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"SHOULD WE TRY TO SELF REMEMBER WHILE PLAYING SNAKES AND LADDERS?": DR. GAMBIT AS GURDJIEFF IN LEONORA CARRINGTON'S THE HEARING TRUMPET (1950)

Abstract

Emerging from the Paris surrealist group, the English-born writer and painter Leonora Carrington (England, 1917 – Mexico, 2011) was perpetually suspicious of orthodoxy and she often pokes fun at, parodies, and ultimately upsets traditional hierarchies of power. In her work animals impart wisdom, Goddesses loom large, and domestic spaces become sites of occult power. In this article, I investigate Carrington's suspicion of gurus with claims to esoteric truth. Carrington participated in Fourth Way groups run by students of G. I. Gurdjieff (Christopher Fremantle) and P. D. Ouspensky (Rodney Collin). However, while she had a deep interest in the teachings, Carrington remained suspicious of the group practices of the Fourth Way, as can be seen in Elena Poniatowska's fictionalized biography *Leonora* (2015). This articles explores Carrington's contact with the 'Work' in order to shed light on the character of Dr. Gambit in her 1950 novel, *The Hearing Trumpet*, commonly thought to be a parody of Gurdjieff. In doing so, it will investigate Carrington's feminist objections to the role of the guru, while also contributing to a discussion of the unease some felt toward the praxis of the Fourth Way, despite their attraction to the philosophy.

Keywords

Feminism, mysticism, surrealism, Leonora Carrington, Gurdjieff, The Fourth Way

Leonora Carrington's (1917-2011) work might easily be dismissed as fanciful, given its mysterious imagined landscapes and unusual, playful characters, but it is brimming with tropes from folk and esoteric lore, which are deployed in the service of presenting women as empowered, spiritual agents of their own destiny. Her deep distrust of religious institutions -- begat by her early, negative experiences of the laity and reinforced by the anti-clericalism of surrealism -- informs this world, which often pokes fun at, parodies, and ultimately upsets traditional hierarchies of power. In this article, I will reveal Carrington's challenge to spiritual masters by analyzing her parody of G.I. Gurdjieff (c. 1866-1949) in the 1950 novel *The Hearing Trumpet*, where the Greek-Armenian mystic is lampooned alongside traditional Christianity.[1] Carrington's distaste was borne of direct contact with these teachings and an understanding of her immediate contact with Gurdjieff's Fourth Way, as well as a discussion of the power relations it promotes, is essential to understanding the political implications of her representation of Gurdjieff in the novel. By providing this context, my aim is to show how the character of Dr. Gambit exemplifies Carrington's reservations about Gurdjieff -- a metonym, perhaps, for all religious masters -- despite the admiration maintained by some of her peers. Carrington saw in the Fourth Way the perpetuation of power inequalities that already existed in traditional religion and which she and her peers had hoped to leave behind. By exploring her parody of the Fourth Way, this article will contribute to a broader understanding of the feminist turn towards alternative paradigms of personal

[1] Carrington's only novel, *The Hearing Trumpet* was written in Mexico City in 1950 but was not published until 1974, in French translation, and then in the original English in 1976.

spirituality in the 1960s and 1970s (Wicca,Goddess worship), rather than fully embrace the New Religious Movements that maintained subordination to a master as a core principle (The Fourth Way, Thelema, and so on).

It is a commonplace in Carrington criticism to equate Gambit with Gurdjieff but the connection has yet to be rigorously analyzed. Tere Arcq, international curator and specialist in surrealist women artists, established the link by asking Carrington directly. She reports that, "Carrington herself stated that all the characters were real, and that the story was inspired by the practices of disciples of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky" (*Mirrors* 113-4). Although Arcq does not provide analysis of the novel, she offers invaluable biographical information. Importantly, Arcq highlights the distinction Carrington made between Gurdjieff's teachings on the development of consciousness, which fascinated her, and the guru himself, towards whom she felt a profound disgust (Arcq, *Search* 36). Gloria Orenstein, another critic who spent time with the artist, writes that Carrington "spent 15 years in a Gurdjieff group" (*Marvellous* 126). She does not mention her negative disposition towards the teacher, but does describe *The Hearing Trumpet*'s main setting, Lightsome House, as a "kind of Gurdjieff training centre for old people through which enlightenment is to be reached via rigorous practices under strict patriarchal supervision" (*Rebirth* 181). Orenstein's work focuses instead on Carrington's rejection of Christianity and her dramatization of Goddess spirituality, in order to establish her importance as a precursor to the spiritual and ecological developments in the women's movement in the 1970s, when the book was finally published (Geis 23). Orenstein's work set the tone for Carrington criticism and more recent studies have looked at her marriage of esotericism and feminism differently, but always without engaging fully with the

