

## A perspective on Chapter 12: The First “Growl”

by Trevor Stewart

This essay on Chapter 12 serves three aims. The first is to offer a perspective on one aspect of Chapter twelve. The second, to illustrate a way of penetrating the meanings locked within the Tales baffling exterior. The last is to highlight a common Work *belief* based on unsound judgment that negatively affects students’ ability to understand *Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson*. This third point is especially crucial to me as a young person in the Work, because I feel it is the main barrier to more young people becoming interested in and benefiting from the incredibly relevant wealth of knowledge contained in Gurdjieff’s teaching.

Chapter 12 is a very good example of Gurdjieff’s writing method. Among its many aspects, it is a microcosm of Beelzebub’s Tales as a whole, containing the same basic elements that pervade the others. We will save many other aspects of this chapter for personal investigation rather than revealing something, the value of the understanding of which is dependant on the force exerted under the direction of one’s own individuality and searching to attain it. I simply like to point out, via an analysis of Chapter 12, this one aspect I feel is of critical importance in approaching the Tales, and one, moreover, which I feel needs more attention, and that is non-suggestibility.

I realize this may seem strange. Suggestibility is described throughout the Tales and is an omnipresent subject in Work Group meetings. However, I’m not convinced that the vital role it plays in the Tales is *fully* understood and taken into account.

Beelzebub repeatedly points out that suggestibility is strange, peculiar, and unbecoming to humans. In chapter 14, it is even singled out as the abnormal being-particularity “most terrible for them personally”. He says there, that he will “specially explain” about this being-particularity to us sometime later, and indeed he does. Fascinatingly, he does so not only through *explanation*, but also through an engaging *demonstration*. Most importantly, Beelzebub approaches this particularity through a message that is embedded within a framework of intentional misinformation and manipulation constructed to experientially illustrate, as we break it down thoughtfully, piece by piece, the mesh of lying and suggestibility we are all living in. Beelzebub’s Tales is built, from the ground up, lawfully, in accordance with and in consideration of the structure, composed of alternating, mutually opposing, and ultimately heterogeneous forces, of the average, asleep human mind. It is also worth mentioning that Beelzebub said humans see reality “topsy turvy”, i.e. *backwards*. This is a very intentional hint!

Chapter 12, in sum, is about a writer that pens a new gospel. The gospel subsequently alerts the attention of power possessing beings that, feeling it might awaken the ordinary beings of their community, decide to anathematize it. Despite their measures, they succeed only in arousing interest amongst the people toward the new gospel, and, going from community to community, inadvertently spread its popularity. Over time, the gospel itself is forgotten entirely, but an unquestioned veneration for the writer remains despite a total lack of familiarity with his book.

All of the multitudinous, layered connections with other of the Tales aside, we will take a look at just two of the layers of this chapter. In the process, we'll also see the method I use to penetrate Gurdjieff's meaning.

The first is the surface level message. Beelzebub clearly disdains this writer. The writer is a contemporary writer; one who only copies from existing works and whose book, being among others written by contemporaries, is one of the principal causes of the degeneration of the human psyche into "stuff and nonsense." This is in stark contrast to ancient writers that really invented something themselves. He is "just a "writer" like all the rest there, and nothing particular in himself." He stumbles upon an idea for a book accidentally via the Gospels of Matt, Mark, Luke and John, shows haughty contempt for ancient writers, and decides to finally write his gospel containing supposed "truths" in order to make money off the English and American's suggestibility.

To recap, the writer is: contemporary (i.e. degenerated), an unoriginal copyist, egoistic, an opportunist, and, in Beelzebub's words, a "wiseacre".

So far so good. I totally agree with Gurdjieff. I have seen many rich and famous celebrities use their notoriety to sell books containing all sorts of inane, useless information about their personal history, views, and opinions.

Moving forward, this writer's gospel comes onto the scene just as the power possessing beings, having squandered public funds on gambling, are demanding more money than usual, thereby angering the people of the community. The power possessors, destroying everything newly arisen that might keep the ordinary beings from hibernating, decide to get rid of the writer's gospel, and, despite wanting to shut the writer up in deplorable conditions, find that they cant, and in the end settle on anathematizing his book. They travel between communities denouncing the writer with "pockets full of money."

