.” It is the first word of the Mass for the Dead in the Latin liturgy: *Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine...* [“Grant them eternal rest, O Lord ...”]

While, on the surface, this comparison is amusing, it may also have a deeper meaning. You can take requiem to mean “a prayer for soul of the dead.” “Nail” could imply “a coffin nail,” linking directly to the destiny of the physical body as opposed to higher bodies. You might also associate “nail” to the Holy Nails used to crucify Christ. Nevertheless, the two things are not alike.

French armagnac

Gurdjieff writes:

... If only there be plenty of French armagnac.

Armagnac was Gurdjieff’s chosen drink for toasting after meals and is strongly associated with his ritual “Toasting of the Idiots.” It is the oldest and one of the most revered brandies in France, with its roots in the Gascony region of southwestern France.

It is first mentioned by Maître Vital Dufour, a cardinal and prior in Gascony who wrote a book, *To Keep Your Health and Stay in Good Form*, in 1310. It was thus initially extolled as a medicine, a health drink. It became a popular spirit much later.

Khaizarian bastourma

Gurdjieff continues:

... and “Khaizarian bastourma,”

Bastourma is salted and dried meat. Folklore suggests that it originated with nomadic horsemen from the Central Asian steppes. These horsemen preserved meat for their later consumption by placing slabs of it in their saddlebags. The constant pressure from their legs while riding would press out the moisture from the meat, and the horse’s sweat would salt it.

The word “bastourma” is the Armenian name for the dish. This comes from the Turkish verb *bastırmak*, which means “to press” or “to squeeze.”

To make bastourma, the pressed and salted meat is covered with a paste made from fenugreek, paprika, garlic, and other spices. It is associated with Armenian cuisine and the city of Kayseri (formerly Caesarea) in modern-day Turkey (hence the name Khaizerian). It is popular throughout the Middle East.

I am an old hand at this.

In life, I have so often got into difficult situations and out of them, that this has become almost a matter of habit for me.

Meanwhile in the present case, I shall write partly in Russian and partly in Armenian, the more readily because among those people always “hanging around” me there are several who “cerebrate” more or less easily in both these languages, and I meanwhile entertain the hope that they will be able to transcribe and translate from these languages fairly well for me.

In any case I again repeat—in order that you should well remember it, but not as you are in the habit of remembering other things and on the basis of which are accustomed to keeping your word of honor to others or to yourself—that no matter what language I shall use, always and in everything, I shall avoid what I have called the “bon ton literary language.”

In this respect, the extraordinarily curious fact and one even in the highest degree worthy of your love of knowledge, perhaps even higher than your usual conception, is that from my earliest childhood, that is to say, since the birth in me of the need to destroy birds’ nests, and to tease my friends’ sisters, there arose in my, as the ancient theosophists called it, “planetary body,” and moreover, why I don’t know, chiefly in the “right half,” an instinctively involuntary sensation, which right up to that period of my life when I became a teacher of dancing, was gradually formed into a definite feeling, and then, when thanks to this profession of mine I came in contact with many people of different “types,” there began to arise in me also the conviction with what is called my “mind,” that these languages are compiled by people, or rather “grammarians,” who are in respect of knowledge of the given language exactly similar to those biped animals whom

Russian and Armenian

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The quotes surrounding “hanging around” suggest that he is referring to several of his pupils. His quoted use of “cerebrate” is surprising, as he never uses this word again throughout *The Tales*. He frequently uses the word “mentate” or “mentation,” which has the meaning “mental function” rather than “cerebration” meaning “brain function.”

The writing of *The Tales*

Meanwhile in the present case, I shall write partly in Russian and partly in Armenian,

The detail of the way that *The Tales* was written, as far as we can tell from the literature of the Work¹ is as follows:

Gurdjieff would write while sitting in cafés and observing the behavior of others. He made notes in notebooks, none of which have come to light. He would then dictate from his notes, sometimes in Russian to Madame de Hartmann, who would type in Russian, and some of it to Lily Galumnian, (aka Lily Chaverdian), who would type in Armenian. Two of his pupils who were “hanging around.”

Subsequently, the text that was typed in Armenian (the language he preferred for discussing psychological and philosophical ideas) was then translated into Russian. All of the Russian text was translated on a word-by-word basis by Bernard Metz, who was fluent in both Russian and English. He had been told by Gurdjieff to provide a direct word-for-word translation—to not add or subtract anything. He was nevertheless obliged to understand and convey meaning by his word choices.

¹ From records of Orage's New York Meetings and from *The Gurdjieff Years 1929-1949*, by Louise March, and from other sources.

This literal translation was sent to Orage, whose role was to edit this into an acceptable style for reading. He shared this work with Jean Toomer. Both Orage and Toomer would go to the Priuré with their drafts and spend time going through them with Gurdjieff to finalize the text.

