

# **A Universal Language:**

**Gurdjieff's exact language  
and new tools  
for insight into Beelzebub's Tales**

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## INTRODUCTION

“For an exact study, an exact language is needed.” These words, appearing at the beginning of one of Gurdjieff’s recorded lectures<sup>1</sup>, ring out with the demand for exactitude so characteristic of his approach. The idea of an exact language, far from being a peripheral or passing notion, was placed front and center in the plan of the Work as one of two vital prerequisites for, as Gurdjieff called it, “a properly conducted self-observation.”<sup>2</sup>

We will begin in the first portion of this paper by linking anecdotal and written remarks of Gurdjieff concerning his exact language. This will prove his consistent emphasis on this point. We will then consider his ideas on this topic as a complete picture and in relation to Beelzebub’s Tales.

The suggested conclusion of this survey will lead to a new theoretical formulation of the same principles, laid out in the second section of this paper. In doing so, we will think about some of its characteristic features, such as repeated phrases and thematic parallels, suggesting that they in fact relate to ideas contained in his recorded lectures. Hopefully, the result will be a simple, useful, and systematic means of approaching his allegorical teaching for other students of the book.

The third section will provide an exploration of two examples to give some indication of the application of the theory.

Before beginning, a caution is in order. There are types of thoughts and understandings in the Tales which are of an extraordinary character. The book is a *discovery* which Gurdjieff made that opens new doorways within the reader in quite unexpected and sometimes inexplicable ways. It is able to elicit perspectives and understandings completely unavailable to us ordinarily. None of these can be conveyed whatsoever using ordinary academic speech. However, perhaps we can point in the right direction. After all, if nothing is shared, then perhaps we get the benefits of our personal discoveries and experiences, but others will not. For this reason, and despite the fact that the enterprise is doomed to fall short or be misunderstood, sharing what we can with others may perhaps open conversations and be of some benefit to others.

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<sup>1</sup> Gurdjieff, *Views*, 60-74.

<sup>2</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1211.

## IN GURDJIEFF'S WORDS

What was Gurdjieff's view of language? Let us consider snapshots from available published material in which Gurdjieff describes his own perspective.

In our first passage, we have Gurdjieff in Russia, in 1917:

“For exact understanding exact language is necessary. And the study of systems of ancient knowledge begins with the study of a language which will make it possible to establish at once exactly what is being said, from what point of view, and in what connection. This new language contains hardly any new terms or new nomenclature, but it bases the construction of speech upon a new principle, namely, the principle of relativity; that is to say, it introduces relativity into all concepts and thus makes possible an accurate determination of the angle of thought - for what precisely ordinary language lacks are expressions of relativity.”<sup>3</sup>

A few key takeaways: Gurdjieff points out the necessity of a new, exact language. We receive only the barest hints of this new language and its structure. However, the key principle of this new language is the “principle of relativity” with its “expressions of relativity.” According to this paper, the principle of relativity is pivotal in understanding Gurdjieff's literary technique.

His emphasis on exactitude and precision in language and the concepts implied by it is quite interesting when one considers the book Gurdjieff was ultimately to publish as his Magnum Opus, *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. We may question why Gurdjieff produced so confusing a text. His remarks in lectures are cogent enough to indicate his intelligence. But after such clarity, why would he write a book which seems by passing observation to have been written by a madman?

Other remarks of Gurdjieff's bear light on the “mad” appearance of his writing style. Consider another quote regarding his “exact language”:

“...In order to be understood by another man, it is not only necessary for the speaker to know how to speak but for the listener to know how to listen. This is why I can say that if I were to speak in a way I consider exact, everybody here, with very few exceptions, would think I was crazy. But since at the present I have to speak to my audience as it is, and my audience will have to listen to me, we must first establish the possibility of a common understanding.”<sup>4</sup>

Gurdjieff implies here that he is knowingly speaking in ordinary language, conscious that there is another, more precise language. If he spoke in a language he considered exact, everyone *would think he was crazy*. Perhaps when he decided to transmit his teaching in book form, he chose to write in the “exact language” of which he had been speaking, and true to his claims, this language appeared “crazy.”

In his literary masterpiece, where he is rarely direct, we find Gurdjieff explicit on this very point in the same way as the above quotations of his lectures. Gurdjieff's words in the passage below are not

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<sup>3</sup> Ouspensky, *In Search*, 71.

<sup>4</sup> Gurdjieff, *Views*, 41.

the recollection of pupils or the apparently meticulous memory of Ouspensky, but his own, approved for publication at the end of his life after many years and opportunities to amend them. This will be a longer passage than the previous two, but summarizes Gurdjieff's views:

“And as regards this possibility of correctly conducting self-observation...we make the study of the mechanicality of contemporary man the groundwork of a correctly conducted self-observation.

Before beginning to study this mechanicality and all the principles for a correctly conducted self-observation, a man in the first place must decide, once and forever, that he will be sincere with himself unconditionally, will shut his eyes to nothing, shun no results wherever they may lead him, be afraid of no inferences, and be limited by no previous, self-imposed limits; and *secondly, in order that the elucidation of these principles [regarding self observation] may be properly perceived and transubstantiated in the followers of this new teaching, it is necessary to establish a corresponding form of “language,” since we find the established form of language quite unsuitable for such elucidations.* [Authors Italics]

[description of sincerity]

And as regards the second indispensable condition, that is, the establishment of a correct language; this is necessary because our still recently established language which has procured, so to say, “rights-of-citizenship”, and in which we speak, convey our knowledge and notions to others, and write books, has, in our opinion already become such as to be now quite worthless for any more or less exact exchange of opinions.

