

## THE GURDJIEFF LITERATURE: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

This annotated bibliography is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather includes the most significant and essential works by or about Gurdjieff. Many of the titles are currently out of print or difficult to find, but with some diligence they can usually be obtained from second-hand bookstores or websites specializing in hard-to-obtain books. The titles listed in this bibliography are presented in the order of original date of publication in English.

### WRITINGS AND TALKS OF GURDJIEFF

G.I. Gurdjieff *Herald of Coming Good* (1933)

Gurdjieff's first publication, subtitled "First Appeal to Contemporary Humanity," was initially printed in 1933 but was soon retracted by the author who warned others not to read the book. The writing style is somewhat comparable to *Beelzebub's Tales*, but is much more rambling, disjointed and unorganized (the first sentence is 283 words in length!). Although the book does contain some interesting information on Gurdjieff's early years and his search for esoteric knowledge, it can best be described as a largely unsuccessful experiment, with value mainly as an historical curiosity.

G.I. Gurdjieff *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man* (1950)

*Beelzebub's Tales* is Gurdjieff's magnum opus, universally considered to be his most important work. At over 1,200 pages, it is a cosmic allegory of epic proportions written in the style of a science fiction novel. It contains, in encrypted form, the essence of Gurdjieff's psychological and cosmological teachings. The central figure in the book is the wise and compassionate Beelzebub, who relates to his grandson Hassein a series of teaching tales and reflects on the evolution and development of humanity from an objective, cosmic perspective.

*Beelzebub's Tales* has always provoked strong reactions from critics and reviewers. Assessments have ranged from "the ravings of a madman" to "a work of objective art." When the book was first published in 1950 it was greeted with near unanimous contempt from the American and British literary establishments, who were baffled by its writing style and content. In recent years, however, *Beelzebub's Tales* has been reappraised by a new generation of scholars and students of the Work who are more receptive to the inner dimensions of the book.

One of the major difficulties in approaching the book is Gurdjieff's complex, intricate writing style and his frequent use of multisyllabic words (neologisms) of his own invention: terms such as 'klananoizufarab' and 'heptaparaparshinokh' abound throughout the text. Gurdjieff deliberately challenged the reader through the complexity of his ideas and his unusual style of expression, which demand sustained attention to

unravel the fabric of the narrative. It has been reported that Gurdjieff carefully studied the reaction of his audience during readings of early drafts of *Beelzebub's Tales*, and subsequently revised the manuscript "to bury the dog a little deeper." He may have buried it too deeply, however, as many passages are almost incomprehensible to all but those having a thorough grounding in Gurdjieff's ideas. Nevertheless, repeated and careful readings of the book eventually yield a rich tapestry of insights into the human condition and the nature of the universe.

G.I. Gurdjieff *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1963)

The second series of Gurdjieff's writings was originally written to be read aloud within the circle of his students. The published text was reworked from the original Russian manuscript and the first English translation by A.R. Orage. Gurdjieff's purpose in the second series was "to prove that there exist other ways of perceiving reality, and to indicate their direction."

The book is semi-autobiographical and describes Gurdjieff's personal search for answers to the fundamental questions of life. Although he provides many glimpses of his early life and the sources of his knowledge, the information presented is clearly not to be taken as entirely factual. There is no historical evidence that any of the persons described in the book, other than Gurdjieff's father, actually existed. Rather, these characters should be seen as psychological composites, representing different human types and varieties of authentic spiritual seekers.

The style, tone and content of the book differs completely from *Beelzebub's Tales*. The writing is simple and direct, reading like a series of teaching stories, much like the Eastern classic *A Thousand and One Nights*, that embody various approaches to truth. Each chapter is devoted to a particular aspect of Gurdjieff's life, from his childhood and the loving influence of his father to his journeys throughout Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia in search of esoteric knowledge with his companions, the "Seekers of Truth." Teaching material is presented through the book's observations, conversations, and relating of adventures and experiences, all of which are designed to suggest a new way of approaching life that acknowledges and aspires to a higher order of reality.

The last section of the book, entitled "The Material Question," was not included in the original manuscript but was added in the first published edition. It contains a lengthy response by Gurdjieff to a question posed during a group meeting in April 1924 concerning his financial resources. It reveals Gurdjieff's ingenious and cunning (some might say unscrupulous) ability to raise significant sums of money for his enterprise.

G.I. Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (1973)

This important volume consists of talks, lectures and conversations with Gurdjieff as recollected by his pupils between 1917 and 1930. Students were not permitted to take notes during Gurdjieff's talks and the preservation of these lectures is a testament to the

incredible memory of his pupils. Immediately following each session with Gurdjieff and without his knowledge, students made notes essentially reconstructing what they had heard. Over the years the original notes were gradually collected and compared under the direction of Jeanne de Salzmann, and even tested for accuracy by reading them aloud to pupils who had heard the original talks.

Although the book is not a direct transcription of Gurdjieff's exact words, it does provide an authentic glimpse into the way he presented his ideas and challenged his pupils. The notes are admittedly incomplete and in some cases fragmentary, and some of the text is confusing, as material is taken out of context or presented randomly. The book should not be considered a substitute for Gurdjieff's own written work. *Views* also includes "Glimpses of Truth," an anonymous account by a Russian pupil of a visit with Gurdjieff in 1914 that was occasionally read to newcomers as an introduction to some of Gurdjieff's ideas. The book concludes with a set of aphorisms by Gurdjieff inscribed above the walls of the Study House at the Château du Prieuré.

G.I. Gurdjieff *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am"* (1975)

This publication of Gurdjieff's third series is a preliminary and fragmentary draft of what he intended to write. In May 1935, Gurdjieff decided to stop writing entirely, leaving this book incomplete. The text consists of a lengthy prologue, an introduction and five talks delivered by Gurdjieff to his New York students in the 1930s. The final chapter, "The Inner and Outer World of Man," is unfinished, breaking off in mid-paragraph.

In a sense this is Gurdjieff's most personal book, in that he reveals many of his innermost thoughts and feelings as well as autobiographical details of his extensive search for esoteric knowledge. The talks to the New York groups describe a "shock" given to A.R. Orage (who was in charge of the groups) when Gurdjieff recognized an imbalance in Orage's presentation of his ideas and attempted to rectify it.

The third series was not originally intended for publication and was left unfinished because it had already served its purpose. Chapters were read aloud to senior students at particular times and in certain situations in order to achieve a calculated spiritual effect.

## **BOOKS WRITTEN BY STUDENTS OF GURDJIEFF**

P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (1949)

Piotr Demianovich Ouspensky was a prominent Russian journalist, mathematician and intellectual in 1915 when he first met Gurdjieff in Moscow. *In Search of the Miraculous* is a fascinating account of his years of study with Gurdjieff and is generally considered the most accessible introduction to Gurdjieff's ideas. Ouspensky began work on the manuscript in 1925 and continued refining the text for nearly two decades. It remained

unpublished at his death in 1947, but with Gurdjieff's permission and encouragement was eventually published in the autumn of 1949.

The book is characterized by an unusual degree of objectivity and clarity. It is unparalleled as an exposition of Gurdjieff's psychological and cosmological ideas in the Russian phase of his teaching, from 1915 to 1918. The nature of group work and Gurdjieff's demands on his closest pupils are recounted with unwavering honesty and unforgettable impact.

The book follows a definite structure in which ideas are initially introduced, then subsequently elaborated on and clarified to build in the reader a comprehensive understanding of the essential concepts of the Work. The cosmological aspects of the teaching are accompanied by numerous diagrams and tables that clarify many of the more difficult concepts. As the book's subtitle implies, Ouspensky includes only selected aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching, since much of it can only be successfully passed on from teacher to pupil through oral transmission.

Students reported that when the manuscript of *In Search of the Miraculous* was first read to him Gurdjieff exclaimed: "Before I hate Ouspensky; now I love him. This very exact, he tell what I say." Nevertheless, Gurdjieff stressed that his own book *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* should be considered the definitive source for expression of his ideas.