Orage used the largest Oxford English Dictionary as his reference for meaning and etymology. We know this because that copy of the Oxford English Dictionary is now owned by Paul Beekman Taylor. It is clear from this book (Orage made pencil notes on the pages) that Gurdjieff checked the etymology of many of the words that were used in *The Tales*.

After the text was edited and a draft completed to Gurdjieff's satisfaction, Gurdjieff had chapters read out to audiences of English speakers and observed their reactions. He subsequently made edits in accordance with what he had observed.

A universal language?

Given the meticulous approach that Gurdjieff took in writing *The Tales*, it is worth discussing what language the final version of *The Tales* is written in. On the surface, the English version is in English give or take hundreds of neologisms, and the same goes for the German version.

It is worth pondering the following extracts from *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky.

People do not clearly realize to what a degree their language is subjective, that is, what different things each of them says while using the same words. They are not aware that each one of them speaks in a language of his own, understanding other people's language either vaguely or not at all, and having no idea that each one of them speaks in a language unknown to him.

People have a very firm conviction, or belief, that they speak the same language, that they understand one another. Actually this conviction has no foundation whatever. The language in which they speak is adapted to practical life only.

People can communicate to one another information of a practical character, but as soon as they pass to a slightly more complex sphere they are immediately lost, and they cease to understand one another ...¹

Clearly if *The Tales* had been written in ordinary subjective language, the reader would have no possibility of receiving much of the knowledge Gurdjieff wished to convey.

Now consider the following words:

Someone asked him about the possibility of a universal language—in what connection I do not remember.

“A universal language is possible,” said G., “only people will never invent it.”

“Why not?” asked one of us.

“First because it was invented a long time ago,” answered G., “and second because to understand this language and to express ideas in it depends not only upon the knowledge of this language, but also on being. I will say even more. There exists not one, but three universal languages.

The first of them can be spoken and written while remaining within the limits of one's own language. The only difference is that when people speak in their ordinary language they do not understand one another, but in this other language they do understand.

In the second language, written language is the same for all peoples, like, say, figures or mathematical formulae; but people still speak their own language, yet each of them understands the other even though the other speaks in an unknown language.

The third language is the same for all, both the written and the spoken. The difference of language disappears altogether on this level.”²

In the opinion of Orage, *The Tales* is an objective work of art. In *The Teachings of Gurdjieff*, C. S. Nott quotes one of Orage's comments on *The Tales*, as follows:

¹ *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky, p68

² *In Search of the Miraculous* by P D Ouspensky. p95-96

'I don't propose to rewrite it,' he said. 'In fact, apart from general editing, I shall leave it as it is until, probably the final revision, whenever that may be. The book will take shape. It is full of ideas. As I see it, it is really an objective work of art, of literature of the highest kind; it is in the category of scripture. It seems that Gurdjieff planned it while he was lying in bed after the accident. It is consciously designed to have a definite effect on everyone who feels drawn to reading it. Anyone who tried to rewrite it would distort it.'

In *In Search of the Miraculous* Ouspensky recalls Gurdjieff saying:

"In real art there is nothing accidental. It is mathematics. Everything in it can be calculated, everything can be known beforehand. The artist knows and understands what he wants to convey and his work cannot produce one impression on one man and another impression on another, presuming, of course, people on one level. It will always, and with mathematical certainty, produce one and the same impression.

"At the same time the same work of art will produce different impressions on people of different levels. And people of lower levels will never receive from it what people of higher levels receive. This is real, objective art. Imagine some scientific work—a book on astronomy or chemistry. It is impossible that one person should understand it in one way and another in another way. Everyone who is sufficiently prepared and who is able to read this book will understand what the author means, and precisely as the author means it. An objective work of art is just such a book, except that it affects the emotional and not only the intellectual side of man."

It seems likely then that Gurdjieff's approach to creating *The Tales* was not only to produce a book that was objective (as he titled it, *An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man*) but one that was written in the first universal language. As he personally oversaw the production of the English and the

German versions, we may assume that these two versions at least are texts written in the first universal language.

To destroy birds' nests

In this respect, the extraordinarily curious fact and one even in the highest degree worthy of your love of knowledge, perhaps even higher than your usual conception, is that from my earliest childhood, that is to say, since the birth in me of the need to destroy birds' nests, and to tease my friends' sisters, ...

The "high-sounding" start to this sentence is probably best taken literally. He states that what he is about to write is not just extraordinary and curious, but important knowledge. And then he notes that he had a "need" (rather than simply an inclination) to "destroy birds' nests" and "tease his friends' sisters," which was born in him in "earliest childhood."