The words of which our contemporary language consists, convey, owing to the arbitrary thought people put into them, indefinite and relative notions, and are therefore perceived by average people “elastically.”

In obtaining just this abnormality in the life of man, a part was played in our opinion, by always that same established abnormal system of education of the rising generation.

And it played a part because, based as we have already said, chiefly on compelling the young to “learn by rote” as many words as possible differentiated one from the other only by the impression received from their consonance and not by the real pith of the meaning put into them, this system of education has resulted in the gradual loss in people of the capacity to ponder and reflect upon what they are talking about and upon what is being said to them.

As a result of the loss of this capacity and in view, at the same time, of the necessity to convey thoughts more or less exactly to others, they are obliged, in spite of the endless number of words already existing in all contemporary languages, either to borrow from other languages or to invent always more and more words; which has finally brought it about that when a contemporary man wishes to express an idea for which he knows many apparently suitable words and expresses this idea in a word which seems, according to this mental reflection, to be fitting, he still instinctively feels uncertain whether his choice is correct, and unconsciously gives his word his own subjective meaning.

Owing on the one hand to this already automatized usage, and on the other hand to the gradual disappearance of the capacity to concentrate his active attention for any length of time, the average man on uttering or hearing any word, involuntarily emphasizes and dwells upon this or that aspect of the notion conveyed by the word, invariably concentrating the whole meaning of the word upon one feature of the notion indicated by it; that is to say, the word signifies for him not all the implications of the given idea, but merely the first chance significance dependent upon the ideas formed in the link of automatic associations flowing in him. Hence every time that in the course of conversation, the contemporary man hears or speaks one and the same word, he gives it another meaning, at times quite contradictory to the sense conveyed by the given word.

For any man who has become aware of this to some degree, and has learned more or less how to observe, this “tragicomic feast of sound” is particularly sharply constated and made evident when others join the conversation of two contemporary people.

Each of them puts his own subjective sense into all the words that have become gravity-center words in the said so to say “symphony of words without content,” and to the ear of this impartial

observer it is all perceived only as what is called in the ancient sinikooloopianian tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, “cacophonous-fantastic-nonsense.”

Conversing in this fashion, contemporary people nevertheless imagine they understand one another and are certain that they are conveying their thoughts to each other.

We, on the other hand, relying upon a mass of indisputable data confirmed by psycho-physico-chemical experiments, categorically affirm that as long as contemporary people remain as they are, that is to say “average people,” they will never, whatever they may be talking about among themselves, and particularly if the subject be abstract, understand the same notions by the same words nor will they ever actually comprehend one another.

That is why in the contemporary average man, every inner experience and even every painful experience which engenders mentation and which has obtained logical results which might in other circumstances be very beneficent to those round about, is not manifested outwardly but is only transformed into so to say an “enslaving factor” for him himself.

Thanks to this, even the isolation of the inner life of each individual man is increased, and as a consequence what is called the “mutual instruction” so necessary to people’s collective existence is always more and more destroyed.

Owing to the loss of the capacity to ponder and reflect, whenever the contemporary average man hears or employs in conversation any word with which he is familiar only by its consonance, he does not pause to think, nor does there even arise in him any question as to what exactly is meant by this word, he having already decided, once and for all, both that he knows it and that others know it too.”<sup>5</sup>

There are many ideas in this passage but there is one critical item to highlight for the purposes of this paper: Gurdjieff’s insistence on the indispensability of a new, exact language for self observation. His claim that the average person lacks the capacity to reflect on the meanings of words implies that *Beelzebub*, with its difficulties, is meant to develop this capacity.

The three quotations above are snapshots of longer passages which contain a great deal of overlap but establish Gurdjieff’s consistency during his teaching career. Readers of this paper may find it useful to read and ponder those sections more in depth, as not all of the ideas connected with them have been covered here.

This paper suggests that the following picture emerges from this material: During the course of Gurdjieff’s teaching career, which had several iterations, he taught the instability of ordinary language. Second, he said the primary deficiency of ordinary language is the lack of an indication of relativity, or angle of thought. Third, Gurdjieff claimed knowledge of a new language, which he considered precise, but which would appear “mad” if used. Fourth, *Beelzebub*, which Gurdjieff painstakingly wrote over many years, represents his exact language. Its’ “crazy” appearance results from the principles of its construction, including its “expressions of relativity”. Last, Gurdjieff considered this exact language as “indispensable” for self observation.

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<sup>5</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1210-1214.

## OBJECTS AND MODIFIERS: A NEW THEORY

In the Tales, we encounter, in each complete statement, a series of words. These words are of two kinds.

One kind we may call *Objects*. These *Objects* can be classified as: characters, places, things, or events. We use the word *Object* intentionally. The word *Object* implies something that can be held, manipulated, turned about, displaced, inverted, broken up, and other similar transformations, and taken in relation to other objects. Thinking about Gurdjieff's allegories this way creates a sense of three dimensionality and shifting perspective.

Each *Object* has, littered about it, a series of inferences we may call *Modifiers*. As we noted in an earlier quotation, Gurdjieff called these "expressions of relativity." They indicate from what angle or point of view the given *Object* is to be viewed. There are many types of indicators that Gurdjieff used in an intentional and repeated fashion.

