

CONTROVERSIAL REPUTATION¹

During the 1920s Gurdjieff gained prominence in the West as a powerful teacher of esoteric ideas. Important writers, journalists and academics began paying attention to Gurdjieff and his students. As with many charismatic figures surrounded by an entourage of dedicated followers, rumour and innuendo swirled like dark clouds around Gurdjieff and his community at the Château du Prieuré in France:

A certain ambivalence broods over the historical Prieuré, almost as if both White and Black Magician held sway there; perhaps – in unequal measure – they did. Bechhofer-Roberts detected signs of hoofs and horns all over the place; Clifford Sharpe, despite his fundamental sympathy, had Gurdjieff manipulating ‘with an ingenuity that is almost diabolical’; and Captain John Godolphin Bennett (a weekend guest) alleges: ‘Some people went mad. There were even suicides. Many gave up in despair.’ (1)

Even though many of the allegations were subsequently proven to be untrue or at least greatly exaggerated, an impression was created in the minds of many that Gurdjieff was disreputable or even dangerous. He was described by cynical journalists and members of the French metaphysical establishment as an authoritarian dictator who controlled and manipulated his followers: “Gurdjieff demanded and received absolute obedience from every one of his pupils. His word was law, and he reigned as a tyrant among devoted slaves.” (2)

In subsequent years the press, outside observers and some of Gurdjieff’s own students continued to question and criticize his motives, scope of knowledge, unorthodox healing practices, personal behaviour and habits, patriarchal beliefs, gender attitudes and even his driving. And after his death in 1949 a number of critical articles and books appeared which vilified the man and his teachings, reinforcing the impression that Gurdjieff was at best misguided and at worst a charlatan and demagogue.

Criticism by Journalists and the French Metaphysical Community

The establishment of Gurdjieff’s Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Château du Prieuré in 1922 attracted the attention of many journalists eager for a sensational story. Gurdjieff and his followers did not disappoint. A number of rumours quickly surfaced and circulated with little or no evidence to substantiate them. The popular press vied for the most outrageous article: Gurdjieff exercised occult powers; he seduced his female disciples; he was responsible for several deaths under suspicious circumstances. Gurdjieff was variously referred to as a “Black Magician,” “a devil, an untrustworthy exploiter,” “the Levantine psychic shark.” One prominent French critic labelled him “a false prophet, a pretentious ignoramus.”

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Gurdjieff's controversial image followed him to North America. In 1933 well-known English writer Rom Landau visited Gurdjieff in a New York City hotel for an interview. According to Gurdjieff biographer James Webb, Landau was alarmed and agitated by the experience:

The interview with Gurdjieff went badly. Landau was discomposed by having unwanted cigarettes pressed on him, and Gurdjieff clearly did not intend to answer his questions. Even worse, the journalist appeared to be falling under some "hypnotic influence" or "electric emanation" which deprived him of the power to move from his chair and gave him a feeling of "acute nervousness" in the pit of his stomach. Gurdjieff looked "the perfect Levantine, evasive in his answers, hyperbolic and anxious as to what effect he was producing." (3)

Many of the rumours surrounding Gurdjieff during and after his life were wildly speculative without a shred of supporting evidence. James Webb claimed that Gurdjieff was once an agent for the Russian secret service, but supplied no convincing substantiation in his 1980 biography of Gurdjieff. A rumour, circulating in London émigré circles during the 1930s, suggesting Gurdjieff had been imprisoned for evading military service in his youth was, again, sheer speculation. Allegations by French writer Louis Pauwels in 1954 that Gurdjieff played an important role in shaping Nazi ideology, including having suggested the use of the reversed swastika, were subsequently refuted by credible historical sources.

Some of the most serious allegations about Gurdjieff involved sexual misconduct and suspicious circumstances surrounding the deaths of some of his students. Biographer James Moore thoroughly reviewed these accusations and found virtually no supporting evidence. (4) Although the most outrageous allegations have been dispelled by Moore and others, the impression they created at the time left a cloud of suspicion that hung over Gurdjieff for the rest of his life.

Gurdjieff was also opposed by the French metaphysical establishment. When he began teaching in France in 1922 there was already a long tradition of esoteric studies in that country. Proponents of these metaphysical schools quickly denounced Gurdjieff and his ideas as an affront to traditional spiritual teachings. He was labeled a charlatan and accused of leading his followers into a spiritual void.

The chief critic of Gurdjieff and his teachings for much of the 1930s and 1940s was the leading French esotericist René Guénon, who advised his students to "flee Gurdjieff like the plague." He strongly condemned Gurdjieff's personal behaviour and perceived disregard for traditional spiritual transmission through established religions such as Christianity and Islam. (5) Scholar Whithall Perry was a strong advocate of the school of traditionalism and an adherent of Guénon and metaphysician Frithjof Schuon. He penned a controversial book *Gurdjieff: In the Light of Tradition* which criticized Gurdjieff and his teachings from the traditionalist perspective. Although it was panned and ill-received

by followers of Gurdjieff, it achieved currency in certain metaphysical circles in later years, contributing to the shadow surrounding him.

Criticisms by Pupils of Gurdjieff

Students have expressed reservations about Gurdjieff from the earliest days of his teaching mission. His most famous pupil, P.D. Ouspensky, began to lose confidence in Gurdjieff as early as 1917. Finally, at a meeting in January 1924 with his English pupils, Ouspensky formally broke off all relations with Gurdjieff. He discussed his misgivings:

Mr. Gurdjieff is a very extraordinary man. His possibilities are much greater than those of people like ourselves. But he can also go in the wrong way. I believe that he is now passing through a crisis, the outcome of which no one can foresee. Most people have many "I"s. If these "I"s are at war with one another it does not produce great harm, because they are all weak. But with Mr. Gurdjieff there are only two "I"s; one very good and one very bad. I believe that in the end the good "I" will conquer. But meanwhile it is very dangerous to be near him. (6)

Criticism of Gurdjieff's domineering personality and confrontational teaching style also emerged in the 1920s at the Prieuré in France. Nikolai de Stjernvall, a biological son of Gurdjieff, spent his childhood at the Prieuré and describes the power of his personality and the fear among some of his students at that time:

Gurdjieff surrounded himself with competent, intelligent and cultivated people. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that practically no one dared to defy, contradict, criticize or lead him into an argument, or even react to the humiliations which he forced occasionally his disciples to bear. The only one who could hold his head high by saying to his face, in Armenian, what he thought of him was his own brother Mido . . . At the end of violent confrontations between the two, the master could be seen leaving ashamed for having been opposed. Gurdjieff obviously had a personality out of the ordinary. The mastery which he exercised over his adepts was almost limitless. More or less everyone was subjugated to his will. Some admired G.I., some venerated him, while others openly hated him. His occult powers, the aura of mystery which surrounded him, his magnetic personality, his extraordinary intuition, were such that women of all rank and social standing could not resist him and succumbed to his charm, so much so that his detractors did not hesitate to qualify him as demonic. (7)

Louise Goepfert March met Gurdjieff in 1929 and was his student, secretary and translator of the German edition of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, giving her a unique perspective on the man and his teaching. Her association with her teacher lasted until his death in 1949. Although she recognized the impressive depth of his knowledge and the power of his personality, she also was cognizant of his shortcomings: "G. is headstrong even in the face of better knowledge . . . He is a man with a very strong will, maybe dangerous for some people." (8)

Solita Solano was Gurdjieff's secretary for many years and a member of the Paris group 'the Rope.' In her journal she expressed doubts about Gurdjieff's presumed infallibility (9) in this terse description: "I don't understand why a conscious being under an emotion forgets a number three times I have just told him and has to return from the street to the café table to ask and re-ask a two-digit number. Or why he complains of indigestion and gas every day and can't cure a cough after a month." (10)

By the early 1930s Gurdjieff's reputation among many of his students was in tatters. They were disillusioned by his seedy appearance, unprincipled behaviour, and his alleged use of hypnosis and unorthodox medical treatments as a source of income. By the summer of 1933 scandalous rumours about Gurdjieff had reached a crescendo: he was slovenly and debauched; he was afraid of the dark and of being alone; he was out of control and destroying everything; he was alienating even his closest students.

In *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises*, Joseph Azize describes this particular time as the nadir of Gurdjieff's teaching mission in the West: "By all accounts the 1930s were a rather desultory period for him where little was accomplished . . . It was a period of underachievement, of an inexplicable lassitude and apparent indifference to any mission." (11) He elaborates in greater detail:

In the 1930s, Gurdjieff gave only fitful signs of being driven by a mission; he allowed perhaps the most significant of his Sacred dances to be simply forgotten; and he practically impeded Ouspensky and Orage, his two most successful lieutenants. His sometimes bizarre behavior and contrariness, especially difficult to understand when directed toward people who were not even his pupils, must be acknowledged: for instance, abusing priests totally unknown to him while driving past them, even causing one of them to fall heavily onto the pavement; and telling Olga de Hartmann's parents that if they did not do something he asked, "a coffin will be in this room and your daughter will be in it." It is a question of judgement as to whether Gurdjieff did not sabotage whatever his mission was by devising too many difficulties, and sometimes making his presentation too baffling, particularly in the book to which he devoted so much time, *Beelzebub*. Some of its readers even complained about *Beelzebub's* opacity to his face. (12)

Even writer Jean Toomer, a loyal American pupil of Gurdjieff for many years, began to experience doubts about his teacher (13). He writes: "His behavior during these months as reported to me by a few people who had seen him was awful . . . He seemed to be tearing down everything he had created, his life seemed a blight, he was alienating people and throwing them off left and right." (14)

Was he the supreme egotist? Was he, as some claimed, insane? Did he, as some also claimed, know psychic laws but was essentially stupid in his practical dealings with people? If he knew anything at all about me, how could he fail to know that I was ready and willing to do all I possibly could as regards any real need of his that I could grasp and understand, whereas just these tricky manipulative tactics were sure to throw me off. (15)

Some of Gurdjieff's pupils considered the litany of criticisms directed at him to be one-sided and unjust. Others believed that Gurdjieff was being scapegoated for anything negative that he happened to be proximate to:

He is accused, blamed, for having been present, for having been absent. for helping and for refraining from helping, for talking and for being silent, when a variety of events ranging in people's imagination from rape to taking the veil, from natural death to suicide, from bankruptcy to brilliant success took place in the lives of this one or that one of his followers. (16)

During the Second World War, Gurdjieff resided in occupied Paris, and although he kept a lower profile there his reputation was far from spotless. Despite widespread rationing, Gurdjieff maintained a very comfortable lifestyle: "His lavish hospitality struck a jarring note at a time of material privation: for even if the Master expended a great deal of time and money on his pupils, just how, in that occupied city, had he acquired the vodka and the delicacies which gave his feasts their memorable flavor?" (17) According to James Webb, authorities assembled a wartime dossier on Gurdjieff which was bulging with reports of unlawful activities. Webb claimed that Gurdjieff worked the black market and even collaborated with the Germans.

Following the war, students of Gurdjieff from all over the world returned to their teacher. However, many were shocked by his bad language and outrageous behaviour. When John Bennett brought a large group of English students to meet Gurdjieff, he saw fit to prepare them for any manner of conduct by Gurdjieff:

I must warn you that Gurdjieff is far more of an enigma than you can imagine. I am certain that he is deeply good, and that he is working for the good of mankind. But his methods are often incomprehensible. For example, he uses disgusting language, especially to ladies who are likely to be squeamish about such things. He has the reputation of behaving shamelessly over money matters, and with women also. At his table we have to drink spirits, often to the point of drunkenness. People have said that he is a magician, and that he uses his powers for his own ends . . . I do not believe that the scandalous tales told of Gurdjieff are true: but you must take into account that they may be true and act accordingly. (18)

The final few years of Gurdjieff's life were arguably the most fertile of his long teaching career. Students remember this time as one of bountiful giving as Gurdjieff drew from his vast spiritual resources to pass on his profound knowledge. Yet the critics continued to have their say. A 1946 article in the French periodical *l'Illustration* accused Gurdjieff of spell-binding powers which sent his pupils into a "cataleptic state."