The attention to his "friends' sisters" implies sexual interest. But what does destroying birds' nests imply? While some adolescent boys become rebellious and exhibit antisocial and even criminal behavior, not all do. It is hard to imagine such behavior as a need, and destroying birds' nests seems like an unlikely way of characterizing it. So it may have a metaphorical meaning.

In *The Tales*, birds (the raven inhabitants of Saturn, including Gornahoor Harhark and Gornahoor Rakhoorkh) signify the intellect. So perhaps destroying birds' nests signifies the common adolescent behavior of challenging intellectual authority in science and religion.

Ancient Theosophists

... there arose in my, as the ancient theosophists called it, "planetary body," ...

There are occasional mentions of the "planetary body" in modern theosophical writings, although the term is most often used to apply to the body of a planet rather than of a human being.

The modern theosophical movement is not at all ancient. It was established with the founding of the Theosophical Society on November 17, 1875, in New York City. Founding members included: Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott and William Quan Judge.

The word “theosophia,” meaning “divine wisdom,” was coined by Ammonius Saccas of Alexandria in the third century A.D. However, we can find no evidence of the mention of “planetary body” in the writings of the Neo-Platonists (ancient Theosophists), whom Ammonius Saccas inspired.

The right half

... chiefly in the “right half,” an instinctively involuntary sensation, which right up to that period of my life when I became a teacher of dancing, was gradually formed into a definite feeling, and then, when thanks to this profession of mine I came in contact with many people of different “types,” there began to arise in me also the conviction with what is called my “mind,” ...

The right half of the body is under control of the left half of the brain, which is generally classified as the “intellectual” side. In the Gospel, the right side signifies the side of personality as in Matthew 5:29- 5:30:

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Sensation, feeling, conviction

Gurdjieff describes an involuntary sensation from childhood which evolved into a feeling which ultimately became a conviction. He is, incidentally, describing a psychological

process of development: sensations can invoke feelings which eventually form convictions in the mind.

Types

What Gurdjieff means precisely by types is unclear, even though he mentions it many times. As far as we are aware he never taught about “personality types,” as described in the many popular books on this. Nor did he teach about the planetary essence types that Rodney Collin refers to in *The Theory of Celestial Influence*.

In *The Tales*, when writing of ways in which three-brained beings “love” someone:

... or because his nose is much like the nose of that female or male, with whom thanks to the cosmic law of “polarity” or “type” a relation has been established which has not yet been broken ...¹

He also writes:

Love of consciousness evokes the same in response

Love of feeling evokes the opposite

*Love of body depends only on type and polarity.*²

However, he does not explain what he means here by type. In describing the “acting” of the Babylonian mysticists, he writes:

*Well then, these three learned beings who were thus cast impromptu by the fourth learned being for fulfilling every kind of perception and manifestation, which had to flow by law, of types foreign to them, or, as your favorites say, of ‘strange roles,’ ...*³

He adds:

... because the learned beings of the planet Earth of that time were very well aware of what is called the ‘law-of-typicality,’ and that the three-brained beings of their planet

¹ *The Tales* p358

² *The Tales* p361

³ *The Tales* p848

are ultimately formed into twenty-seven different definite types, ...¹

Later, in discussing Judas, he provides a different count of types. He writes:

when this Sacred Individual Jesus Christ, intentionally actualized from Above in a planetary body of a terrestrial being, completely formed Himself for a corresponding existence, He decided to actualize the mission imposed on Him from Above, through the way of enlightening the reason of these three-brained terrestrial beings, by means of twelve different types of beings, chosen from among them and who were specially enlightened and prepared by him personally.

Towards the beginning of the final chapter of *The Tales*, *From The Author*, he writes:

I—or rather, this time, that dominant something in my common presence which now represents the sum of the results obtained from the data crystallized during my life, data which engender, among other things, in a man who has in general set himself the aim, so to say “to mentate actively impartially” during the process of responsible existence, the ability to penetrate and understand the psyche of people of various types ...

And to add to that information, but not to lessen the confusion, in *The Herald of Coming Good*, he writes:

... I was compelled to give them all up and to undertake the organization of my own “circle” on quite new principles, with a staff of people chosen specially by me.

I decided to do so mainly for the reason that, meeting then a great number of people usually composing such circles, I had elucidated and established the fact that in such societies foregather generally people of three or four definite “types”, whereas it was necessary for me—in order to observe the manifestations of man’s psyche in his waking state—to have at my disposal representatives of all the 28 “categories-of-

¹ *The Tales* p486

types” existing on Earth, as they were established in ancient times.¹

The 1931 Manuscript contains a further reference to “types” in the part that discusses astrologers. Gurdjieff writes:

... indicated just what they had to do to their own planetary body at which definite periods of the Krentonalnian movements of their planet—as for instance, in which direction to lie, how to breathe, which movements to make in preference, with which types to avoid relations and many things of the same kind.²

¹ *The Herald of Coming Good*, p19

² *The 1931 Manuscript*, p270

the esteemed Mullah Nassr Eddin characterizes by the words: “All they can do is to wrangle with pigs about the quality of oranges.”