In other words, all words or phrases in the book fall into one or both of two categories:

1. Objects
2. Modifiers

Objects, as we mentioned, consist of only four kinds:

1. Characters
2. Places.
3. Things.
4. Events.

The first three types of *Objects* are our "people, places, and things" which we learned in grammar school when studying nouns as children. Events are similar to people, places and things, but have the aspect of being linked to one another in time.

*Modifiers*, briefly, come in a number of types, but to limit the duration of this discussion I will just mention a few:

1. Quotation Marks
2. "...what are called..."
4. Neologisms
5. Thematic/Phrasal parallelism

*Modifiers* are all elements in the text that indicate perspectives from which the object under consideration can be viewed. They attach to the *Object* inferences or implications, and also link different *Objects* together at different moments. They cause trains of associations to be activated between disparate parts of the book.

According to this theory, the reader’s task with regard to the *Modifiers* and *Objects* is to actively collect associations (angles of thought) from different passages, forming them into a more and more complete picture. Each step in the sequential unfolding of a sentence, an individual tale, a series of tales, etc., forms, due its associations, a moving mental-emotional picturing within the reader. The completeness or clarity of this shifting picture depends entirely on the stability of attention of the reader and their ability to consider the allegory from different aspects and in varying combinations.

## EXAMPLES

### “The Perceptions and Conditions Paragraphs”

This example comes from Chapter 2 of *Beelzebub*. We will begin with the passage and then explore an example of phrasal parallelism used as a *Modifier*. Relevant phrasing has been highlighted for clarity.

Only a little before this journey Beelzebub had returned home to the planet Karatas where he had received his arising and far from which, on account of **circumstances independent of his own essence**, he had passed many years of his existence in **conditions not proper to his nature**.

This many-yearred existence, unsuited to him, together with the **perceptions unusual for his nature** and the **experiences not proper to his essence** involved in it, had not failed to leave on his common presence a perceptible mark. <sup>6</sup>

These two paragraphs can be seen as opposites. We may notice Gurdjieff highlighting the fact that Beelzebub spent time somewhere “unsuited to him”. In fact, looking at the blue phrases, he seems to repeat this to the point of redundancy.

In the first paragraph the author refers to:

**circumstances** independent of his own essence  
**conditions** not proper to his nature

The words “circumstances” and “conditions”, generally speaking, both refer to *external* situations. Notice how each of these phrases *contain a similar meaning*, but state it using different words. The first word in each phrase, looked at simply, can be taken to mean “external situation” The phrases linked to them both refer to something intrinsic within Beelzebub with which those external situations are in conflict. In other words, the first paragraph says this place Beelzebub has gone has *external situations* that don’t correspond to him in some way. Circumstances and conditions can be construed to have slightly different meanings, but nonetheless they are similar.

In the second paragraph we get this:

**perceptions** unusual for his nature  
**experiences** not proper to his essence

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<sup>6</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 51.

Here once again we have a word linked with a phrase. The words in red both refer to *internal* situations or states. Beelzebub has gone to a place where his *internal* states do not correspond to him.

This meaning from the second paragraph contrasts the reference to externals in the first paragraph. The red words in both are linked to phrases which are remarkably similar in referring to Beelzebub's nature or essence. However, paragraph two is implying that it is Beelzebub's internal state that doesn't correspond rather than the external situation.

We may infer from this contradiction that perhaps his internal situation is the cause of the difficulty and not so much the external one. It is his perception of the situation, not the situation itself. At the very least, the difference is being called into question.

We notice how in the blue phrases the words essence and nature both occur in both paragraphs. "Not proper to" has simply been swapped to being in front of essence instead of being in front of nature as in the first paragraph. "Independent of" and "unusual for" in this case may have been a mistranslation, but in any case are referring to a similar meaning. This implies that these blue phrases are operating as connective phrases between the two paragraphs. They connect the red words and *cause them to overlap* in the mind of the reader, revealing a contradiction: Circumstances/Conditions (external) versus Perceptions/Experiences (internal). The blue words have been swapped, changed, or altered just slightly so the parallel isn't obvious, but with a little thought it is not hard to see their similarity. The fact that the two red words in paragraph 1 refer to *external* and the two in paragraph 2 refer to *internal* is too obvious to be a mistake.

What is the implication? The basic sense of the first paragraph is that the external situation isn't proper to Beelzebub. The basic sense of the second paragraph is that Beelzebub's *perceptions* or internal state are the problem. We take this to mean that Gurdjieff is asking the reader to consider the difference between perceptions and conditions.

Humans habitually speak about external situations as though they were fixed, solid, and real. However, just as often those very same "solid" external situations are built on our opinions. We may be so identified with our view we are unwilling to question our perceptions and instead simply view our opinions as *being* the situation itself. Perhaps Gurdjieff is asking the reader to consider whether things exist solidly "out there" or to what degree our perceptions create our reality.

In this example the red words function as *Objects*. The phrases linking them function as *Modifiers*. The *Modifiers* connect the red words together, altering the reader's angle of thought and specifying an implied meaning. We call this type of *Modifier* a phrasal parallel because the presence of two like phrases serve as the primary cue to the reader about where to look to find new information regarding the *object* under study. In other passages, readers may notice that Gurdjieff uses *complex phrasal parallelism* to combine many disparate objects in a similar way.