Gurdjieff's negative reputation even followed him to his grave. In the years following his death a number of critical articles were published in the French press which contributed to a distorted impression of Gurdjieff and his ideas. In the last few decades, however,

a new generation of scholars have looked more objectively at information promulgated by critics and the press about Gurdjieff, and have challenged the veracity of many of their allegations.

Exaggerated Knowledge and Abilities

Although Gurdjieff undoubtedly possessed an understanding of the human condition far surpassing that of most people, his knowledge and capacities were perhaps more modest than he claimed. Critics have accused Gurdjieff of arrogance, exaggeration and even megalomania. Psychiatrist Anthony Storr questioned his claim in *Meetings with Remarkable Men* that he knew eighteen languages, noting that there is no evidence to support this. Author Louis Pauwels challenged Gurdjieff's assertion in a 1923 pamphlet distributed in Paris that he had almost 5,000 adherents throughout the world and was conducting research in a number of scientific fields. According to Pauwels, "many of his statements were patently absurd . . . wholly misleading and untrue." (19)

Storr reproached Gurdjieff on a number of his pronouncements which contradicted accepted scientific knowledge:

Gurdjieff's arrogance and disregard of established experts were extraordinary. When he visited the caves of Lascaux, he told J.G. Bennett that he did not agree with the Abbé Breuil's dating of the rock paintings at thirty thousand years ago because he had concluded that the paintings were the work of a brotherhood that existed after the loss of Atlantis some seven or eight thousand years ago . . . He said that he had invented a special means of increasing the visibility of the planets and the sun and also for releasing energies that would influence the whole world situation. Gurdjieff's complete disregard for science and for the views of generally accepted experts is narcissistic in the extreme. (20)

Gurdjieff was not a certified doctor and did not possess any legitimate medical credentials. However, his followers were convinced that he had acquired a vast knowledge of the workings of the human body and mind. He frequently recommended unorthodox treatments to his pupils, including lengthy fasts, dietary regimes, olive oil enemas and breathing exercises. He used hypnosis and other unconventional methods to treat alcoholism, drug addiction, depression and sexual dysfunction.

During the 1920s and 1930s, when Gurdjieff began to rely on giving medical treatments and advice as a supplementary source of income, he found himself frequently in conflict with the medical establishment, who widely regarded him as a quack. In one instance, when one of his students vomited blood, Gurdjieff disputed the diagnosis of an intestinal ulcer by English physician James Young, but was subsequently proved wrong. In another case he interfered with the treatment of an alcoholic woman, which infuriated the attending physician. Some of Gurdjieff's methods, like hypnosis, are no longer considered out of the ordinary by contemporary medical practitioners. However, Gurdjieff's practices of diagnosing illness and prescribing treatment without any medical training were widely regarded by the medical authorities as irresponsible and dangerous.

Despite his lack of official credentials, Gurdjieff was considered to be a genuine healer by many of his pupils and associates. Accounts by students like Fritz Peters and others indicate that Gurdjieff was able to transmit subtle healing energy and to influence the psychological and physiological functioning of those he treated. On balance, the available evidence suggests that, while Gurdjieff possessed genuine healing abilities, he clearly overstepped ethical and professional boundaries in believing that he could provide appropriate medical treatment and advice to all who came to him for help.

Gender Attitudes

Gurdjieff's attitudes about women and gender roles were complex and often contradictory. Commentators have noted how infrequently women are mentioned in his major writings. (21) He firmly believed in a circumscribed role for women in daily life, insisting for example, that they should not make decisions or take responsibility in non-domestic matters. It is difficult to pinpoint what he truly believed about women as opposed to what was merely culturally conditioned or designed to shock or challenge prevailing attitudes and beliefs. John G. Bennett comments on this quandary: "This apparent disparaging attitude towards women has been the cause of considerable difficulty for modern people who wish to put this distinction aside. But it is remarkable that many women were not only very devoted but also very successful pupils of Gurdjieff and attained perhaps more than most of the men. The main difference is in the kind of relationship which is possible between teacher and male pupil and what he can do with a female pupil." (22)

When he did express his views about women, they appeared to many to be at best simplistic and naïve, and at worst hopelessly misogynistic (23). According to Bennett, Gurdjieff regarded women as only a means to an end – sexual satisfaction. The role of women, he claimed, was to nourish men and bear children, and under no circumstances was domestic life to be considered more important than the work of self-transformation. A.R. Orage reported that Gurdjieff once told him that "some women, whose proper roles are collaboratively spiritual and moral, need not bear and raise children in the interests of men, but others should do so to provide Earth with more seekers for truth." (24) And Orage reported that on more than one occasion Gurdjieff remarked that "the cause of every anomaly can be found in woman." (25)

Some of Gurdjieff's statements about women may have been in jest. In his writings he quotes Mullah Nasr Eddin: "The cause of every misunderstanding must be sought only in women." And, in a casual conversation he remarked, "Ask a woman's advice and do the opposite." (26) But clearly some of his beliefs were strongly entrenched in his psyche and may reflect his own cultural upbringing and conditioning (27).

A rebuttal to these criticisms is voiced by Nonny Kherdian, an artist and student of the Work, whose Armenian-American heritage provides a unique perspective when assessing

Gurdjieff's attitudes towards women and the effect of his own cultural upbringing, which mirror, to some extent, her own formative experience. (28):

One often hears disparaging remarks about Gurdjieff and his attitude toward women . . . Perhaps we see a very partial picture and he is really saying more than we can understand. Perhaps he is trying to tell us something about the Denying Force and that it has to be met by an equal Affirming Force. Or, perhaps women have taken on too much in their emotional centers to compensate for the lack of emotions in many men today. Perhaps we need to be more open to try to fully understand what he is trying to tell us instead of putting down judgments based on today's need to fight for women's rights. It would be good if we could open a dialogue about this to broaden our own understanding. (29)

Gurdjieff believed that the spiritual development of men and women proceed along fundamentally different lines. He taught that, in general, intellect is dominant in men and emotion in women: that women have a passive role in life compared to the active role natural to men (30). In a talk to his pupils in New York in 1924, he spoke of the essential difference between men and women: "In general, men have minds more developed; women, feelings more developed. Men are logical, women are emotional and instinctive. Men should learn to feel more, women to think more. You must think, feel and sense a thing before it can become real to you." (31)

Question: Can women work as well as men?