More than 60 years after its publication, *In Search of the Miraculous* has retained its power as one of the most brilliant and challenging spiritual books ever written. It is widely regarded in spiritual circles as a masterpiece of objective reporting.

#### P.D. Ouspensky *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* (1950)

This series of five lectures, originally designed to be read aloud at weekly meetings of students under the direction of Ouspensky, is an introduction to and a distillation of the basic psychological ideas transmitted by Gurdjieff. Ouspensky constantly revised the material from 1934 until shortly before his death in 1947 to achieve the most precise and lucid presentation of the material. The style of writing is provocative and somewhat dogmatic, designed to challenge the reader's preconceptions and beliefs. As some commentators have noted, although Ouspensky presents the essence of Gurdjieff's psychological teachings in a succinct, accessible form, "reading them as a book gives practically no measure of the scale and time needed to realize, even partially, the ideas which are expressed."

#### Kenneth Walker *Venture with Ideas* (1951)

Dr. Kenneth Walker was a prominent London surgeon when he first met P.D. Ouspensky in 1923. He studied intensively with Ouspensky for 25 years, then in 1948 met and worked with Gurdjieff for more than a year in France. *Venture with Ideas* combines autobiographical accounts of his association with Ouspensky and Gurdjieff with brief sketches of the basic psychological and cosmological ideas of the teaching.

The book's primary value is the intimate descriptions of Walker's two teachers and his personal perspectives on his own inner work.

Maurice Nicoll *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of G.I. Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky* (1952-1956)

Maurice Nicoll, a London physician who had trained with Carl Jung, met Ouspensky in 1921. He was introduced to Gurdjieff in 1922 at his Institute at Fontainebleau, France where he worked closely with Gurdjieff for a year. He subsequently returned to England and studied under Ouspensky for many years before eventually being given permission to lead his own study groups.

The five-volume *Commentaries* consist of lectures, letters and papers prepared for the study groups under his direction between 1941 and 1953. They are a detailed and precise description of the psychological and cosmological ideas he learned from Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, formulated almost like a classroom presentation. Some of the material is drawn verbatim from Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*. Although the *Commentaries* largely reflect Nicoll's own understanding of the ideas expounded by his teachers, they are also infused by his own profound understanding of esoteric Christianity and other spiritual traditions.

Nicoll's exposition of the practical teachings of 'work on oneself' is sharply focused and clearly written. However, the ideas are often presented randomly or loosely following the order of Ouspensky's formal lectures to his students. The overly structured format deprives them of their living, organic function to challenge and awaken the inner consciousness of the reader. The writing is reflective of the times, wartime and post-war Britain, and is coloured by a somewhat gloomy, pessimistic view of human nature.

P.D. Ouspensky *The Fourth Way* (1957)

*The Fourth Way* consists of verbatim transcriptions from Ouspensky's talks to his students as well as answers to questions posed to him during his group meetings from 1921 to 1946. The volume was prepared largely under the supervision of Mme Ouspensky and the chapters are organized subject by subject in a specific order. Many of the questions from his pupils reveal their lack of insight and understanding, and Ouspensky's responses often carry a tone of impatience bordering on exasperation. The format and style of the book is stiff and artificial and, with few exceptions, the content adds nothing new to material contained in the vastly superior *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Kenneth Walker *A Study of Gurdjieff's Teaching* (1957)

Walker's second book chronicles his relationship with Ouspensky and Gurdjieff; it outlines those aspects of Gurdjieff's teaching which were most significant and made the

deepest impression on him, while acknowledging the impossibility of transmitting the full import of such ideas solely through the printed word. Although his presentation of the psychological and cosmological ideas closely follows the format of Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, and essentially adds nothing new to the existing literature, he does make a number of interesting links to Western and Eastern scientific, philosophical and religious sources. The final chapter contains aphorisms and sayings of Gurdjieff taken from the Study House at the Château du Prieuré and abstracted from meetings held in the early 1920s.

René Daumal *Mount Analogue* (1959)

René Daumal was a writer and Sanskrit scholar who was Gurdjieff's first French pupil. *Mount Analogue* is his unfinished novel, written in the form of a spiritual allegory. The book narrates the adventures of an expedition of wisdom-seekers as they attempt to ascend the mythical Mount Analogue. Their struggle with various inner and outer obstacles symbolizes the human search for meaning and spiritual fulfillment. By turns poetic, symbolic and humorous, *Mount Analogue* is considered in many esoteric circles to be a masterpiece of allegorical literature.

Margaret Anderson *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (1962)

Anderson was the founder and editor of an important American literary magazine, *The Little Review*, before she met Gurdjieff. She studied intermittently with him from 1924 until his death in 1949. The book is a passionate account of her work with Gurdjieff as part of a group of women who went by the name 'The Rope.' The focus of the book is on the personal teacher-student relationship and the dynamics of inner work, rather than a formal presentation of Gurdjieff's ideas. Particularly vivid are the descriptions of Gurdjieff's teaching technique of applying "shocks" to reveal each pupil's persona or mask in order to awaken their real self.

C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil* (1962)

Nott was a young Englishman who first came into contact with Gurdjieff and his students in 1924 at a public demonstration of sacred dances in New York City. The dances made a powerful impression on him and he became a life-long student of both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

The book is a clearly written, insightful account of the impact and cumulative effect on Nott of the practical work in an esoteric school. It is a compendium of the sayings and teachings of Gurdjieff, as well as a rich description of life at the Château du Prieuré in France, compiled from Nott's notes and diaries from the time. The text also contains a valuable compilation of A.R. Orage's talks to groups in New York entitled "Orage's Commentary on Beelzebub."

Kenneth Walker *The Making of Man* (1963)

*The Making of Man* is less philosophical and more personal and autobiographical than Kenneth Walker's two earlier books on Gurdjieff. Describing his 25-year involvement with Ouspensky and Gurdjieff, Walker contrasts Ouspensky's dry and austere teaching style with the robust, confrontational approach of Gurdjieff. Like all of Walker's books, *The Making of Man* is written in a clear and intelligent manner, presenting a balanced appraisal of his many experiences at the hands of his two spiritual teachers.

John G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: A Very Great Enigma* (1963)

This short book consists of three lectures delivered by Bennett in England in 1963. The first lecture examines Gurdjieff's background, early life and environment, while the second speculates on the sources of his knowledge. The final lecture deals with Gurdjieff's practical, yet often unorthodox teaching methods. Although the text is somewhat rambling and unorganized in places, it does include interesting material from Bennett's research into the sources of Gurdjieff's teaching.

Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (1964)

This memoir, now a classic, was first published in 1964 and later revised and expanded in 1992 as a "definitive edition." Thomas de Hartmann was integrally involved in the composition and performance of much of Gurdjieff's music while Olga de Hartmann served as Gurdjieff's personal secretary for many years. Their memoir, with alternating narratives by the two authors, covers the years from 1917 to 1929. It relates the epic and grueling journey of Gurdjieff and his pupils during the turbulent period of the Russian Revolution and afterwards through many countries of Eastern and Western Europe.

The book presents a portrait of Gurdjieff as he moves through a landscape of confusion and turmoil while "welcoming each difficulty and danger as a new opportunity for practical teaching." The style of writing is innocent, even simplistic, and comes from the writers' hearts. Both Olga and Thomas de Hartmann were very faithful to Gurdjieff and his teaching, and their uncritical perspective emanated from their attachment and devotion to their teacher. Nevertheless, *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* has taken its place as one of the most honest and revealing descriptions of the nature of inner work under the guidance of a master.

Fritz Peters *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (1964)

Fritz Peters, who spent four years in the 1920s at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Château du Prieuré in France, was only 11 years old when he first met Gurdjieff. The book is charming, innocent and humorous,

providing many insights into the way Gurdjieff worked with both children and adults. His relationship with the children of the Prieuré is vividly described and characterized by “rigorous demands tempered with warmth and humanity.” *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* has become a classic of the Gurdjieff literature, retaining its appeal and freshness 40 years after its publication.