Reflecting on the reader's journey into understanding these two statements, we notice that the reader has actualized the truths indicated. The knowledge gained amounts to a realization that our environments may be more colored by our perceptions than we imagine.

Here, the first reading of these passages will likely not strike the eye of the reader. The reader may casually assume their initial perception of the paragraphs is sufficient. Upon further scrutiny, however, the reader's perception shifts, and as a result the statements themselves are transformed with new meaning. In this way, the reader may realize the difference between their initial impression, which was felt to be accurate, and the results of a deeper analysis, showing that the conditions contained surprising aspects. In other words, the paragraphs are the "conditions" but the reader may have a shift of "perception" which alters what they believe was there.

The reader, much like Beelzebub, is entering into an environment of word and phrasal use that does not correspond to their accustomed expectations. Like Beelzebub, the reader must endure a kind of purgatory to ultimately be redeemed in the light of a fuller interpretation of the text. This again, is an example of Gurdjieff's Objective Art, in which being matches knowledge at every step. The reader actualizes, through their own experience, the very knowledge they gain. The knowledge itself is none other than the path the reader tread to achieve it. We suggest in this paper and others that this is characteristic of the entirety of *Beelzebub's Tales*.

### **Second Example: ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub**

Referring once again to the *Tales*' Chapter 2, the author recounts the collision of two primary characters in the book: the young Beelzebub and patient old ENDLESSNESS. Using our theory of *Objects* and *Modifiers*, we will consider these twin allegories as being subject to multiple intended meanings. The interpretations offered in this paper are not meant to be conclusive or all encompassing; on the contrary, I suggest there are many more configurations to explore and hope these examples galvanize creative exploration by others. For the purpose of this paper, we will consider both Beelzebub and ENDLESSNESS as simultaneously representing the author (Gurdjieff) and the reader. I will end with a suggestion for how each view, although different, assists or corroborates the others, forming a harmonious whole.

#### Beelzebub as Gurdjieff

Beginning with Beelzebub as our *Object*, we consider reasons he may represent Gurdjieff. This is not a particularly earth shattering thought for most readers of *Beelzebub*, but we will give it due support and perhaps uncover unique aspects of this perspective.

First, Beelzebub is the chosen mouthpiece for Gurdjieff's book. "Beelzebub's Tales" are very much so "Gurdjieff's Tales"; all we must do is simply substitute Gurdjieff for Beelzebub. We may see Beelzebub as a performance costume highlighting the fiendishness of our author and his new literary form. This comes through very strongly in the playful tone of the book's preface:

“First and foremost, I shall place my own hand...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...”<sup>7</sup>

Here the description of the state of his heart, on which he is placing his hand to confess, leaves us less than sure about his “frankness.” This devilishness goes hand in hand with the play mask of Beelzebub used by the author.

In this same passage, we have a further linkage with Beelzebub. The phrase “circumstances, quite independent of me...” links him to the first paragraph highlighted in the above example taken from Chapter 2:

Only a little before this journey Beelzebub had returned home to the planet Karatas where he had received his arising and far from which, on account of circumstances independent of his own essence, he had passed many years of his existence in conditions not proper to his nature.<sup>8</sup>

Gurdjieff, much like Beelzebub, is existing in “circumstances independent of” himself which do not correspond to his nature. This phrase, acting as a *Modifier*, causes us to think of Solar System Ors, where Beelzebub is banished, as being Gurdjieff’s literary experience writing his book. That is, the Solar System Ors is *Beelzebub’s Tales* itself. Gurdjieff, having characterized himself with these phrases in his preface, then writes Chapter 2 using the same phrases, indirectly nudging the reader to insert Gurdjieff’s self-portrayal into the image of Beelzebub. In this light, his venture into authorship is Beelzebub’s journey through Ors. This works quite well since *the book he writes is itself the story of Beelzebub’s journey*. We will find a similar metaphorical cohesion or tightness momentarily when we shift and examine ENDLESSNESS as Gurdjieff.

A second *Modifier* causing us to think of Beelzebub as Gurdjieff is simply the sequence of places Beelzebub visits. Tibet, India, Egypt, Russia, Germany, France, and America: these trace Gurdjieff’s own life travels.<sup>9</sup> In this sense the travels of Beelzebub represent Gurdjieff’s own peregrinations, both as a young man, and also later in Europe.

Having connected Beelzebub and Gurdjieff in our mind, we may consider what any other *Object* connected with the character of Beelzebub could represent if our protagonist is, in fact, assumed to be Gurdjieff himself. Perhaps the first and most iconic *Object* connected with Beelzebub to come to mind is his painstakingly constructed observatory. Not discounting other potential views, we may think of the observatory, Beelzebub’s “chief occupation”<sup>10</sup>, as Gurdjieff’s book, that is, *Beelzebub’s Tales*. Like

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<sup>7</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, Chapters 21, 22, 23, 24, 34, 37,38, 42, and 46 contain primary stories of these places.

<sup>10</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 55.

Beelzebub's observatory, Gurdjieff's book was also his chief occupation, and he is reported as using it to observe listeners:

“Gurdjieff worked as usual every day on *Beelzebub's Tales*, re-writing and revising, working, as usual, in cafes and at the Prieure - sometimes indoors, sometimes in the garden; sometimes with people round him, sometimes alone. When chapters were read out in the salon after dinner he would watch the expressions on our faces. He had begun to draft the chapter on America; and if an American visitor turned up he would have parts of the chapter read, and always he would begin to laugh during certain passages. We also would join in the laughter, although most of us were never sure what he was laughing at. I suspect that it was at ourselves.”<sup>11</sup>

Beelzebub's observatory has many more versions and aspects when taken in relation to Gurdjieff. As stated at the beginning of this section, the views presented are not meant to be fully comprehensive but rather only meant to demonstrate *an entirely new way of working with Gurdjieff's allegories*.