Fourth Way. More recently, Miriam Wallraven, in her important analysis of Carrington's occult, feminist spirituality, acknowledges that "a parody of Gurdjieff and his teachings plays a central role in *The Hearing Trumpet* and testifies to the independence of Carrington's depictions of women's spirituality."[2]

In each case, criticism recognizes the presence of Gurdjieff in the novel and the political importance of the feminist spirituality it promotes. Nevertheless, we are left without a close analysis of Dr. Gambit's role in the narrative. As I will demonstrate, Dr. Gambit becomes indicative of a failing that Carrington observed in modern alternatives to religion, which her peers flocked to in their disillusion. Gurdjieff becomes as a representative of an old ontology of power that is sustained despite the novelty of the alternative vision of spiritual practice he promotes.

Carrington's Contact with the Fourth Way

Points of contact between Carrington and the Fourth Way can be established despite the scarcity of details in published accounts of her life. She was born in England to Catholic Anglo-Irish parents on the ascent. Her father was a textile industrialist and the young Leonora was a debutante at the court of George V in 1936. Perpetually suspicious of orthodoxy, Leonora never settled into aristocratic life and from a young age resisted attempts to compel her to conform. At the age of nine she was expelled from the convent school the Holy Sepulchre and then from another -- St Mary's Catholic convent school in Ascot -- in 1931, where her rebellious behavior was

[2] 113. Whitney Chadwick also notes Carrington's scepticism (32).

tolerated for less than a year (Aberth 15). In 1933, the same "unruly behavior" led to a third expulsion, this time from a finishing school in Paris (Aberth 19). She left England forever in 1937 and established herself in Paris, where she had a life-defining encounter with the surrealists, who encouraged her to devote her life to the Marvellous by resisting orthodoxy and embracing freedom.

Carrington arrived in Paris during Gurdjieff's sojourn; he was busily developing connections amongst the cultural and artistic elite. At this stage surrealism has turned to occult sources for inspiration and André Breton's writings began to echo some of the central tenets of P.D. Ouspensky's work.[3] In 1938, a number of prominent surrealists who would later form part of Carrington's group of friends in Mexico -- Estéban Francés, Roberto Matta, and Gordon Onslow Ford -- spent the summer in Brittany "reading, among other things, Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*" (Henderson 229). It stands to reason that Gurdjeiff would have been known to them, especially given that prominent surrealist and co-founder of the renegade surrealist magazine *Le Grand Jeu,* René Daumal, was by this time dedicated to the Fourth Way, incorporating his art into his spiritual practice.[4]

At the outbreak of World War II, Carrington fled Europe, first to New York and then to Mexico, where she created the body of paintings and sculptures for which she is best known. This was where she had her most direct contact with the Fourth

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[3] Henderson 229. Having received a lot of attention for his 1912 book *Tertium Organum*, P.D. Ouspensky encountered Gurdjieff in 1915 and became his student for 10 years. He believed that Gurdjieff held the secret to the *miraculous*, which he had spent years searching for in India, Ceylon and Egypt. Although his understanding was greatly advanced by his work with Gurdjieff, he broke with his master in 1924, continuing to develop his own system and encouraging his students to do the same (Webb 458; 491-93).

[4] Rosenblatt 136-137. Daumal lived and worked with Madame de Salzmann, who took over control of Gurdjieff's teachings after his death, between 1933 and 1938. Gurdjieff himself often led the group in their studies (Rosenblatt 142).