Fritz Peters *Gurdjieff Remembered* (1965)

The sequel to *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* focuses on Fritz Peters’ recollections of his personal and sometimes stormy relationship with Gurdjieff as a young adult. The book tells of his encounters with Gurdjieff in New York and Chicago in the 1930s and in Paris just before Gurdjieff’s death. By this point, Peters has lost his innocence, and his writing has a more jaded and somewhat bitter tone than his first volume. In Peters’ own words, “Life with Gurdjieff was unpredictable, difficult, infuriating, sometimes hilarious, and, in its own peculiar way, rewarding.”

One of the highlights of the book is Peters’ uproarious account of a long train trip to Chicago with an inebriated Gurdjieff, who managed to annoy virtually everyone on the train. However, Peters also captures Gurdjieff’s humanity and deep insight into the human condition by documenting a series of personal conversations with Gurdjieff over two decades.

Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country* (1966)

American author Kathryn Hulme, who later wrote *The Nun’s Story*, first encountered Gurdjieff in 1932. She was part of a group of talented, independent women studying with Gurdjieff called ‘The Rope’ (an allusion to their spiritual and psychological interdependence). The book is a very personal, emotionally-charged spiritual autobiography that vividly captures the exotic atmosphere created by Gurdjieff at his apartment in Paris, stocked with every kind of delicacy and foreign foodstuff. Gurdjieff’s humanity and ability to work with all types of spiritual seekers is conveyed by Hulme with passion and sensitivity.

C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World: The Second Journal of a Pupil* (1969)

Nott’s second journal of his experiences with Gurdjieff and Ouspensky is a companion to his *Teachings of Gurdjieff*. It relates events and meetings with A.R. Orage, Ouspensky and Gurdjieff in Europe and America between 1927 and 1949. He also describes time spent with Frank Lloyd Wright and his wife Olgivanna at their Taliesin community in Wisconsin. His tone and style are similar to his first book, and his insights into the nature of ‘work on oneself’ just as valuable, but the content, with its primary emphasis on Ouspensky’s teaching, is not as interesting or satisfying.



Irmis Popoff *Gurdjieff: His Work on Myself with Others, for the Work* (1969)

Irmis Popoff studied with Ouspensky in America from 1941 until his death, and then worked with Gurdjieff when he visited students in New York City in 1948-49. The first part of the book focuses on Ouspensky's presentation of the theoretical side of the Work and includes a vivid portrait of Mme Ouspensky and how she provided practical, unsparing work for the emotional centre of her pupils. The most interesting sections describe her impressions of Gurdjieff and how he consciously worked with pupils to relentlessly challenge them to become "real beings made in the image of God." The author also includes secondary material on the Movements and the enneagram.

Although the quality of the awkwardly titled book is uneven, and in many places very subjective, she manages to convey a reasonably accurate picture of her two principal teachers and the atmosphere surrounding them during this important period.

William Welch *What Happened in Between* (1972)

Dr. William Welch and his wife Louise were prominent members of Gurdjieff's New York groups. He was the attending physician at the time of Gurdjieff's death and later served as president of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York. This autobiography chronicles his early life, professional career and, most significantly, his relationship with Gurdjieff. Although the personal reminiscences of his teacher comprise only a small part of the book, they provide many illuminating examples of how Gurdjieff taught and interacted with his pupils. Particularly moving is his chapter on Gurdjieff's final days and what Dr. Welch characterizes as his "dying an honorable death."

John G. Bennett *Witness: The Autobiography of John G. Bennett* (1974)

John Bennett was one of Gurdjieff's most gifted pupils and this fascinating autobiography is a record of his passionate search throughout his life for the sense and purpose of existence. During his long journey in search of spiritual truth he met some of the most significant spiritual teachers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including P.D. Ouspensky, Gurdjieff, Pak Subuh and Idries Shah. Bennett writes with great sincerity and candour, revealing many of his own weaknesses and failings, and providing clear insightful portraits of his various teachers and fellow seekers. Although Bennett's search followed a wildly eclectic trajectory, there is no doubt that he regarded Gurdjieff as the most important spiritual influence in his life. The chapters on Gurdjieff are particularly revealing and testify to Bennett's great respect for Gurdjieff and his teachings.

Anna Butkovsky-Hewitt *With Gurdjieff in St. Petersburg and Paris* (1978)

The author, who first encountered Gurdjieff and his teachings in St. Petersburg in 1916, was one of Gurdjieff's first Russian pupils. The book is a warm memoir of her relationship with Gurdjieff and her romantic involvement with P.D. Ouspensky. Butkovsky-Hewitt vividly captures the intense atmosphere of revolutionary Russia at the time Gurdjieff's ideas were first introduced. Written more than 50 years after the actual events, the book suffers from a number of factual inaccuracies and lapses of recall which render it a less than fully accurate account of the times.

A.L. Staveley *Memories of Gurdjieff* (1978)

Annie Lou Staveley met P.D. Ouspensky in England and later studied with Jane Heap for many years. Heap and her students travelled to Paris on numerous occasions in the years 1946-49 to work with Gurdjieff. Her recollections of these visits form the centrepiece of *Memories of Gurdjieff*, a book she was encouraged to write by John Pentland. Staveley describes this period as "a golden time" and there is no doubt that Gurdjieff had a profound impact on her spiritual development. Her slim volume poignantly captures the grandeur of Gurdjieff and the unique way he taught his students. The book concludes with an insightful afterword which addresses some of the challenges facing the Work in today's world and the nature of the teacher-student relationship.

Jean Vaysse *Toward Awakening* (1979)

Dr. Vaysse was a French surgeon who studied with Gurdjieff in the 1940s. This English translation of previously published material describes the central psychological ideas of Gurdjieff and is reminiscent of Ouspensky's *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution* in style and structure. Vaysse clarifies many psychological concepts with examples from everyday life and offers an interesting perspective on self-study and self-observation. The final chapter, which examines an important Gurdjieff exercise that links attention with sensations of the body, is especially useful.

René Zuber *Who Are You, Mr. Gurdjieff?* (1980)

This concise volume by René Zuber, a French film director and student of Gurdjieff, was first translated into English in 1980. It is a valuable record of Gurdjieff's teaching style during the years of the German occupation of France. Particularly vivid are the descriptions of Gurdjieff's sometimes harsh interactions with the pupils at his dinner table ("you are *merde*"), contrasted with revealing glimpses of Gurdjieff's deep humanity and compassion.

John and Elizabeth Bennett *Idiots in Paris* (1980)

The title of the book refers to the ‘Toasts to the Idiots,’ an elaborate ritual performed at Gurdjieff’s table involving the consumption of generous quantities of food and alcohol. The book combines the diary entries of John and Elizabeth Bennett during the months before Gurdjieff’s death in October 1949. The raw, unedited diary entries capture the charged atmosphere surrounding Gurdjieff, the otherworldly ambience of his Paris apartment and the subtle, parabolic way in which he taught.

John Bennett’s diary extracts reveal his often painful inner struggle in the face of Gurdjieff’s direct and powerful teaching. Elizabeth Bennett’s sections are more descriptive of the milieu and personalities of the time, but also relate her own private difficulties and resulting personal insights.

Louise Welch *Orage with Gurdjieff in America* (1982)

In the late 1920s, Louise Welch, a devoted pupil of A.R. Orage, met Gurdjieff at the Prieuré and became a close student until his death. The book describes her years in the New York group led by Orage, who is revealed as a gifted writer, editor, friend and teacher, and provides insight into the complex and sometimes troubled relationship between Orage and Gurdjieff. Simply and honestly written, the book conveys the flavor of the contrasting teaching styles of Orage and Gurdjieff, and sheds light on some of the pivotal events in their lives.