#### ENDLESSNESS as Gurdjieff

Next we consider ENDLESSNESS as representing Gurdjieff the author. The chapter Purgatory contains the story of ENDLESSNESS and his dilemma:

“From the third most sacred canticle of our cherubim and seraphim, we were worthy of learning that our CREATOR OMNIPOTENT once ascertained that this same Sun Absolute, on which HE dwelt with HIS cherubim and seraphim was, although almost imperceptibly yet nevertheless gradually, diminishing in volume.

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“...our OMNIPOTENT CREATOR for the first time made it clear that the cause of this gradual diminishing of the volume of the Sun Absolute was merely the Heropass, that is, the flow of Time itself.

“Thereupon our ENDLESSNESS became thoughtful, for in HIS Divine deliberations HE became clearly aware that is this Heropass should so continue to diminish the volume of the Sun Absolute, then sooner or later it would ultimately bring about the complete destruction of this sole place of HIS Being.”<sup>12</sup>

This passage presents a real irony: "ENDLESSNESS", whose very name says he should *never end*, is *running out of time* as the Sun Absolute gradually erodes.

In Chapter 48, *From the Author*, Gurdjieff describes his own car wreck and subsequent realization that his institute would inevitably fail due to his own old age and other factors:

“I was constrained with an inexpressible impulse of grief and despondency to make this decision to liquidate this institution and everything organized and carefully prepared for the opening the following year of eighteen sections in different countries, in short, of everything I had previously created with almost superhuman labor, chiefly because, soon after the said accident occurred, that is, three months afterwards, when the former usual

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<sup>11</sup> C.S. Nott, *Teachings of Gurdjieff: A Pupil's Journal*, p 115.

<sup>12</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 749.

functioning of my mentation had been more or less re-established in me - I being still utterly powerless in body - I then reflected that the attempt to preserve the existence of this institution, would, in the absence of real people around me and owing to the impossibility of procuring without me the great material means required for it, inevitably lead to a catastrophe the result of which, among other things for me in my old age as well as for numerous others wholly dependent on me, would be , so to say, a “vegetation.”<sup>13</sup>

Much like in his preface he is *constrained* to perform an action. Here he is constrained to liquidate the institute, while in the preface he is constrained to begin authorship. The two are of a piece: Gurdjieff, in closing his institute, had decided to put everything in book form instead.

We may view ENDLESSNESS’ realization of the eroding of the Sun Absolute as Gurdjieff’s realization of the inevitable catastrophe toward which his institute was heading. ENDLESSNESS devotes himself to “...finding a possibility of averting such an inevitable end...”, that is, the destruction of the Sun Absolute.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, he decides to create the present existing Megalocosmos, which is described as a tiered emanation. Notice that both the erosion of Sun Absolute and the poor outcome of Gurdjieff’s institute are considered “inevitable”, and the response constrained/forced.

The thematic parallels and even specific words used (such as “inevitable” and “constrained” or “forced), among other things, are *Modifiers* which tie the *Objects* (characters) of ENDLESSNESS together with Gurdjieff the author. ENDLESSNESS’ emanation of the Megalocosmos to lines up with Gurdjieff’s creation of *Beelzebub*. Here we find the same cohesiveness mentioned above in the examination of *Beelzebub* as Gurdjieff. The book Gurdjieff writes *is itself the emanation*.

Another parallel worth mentioning is that ENDLESSNESS’ “Will Power” participates “only at the beginning”<sup>15</sup> of the Theomertmalogos much as Gurdjieff’s book will proceed automatically, “like a ‘pianola’”.<sup>16</sup> This parallel is another *Modifier*.

Viewing ENDLESSNESS as the author initiates other considerations as well. We do not have space to flesh these ideas out, but brief mention of them is warranted. First, if the emanation is Gurdjieff’s book, it brings new meaning to the neologism he used to describe it: Theomertmalogos (logos has been variously translated as “word”, “speech”, “discourse”, among others). Also, what then do all “worlds” represent?<sup>17</sup> One may hypothesize they correspond to *levels of meaning* in the book’s symbolism.

#### Gurdjieff as ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub

Viewing *Beelzebub* with his observatory and ENDLESSNESS with his “created world” as both representing Gurdjieff with his book implies an interesting overlap between *Beelzebub* and ENDLESSNESS. If ENDLESSNESS’ Megalocosmos is the *Tales*, and *Beelzebub*’s observatory is also

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<sup>13</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1187.

<sup>14</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 750.

<sup>15</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 756.

<sup>17</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 760-761, contains a list of the cosmoses.

the *Tales*, then the Megalocosmos is also the observatory. Reversing the statement, the observatory is the created world. This implies that ENDLESSNESS, in creating his world, is *observing*, and that Beelzebub, in assembling his observatory, is *creating*. The act of perceiving, in a sense, creates the world, or, put differently, the existence of the world depends on one's perception of it.