Answer: Different parts are more highly developed in men and women. In men it is the intellectual part, in women the emotional. Work in the Institute is sometimes more along the lines of [the intellectual part] in which case it is very difficult for the emotions. At other times it is more along the lines of [the emotional part], in which cases it is harder for [the intellectual part]. But what is essential for real understanding is the fusion of the intellectual with the emotional. This produces a new force. (32)

Gurdjieff sometimes asserted that the challenge for women is greater than for men because "women were more likely to allow their essential beings to be influenced by exterior considerations, so that women faced a more difficult task than men in ascending the scale of development from sensuous to emotional to intellectual to objective consciousness." (33) Yet, when asked whether women can develop as well as men on the path of self-transformation, he responded that both genders had equal chances:

He said very specifically that men and women have equal possibilities of inner development. He insisted on the difference in their types of natural energy, and the roles to be played in outer life in order to be in tune with them. But the work on oneself is the same for all, there is no difference. (34)

Gurdjieff made seemingly contradictory statements regarding the possibilities of spiritual growth for men and women. He told A.R. Orage that for men the work of self-development was blocked by the distracting presence of women and their sexual allure.

But, he also claimed that a woman could consciously collaborate with a man to promote the growth of both into spiritual wholeness: “It is absolutely necessary for every person, in the process of his responsible life, to have beside him a person of the opposite sex of corresponding type for mutual completion in every respect.” (35)

In group teaching situations at the Château du Prieuré during the 1920s, the respective roles of male and female students differed:

In the Study House men sat on the right and women sat on the left. On Saturdays, the men went alone with Gurdjieff to the Russian bath and there they heard many things that we were supposed not to repeat in the ears of women. After the Russian bath the men went privately to dine with Gurdjieff and the toasts, first of all, were given for men only . . . It was not until after his accident, when life at the Prieuré became more of a family affair than a work situation, that the segregation of men and women was modified. (36)

At his Institute at the Prieuré, Gurdjieff imposed strict rules for the women. They were only allowed to smoke in their rooms and not on the grounds or in the Study House. Jesse Orage, wife of A.R. Orage, shocked many of Gurdjieff’s pupils in the 1920s by dressing in trousers and smoking openly when she visited the Prieuré. She appears to be an exception among Gurdjieff’s female students at the time, as most of them diligently followed his strict rules for women.

In his personal life Gurdjieff had numerous sexual liaisons with women, many of them his students, and fathered at least eight children. But these relationships seemed strangely detached, with little apparent emotional connection: “If Gurdjieff’s casual couplings ever turned his head, seriously engaged his heart, or deflected his course of action by a hair’s breadth – the evidence is peculiarly lacking.” (37)

Gurdjieff’s relationships with the mothers of his children and his own offspring appear to be ambivalent. Some of the women (Elizabeta Stjernvall, Edith Taylor and Jessmin Howarth) were clearly confused, angry and resentful at Gurdjieff’s distance and lack of emotional support following the birth of their child. A.R Orage made an attempt to explain this situation as part of Gurdjieff’s overall vision for his children as carriers of spiritual truths for future generations: “Jessmin Howarth and Edith were chosen by Gurdjieff for this role. Gurdjieff worked for them, not as a potential husband or father in the usual sense of those words, but as guide. Edith had made the mistake of demanding husbandly affection and outward fatherly signs of care. By her demands, she had put into peril Gurdjieff’s projects for his children.” (38)

A number of his children, such as Nikolai de Stjernvall and Dushka Howarth, also expressed strong antipathy toward him as their father. Their relationship was sometimes affectionate, but also at times strained, as they resented his criticisms, demands for strict obedience to his wishes and attempts to control their lives (39). A striking example of such behaviour on the part of Gurdjieff occurred at a lunch at the Wellington Hotel in New York in 1948. In a baffling exchange, he confronted Jessmin Howarth in front of

the other guests for her supposed failures in rising their daughter Eva (whom he always called “Sophia”):

Gurdjieff had a penchant for shocking and badgering guests at his table. He seemed to wish to draw out self-revealing reactions from guests. Many reacted with anger, others with tears, and others with incomprehension . . . In the midst of the meal, he looked down from his position at the head of the table to the end of the table where Jessmin Howarth sat, and said loudly, “You, mother of Sophia!” . . . He railed at her for the way she treated her daughter. She had brought her up badly, she had failed to instill in her proper ideas of his ideas, and so on. As she seemed to wilt into her chair, and tears rolled down her cheeks, he increased his volume and intensified his tone. Jessmin remained silent, and the hurt in her aspect was painfully evident. Jessmin sat as if in a trance . . . When later I had asked my mother [Edith Taylor] why Gurdjieff had done this to Jessmin, she said quietly: “He shocks people to see how they respond to him.” (40)

Supporters of Gurdjieff have noted that, despite the gender inequalities evident at the Prieuré during the 1920s and Gurdjieff’s traditional conservative beliefs regarding women (41), many of his female students played significant roles in his teaching mission. Many of his most prominent and successful pupils were women, including respected authors Margaret Anderson and Kathryn Hulme. Olga de Hartmann was Gurdjieff’s personal secretary for many years and was integrally involved in the practical running of the Prieuré. He entrusted Jane Heap, Henriette Lannes and Jeanne de Salzmänn to transmit his teachings to future generations. Jeanne de Salzmänn, in particular, played a decisive role, having taught Movements classes for many years under Gurdjieff’s direction, led study groups in Paris during the 1930s and 1940s and later assumed leadership in the continuation of Gurdjieff’s teaching after his death.

Many observers have commented on the enigma of the women-only group known as ‘The Rope’ created by Gurdjieff in the 1930s. The members were all strong, successful women, largely lesbian, who did not subscribe to traditional gender roles for females. Yet, Gurdjieff placed great importance on the group and used its members to experiment with many innovative teaching methods, both individually and collectively. The existence of ‘The Rope’ contradicts many of Gurdjieff’s written and stated beliefs regarding the possibilities of women’s spiritual development. It highlights the fact that Gurdjieff’s teaching relationship with women was complex and not easily understood by outside observers.