P. D. Ouspensky *A Further Record* (1986)

This volume consists of verbatim extracts from group meetings conducted by Ouspensky between 1928 and 1945. Grouped by subject matter, the material contains detailed answers to questions posed by students (“whether these questions were naive or profound”). The format and style are similar to *The Fourth Way*, but the book is essentially a rehash of previously expressed ideas.

Rina Hands *Diary of Madame Egout Pour Sweet* (1991)

Rina Hands was a member of one of John Bennett’s English groups when she met and studied with Gurdjieff in Paris in 1948-49. The French word “egout” means sewer or drain and refers to the honorary title bestowed upon her by Gurdjieff when she took part in his ritual meals and ‘Toasts to the Idiots.’ Originally intended as a private diary, it recounts her personal experiences at the time and provides sketchy impressions of Gurdjieff and his pupils. Her effort is well-intended but falls far short of the quality of other, more perceptive memoirs by Gurdjieff’s students during the same period.

P.D. Ouspensky *A Record of Meetings* (1992)

The book is similar to *A Further Record* and is based on transcripts of Ouspensky's meetings and lectures between 1930 and 1947. The material is structured chronologically and consists of densely structured questions and answers to subjects or issues almost randomly grouped. The reader will likely find the going too heavy for the scant payoff.

Luba Gurdjieff *A Memoir with Recipes* (1993)

Luba Gurdjieff, the daughter of Gurdjieff's younger brother Dmitri, recounts in a simple, light-hearted style some of her experiences growing up at the Château du Prieuré. Luba clearly has mixed emotions toward Gurdjieff whom she describes as patriarchal, demanding and "a big bully." She tells us very little new about Gurdjieff, and the best feature of the book is her hearty recipes from the London bistro she owned for many years.

Henri Tracol *The Taste for Things That Are True* (1994)

A former French photojournalist and close pupil of Gurdjieff for nine years, Henri Tracol later served as president of the Gurdjieff Institute in France. First published in France in 1983 and later translated into English in 1994, the book is a collection of essays, talks, articles and interviews covering a period of almost 50 years. Although the content is uneven and many of the sections are tangential to the Work, Tracol does present an interesting perspective on many of the fundamental metaphysical questions of life. The chapters devoted to Gurdjieff and his ideas are the most insightful and reveal Tracol's deep understanding of 'inner work.'

Jane Heap *The Notes of Jane Heap* (1994)

Jane Heap met Gurdjieff in New York City in 1924, became a pupil of A.R. Orage, and later studied with Gurdjieff at the Prieuré. She led her own group in Paris and in 1935 was sent by Gurdjieff to London to teach. There she made notes for talks to her groups and after her death they were collected and a selection published as *The Notes of Jane Heap*. The focus of the notes is on the practical, experiential side of the Work, especially the barriers to self-observation and self-remembering and the value of sustained attention of the sensations of the body. Although Heap often provides real insights into the application of Gurdjieff's teachings to everyday life, many of the selections are fragmentary and only hint at the depth of the ideas being explored. All but the most experienced Work practitioners will find the going hard and, for most readers, the rewards will probably be few and far between.

Jacob Needleman & George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and his Teaching* (1996)

This important volume of essays, interviews and personal accounts of Gurdjieff and the impact of his teaching is a translation of a book originally published in France in 1992. The text is divided into a number of sections: explorations of the relevance of Gurdjieff's ideas to modern culture and contemporary psychological and scientific paradigms, comparative studies with other spiritual traditions, descriptions and discussions of Gurdjieff's music and Movements, and personal experiences and teaching encounters related by students of Gurdjieff.

Like many anthologies, the quality of the contributions by students of the Work and leading authors in the sciences, humanities and the arts, is somewhat uneven. Some chapters, like those attempting to relate Gurdjieff's teaching to Freudian and psychoanalytic concepts, often make comparisons that are artificial and without substance. But other chapters, especially those written by students who had direct experience with Gurdjieff's teachings, music and Movements, are illuminating and original studies: "the breadth of interest and expertise represented by the authors testify to the scope and depth of his teaching." The personal reminiscences of pupils who actually worked with Gurdjieff are perhaps the most moving and valuable contributions to this excellent anthology.

John Pentland *Exchanges Within* (1997)

The subtitle of the book aptly describes its contents: "Questions from Everyday Life from Gurdjieff Group Meetings with John Pentland in California 1955-1984." Pentland was appointed by Gurdjieff in 1949 to lead the Work in America, served as the first president of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York, and established the Gurdjieff Foundation of California.

In these records of exchanges with Fourth Way students, he provides precise guidance in the practical work of self-study and direct experience of oneself, and the barriers preventing real inner growth. Pentland is at pains to avoid definitive answers to the questions, choosing instead to "encourage a deeper questioning and further experience" by throwing the question back to the student, forcing them to examine their underlying motives and assumptions. Some may find the material dry and repetitive, while others may argue that a question and answer format can never capture the living, organic nature of spiritual transmission as it "freezes" the teaching in a form that may not be relevant to those in other times and different circumstances.

Paul Beekman Taylor *Shadows of Heaven: Gurdjieff and Toomer* (1998)

*Shadows of Heaven* details the complex relationship between Gurdjieff and Jean Toomer, an American poet and novelist. Toomer was a student of Gurdjieff from 1924 to 1935 and was involved in teaching, organizing study groups and fundraising. In

compiling the book, Taylor draws on the unpublished diaries of Jesse Orage (wife of A.R. Orage), private letters and the memoirs of his mother Edith Taylor who had a child by Gurdjieff and who later fell in love with Toomer.

There is a strong personal element running through the book as the author attempts to explore and understand his relationship with both men. Taylor tries to be objective, but his ambivalence towards Gurdjieff and his close relationship with Toomer, who adopted and helped raise him, clearly colours his perspective.

Paul Beekman Taylor *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* (2001)

This scholarly and densely footnoted volume relies heavily on letters written by A.R. Orage and on the unpublished diaries of his wife Jessie. It captures the complex, intense relationship between Gurdjieff and Orage and casts new light on the split between the two men and the role Jessie Orage played in their separation. Gurdjieff clearly disapproved of Orage's marriage to Jessie, whom he regarded as an impediment to his student's important role as a "helper-instructor" in disseminating his Fourth Way teachings to a wider audience. The book also reveals Orage's ongoing frustration with Gurdjieff's relentless demands for money and the challenging task of editing the rough manuscript of *Beelzebub's Tales*. Taylor's obvious respect and admiration for Orage is evident throughout the text, but he seems misguided in his attempt to elevate Orage to virtually the same spiritual level as Gurdjieff.

Paul Beekman Taylor *Gurdjieff's America* (2004)

Taylor's ambitious book examines Gurdjieff's fascination with America, the American psyche and its culture. The author provides detailed accounts of each of Gurdjieff's trips to America between 1924 and 1949, highlighting his interactions with students and prominent writers, journalists, artists and other members of the cultural elite. The book is seriously flawed by too much irrelevant, secondary information and not enough thoughtful analysis. The reader is soon overwhelmed by inconsequential detail as Taylor is guilty of "missing the forest for the trees." This is a text that clearly needed a strict and accomplished editor.

Solange Claustres *Becoming Conscious with G.I. Gurdjieff* (2005)

Originally published in France in 1999, *Becoming Conscious with G.I. Gurdjieff* was translated into English in 2005. Claustres worked closely with Gurdjieff in Paris from 1941 to 1949 and later became one of the leading Movements teachers in the Work. She recounts her experiences with Gurdjieff in a series of illuminating vignettes which illustrate the way in which he challenged his pupils and showed the path to a higher state of being. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the volume is her descriptions of the practical application of Gurdjieff's teachings "in our current life, just as it is," and the

inner exercises he provided his students to fully integrate body, mind and feelings into a harmonious whole. The book concludes with some technical notes on the Movements, sayings and aphorisms of Gurdjieff and brief descriptions of some of the key ideas from his teachings. Solange Claustres has given the world a real gift through her heartfelt description of what it means “to become conscious and responsible for oneself.”