We highlight this particular connection because it coincides with thoughts presented in the first example taken from Chapter 2 about perceptions and conditions. This paper proposes that the relationship of perceptions of reality and reality itself is fundamental to the educational process of Beelzebub.<sup>18</sup> We will return to this thought later, after we have examined both Beelzebub and ENDLESSNESS' as symbolizing the reader.

### Beelzebub as Reader

Beelzebub represents the reader in the sense that the reader, hearing about the old devil's (Gurdjieff's) journeys, in a sense *travels with him* and partakes in his experiences, thereby garnering the same experience or understanding. We may say that the reader, in overcoming the various obstacles set by the narrator, develops an attention and being corresponding to that developed by Beelzebub in his travels.

The reader may also be Beelzebub in the sense that the reader is taken on by Gurdjieff much as Beelzebub was taken on by ENDLESSNESS. In thinking of ENDLESSNESS as representing Gurdjieff writing Beelzebub's *Tales*, the reader's struggle *against* the difficulties of Beelzebub's *Tales* is symbolized in one sense by Beelzebub's revolution *against* ENDLESSNESS. Gurdjieff wants the reader to challenge the things he writes in his stories and think for themselves.

In another sense, ENDLESSNESS' banishment of Beelzebub to Ors where he must go through a series of journeys and learning experiences, which we noted are the learning experiences the reader will undergo, is Gurdjieff's banishment of the reader by means of a challenging literary style, something which he is careful to warn the reader about in his preface<sup>19</sup>. The reader must slog through a proverbial "hell" of red herrings, neologisms, apparent non-sequiturs, and a host of other difficulties.

The difficulty of processing the *Tales* was symbolized by the story of the Transcaucasian Kurd who ate the beautiful red pepper and suffered the results. Beelzebub, being taken on to Sun Absolute only to find something "illogical" waiting for him, is similar to the "cheerful" and "swaggering candidate for a buyer of [Gurdjieff's] writings", who, like the Kurd, is in for a shock.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The aim of the First Series is to Destroy Mercilessly Everything the Reader believes about the world.

<sup>19</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 19-21 for the story of the Transcaucasian Kurd.

What then does Beelzebub's observatory represent? We may say that the reader, in attending to the Tales, is building their own observatory, that is, the observatory represents the practice of *self observation*<sup>21</sup>.

### ENDLESSNESS as Reader

The reader can also be seen in the character of ENDLESSNESS. Above, when looking at ENDLESSNESS as Gurdjieff, we noticed the unusualness of the dilemma facing "ENDLESSNESS." This caused us to question just how "ENDLESS" he really is.

Gurdjieff, toward the end of the book, famously pointed out in Beelzebub's answer to Hasein's question, the importance of realizing one's own mortality:

"The sole means now for the saving of the beings of the planet Earth would be to implant again into their presences a new organ, an organ like Kundabuffer, but this time of such properties that every one of these unfortunates during the process of existence should constantly sense and be cognizant of the inevitability of his own death as well as of the death of everyone upon whom his eyes or attention rests.

"Only such a sensation and such a cognizance can now destroy the egoism completely crystallized in them that has swallowed up the whole of their Essence and also that tendency to hate others which flows from it..."<sup>22</sup>

ENDLESSNESS, who is perhaps not so ENDLESS, in this sense represents the egotistical reader instead of the author. That is, connecting his story with the idea of contemplating one's own death causes us to view ENDLESSNESS as ourselves readers. What is ENDLESSNESS after all but the image of a false god existing on a mythological sun thinking himself to be at the center of the entire Universe? This is the picture of the egotistical reader relativizing their surroundings to themselves.

"And indeed, my boy, it has already long ago become proper there to the three-brained beings who have taken your fancy to become interested only in what they often see or often hear about, and whenever they do become interested in something, then this interest of theirs stifles all other being- necessities in them, and it will always seem obvious to them that what interests them at the given moment is just the very thing that 'makes the world go round.'<sup>23</sup>

If ENDLESSNESS and the shock of his realization of the "inevitable" erosion of his abode corresponds to the reader and the cognizance of their own death, what then is the Ray of Creation (Theomertmalogos) which results? One suggestion is that it represents the development of the human being. The downward flow of the ray represents one's subjectivity "going out" and creating the sensed world, while the upward flow represents the turning of awareness back onto oneself and one's own perceptions.

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<sup>21</sup> For a record of Gurdjieff's description of self-observation from his Russian Period of teaching, PD Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*.

<sup>22</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1183.

<sup>23</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 875.

### Reader as ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub

This last thought, that the travel up against the current of the emanation represents self observation, leads us to now consider overlaps between Beelzebub with his observatory and ENDLESSNESS with his created world.

Viewing involitional emanation as the subjectivity of the reader and the evolutional backflow of the emanation as observation of that subjectivity fits perfectly with the view of Beelzebub's observatory as self observation. If Beelzebub is the reader, and ENDLESSNESS is the reader, then Beelzebub is ENDLESSNESS. If Beelzebub is ENDLESSNESS, then Beelzebub's invention, his observatory, is ENDLESSNESS' invention, his created world or emanation. Once again, these are not the only views intended by the author or possible to make by a thoughtful reader, but examples of a way of thinking about metaphors from multiple directions at once.

### Overlapping Gurdjieff and Reader as ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub

There are many many permutations of meaning that arise from a simultaneous comparison of all the versions above. In each configuration, the attention exercise consists of *holding* and *consciously manipulating* the metaphors in dynamic tension with each other. This paper suggests that the *Modifiers*, exemplified by the above thematic parallels (among others), are the key source of guidance given by Gurdjieff to the reader about how to view a given *Object* under consideration.