Here we are given also a rather grim view of politicians as thieving, cruel, power hungry gamblers, forcefully demanding money from unsuspecting, ordinary people and seeking to maintain an unaware populace. Here again we see a legitimate, insightful real-world message about power possessors, and there are many examples of government exploitation, business collusion, and corruption in the world today.

There are clear similarities between the writer and the power possessors. First, both rely on chance: the original gospels "chance" to "fall" into the writer's hands, causing us to recall the chapter about Saint Venoma's invention using the Law of Falling; the power possessors are inveterate gamblers, going only where "baccarat" and "roulette" proceed. Second, both profit from the weaknesses of others: the writer through the beliefs of English and Americans and the power possessors through the people's ignorance. Lastly, both are interested largely in money.

Going back to the story, the ordinary beings, having begun to "sit up" under the economic pressures caused by their government, and being already ill disposed at this point toward their leaders are suggestible to anything opposed to the current regime. Therefore, the government's anathematization has the opposite effect intended, and peaks the people's curiosity. All other interests die down, they talk and think only of this writer and his fame spreads, climaxing in an almost religious veneration similar to the way in which the ancient Kalkians listened to their Pythoness (this clues us back to the nominal followers of Jesus' gospel on page 99). His reputation persists down to the present day, when, despite having forgotten and not even read his book, any human you asked about

him would talk, discuss, and splutteringly insist on his incomparable understanding of the human psyche.

Ordinary beings are painted here as asleep, highly reactive, dogmatic, suggestible and herd-like.

If we compare their negative qualities with those of the power possessing beings and the writer, we find rich parallels. All three profit off the weakness of others: the writer and power possessors to make money and retain control, the ordinary beings to “be right” and convince others of their rightness. All three exist according to chance: Beliefs pass through communities by chance, the power possessors are addicted to it, and the writer chances upon books to copy from. All three are egoistic: the writer thinks he’s better than the ancients, the power possessors think they can keep the people down, and ordinary beings convince one another to adopt their beliefs forcibly, splutteringly insisting on their validity. Connecting this with the description of the circulation of the original Gospels of the apostles amongst ordinary beings existing nominally according to Jesus’ indications, we see how Jesus’ teaching was treated the same way as the “New Gospel” of the writer.

Many more similarities in this connection can be found. Suffice to say, all three categories of person (writer (or learned being), power possessor, and ordinary) are unfavorably characterized.

Still taking the story at this level, we see many subtly implied messages. As Gurdjieff explains in the chapter on Art, messages are transmitted in Legominisms via inexactitudes. This is important for understanding this and all other chapters in the Tales.

The first inexactitude that strikes us is the *timing* of the writer’s invention. He is described as a “contemporary” writer, living long after the apostles, and he regards them as “*ancient* barbarians”. He feels he is more cultured than they ever were. Later we find out that his book is “*long* forgotten” despite his name retaining its fame, and contemporary people only seem to know of him by hearsay. Also, there is an indefinite period of time between the publication of his book and the spreading of his fame by the power possessors that is characterized with two occurrences of the word “gradually” on the last page of the chapter.

This inexactitude gives us two leads. One would send us “down” to the third level prematurely, so we’ll just address the second here, namely, that the writer’s gospel is indirectly associated with the teachings of Jesus. We get the sense that Jesus’ teaching underwent this same kind of degeneration. His followers are “nominal” and the writer’s adherents are described in exactly the same way, not to mention the connection is strengthened by the seemingly arbitrary reference to the ancients Kalkians and their veneration of their Pythoness. To be clear on this point, my take is that the reference to the Kalkians implicitly associates the credulity of the writer’s adherents with that of ancient peoples, and the combined aspects of *nominal belief* and *ancientness* then leads us back, by association, to Jesus’ followers. So the dog is buried two associations away.