Tcheslaw Tcheckhovitch *Gurdjieff: A Master in Life* (2006)

Tcheckhovitch met Gurdjieff in Constantinople in 1920 and studied with him until his death in 1949. The book is essentially a series of recollections of Gurdjieff and the way he worked with his students, rather than an exposition of his ideas. Tcheckhovitch writes in a simple, almost innocent style and was clearly in awe of Gurdjieff. Although many of his anecdotes of his life with Gurdjieff are very revealing of the master’s ability to show his pupils their weaknesses and the proper direction of inner work, the author sometimes turns ordinary, mundane events into exaggerations of Gurdjieff’s abilities and actions (Gurdjieff improvises by using the heel of his shoe as a hammer). Nevertheless, it is an honest account of one student’s experiences at the hands of a teacher who was both open and direct, but also bafflingly enigmatic in the way he taught his pupils.

Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (2008)

*The Inner Journey*, part of an eight-volume Anthology series exploring the world’s great spiritual traditions, is a collaboration between *Parabola*, a quarterly journal of myth and tradition, and Morning Light Press. The selections in the book were drawn from articles appearing in *Parabola* over the last 30 years. The volume is similar in structure and content to *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching* which was also edited by Jacob Needleman.

The book is divided into sections whose order reflects the stages of spiritual development, from ‘sleep’ to ‘awakening.’ Needleman provides an excellent, informative introduction which has been separately published as *Introduction to the Gurdjieff Work* (Morning Light Press, 2009). Many of the selections are by direct students of Gurdjieff while others are excerpts from the writings of Gurdjieff and P.D. Ouspensky. The interviews and essays by Gurdjieff’s pupils have a particular impact as they convey the way in which he worked with his students to reveal the nature of the ‘prison’ which enslaved them, while directing them to the central aim of his teaching: “the struggle, whatever the conditions of our lives, to awaken to the gift that descends from above.” Although there is an uneven quality to some of the sections, the anthology is undoubtedly a significant addition to the Gurdjieff literature.

Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: a Mother, a Daughter and Gurdjieff* (2009)

Jessmin Howarth was a pupil of Gurdjieff at the Prieuré in the 1920s and eventually became one of the principal and most respected Movements teachers in the Work. Her daughter, Dushka, was fathered by Gurdjieff. This mother/daughter memoir weaves recollections, conversations, private correspondence, documents and personal opinion in a loosely chronological format.

The tone and content of much of the book is superficial, almost gossipy, but does shed light on Gurdjieff's somewhat tense relationship with his children and their mothers, and clarifies some of the important events in Gurdjieff's life by those who were first-hand witnesses. Perhaps the most interesting feature of this book is the large collection of photos, many previously unpublished, of Gurdjieff and his followers.

Jeanne de Salzmänn *The Reality of Being* (2010)

When Jeanne de Salzmänn met Gurdjieff in 1919 in Tiflis it completely altered the direction and significance of her life. During the next 30 years she worked closely with Gurdjieff and, following his death, was entrusted with the preservation and continuation of his teachings. For almost 40 years, beginning in the 1950s, Mme de Salzmänn recorded, in a series of notebooks, her thoughts and reflections on the nature of reality and the teachings transmitted to her by Gurdjieff. These journal entries have been edited by family members and others and published, two decades after her death in 1990, as *The Reality of Being*. The material has been structured according to themes that follow an order which reflects the stages of inner work.

In her words we hear the voice of a questioning spirit which, much like the writings of Krishnamurti—whom she greatly admired—continually challenge our established beliefs, world-view, and understanding of the nature of the spiritual path which she describes as “an opening to a sense of the *unknown*.” Mme de Salzmänn is eminently practical as she returns again and again to the centre of gravity of ‘work on oneself’—impartial self-observation, awareness of sensation and the flow of energy in the body, receptivity to a higher energy from above, and self-remembering. She writes with the authority of her own deep personal spiritual understanding, while paying homage to her own teacher who she regards as a “master who by his very presence awakens and helps others in their search for consciousness.” *The Reality of Being* is a worthy companion to Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men* and P.D. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* as exemplary expositions of the perennial teaching of human spiritual transformation. It is destined to become a classic in the literature of Fourth Way studies.



## SECONDARY AND ANCILLARY LITERATURE

Rodney Collin *The Theory of Celestial Influence* (1954)

This author studied with Ouspensky from 1936 to 1947, and at one point was given the task of classifying and organizing the contemporary sciences according to the basic principles of Ouspensky's teaching. In a sense, *Celestial Influence* is a reformulation of the ideas of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky into a scientific framework. Collin attempts to reconcile the many facts of science from an esoteric perspective, central to which is the acknowledgement of the underlying unity and interdependence of the cosmos.

Some of the chapters, especially those dealing with the shape, growth and evolution of human civilizations, make for fascinating reading. However, much of his scientific knowledge is out of date and does not support his hypotheses. Ultimately, the book is a noble failure. Despite challenging our conception of the universe and the meaning of human existence, it fails to integrate esoteric ideas with scientific knowledge.

Louis Pauwels *Gurdjieff* (1964)

Pauwels was a French author who took part in study groups led by Gurdjieff's pupils, but who later became disenchanted with the teachers and the teaching. His book, which was first published in France in 1954, is an anthology that intersperses previously published articles, excerpts from books and personal correspondence in an attempt to present both the strengths and weaknesses of Gurdjieff and his ideas. The book adopts an almost prosecutorial tone: two sections are even called "Witness for the Prosecution" and "Witness for the Defense."

When first published this book was swiftly dismissed by the Gurdjieff establishment as a "hatchet job" which gave a distorted picture of Gurdjieff and the nature of his teaching enterprise. Indeed, the book repeats some of the most outlandish and unsubstantiated rumours about Gurdjieff: he was a secret intelligence agent for the Russian Tsar; he contributed to the death of the writer Katherine Mansfield; he was directly responsible for the suicides of some of his students. The book is also replete with factual errors and inconsistencies, and deserves the condemnation that it received by Gurdjieff's followers when it was first published.

Rafael Lefort *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* (1966)

When first published in 1966, *The Teachers of Gurdjieff* created a strong negative reaction among Gurdjieff's followers since the events recounted in the book, including purported meetings with some of Gurdjieff's teachers, were obviously invented. Rafael Lefort (an anagram for "Real Effort") is widely believed to be a pseudonym for Idries Shah, the Sufi author and teacher. One of the more controversial claims about Gurdjieff is that the source of his teaching can be traced to Sufism.

The book should not be arbitrarily dismissed. When read as a series of fables or teaching stories to illustrate a certain perspective, it reveals its function, to those readers sensitive to its inner energy or *baraka*, as a call to question the current state of Gurdjieff studies and as a summons to return to an authentic contemporary expression of the perennial spiritual teaching of human transformation and evolution. The text continually challenges the reader's assumptions about the current state and relevancy of the Work: "as is the way of all movements once their founder has left them, divisions have appeared among the disciples, different interpretations are given to his teaching methods, and in some quarters groups have tended to fossilize."

Robert de Ropp *The Master Game* (1968)

Robert de Ropp was a distinguished research scientist who met P.D. Ouspensky in 1936 and studied with him for many years before briefly meeting Gurdjieff. *The Master Game* was very influential in the "counterculture" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and became a surprising best seller when many Western seekers were discovering Eastern spiritual teachings. The book is a wide-ranging exploration of Western and Eastern approaches to the development of higher consciousness, and attempts to synthesize these teachings into a coherent whole which de Ropp calls "Creative Psychology." But there is no doubt that his primary influence was the teachings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. De Ropp writes in a no-nonsense, sometimes cynical, style and his scientific background is evident throughout the book as he evaluates various spiritual schools of thought with a dispassionate, critical eye. His book remains relevant to this day.