Travelling Adventures

The advent of the automobile age ushered in unexpected adventures for pupils of Gurdjieff and a new creative method of teaching. Gurdjieff learned to drive in 1923, and for the next 26 years he used automobiles for a succession of personal trips and excursions with pupils throughout the European countryside.

By all accounts Gurdjieff was a terrible driver. “In reality he was so dangerous a driver that his followers avoided being driven by him whenever possible.” (42) He taught himself entirely by personal experiment, accompanied by the sounds of grinding gears and squealing brakes. According to Gurdjieff’s niece Luba, his driving style was wildly erratic – he would speed up and slow down unpredictably and change course and direction at a moment’s notice. He also drank alcohol before and during the motor trips, and at times was so drunk he was unable to drive. Pupils described him as driving like a man possessed. Kathryn Hulme vividly captures the experience:

He drove like a wild man, cutting in and out of traffic without hand signals or even space to accommodate his car in the lanes he suddenly switched to . . . until he was in them, safe by a hair . . . he always got away first on the green light even (so it seemed) when he was one or two cars behind the starting line . . . the chances he took overtaking buses and trucks were terrifying. I watched with suspended breath each time he swung out around a truck and headed directly into another coming toward him on the narrow two-lane road. (43)

Hulme’s terrifying experience driving with Gurdjieff during his outings was not an uncommon event, as testified by family members and numerous pupils:

- “Terrible, terrible driver” (Luba Gurdjieff)
- “Wild, reckless, daring, exhausting” (Jean Toomer)
- “He would sometimes speed up to 75 mph over primitive road conditions . . . at one point he raced a motorcycle and nearly crashed.” (Elizabeth Gordon)
- “Once on the road to Fontainebleau, he tramped on the gas, passing by inches the cars ahead . . . or, when halfway past a vehicle, slowing down, the cars and trucks behind screeching brakes and blaring horns.” (Solita Solano)
- “Gurdjieff’s driving was very erratic. Even with the person responsible for reading the maps sitting next to him, we did not always arrive at our destinations by the shortest, most direct route. Once Gurdjieff made a turn, he would never go back or retrace his steps. We took many detours in this way.” (Louise March)
- “Within the first hour or two, I learned quickly enough that travelling with Gurdjieff was not an ordinary experience . . . He drove his car as if possessed. We would tear along the roads at a high rate of speed for a few hours, then he would stop abruptly to spend hours at a café in a small town.” (Fritz Peters)
- “Despite a first, and then a second serious car accident, G.I. loved to drive his many cars. He drove, alas, terribly. He neither had mechanical sense nor observed the rules of the road. He took little notice of distances between cars. Even when I was very young, each time I was a passenger in one of his cars, I

closed my eyes and braked mentally as soon as I saw him start one of his crazy daring maneuvers on the road in defiance of any caution.” (Nikolai de Stjernvall)

Gurdjieff was involved in at least four automobile accidents, most of them not his fault, but one of them so serious that it almost cost him his life. In July 1924 while returning home to the Château du Prieuré from Paris late at night he crashed his car at high speed. (44) He was found unconscious in his car the next morning and did not fully recover from his injuries for many months. Nevertheless, soon after the accident he attempted to get behind the wheel again. His secretary Olga de Hartmann thwarted his plan by surreptitiously cutting the car’s accelerator cable.

Even near the end of his life, Gurdjieff demanded to drive even though his physical capacities had severely atrophied. John Bennett describes one of his final rides and the dangers experienced:

When he got up to go, I saw that he could scarcely walk. I had to lift his legs into the car, and was nearly in tears to see how his condition had deteriorated. In spite of his weakness, he insisted on driving himself, although his legs were so swollen that he had not the strength to put on the brake. It was the most terrifying car drive of my life. Crossing the Avenue Carnot, a large lorry bore down on us. Gurdjieff could not even slow down. By a miracle we crossed the street, but he could not turn the car. He let it run down and just succeeded in pulling up. (45)

During the last two decades of his life Gurdjieff took frequent trips by car, throughout France and neighbouring countries. These trips served a dual purpose. First, Gurdjieff used these excursions and the new impressions they brought to stimulate his writing and re-energize his body. He would work on the manuscripts of *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men* in cafés, wayside inns or in his car.

The second purpose of his trips was to create deliberate difficulties and challenges for his pupils as food for self-observation and self-study. (46) The memorable excursions through the countryside produced “a flood of intense impressions” by constantly creating a succession of unexpected events and avoidable problems with the intention of observing and testing his students in “difficult practical situations.” Kathryn Hulme described these travelling sorties as teaching moments; “When Gurdjieff took us on his travels, he taught directly from the ‘book of life,’ a marvelously enlightening aspect of his teaching, which left us without a shred of illusion.” (47) Students have recounted the typical confusion and uproar surrounding Gurdjieff’s travel departures:

His departures were always disconcerting. Very often he would fix a time for going and would be ready half an hour earlier when those invited to go with him had to drop their preparations and rush to join him in the car. At other times, he would suddenly decide to work on *Beelzebub* and would sit at the wheel of the car for half an hour or an hour while everyone waited to know whether he would leave . . . Some people avoided going in his car [because of his notorious driving] and preferred to follow behind, which he only rarely permitted. (48)

Biographer James Webb describes some of the frequent and unnecessary problems on Gurdjieff's journeys deliberately created by his "carelessness" or instigation:

Gurdjieff would appoint a map reader – and decline to consult him. He would refuse to stop for gas until he ran out – whereupon one of the passengers would have to trudge back to the nearest village. He never carried a spare tire, and so, if a puncture occurred, the tire had to be repaired, not replaced. (49)

Gurdjieff's intractable behavior on trips was not limited to automobile travel. Fritz Peters accompanied his teacher on a train journey from New York to Chicago in the 1930s, and was driven to the point of exasperation. His outrageous behaviour and disregard for the sensibilities of his fellow passengers was classic Gurdjieff, as he was "smoking incessantly despite passengers' complaints and threats from the porter, drinking heavily, and intermittently producing foods – mainly evil-smelling cheeses – all the time apologizing profusely to the irate passengers even while inventing new ways to annoy and offend." (50)

While tales of Gurdjieff's wild and unpredictable behavior during trips may seem amusing, his dangerous driving, especially under the influence of alcohol, and his wanton disregard for the rules of the road, were clearly irresponsible.