I also understand the apostles, who, historically speaking, spread Jesus’ teaching, to correspond with the “power possessors” who spread the writer’s gospel. This may seem strange at first, but it is connected with the third level and we’ll clear it up later.

In any event, I don’t think that Gurdjieff’s main point in writing this chapter was to tell us that Jesus’ teaching has degenerated, as it’s a rather obvious truth from the point

of view of any “Gurdjieffian” who would be reading Beelzebub’s Tales. There are multiple intended meanings here, some of which would take us outside of this chapter and out of my scope. One intended meaning does, however, as I said, lead us to the third level I spoke of.

All these considerations aside, it is fascinating that he brings us round to this implication, and moreover, *in this way*. (If you’re not familiar with Gurdjieff’s method of using trails of hints and my connecting the paragraphs about the Kalkians/Pythoness with Jesus and his followers seems obscure, go back and read the book again *very carefully*.)

So, to sum up what has been said, we have the ambiguity of the time in which the writer lived with the opposing implications that he is both contemporary and from “long” ago. Further, as the second level of meaning I see as intended by Gurdjieff, I associate the writer with Jesus, the power possessors with his apostles, and the nominal followers of Jesus with the credulous followers of the writer. Lastly, there is the implied message that Jesus’ teaching has degenerated via not only the word nominal but also the aforesaid connections with the story of the gospel writer.

Before going on to the third level of meaning that I see in this chapter, I’d like to say something first about the way that I’m breaking this down. Obviously, this seems like a good deal of hair splitting. First off, it’s necessary to qualify that I have left in “unessential” points that I feel a really well versed reader of the Tales will understand and benefit from but that may seem like minutiae to the uninformed. Second off, we are traversing incredibly subtle terrain. In fact, we haven’t covered the half of it. The true unraveling of this chapter would include seeing and feeling its connections with the *entire book*! I’ve left out many aspects of this chapter because my aim is to demonstrate just one “way in” to the Tales. Gurdjieff emphasized continually that a *refined* awareness, as opposed to a coarse one, picked up on *subtlety*, the details. To pick up on the subtlety in the Tales *requires* comparing sentences, paragraphs, pages, chapters, and books (cosmic phenomena) against each other time and time again.

I say this because there is a running popular delusion that one can passively imbibe the Tales with no hard thinking and merit some kind of fantastic subconscious reward in the process. It does not matter how present we are in feeling and sensation, the messages in the Tales *will not* reach us if we do not *actively mentate*! This seems so simple and straightforward that I’m sorry I have to mention it to those who are already aware of this Work contradiction.

Writing about the Tales’ subtleties in an organized, accessible way requires the slowing down and explaining of the associative thought process that led to these conclusions and doesn’t easily convey the organic way in which the understanding actually arose. Naturally, to compress insights that took months and even years to emerge will require going back and *explaining* all the little steps that took place in the interim. Consequently, reading this essay more than once may be useful.

Another thing I’d like to suggest here is that a subtle awareness of the Tales can grow quite naturally over time from attentively reading and thinking about it, and that the growth of that attention, running parallel with the development of awareness in other aspects of one’s life (for instance, in the sittings and in the movements), serves to feed and maintain those other parts of oneself. This is one of the most interesting aspects of

Gurdjieff's legacy, that sustained, in-depth study of the Tales and, for instance, performance of the Movements *feed* each other in ways that are difficult to explain yet palpably experienced. I believe the truly three centered approach to the Tales lies in our allotment of time and energy during our day to our centers. In the end, being in sensation and feeling is incredibly vital, but will never bring the powers of discernment needed for understanding the Tales.

All this being said, the need for subtle awareness in understanding Beelzebub's Tales is undeniable. This should be really clear by the end of this essay. All talk of passively imbibing the Tales is *really just a strange dogma* that leaves the intellectual center out. Having considered the nature of this almost religious veneration, my feeling is that it arose among Work people for two reasons:

1. As an explanation for why, after years of study, they still cannot understand the book and
2. As a justification for why they are right in tagging along with their groups and/or communities of believers in the continual reading of such a strange and unusual book despite their lack of understanding. This may be compared with the meanings presented in this chapter for greater clarification.