Kathleen Speeth *The Gurdjieff Work* (1976)

The author was born into a family who were students of A.R. Orage and Gurdjieff, and has been connected to the Work throughout her life. She attempts to distill the essence of Gurdjieff's psychological and cosmological teachings by briefly describing some of his key ideas. A number of diagrams and illustrations accompany the text. The purpose of the book was to provide a clear, approachable introduction to Gurdjieff and his teachings. Unfortunately her presentation lacks depth and substance, depriving the ideas of their real weight. The result, in the words of Michel de Salzman, is "a completely indiscriminating mixture, all on one level, of information of diverse sources, qualities and credibility."

Whithall Perry *Gurdjieff: In Light of Tradition* (1978)

Perry's material was originally published as a series of essays in the journal *Studies in Comparative Religion* (1974-1975). He is affiliated with the traditionalist school of Frithjof Schuon and René Guénon, which holds that authentic spiritual transmission and initiation can only occur in the context of a formal religious tradition like Christianity or

Islam. Gurdjieff's behavior and unorthodox Fourth Way teachings were routinely attacked by proponents of this school of thought.

Gurdjieff's background, teaching and reputation are examined and evaluated with supporting documentation drawn from the Gurdjieff literature. Unfortunately, many of the quotations are either prejudicial or taken out of context, which could mislead the uninformed reader. Perry's critical perspective has been criticized by followers of Gurdjieff and others as subjective, unbalanced, even polemical.

J.H. Reyner *Gurdjieff in Action* (1980)

This book is based on a series of talks given to study groups in England by John Reyner, who studied under Maurice Nicoll for fifteen years. The importance of the practical application of Work ideas is stressed and some of Gurdjieff's cosmological concepts are briefly outlined. Reyner writes clearly and expresses Gurdjieff's teachings in his own voice, but the reader is left with the feeling that nothing new is being said.

James Moore *Gurdjieff and Mansfield* (1980)

James Moore is the author of the major biography *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* and a longtime student of the Work in England. This book examines the brief relationship between Katherine Mansfield, a well-known English writer, and Gurdjieff during the last months of her life when she stayed at the Château du Prieuré. The material is the result of meticulous research from primary source documents, including Mansfield's letters to her husband, and puts to rest the false claim that Gurdjieff contributed to her untimely death. Moore is an unswerving defender of Gurdjieff and tends to lack objectivity. The book is also marred by a rather mannered writing style which at times distracts from the narrative.

Kathleen Speeth and Ira Friedlander *Gurdjieff: Seeker of the Truth* (1980)

The book is essentially an historical travelogue of Gurdjieff's youth and search for esoteric knowledge, arranged in roughly chronological order and interspersed with quotations and teachings from various spiritual traditions. The volume is illustrated with historic black and white photographs which capture the atmosphere of the geographical regions and countries that Gurdjieff ostensibly visited. Much of the narrative is speculative and in some instances may border on pure imagination, as the authors offer scant evidence to support many of their assertions. The most useful feature of the book is an extensive bibliography on Gurdjieff, compiled by Walter Driscoll, and later expanded as *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland, 1985).

Michel Waldberg *Gurdjieff: An Approach to His Ideas* (1980)

This book is an expansion of a lecture originally delivered in 1966 in Paris by the French academic Michel Waldberg. This is an intelligent and original work, not the mechanical rehashing of ideas found in many books about the Work. Waldberg's fresh, penetrating perspective connects and weaves together complex ideas in a very creative manner. The commentaries on Gurdjieff's *Beelzebub's Tales* are especially illuminating.

Walter Driscoll *Gurdjieff: An Annotated Bibliography* (1985)

This volume is a researcher's dream, as it exhaustively catalogues virtually everything written by and about Gurdjieff from 1919 to 1984. With well over 1,100 descriptive entries of English-language references and many more in French and other languages, this annotated bibliography is a comprehensive and definitive work. The book also contains an introductory essay by Michel de Salzman on the Gurdjieff literature, several bibliographies of Gurdjieff's most prominent pupils and a lengthy title index. The content is scholastic with editorial comments for some references. The only shortcoming is that the bibliography is perhaps *too* comprehensive: many citations contain only a passing reference to Gurdjieff, such as entries in certain novels and periodicals, and are really of little value or consequence. A second revised edition has been in the works for many years and its publication is eagerly awaited by students and researchers of the Fourth Way.

Charles Tart *Waking Up* (1986)

Tart is a well-known American psychologist and consciousness researcher who has published extensively in the field of transpersonal psychology. *Waking Up* examines Gurdjieff's psychological thought through the lens of contemporary Western psychology, linking many of Gurdjieff's ideas to concepts like projection, rationalization and denial. The book is intended to be a practical textbook for identifying the obstacles that block the achievement of full human potential. Tart discusses in detail some of the spiritual practices employed in the Work like self-observation, self-remembering and group work. However, at times Tart oversimplifies and reduces powerful esoteric ideas to the level of popular psychology and he misses very important spiritual dimensions of Gurdjieff's teachings.

Robert de Ropp *Self-Completion* (1988)

Robert de Ropp's compelling book, written shortly before his death, is a summation of his life-long search for spiritual knowledge and answers to the fundamental questions of life. He begins by surveying the complex and dynamic relationship between "God, Man and Cosmos" from the perspectives of scientific knowledge and ancient esoteric

teachings. Turning his attention to the nature of human spiritual development, de Ropp contrasts “Fantasy Work” with “Real Work.” He draws from multiple sources to illustrate his thesis, but the psychological and cosmological teachings of Gurdjieff clearly form the cornerstone of his arguments. Although de Ropp’s tone is acerbic, his insights are real and challenge the reader to evaluate their most cherished beliefs and assumptions about the spiritual path and the nature of human evolution and transformation.

David Kherdian *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub* (1991)

An accomplished poet and novelist with an engaging writing style, David Kherdian studied at the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York under John Pentland. He eventually became disenchanted and moved to a communal setting in Oregon, where he worked with Annie Lou Staveley, a pupil of Jane Heap. Eventually Kherdian broke with Staveley and began to teach on his own.

Kherdian’s descriptions of the tense, humourless atmosphere of the Gurdjieff Foundation in the early 1970s contrasts sharply with the utopian idealism of his Oregon experience. Although Kherdian is unsparingly honest in his questioning of himself, his teachers and the teaching, the constant critique becomes rather wearing.

Ravi Ravindra *Heart Without Measure* (1991)

Ravi Ravindra, a Professor of Comparative Religion at Dalhousie University in Halifax, worked closely with Jeanne de Salzmann for almost 20 years. During this period he kept a journal recording his reflections and teaching encounters with Mme de Salzmann. He was encouraged to publish his journal entries by senior members of the Gurdjieff Foundation; the result is a well-written and perceptive account of spiritual work with an extraordinary teacher. Included in the book are selections of “Remarks of Madame de Salzmann,” extracted from the text, which convey the essence of the teachings she transmitted to her students. Ravindra’s deep gratitude to his teacher is clearly displayed throughout the book: “Her being called me towards an authentic existence and demonstrated its possibility.”

William Patterson *Eating the “I”* (1992)

Spiritual autobiographies risk exposing an author’s weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and this volume by a student of John Pentland is no exception. The content spans many decades and covers a great deal of territory, both geographical and psychological. Although written in an honest and engaging style, there is just too much material about Patterson’s personal and professional experiences which seem only indirectly related to his transformational work. Patterson puts Gurdjieff and Pentland on a pedestal and the reader may wonder, in light of the conflicted relationship with his father, if Patterson was

really looking to these men for a father figure. Despite the drawbacks, the book is an interesting and useful exploration of the dynamics of intense inner work

John Fuchs *Forty Years After Gurdjieff* (1994)

After studying with John Pentland for many years, John Fuchs was asked to direct the Gurdjieff group in Denver, Colorado. His small book is clearly written and eminently practical, showing how 'work on oneself' can be practised in the circumstances of daily life by using our own personal experiences to develop consciousness and awareness. He provides many practical exercises based on his own experiences in the Work, which are applicable to beginners and advanced students alike.