Previously, we suggested implications that arise from overlapping ENDLESSNESS/Beelzebub with their creations/inventions. We looked at how ENDLESSNESS' emanation brought out the aspect of Gurdjieff's book as a kind of "world" or series of "worlds" the reader can enter, but also how, at the same time, the metaphor of Beelzebub with his observatory highlighted Gurdjieff's use of the book as a means for observing pupils. We also looked at how ENDLESSNESS' emanation can be viewed as the reader's observation of their own subjectivity while, at the same time, Beelzebub's building of an observatory represented the construction of an inward facing attention or self observation by the reader.

Now remains the task of comparing the following permutations:

1. ENDLESSNESS as Author; Beelzebub as Reader
2. ENDLESSNESS as Author; ENDLESSNESS as Reader
3. Beelzebub as Author; ENDLESSNESS as Reader
4. Beelzebub as Author; Beelzebub as Reader

### ENDLESSNESS as Author; Beelzebub as Reader

Perhaps the most intuitive version is to think of ENDLESSNESS as Gurdjieff and the young Beelzebub as the reader. In this sense, ENDLESSNESS' emanation is Gurdjieff's creation of the *Tales* against which the reader must struggle. Beelzebub is taken on by ENDLESSNESS, but then finds, to his dismay, something is off and must subsequently go through a journey of redemption. This symbolizes the "swaggering candidate for a buyer of" Gurdjieff's writings, who, interested in *Beelzebub*, perhaps discovers it is not so easy and must therefore work through all of the stories in detail to understand. The

revolutionary character of Beelzebub represents the reader's need to think for themselves and perhaps reject much of the literal meaning.

#### ENDLESSNESS as Author; ENDLESSNESS as Reader

ENDLESSNESS his self-created world which is oriented around himself and which he projects out onto his environment, ultimately brings back to him a reality tailored to his assumptions. Perhaps, fundamentally, our ego creates this false reality to avoid the fact of death. ENDLESSNESS as author, however, consciously emanates stories which will challenge the reader's worldview which is taken as a fixed reality. The result is a potential new emanation from the reader, the ability to project differing views consciously with an awareness of how each view changes things. Perhaps the best summary of this dyad is Ravi Ravindra's "centered self, not self-centered". ENDLESSNESS the author is centered in Self, whereas the reader is self centered (this is why the author refers to the "swaggering" reader). ENDLESSNESS', as a metaphor, contains both versions and shows a comparison of them.

We see here a parallel in the ray of creation emanating from ENDLESSNESS-the-reader and the ray of creation emanating from ENDLESSNESS-the-author. Both Rays represent the Tales: one the development of the stories by the author, and the other, the conceptualizing of them by the reader. Looked at diagrammatically, the reader ascends the Ray, while the author's work descends, going in opposite directions.

#### Beelzebub as Author; ENDLESSNESS as Reader

Beelzebub as author plays the role of conscience within the reader. The "swaggering", self-centered ENDLESSNESS-reader, is likely to discount the author. The author points this out in the preface:

In all probability you are now thinking that I am, of course, a young man with an auspicious exterior and, as some express it, a "suspicious interior," and that, as a novice in writing, I am evidently intentionally being eccentric in the hope of becoming famous and thereby rich.

If you indeed think so, then you are very, very mistaken.

First of all, I am not young; I have already lived so much that I have been in my life, as it is said, "not only through the mill but through all the grindstones..."<sup>24</sup>

The author's opinions will be contradictory to those held by the reader, and the playful, jocular tone the author brings out his devilishness. Beelzebub and his revolution are Gurdjieff's efforts to change Western Civilization, and ultimate banishment to authorship, and ENDLESSNESS represents the egocentrism of his pupils.

#### Beelzebub as Author; Beelzebub as Reader

Beelzebub-Gurdjieff's observatory was his book which he used to understand listeners. He was studying and understanding the process of mentation of the listener, which he pointed out was his "hobby" of late. We may infer he was doing this to understand how to help the listener self observe. The reader, as Beelzebub, must overcome their own egocentricity to observe themselves, a kind of revolution

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<sup>24</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 17-18.

against themselves. The observatory in both cases is the book, in which the author is observing the reader and the reader is observing themselves.

### Some further thoughts

Some readers at this point may wonder why we haven't considered some more prominent interpretations of these two characters, or why perhaps we left out others. For instance, we considered ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub both as representing the reader. Although after some thought Beelzebub representing the reader may make fairly intuitive sense to some, a more obvious choice for the reader is Hassein. Beelzebub more clearly represents Gurdjieff the author. In this way, thinking of Hassein and Beelzebub as being the reader and Gurdjieff would perhaps be a better point of departure.

The primary reason ENDLESSNESS and Beelzebub were chosen in the versions stated was to support and substantiate the model of *Objects* and *Modifiers*. Demonstrating a coherent thought process in which two *Objects*, interacting in the narrative as separate characters, are seen to switch metaphorical places, particularly the characters of *God* and *Devil*, seemed a more powerful example of the way in which Gurdjieff's literary masterpiece could truly pull the rug from under the readers expectations. He himself claimed he knew well the "laws-of-the-fixing-and-unfixing-of-ideas-in-localizations."<sup>25</sup>

If we for the moment consider Hassein as the reader, we may *layer* this thought over the ones I have presented above to create interesting thoughts. For instance: I have suggested Beelzebub also represents the reader. If we take *both* to be the case, that is, that both Beelzebub and Hassein represent the reader, there is an interesting result. Hassein is described as "eagerly absorbing"<sup>26</sup> everything the old Beelzebub says, whereas Beelzebub is depicted right off the bat as a revolutionary who rejects, for reasons not initially explained, God's governance of the world.