So, back to the third level. It may be at this point, if you weren't already aware of it that you've stumbled on this tertiary meaning. In any case, I'll go back through the story, relating a third perspective.

From the view of the third level the writer is Gurdjieff, the gospel is Beelzebub's Tales, and the power possessing beings are Gurdjieff's prominent followers (particularly Ouspensky).

Gurdjieff describes himself as ignorant of the bon ton literary language and that nothing stuck from his education in writing and grammar as a child. He also describes how "invalids", having rent paid three months in advance, invariably begin writing some "instructive" article or another. Gurdjieff himself, after his motor accident, was an invalid due to his injuries and decided to write Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson during that time frame, which we could characterize as an instructive article. The gospel writer in this chapter is described in chapter 13 as "totally illiterate." So Gurdjieff describes both himself and this gospel writer as "illiterate".

Further, the gospel writer, who knows of the "nominal" followers of Jesus, feels that he can write a much better gospel for his contemporaries. Taking the implied message that Jesus' teaching has degenerated, which Gurdjieff certainly spoke about, we can put this together with Gurdjieff's feeling that he was bringing modern man a "new conception of God", or a spiritual teaching that was much more relevant for modern human beings.

Gurdjieff was also a contemporary writer who became relatively *forgotten* like the gospel writer, even by followers of his teaching during his lifetime! When Ouspensky died, many of his pupils were shocked to find out Gurdjieff was even alive. This leads us back, if we can make a big jump without losing our thread, to the connection with the satellite Anulios. Anulios "never allows one to sleep in peace", similar to the way in which the gospel is feared to wake ordinary people up from their hibernation. Its pretty clear Anulios is a reference to Conscience, and that Gurdjieff's book is speaking about the incredible importance of Conscience.

It is important to note that in this perspective we have to be willing to take an opposite, or “topsy turvy”, mental position to what is described in the chapter by the protagonist Beelzebub. This requires a certain amount of non-reactivity and non-suggestibility. So when Gurdjieff describes the difference between ancient and contemporary writers, he was associating himself with ancient writers “who wrote something really by themselves.” However, he was *also* simultaneously associating himself with contemporary writers who, similar to Saint Venoma and his recombination of old phenomena to create new phenomena on page 66, refit old ideas together to make “new books”. Some, including the author of this essay, have intuited an almost mathematical recombination of a relatively few basic elements throughout Beelzebub’s stories, and its verifiable. This resonates with the multiplication exercises of the Movements as well, alluding to a “world” of possible comparative study between the Movements and Beelzebub’s Tales.

The interesting thing here is that we have to take a piece of his description of ancient writers, and a piece of his description of contemporary writers, and, separating them from their original contexts where they appeared as opposing factors, refit them together to create what appears as a very reasonable description of Gurdjieff and his book. This kind of teasing out requires impartiality because we cannot take everything said about contemporary writers literally and as applicable only to them. The message we come out with is that Gurdjieff really refit old ideas together to make new ones and simultaneously really wrote something by himself. This is a seemingly irreconcilable paradox. It’s the kind of paradox we find in our own lives in regard to the stances we take toward situations we encounter, how we feel about others, etc., and it is the kind of paradox we find embedded throughout the Tales, making it so difficult to unravel. Incidentally, the penetration of the Tales strengthens the ability of the mind to hold paradoxes impartially. Such paradoxes find reconciliation only through greater and greater contextualization. This is similar to what J.G. Bennett called Progressive Approximation.

Another clue that Gurdjieff left was in the writers desire to profit off the English and Americans. Gurdjieff often spoke of “shearing the sheep” in reference to the English and Americans.

When we begin the Tales, it seems pretty obvious that Beelzebub is a thinly disguised persona of Gurdjieff himself. Some of the power possessors propose to send the gospel writer to “Timbuktu”, i.e. to the middle of nowhere, and it strikes me as an obvious correlation to Beelzebub’s banishment to “Ors”, which I’ve heard etymologically relates to the word “ass”, i.e. the ass end of the universe. This gives us yet more evidence for the connection between Gurdjieff, Beelzebub and the gospel writer. Gurdjieff, in his introduction, indicates that he is writing owing to circumstances that have arisen in his later years, and that he himself had no desire to write. This constraint to write the Tales correlates with Beelzebub’s constrained banishment to Ors, where he constructs an observatory. The observatory, on one level, represents the Tales.