William Patterson *Struggle of the Magicians* (1996)

*Struggle of the Magicians* explores the complex relationship between Gurdjieff and three of his leading students: P.D. Ouspensky, A.R. Orage and John Bennett. The book's major thesis is that the three could not assist Gurdjieff in his special mission to introduce Fourth Way teachings to the West because they were unable to overcome their respective personality flaws or 'chief features.' The author does a skillful job of cross-referencing multiple sources (many not easily accessible to the general public) and synthesizing a myriad of details against the historical backdrop of the first half of the twentieth century. The book is not without significant flaws. Some of the characters from Gurdjieff's *Meetings with Remarkable Men* are treated as actual historical figures (e.g. Professor Skridlov and Madame Vitvitskaia), without any supporting evidence for this belief. More importantly, Patterson virtually canonizes Gurdjieff and constantly rationalizes his behaviour. Patterson borders on arrogance as he attempts to evaluate the spiritual caliber of Ouspensky, Orage and Bennett and tries to impute motives to Gurdjieff's behaviour.

William Patterson *Taking with the Left Hand* (1998)

This erudite book consists of three sections, each devoted to an aspect of the inevitable deterioration of higher ideas over the course of time. The first two parts, penetrating critiques of the contemporary misuse of Gurdjieff's enneagram symbol and the cult-like school of Robert Burton, are excellent. The third section, which examines the relationship between the ideas of Gurdjieff, Boris Mouravieff and the Eastern Orthodox Church, is not nearly as interesting and amounts to an intellectual spat. Although Patterson states that he "didn't like writing this book," he has provided a real service to discriminating seekers through his persuasive scholarship.

William Patterson *Ladies of the Rope* (1999)

‘The Rope’ was the name chosen by a group of independent and progressive women, most of whom (ironically, in light of Gurdjieff’s beliefs) were lesbians, to describe themselves and their spiritual work under the tutelage of Gurdjieff during the 1930s. The expression is an allusion to the support climbers provide to each other during the perilous ascent of a mountain. The heart of the book examines the complex interactions between Gurdjieff and members of the group. It clearly demonstrates the fluid and organic quality of Gurdjieff’s methods: the language and form of his teaching during this period bears little resemblance to his earlier presentations of the Work in Russia and at the Prieuré. It is much more practical and immediate, grounded in the reality of everyday lived experience, with less emphasis on theory and conceptual understanding. Gurdjieff is seen as a powerful charismatic teacher with penetrating insight into the inner life of his students and an uncanny ability to reveal to them their ‘chief feature’ or obstacle to real spiritual development. Like all of Patterson’s books, *Ladies of the Rope* is well-researched and clearly written.

William Patterson *Voices in the Dark* (2000)

*Voices in the Dark* is really two books in one. First-hand accounts of Paris under German occupation from 1941 to 1945 are juxtaposed with transcriptions of group meetings with Gurdjieff and his pupils during the same period. Patterson writes that “the contrast between the historical forces and psychic madness playing out on the streets of Paris, and the consciousness, love and understanding displayed in the meetings, is startling.”

The author draws on historical documents, letters and articles in the popular press to weave a gripping story of this pivotal time in history. The voices of those who directly experienced the German occupation—ordinary citizens, statesmen and notable figures of the French intelligentsia, such as Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre—are effectively employed to create a compelling picture of the times.

The transcriptions of meetings reveal Gurdjieff’s unrelenting focus on the practical centre of gravity of the Work: self-observation, self-remembering and the importance of aim and intention. However, the reader should keep in mind that words intended for a specific audience at a particular time and place may no longer serve as useful teaching instruments for contemporary students of Gurdjieff’s ideas.

Anna Challenger *Philosophy and Art in Gurdjieff’s Beelzebub* (2002)

*Philosophy and Art* is an expanded and reworked version of her PhD dissertation, which examined *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson* for its philosophical and literary significance. The stated aim of this volume by Dr. Challenger, an associate professor of English at the American College of Thessaloniki in Greece, is to familiarize the academic world with the value of Gurdjieff’s practical teachings and cosmological ideas. The book

in turn examines the alleged Sufi sources of Gurdjieff's teaching, expounds his theory of art and interprets selected tales from *Beelzebub's Tales*. Challenger's central thesis is that Gurdjieff's magnum opus is a work of 'objective art' capable of transmitting higher knowledge and wisdom to future generations.

The author is impressively conversant with the many dimensions of Gurdjieff's writings. Challenger's approach has been described by reviewers as a "thoughtful interpretation and concise analysis of the meaning, value and purpose of a few of *Beelzebub's* core tales." Although some have criticized her reliance on Sufi sources for many of the assertions and interpretations in the text, it remains an innovative piece of work by a creative mind and is highly recommended.

Sophia Wellbeloved *Gurdjieff, Astrology and Beelzebub's Tales* (2002)

The book is an expansion of Wellbeloved's PhD thesis completed at King's College, London in 1999, which analyzed the narrative content of *Beelzebub's Tales* from an astrological perspective. The first section of the text briefly describes Gurdjieff's life and cosmological teachings in the context of Western metaphysical traditions. The heart of the book which follows is an attempt to analyze the structure of *Beelzebub's Tales* in terms of the 12 signs of the zodiac and other fundamental astrological concepts. The author brings an impressive knowledge base in astrology, metaphysics and study of *Beelzebub's Tales* to bear on her subject. Her central hypothesis, that *Beelzebub's Tales* is constructed on a pattern based on astrological principles, is intriguing and merits consideration and further study. Although Wellbeloved attempts to make a convincing case for this supposition, it remains an open question whether the evidence and arguments she presents are speculation and conjecture or fact.

Sophia Wellbeloved *Gurdjieff: The Key Concepts* (2003)

The book is part of the *Routledge Key Guides* series, which define and discuss the central concepts of a wide range of academic and other disciplines. The intention is to provide a reference resource for students, teachers, researchers and the "interested lay person." Wellbeloved was a member of the Gurdjieff Society of London from 1962 to 1975 and has published a number of books and articles on Gurdjieff. The book presents the major concepts in Gurdjieff's psychological and cosmological teachings in strict alphabetical order, with references and suggestions for further reading. Appendices contain biographical notes on important pupils and current Work groups.

Unfortunately, her re-writing of the fundamental ideas and taking them out of context from their original exposition by Gurdjieff, Ouspensky and others, deprives them of their inherent spiritual power and masks their complex, organic interrelationships. The result is a book that is of scholarly interest only.



John Shirley *Gurdjieff: An Introduction to His Life and Ideas* (2004)

Novelist, screenwriter and storyteller John Shirley has written extensively on spiritual and esoteric subjects. His stated purpose for writing the present volume was to provide “an updated, compact, straightforward book on Gurdjieff for the general public that might open a door, for some readers, to a deeper study.” And on that level it generally succeeds as he combines biographical information, an exposition of Gurdjieff’s ideas and methods, and brief portraits of his leading pupils to produce a useful introductory text. However, although the book is clearly written and well researched, there is a sense that Shirley never captures the true reality of Gurdjieff or fully uncovers the depth of his teachings.

Frank Sinclair *Without Benefit of Clergy* (2005)

Frank Sinclair was born and raised in South Africa, but moved to the United States in his late 20s to pursue business interests and study Gurdjieff’s teachings under the direction of his direct successors. He became integrally involved in the activities of the Gurdjieff Foundation of New York, eventually becoming co-president in 2000 and president in 2005. The title of the book reflects his independent and questioning spirit: in his preface he warns readers that the content “will touch some raw nerves and upset a few delicate psyches.” The volume combines autobiographical material, reminiscences of fellow Work students, a description of his own personal spiritual journey, and passages which convey his deep respect for Jeanne de Salzmann. With refreshing honesty, Sinclair lays bare the sometimes dysfunctional state of current Work activities and the all too frequent human weaknesses of its leaders.