This kind of people among us who have been turned into, so to say, “moths” destroying the good prepared and left for us by our ancestors and by time, have not the slightest notion and have probably never even heard of the screamingly obvious fact that, during the preparatory age, there is acquired in the brain functioning of every creature, and of man also, a particular and definite property, the automatic actualization and manifestation of which the ancient Korkolans called the “law of association,” and that the process of the mentation of every creature, especially man, flows exclusively in accordance with this law.



Wrangle with pigs

... that these languages are compiled by people, or rather “grammarians,” who are in respect of knowledge of the given language exactly similar to those biped animals whom the esteemed Mullah Nassr Eddin characterizes by the words: “All they can do is to wrangle with pigs about the quality of oranges.”

wrangle: late 14c., from Low German *wrangeln* “to dispute, to wrestle,” related to Middle Low German *wringen*, from Proto-Germanic *wrang-*, from *wreng-*, nasalized variant of *wergh-* “to turn.” Meaning “take charge of horses” is by 1897, American English. The noun is recorded from 1540s.

pig: probably from Old English *picg*, found in compounds, further etymology unknown. Originally “young pig” (the word for adults was swine). Apparently related to Low German *bigge*, Applied to persons, usually in contempt, since 1540s; the derogatory slang meaning “police officer” has been in underworld slang at least since 1811. Sailors and fishermen are said to avoid uttering the word “pig” at sea, in case it should bring bad luck—a superstition perhaps based on the fate of the Gadarene swine, who drowned.

quality: c. 1300, “temperament, character, disposition,” from Old French *qualite* “quality, nature, characteristic,” from Latin *qualitatem*, “a quality, property; nature, state, condition” (said to have been coined by Cicero to translate Greek *poiotes*), from *qualis* “what kind of a.” Meaning “degree of goodness” is late 14c. Meaning “social rank, position” is c. 1400.

The symbol “pig” is sometimes used to refer to man (derogatorily), as in the English saying:

Cats are superior, dogs are inferior, pigs are man’s equal.

Also, in *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, Gurdjieff provides the following saying:

“A man is not a pig to forget good, nor is he a cat to remember evil.”

While pigs can in general eat most kinds of food, citrus fruit can upset their stomachs and thus they are rarely fed such food. There is no sense in wrangling with pigs about the quality of food in which they have no genuine interest.

Moths

This kind of people among us who have been turned into, so to say, “moths” destroying the good prepared and left for us by our ancestors and by time, have not the slightest notion and have probably never even heard of the screamingly obvious fact that, ...

moth: Old English *moððe* (Northumbrian *mohðe*), Old Norse *motti*, Middle Dutch *motte*, Dutch *mot*, German *motte* all mean “moth.” Perhaps related to Old English *maða*, “maggot.” Until 16c. was used mostly of the larva and usually in reference to devouring clothes, which makes sense as it is only the larvae that devour clothes.

Gurdjieff will have known that “moth” is a New Testament symbol. It can be found in *The New Testament*: Matthew vi.19-20, as follows:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

Korkolans

He continues

... during the preparatory age, there is acquired in the brain functioning of every creature, and of man also, a particular and definite property, the automatic actualization and manifestation of which the ancient Korkolans called the “law of association,” and that the process of the mentation

of every creature, especially man, flows exclusively in accordance with this law.

The Korkolans that Gurdjieff refers to could be the Colchians (Kolkhians) as this is the most direct and compelling phonetic equivalent. The Colchians were the inhabitants of Colchis, an ancient kingdom on the coast of the Black Sea, centered in present-day western Georgia. Colchis was the famous destination of Jason and the Argonauts in their quest for the Golden Fleece.

Alternatively, it may be a reference to the ancient inhabitants of the Caucasus. The word “Caucasus” comes directly from the Ancient Greek word *Kaukasos* (Καύκασος). This word was claimed by the Roman historian Pliny the Elder, to be a Greek version of a Scythian word, *kroy-khasis*. In the Scythian language, this supposedly meant “ice-shining” or “white with snow,” a fitting description for the high, snow-covered mountain range.

The assertion that “the process of the mentation of every creature, especially man, flows exclusively in accordance with” association, is worthy of pondering. Earlier in the text, referring to the Greek language, Gurdjieff writes:

... which I spoke in childhood and, as might be said, the “taste of the automatic associative power of which” I still retain.

According to Gurdjieff, languages are imbued with “automatic associative power.”