Beelzebub says that contemporary writers are the cause that human reason has degenerated into “stuff and nonsense”. We can assume contemporary writers, if they are causing human reason to become stuff and nonsense, must write “stuff and nonsense”. Taking Gurdjieff as the contemporary writer makes a lot of sense because the surface, or first, level of the Tales is itself “stuff and nonsense”, a series of seemingly absurd stories

and apparently meaningless and repetitive successions of words. Gurdjieff writes in *Life is Real*, that

“...I want, right from the beginning of this series, to speak also of such external facts, the description of which for a naive reader might appear at first sight almost a meaningless, mere succession of words; whereas for a man who has the habit of thinking and of searching for the sense contained in so-called "allegorical expositions," on condition of a little strengthened mentation, they would be full of inner significance, and, if he makes the slightest effort "not to be a puppet of his automatic reflection," he will grasp and learn very much.”

Ouspensky especially seems reminiscent of the power possessors. First off, they are sarcastically called “power possessors” in quotes, implying an opposite meaning. In this chapter, despite being called power possessors, they appear relatively helpless in controlling popular interest in the gospel. They seem in reality to serve the gospel writer’s wishes, almost as though he has played off of their weaknesses as well. Ouspensky more or less anathematized Gurdjieff, forbidding his pupils to read his book or speak of him, and yet Gurdjieff’s fame as a teacher spread via Ouspensky’s teaching into a number of other communities, maybe more than through any other of his students. We could also say Ouspensky and his followers’ “wiseacring” diluted his message in the process, particularly the study of Beelzebub’s Tales to His Grandson.

To wrap this up, one very fundamental and disturbing message that is implied here is that Gurdjieff believed the true study of his writings would be forgotten, that a false veneration for him as a man (or supposed divine messenger) would arise, and that his teaching would degenerate into a mere belief system. This chilling prediction of the future appears hauntingly true in a time when few Gurdjieffian’s have actually studied Gurdjieff’s major instructive tool for posterity, Beelzebub’s Tales, in detail, and rely more on Group and Lineage tradition. It seems that some take his meanings literally and never consider that the *opposite* of what is being related might be true. Further, it has rarely been considered that Gurdjieff may be testing, as he was recorded having done with his pupils, our suggestibility through false screens and manipulations. If we take Beelzebub literally, which we are bound at first to do, we immediately lose understanding.

Taking what was said earlier about disentangling pieces of the story from others and refitting them together, it is clear that Gurdjieff really “mixed” things up in order to force us, by a series of careful considerations totally independent of what we *think* his views may have been, to make up our own minds. This is an important factor that reading the Tales crystallizes in us, but it will *never* crystallize if we take allegories such as the separation of Earth into three orbiting satellites literally. Some of the stories in the Tales, such as this one, may have turned out to be scientifically true, but in the context of the metaphor carefully laid out by Gurdjieff, it is very clear that *nothing* is essentially literal. Even things that make some practical sense are only the tip of the iceberg. It seems more so, that the author of this astonishing invention wished to effect the state of mind of his readers in order to reconstitute their basic perceptive functions and thereby transform their very digestion of reality. Case in point, the judgments of contemporary writers espoused in the First Growl are really pointing to a deeper meaning. Beyond this

deeper meaning, in this case indications about “real events from long ago” in the life of Gurdjieff, there are yet others, which we have not covered in this essay.

If quoting Gurdjieff helps, I will conclude with his words:

"The strangeness of the psyche of your favorites with respect to religious teachings that arise in this way manifests itself in that, from the very beginning, they understand 'literally' everything that has been said and explained by these genuine Sacred Individuals actualized from Above, and never take into account under what circumstances and for what occasion this or that was said or explained."