Keith Buzzell *Perspectives on Beelzebub’s Tales* (2005)

Dr. Keith Buzzell is a physician and long-time practitioner of the Work who studied with two of Gurdjieff’s pupils, Irmis Popoff and Annie Lou Staveley. In this ambitious and highly original book he examines *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*, which he regards as a ‘Legominism,’ from the perspective of both current scientific knowledge and his own impressive understanding of Gurdjieff’s complex system of psychological and cosmological ideas. The result is a brilliant, pioneering work of objective research that challenges the reader to explore new pathways in approaching the vast depth of spiritual wisdom embodied and encoded in *Beelzebub’s Tales*. Buzzell illustrates, through text, diagrams and illustrative examples, some of the fundamental concepts of Gurdjieff’s cosmology, such as the enneagram, ray of creation, table of hydrogens and kundabuffer. His creative synthesis provides a framework which reconciles the material and spiritual understanding of reality, thereby making sense of both “worlds.” Buzzell’s volume is a significant contribution to trying to “fathom the gist” of Gurdjieff’s teachings, especially as he expressed them through his most important work, *Beelzebub’s Tales*.

Keith Buzzell *Explorations in Active Mentation* (2006)

The book is a companion volume to the author's *Perspectives on Beelzebub's Tales* and is similar in structure, writing style and philosophical approach. Although there is a greater emphasis on Gurdjieff's psychological ideas, the cosmological aspects of the teaching remain the centre of gravity of his explorations "of 'all and everything' in the universe and our place within it."

Buzzell presents a detailed description of the laws and processes which govern human life and cosmic evolution. High quality diagrams and illustrations aid the reader in grasping the subtleties and essential meaning of many of the difficult concepts presented in this in-depth examination of Gurdjieff's teachings. Although clearly not a starting point for those approaching his teachings for the first time, *Explorations* is highly recommended for seasoned students of the Work who wish to deepen their understanding of the timeless spiritual teachings Gurdjieff transmitted to the world.

Frank Sinclair *Of the Life Aligned* (2009)

This sequel to *Without Benefit of Clergy* is less descriptive and more reflective of Sinclair's lengthy involvement with Work activities in America and his passionate quest for spiritual truth. The impetus for the book is his "brush with the outer darkness"—a near-death experience—and the painful loss of his wife of almost 50 years. The majority of the book consists of in-depth explorations of the mysteries of life and death, the nature of grace, prayer and surrender, and the importance of conscious attention and presence in the spiritual life. The final section is a series of interviews conducted with the author, in which he examines the current state of Gurdjieff's teaching in the modern world and gives indications of the alignment and direction of an authentic spiritual search.

Although not the most gifted of writers, Sinclair manages in his own forthright style to express something of the qualities of a consuming hunger for spiritual truth and the fruit that such a search bears.

William Patterson *Spiritual Survival in a Radically Changing World-Time* (2009)

William Patterson's books are always interesting and often provocative: he holds strong opinions about the origin, purpose and contemporary significance of Gurdjieff's Fourth Way teachings. His latest offering is no exception and is an important effort to draw attention to the central principles of self-study embodied in the Work. The book is divided into a number of distinct sections, each with a different style and rhythm of expression. An excellent introductory essay "explores technology's challenges and how it can spur us to awaken to a new integration of body, senses and mind." The heart of the book is a series of exchanges at Fourth Way meetings in which Patterson responds to questions from students. Although at first the content seems mundane, even banal, further study reveals that Patterson is constantly drawing the questioner back to the centre of gravity of the practical work of impartial self-observation, sensing and self-remember-

ing in the circumstances of everyday life. The last two sections of the book, ‘Probes’ and ‘Essays,’ are a collection of talks and previously published articles on a variety of Fourth Way topics. Their quality varies considerably and is diminished in many cases by Patterson’s tendency to disparage other spiritual teachings and teachers.

Fran Shaw *The Next Attention* (2010)

From 1993 to 2000, Michel de Salzman gave a series of seminars in Switzerland to students of the Work from around the world. Fran Shaw kept a journal that captures his voice during this period as he explores “the inexhaustible dimension of attention.” Although the journal entries are fragmentary and address subjects in a random fashion, they do convey de Salzman’s persistent call for a deeper quality of presence and attention that enables one to access a subtle, sacred energy necessary in the process of human awakening and evolution.

## **BIOGRAPHIES OF GURDJIEFF**

John G. Bennett *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* (1973)

Bennett studied with Gurdjieff briefly in the early 1920s and more extensively in the year preceding Gurdjieff’s death in 1949. He states in his preface that the book is not a biography in the usual sense, but more of a reconstruction and interpretation of Gurdjieff’s life story. The book weaves together the story of Gurdjieff’s search for esoteric wisdom, the possible sources of his knowledge and the ideas and methods transmitted by Gurdjieff during his teaching mission. One of the book’s central themes is that Gurdjieff was in contact with a “higher source” connected with schools of wisdom from Central Asia.

Much of the information presented by Bennett is based on his own careful research of Gurdjieff’s early life and spiritual search. He also made extensive use of the unpublished notes and personal recollections of several of Gurdjieff’s closer pupils. While some of Bennett’s interpretations of Gurdjieff’s life and teachings are clearly speculative, they are nevertheless highly stimulating and thought-provoking.

James Webb *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Works of G.I. Gurdjieff, P.D. Ouspensky, and Their Followers* (1980)

This 600-page tome was many years in the making and received a mixed response when first published. The text is very detailed and extensively researched from archival sources, interviews, unpublished letters and documents, and personal recollections, much of it previously unavailable to the public. Some of the more controversial aspects of the

book stem from Webb's frequent use of anonymous sources to support many of his assertions.

Although Webb's writing style is generally clear and precise, the quality and accuracy of the chapters vary widely. Some are well-reasoned and insightful while others are highly speculative and unreliable. At times, Webb's writing seems to suggest elements of paranoia and instability. The reader should approach the book with some discernment, absorbing the best features and disregarding the unsubstantiated and speculative.

James Moore *Gurdjieff: The Anatomy of a Myth* (1991)

Although he never met Gurdjieff, Moore studied for many years at the Gurdjieff Society of London under the direction of one of his pupils, Henriette Lannes. He has published a biographic study, *Gurdjieff and Mansfield*, and a number of articles in scholarly journals which explore issues related to the contemporary presentation of Gurdjieff's teachings.

His biography is generally considered to be the most successful attempt to comprehensively chronicle Gurdjieff's life and teachings. It is structured chronologically, briefly sketching Gurdjieff's early life and search for esoteric knowledge, and then concentrating attention on the most important years of his teaching mission from 1914 to 1949. Accompanying the text is an extensive, although conjectural, chronology of Gurdjieff's life and detailed notes on selected topics.

The book has much to recommend it. It is well researched from published and unpublished sources, many based on Moore's personal contact with Gurdjieff's senior pupils. And the author constructs the major events in Gurdjieff's life with careful documentation and a minimum of unwarranted speculation. However, some readers will find Moore's writing style a major obstacle to profiting from the content of the book. His dry English humour, use of obscure Latin phrases and oblique references to academic and philosophical ideas far removed from the topic at hand, may prove to be a major impediment to someone interested in understanding Gurdjieff and the nature of his teaching mission. A more serious criticism is Moore's clearly subjective bias as he attempts to take the measure of Gurdjieff and his pupils. He is an unrelenting apologist for Gurdjieff and his often controversial behaviour and literally divides students into the 'good' (Jeanne de Salzmann, Thomas and Olga de Hartmann) and the 'bad' (John Bennett, Fritz Peters), based on his own personally formed opinions and beliefs.