If we take these versions as suggestions by Gurdjieff for qualities required by the reader to engage successfully with the *Tales*, we get a reader who must eagerly absorb but not without discrimination, rejecting ridiculous ideas in favor of more common sense interpretations (ENDLESSNESS and old Beelzebub represent Gurdjieff the author with respect to young Beelzebub and Hassein as the reader in this version). In other words, Beelzebub and Hassein represent two poles (acceptance/rejection) between which the reader must live. Beelzebub's revolution was inadequate; he needed to work diligently in Ors much as Hassein must listen diligently and "very attentively" about that journey.

I have heard Ravi Ravindra, the student of Jeanne de Salzmann and author of *Heart without Measure*<sup>27</sup>, say, in Work retreats, that "acceptance and rejection exist on the same level", and I believe Gurdjieff, in symbolizing the reader in these two roles, is suggesting the same: discrimination (discernment) takes place in the nuanced gray area between black and whites. Certainly Gurdjieff criticized the black and white of good and evil<sup>28</sup>, and in the chapter art claims humans lost the ability to see *shades*<sup>29</sup>.

These kinds of hidden thoughts are revealed through *blending* various characters who appear to be separate. In each case, the reader expresses the being-capacity corresponding to the hidden thought,

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<sup>25</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1169.

<sup>26</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ravindra, *Heart without Measure*.

<sup>28</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 1140.

<sup>29</sup> Gurdjieff, *Tales*, 473-474.

that is, engages in *Objective Art*. In this case regarding Beelzebub/Hassein, the reader demonstrates the ability to hold two fairly different characters (eager Hassein and revolutionary young Beelzebub) within one view and harmonize them in their own self image. In arriving at the thought that both characters represent him or herself, the reader has both eagerly/attentively absorbed the material like Hassein and openly thought from different points of view, but has also rejected the literal meaning presented by the author. We could say this corresponds to his admonition in *Meetings* to the effect that one must preserve both the sheep and the wolf within themselves.<sup>30</sup> In this interpretation, the devil Beelzebub represents the wolf and Hassein the sheep.

## CONCLUSION

During the course of Gurdjieff's long teaching career, he consistently emphasized the importance of what he called "the exact language" in both his lectures and writings. Certainly one need not agree with Gurdjieff's conclusions, but if one takes seriously the idea that his teaching was placed in Beelzebub, it behooves us to see if his statements conform with his literary style.

For those not familiar with the theory presented, questions may arise. What is the practical purpose of this exact language? What effect does holding and/or manipulating multiple meanings have? Why does it matter?

First, there is a practical import for those interested in understanding Gurdjieff's legacy. If there is in fact a method of truly *fathoming the gist*, not in theory but in a lucid cognizance of what passages actually mean, this will seem meaningful to those who want to understand Gurdjieff. Once the principles of the new theory have been assimilated through examples, we can create new forms of this art.

Second, there is a direct personal benefit if one views the book as a cumulative series of exercises that affect the brain and our psychology. There are many ways to talk about this because the book touches so many aspects of the reader. We will briefly review just two perspectives.

In modern psychological terms, one may say *Beelzebub's Tales* strengthens the critical reasoning capacity. There is a capacity Neuroscientists call Executive Function. This part, also known as the Rider by psychologists, deals with choice and decision making, the hallmark of Free Will. Studies have shown

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<sup>30</sup> Gurdjieff, *Meetings*, 4. "Only he will deserve the name of man and can count upon anything prepared for him from Above, who has already acquired corresponding data for being able to preserve intact both the wolf and the sheep confided to his care.

that people's capacity to make decisions and reason critically shuts down under stress. This coincides precisely with Gurdjieff's pointing out that undeveloped humans lack choice and free will. From this point of view, Beelzebub's Tales is the first step in the development of Will.

In terms of Spiritual practice, the exercises increase space around thoughts. Beelzebub represents the "monkey mind", and his "Tales" represent "the stories we tell ourselves." A full cognition or *holding* of Beelzebub's Tales amounts to a deep sense of freedom within or from the lower mind. At its lower levels, this corresponds to what psychologists call metacognition, or the ability to be aware of one's own thoughts. It helps direct the inner awareness to the space outside the discursive mind. At higher levels to awakening, which was, after all, the end goal of Gurdjieff's teaching.

The theory expressed in this paper has the merit of fitting with all of Gurdjieff's remarks. It ties them together and gives a new means for exploring what appear to be insoluble difficulties in his text.

The basic thrust of this theory is to simplify and direct the reader's interaction with the book. It points out the need to squarely arrest one's attention upon any particular object under consideration and then subsequently note adjacent words and phrases which modify it. It helps to orient the reader amidst the apparent chaos of Gurdjieff's literary style in which all surfaces appear smooth, sheer, and without handholds. Using this technique, it may be noticed that the meaning of words in the beginning of a long sentence have, by the end of the sentence, been displaced several times in the course of the intervening passage. The book becomes an *alive* exercise similar to Gurdjieff's movements, full of inner experience.

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