Despite all the unexpected and unnecessary travails, there was clearly a deeper purpose to the seemingly chaotic road and travel excursions. The trips were replete with "all kinds of difficulties, adventures and breakdowns. He never travelled alone, but took with him pupils to whom he wished to give new impressions and trials of attention and quickness of wit, and not only adults but also children, sometimes very small ones." (51) Olga de Hartmann captured these 'teaching moments' in *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*:

These trips, though often to holiday places, were nothing like conventional holidays. They continued to be learning experiences for everyone, often in most unexpected ways. A task given to one person might seem like nothing at all to the others, but cause much inner suffering to the one who had to find the strength to perform it. And on the contrary, a task that might seem cruel to everyone else could bring an experience of growth and understanding to the one who received it. (52)

Commentary

Gurdjieff, like many other historical and contemporary spiritual teachers, was shadowed by controversy throughout his life. It is important to separate fact from fiction, reality from imagination, and objective reporting from subjective interpretation and personal motivation in evaluating the validity of the various accusations leveled against him.

In hindsight, much of the controversy and criticism surrounding Gurdjieff during his lifetime was based on bias, selective reporting, misunderstanding and superficial assessment. The same holds true for many of the critical arrows directed at Gurdjieff by outside critics and commentators in the decades following his death.

However, first-hand accounts expressing doubts and criticisms of Gurdjieff's behaviour, beliefs and teaching methods by many of his pupils carry more weight and should not be dismissed out of hand. P.D. Ouspensky, Fritz Peters, Jean Toomer, John G. Bennett and others have voiced varying degrees of skepticism about Gurdjieff's infallibility as a teacher, a healthy counterbalance to the adulation, personality worship and unquestioning obedience of some of his followers.

The limits of Gurdjieff's knowledge, beliefs and abilities is also open to question. There is little doubt that in many instances Gurdjieff deliberately exaggerated or stretched the truth for teaching purposes, role playing or as part of the 'Path of Blame.' But in other cases, he appeared to hold beliefs that were incorrect, suggesting that he was certainly not infallible. Perhaps the best example was his trip with John Bennett and other students to the Lascaux caves in France in 1949. When Bennett mentioned that the caves had been carbon dated to be at least 30,000 years old, Gurdjieff vehemently disagreed, citing a much later date which coincided with his beliefs about ancient history. Gurdjieff was so set in his beliefs that he was unable to adjust or modify them even when new, more accurate information was presented to him. Subsequent archeological research has confirmed the dates suggested by Bennett. The certainty with which Gurdjieff made medical diagnoses and provided his own interventions and treatments without any medical supervision is also open to valid criticism.

Gurdjieff also held very strong, conservative traditional beliefs regarding the role of women, patriarchal authority and other manifestations of a male-dominated cultural order. From the perspective of the 21st century many of these attitudes appear rigid and uncompromising. Were these attitudes and beliefs reflections of 'objective knowledge' or coloured by historical and cultural influences and conditioning? It is telling that many of his senior Russian students cautioned newcomers to the Prieuré to make a distinction between the spiritual teachings that Gurdjieff imparted and his own personal beliefs.

Gurdjieff also had his defenders among the ranks of his pupils. Some suggested that he was often misunderstood because he used humour – jokes, jests, irony, sarcasm – to reveal the absurdity of the human situation. Fritz Peters acknowledged and accepted the possibility that Gurdjieff had a dual nature:

I was not at all disturbed by his lack of morals in the usual sense; it did not matter to me that he had illegitimate children, that he drank a great deal, or that he might have been a "magician" or a "charlatan" or as he called himself – a "devil." He began to seem to me in a very literal, paradoxical sense, the embodiment of that excellent phrase, "a real, genuine phony." That *he* grew in such a way that the evil and the good within him progressed equally – I accepted whole-heartedly. (53)

John G. Bennett was well aware of Gurdjieff's strengths as a teacher of inner development, but also recognized his imperfections:

It was largely through having the benefit of his most extraordinary search and sacrifice that I and others have had possibilities . . . I owe very much to him. This isn't to say that he didn't make mistakes, or that he found the best way of helping people in this day and age. But he was a pioneer of extraordinary courage – daring one might say – he tried things that people had not tried before and under different conditions of life than we have here . . . But it is totally foolish to think of him as infallible. Even the perfected man is not free from mistakes. The further one goes, the more pitfalls . . . (54)

During the 1930s, at the depth of Gurdjieff's inexplicable behaviour, Jean Toomer was one of his principal critics. However, to his credit, he was able to accept a counter explanation, provided by Gurdjieff himself for his baffling actions and utterances, which marked a turning point in his evaluation of his teacher:

Gurdjieff had said some extremely interesting things which threw light on his apparently shameful conduct during the past months. In order to restore himself, particularly his body, it was necessary that he suffer. In order to suffer he had deliberately done things to people and situations which would enter into his automatic processes and of themselves cause suffering and make him suffer whenever he remembered them. An amazing idea, an amazing intention! If it was to be credited, it fully explained why he had manufactured scandal after scandal, trouble after trouble during the past months. (55)

Toomer further related that Gurdjieff told him, in regard to his motives and methods, that he saw an incomplete picture of what Gurdjieff was intentionally trying to achieve and accomplish: "The means are mine. You look for the results in yourself . . . You can see only the present. I see in terms of a hundred years." (56)

Other senior students have pointed out that many aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching and methods have been misunderstood and misinterpreted. Olga de Hartmann writes in an unpublished manuscript: "So many stupid stories have been written about Mr. Gurdjieff, and so many lies and misrepresentations have been heaped on his head. We all did suffer to stay with him and try to understand his teaching. But it was a kind of suffering through which he could challenge us to develop an understanding in ourselves." (57)

Perhaps biographer Roger Lipsey sums it up best when he argues that the value of a teaching cannot be meaningfully evaluated by outsiders or academics. In *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy*, he concludes:

The decisive test of the value of any teaching or way is not so much its ideas and practices as it is the quality of the men and women who participate: how they are, how they relate, how they act, what they care for, what they strive to further. The literature critical of Gurdjieff and his teaching would be smaller and wiser if authors lacking a sense of kinship, or at least a bridge of some kind from here to there, passed by in silence. (58)

NOTES

- (1) James Moore *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 176.
- (2) Louis Pauwels *Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), p. 154.
- (3) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 421.
- (4) Moore refutes the allegations in James Moore *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991, p. 343):

The aspersion that Gurdjieff abused Katherine Mansfield sexually need not be dignified by comment; the accusation that his Prieuré regime hastened her death gives insufficient weight to her extended pathological history . . . The allegation that Gurdjieff caused the death of his eminent French pupil René Daumal is at variance not only with the viewpoint of Daumal's widow Vera but with the explicit letter of his brother Jack Daumal . . . And finally the charge that Gurdjieff precipitated the 'suicide' of the young Irene-Carole Reweliotty conflicts both with her death certificate and her mother: both attribute her death to heart disease following a long history of pulmonary tuberculosis.

- (5) Guénon's denunciation of Gurdjieff is sometimes attributed to a meeting between Guénon and Alexander de Salzmann, a senior student of Gurdjieff. According to author James Webb, de Salzmann, who possessed a sharp wit, insulted Guénon by making fun of the latter's feigned humility.
- (6) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 126.
- (7) Nikolai de Stjernvall *My Dear Father Gurdjieff* (Dublin: Bardic Press, 2013), pp. 6-17.
- (8) Annabeth McCorkle *The Gurdjieff Years 1929-1949: Recollections of Louise Goepfert March* (Utrecht, the Netherlands, 2012), pp. 29-30.
- (9) George Adie studied with Gurdjieff in the late 1940s. In an insightful observation, he later told his own Australian students that Gurdjieff was not infallible and made mistakes. But he knew how to correct them. In a thoughtful, scholarly analysis of Gurdjieff's life, Joseph Azize, one of Adie's pupils, offers a sober assessment: "Gurdjieff had many faults and miscalculated often . . . He worked with Orage [but] Gurdjieff sabotaged his own efforts. It may have been a mistake, pure and simple." (*Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises* New York: Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 302-303).

- (10) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), p. 320.
- (11) Joseph Azize *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 171.
- (12) Joseph Azize *Gurdjieff: Mysticism, Contemplation, & Exercises* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 22.
- (13) In the period of 1934-1935 Toomer met with Gurdjieff numerous times and was shocked by his appearance and physical health: “He was in a bad way. His health was poor . . . He looked like he had been drawn through a mill, was laboring under a heavy ceaseless strain physically and mentally.” Toomer’s psychological assessment of Gurdjieff during this period was bleak (William Patrick Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009, p. 316):
- Gurdjieff considered no one but himself, he had a way of making his needs and difficulties seem a thousand times more vast and portentous than mine or yours, that he was stronger and wiser than any of us . . . Gurdjieff was like a wheel gone off its axle careening down the road with mad velocity, smashing into things right and left, caring for nothing and nobody. Only his writings, his great books, remained.
- (14) William Patrick Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009), p. 316.
- (15) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), pp. 422-423.
- (16) James Moore *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 343.
- (17) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 469.
- (18) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 244.
- (19) Louis Pauwels *Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), p. 165.
- (20) Anthony Storr *Feet of Clay* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 36.
- (21) Philosophy professor Henry Leroy Finch elaborates in “The Sacred Cosmos: Teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* (New York: Continuum, 1996, p. 24):

What bears further discussion is Gurdjieff's attitude in general toward women. The whole cosmic fable, in both its heavenly and earthly dimensions, is virtually exclusively populated by men. Not even wives are mentioned. In fact, there is only one woman to be found anywhere in the Gurdjieff corpus, a woman named Vitvitskaia, and she, we are told, 'dressed like a man.' While Gurdjieff autobiographically has a lot to say about his father, he has almost nothing to say in writing about his mother . . . There are nowhere descriptions of affairs or relations with women. Romance and sex do not exist in this atmosphere of religious importance.

- (22) J. G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 231.
- (23) In a transcript of a Paris meeting with his students in 1943, when asked how a man should act towards a woman, he opined in highly offensive language: "Every woman should feel herself a man's slave. This is the property of women, they are made that way. For that there is a law. You ought to represent the boss, the master. If you are like that, she, without manipulation, without anything (it always happens), becomes your slave." (G.I. Gurdjieff *Transcripts of Gurdjieff's Meetings 1941-1946* London: Book Studio, 2009, p. 19)
- (24) Paul Beekman Taylor *Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser Books, 1998), p. 144.
- (25) Paul Beekman Taylor *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser Books, 2001), p. 243.
- (26) Nonny Kherdian "The Question of Vitvitskaia and the Place of Women in the Gurdjieff Work" in David Kherdian, ed. *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014), p. 17.
- (27) Gurdjieff advocated separating women from men during their menstrual periods due to his questionable belief that women's personalities during their menses became intolerable and even "psycho-organically harmful" to others. In *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1950, p. 1113) he quotes with approval the "unchangeable truths" supposedly enunciated by King Solomon:

Women during their menstruation are, in the consecrated sense, unclean; and that during these periods, for others, and especially for their husbands, not only to touch them, but to speak with them, is the highest sacrilege and a crime. An unclean force or evil spirit will enter into those husbands or into men in general who touch or even speak with them during this period; in consequence of which there would be among men in their everyday relations and affairs only misunderstandings, quarrels, and enmity.

- (28) In “The Question of Vitvitskaia and the Place of Women in the Gurdjieff Work” in David Kherdian, ed. *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014, pp. 21-22) she writes:

I would like to add a note here about Gurdjieff’s background with regards to women and its connection with my own Armenian-American upbringing. Gurdjieff grew up in a Greek and Armenian family living in Armenia where women were always considered the equals of men – different but equal. The home was their domain, and that was true in my home as well. I lived with my parents and my paternal grandparents and there was no question that the women were in charge of the home. At the same time, the men were treated as most honored beings . . . I have never met an Armenian woman who did not consider herself the equal of a man. My understanding is that Gurdjieff never tries to hold us down in any way, nor does he ask us to be subservient to men but that we should rightfully take our place as women – not to confuse our roles with those of men – but to be *active as women* in the role of the second force, the Holy Denying Force, and thus to allow the actualization of the third force into our lives.

- (29) Nonny Kherdian “The Question of Vitvitskaia and the Place of Women in the Gurdjieff Work” in David Kherdian, ed. *A Stopinder Anthology* (Mount Desert, Maine: Beech Hill Publishing, 2014), p. 17.

- (30) In *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972, pp. 114-115), Fritz Peters reported an exchange between Gurdjieff and his pupils which clarified his teaching about the roles of men and women in life and in the process of inner work and development:

I was surprised and puzzled when he spoke on the subject by his reiteration of the fact that not only was his work “not for everyone” but that “women did not need it.” He said that the nature of women was such that “self-development” in his sense of the phrase was something that they could not achieve. Among other things, he said: “Nature of woman is very different from that of man. Woman is from ground, and only hope for her to arise to another stage of development – to go to Heaven as you say – is *with* man. Woman already know everything, but such knowledge is of no use to her, in fact can almost be like poison to her. Unless have man with her. Man have one thing that not exist in woman ever: what you call ‘aspiration.’ In life, man uses this thing – this aspiration – for many things, such as climbing mountains, all wrong for his life, but *must* use because have such need. Look at life around you: Man write music, paint pictures, write books, all such things. Is way, he thinks, to find Heaven for self . . . I tell you, world all mixed up. True man and true woman not just one sex – not just male or female. True human is a combination of these things: active and passive, male and female . . . It is not necessary for woman to do the work of man in world. If woman can find real man, then woman become real woman without necessity of work.”

- (31) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1974), p. 22.

- (32) G.I. Gurdjieff *Gurdjieff's Early Talks 1914-1931* (London: Book Studio, 2014), p. 312.
- (33) Paul Beekman Taylor *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* (York Beach, Maine: Weiser Books, 2001), p. 243.
- (34) Pauline de Dampierre “The Search for Being” in Jacob Needleman, ed. *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. 88.
- (35) G.I. Gurdjieff *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 56.
- (36) J. G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 231.
- (37) James Moore *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), p. 2.
- (38) Paul Beekman Taylor *Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer* (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1998), p. 144.
- (39) Details of Gurdjieff’s complex relationship with some of his children can be found in Nikolai de Stjernvall’s *My Dear Father Gurdjieff* (Dublin: Bardic Press, 2013) and Jessmin and Dushka Howarth’s *It’s Up To Ourselves: A Mother, A Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2008).
- (40) Paul Beekman Taylor *Real Worlds of G.I. Gurdjieff* (Utrecht, the Netherlands: Eureka Editions, 2012), pp. 145-146.
- (41) Gurdjieff’s conservative view of women and how they should or should not behave in public is vividly captured in an exchange between Gurdjieff and pupil Margaret Anderson (‘Kanari’) in a Paris café in 1936. (William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* Fairfax, California: Arete Communication, 2014, pp. 317-318):

Toward the end of dinner, Kanari casually brings out her compact and powders her nose. Gurdjieff erupts, making himself look terrifying, veins standing out on his forehead as he shouts: “I am Oriental and man. Never can I see woman making prostitute thing without my insides turning over. Never has woman sat in my presence and painted face. I see you make now six times and each time if I had had knife in my hand I wish send it through your heart. This is seven times and finish. At Prieuré no woman ever dare smoke before me. This idiot fashion put paint on face exist only New York and in territory around Place Opéra. Only prostitute make in other places. If you wish make this

thing, you must in water closet go. Now you must remember that you are one of Mr. Gurdjieff's people and pupil. Me, I am Gurdjieff, and compared to me you are shit non-entity."

- (42) Nikolai de Stjernvall *My Dear Father Gurdjieff* (Dublin: Bardic Press, 2013), p. 19.
- (43) Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country: In Search of Gurdjieff* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 66.
- (44) Biographer James Moore discusses the mysterious circumstances of this accident at length in *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (Rockport, Massachusetts: Element Books, 1991), pp. 206-207.
- (45) John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (Tucson: Omen Press, 1974), p. 270.
- (46) Some of the difficulties instigated by Gurdjieff border on the inane, as if he was testing the limits of his driving companions' patience and resilience. Fritz Peters describes one such recurring predicament in *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 129-130.

In addition to the hazards of tyre repairs and finding ourselves almost constantly on the wrong road, there was no way that Gurdjieff could be induced to stop for gasoline. Whatever the gas gauge might read, he would insist that we could not possibly be out of gasoline until the inevitable moment when the motor would begin to cough and splutter and, although he would curse it loudly, the car would stop. Since he was rarely on the proper side of the road, it would then be necessary for everyone to get out of the car and push it to one side of the road while some individual would be selected to either walk or hitch-hike to the nearest gas station and bring back a mechanic. Gurdjieff insisted on the mechanic because he was positive that there was something wrong with the car; he could not have done anything so simple as run out of gas.

- (47) Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country: in Search of Gurdjieff* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 137.
- (48) J. G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), pp. 167-168.
- (49) James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), p. 323.
- (50) Whithall Perry *Gurdjieff: In Light of Tradition* (Bedfont, Middlesex: Perennial Books, 1978), p. 81.
- (51) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 242.

- (52) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 243.
- (53) Fritz Peters *Gurdjieff Remembered* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1971), pp. 74-75.
- (54) J.G. Bennett *The Way to Be Free* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1980), p. 31.
- (55) William Patrick Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009), pp. 319-320.
- (56) William Patrick Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2009), p. 312.
- (57) Roger Lipsey *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2019), p. 259.
- (58) Roger Lipsey *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2019), pp. 259-260.