Way as she attended meetings led by Rodney Collin and later by Christopher Fremantle. Collin was a devoted pupil of Ouspensky and wrote extensively on the Fourth Way.[5] He moved to Mexico in 1948 where he established an English-language bookshop and a publishing company, Ediciones Sol, aimed at distributing Spanish translations of his master Ouspensky and other Fourth Way writers (Webb 485). *Tertium Organum* was published in Spanish in 1950, while Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous*, undoubtedly the most important record of Gurdjieff's teachings, was published simultaneously in French and English in 1949 and was available in Spanish through Ediciones Sol by 1952. While the exact contents of Carrington's personal library have not been made public, it is clear that she would have had direct access to key Fourth Way texts through Collin. Scholars have also established that in this period Carrington undertook the close study of a range of esoteric and mythical texts alongside her close friend, Spanish-born Mexican painter Remedios Varo (Kaplan 130). The most-cited object of study is Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* -- an obvious point of influence on *The Hearing Trumpet* -- but Varo's collection also included a French copy of *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, a Spanish translation of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* and *Tertium Organum*, as well as books by Maurice Nicoll, Rodney Collin, and others (Arcq 24, 35). In a rare published mention, Carrington did admit to Hans-Ulrich Obrist that, "I never met Gurdjieff. I read his book, but I never met him" (161).

[5] For a description of Robert Collin's trajectory through the Gurdjieff work with P.D. Ouspensky see Webb (478-493).

Despite not meeting Gurdjieff, Carrington did participate in Fourth Way groups run by Collin. On his arrival in Mexico, Collin rented a flat in the center of Mexico City where he hosted a group attended by both local people and members of Europe's intellectual diaspora.[6] He also bought an old Hacienda at Tlalpan where the group built a Planetarium based on the enneagram and the Law of Octaves, which was visited by Carrington (Arcq, *Search* 68), and which hosted an extensive library of occult books Collin had acquired from a private collection in Europe (Webb 486). Visitors to Collin's centre had the opportunity to meet people who had worked directly with Gurdjieff, such as Enrique Caraminola, who had spent time at the Prieuré and who commissioned Remedios Varo to create the 1945 piece *Icono* (Arcq, *Search* 34). Carrington described Tlalpan to Obrist as follows:

> Oh, there was a wonderful place, here in Mexico, I think it was in Tlalpan, a very big house, and all these Gurdjieff people all gathered there, but Gurdjieff never came to Mexico as far as I know. I don't think so, but there were all these people who followed Gurdjieff and they all got together there and were utterly humourless, and I thought they were very funny. (161)

This mixture of fascination and contempt is depicted vividly in Elena Poniatowska's fictionalized biography of Carrington, entitled *Leonora*, where she dedicates much of Chapter 47, "El peso del exilio" -- "The Weight of Exile" -- to depicting the ironic distance maintained by Carrington when amongst Collin's group. The rigid

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[6] Webb 483. According to Tere Arcq, the group dispersed when Collin converted to Catholicism in 1954, some joining Gurdjieff groups that had existed before Collin's arrival (*Search* 35).

atmosphere and New Age discourse is resonant of *The Hearing Trumpet*, which is likely a deliberate intertext. Even so, Poniatowska's presentation of this period of Carrington's life shows that she too recognized the reservations Carrington had about committing to a Fourth Way praxis, despite the positive influence it was having on her fellow exiles.

Although Carrington is presented as intellectually curious, her unwillingness to commit is apparent. This is vocalized in the account by Elsie Escobedo, when she says, "It seems to me that you have no need of any of these second rate Rasputins. Just take a cold bath, both you and Remedios. It's healthier and more effective than your fourth way!" (Poniatowska 365). It is clear that Carrington's friend recognizes her lack of engagement, although this becomes even more obvious in Carrington's direct interaction with Collin. At one point, Collin compels her to have more self-control, giving Poniatowska the opportunity to give voice to Carrington's frustrations: "If you succeed in giving up cigarettes, your victory will be your salvation," says Collin, to which Carrington retorts, "And who told you that I wish to be saved?" (366). Her irritation grows and the narrator tells us that it has become "intolerable to her that her companions in their fifties are now behaving like five-year-olds" (366) as Carrington proceeds to lambast Collin and his coterie of students in her diaries, and in conversation with Varo. As the chapter ends, she detaches completely, exclaiming, in exasperation, "What a relief to leave such airheads to the ministrations of their spiritual guide!" (369).

However, Poniatowska presents Carrington's interactions with another student of Gurdjieff -- Christopher Fremantle -- in a more positive light. Carrington is much more impressed by the erudition of Fremantle and his wife Anne -- the subject of one

of Carrington's paintings in 1975 -- and is more convinced by the artistic focus of their meetings (369-70). It was Gurdjieff's trusted follower, Madame de Salzmann, who instructed Fremantle to take control of the teachings in Mexico. He is said to have brought a more "pure" teaching, having worked directly with Gurdjieff, but one that was also more humane (Arcq, *Search* 35). He began to host workshops that involved painting, weaving, and embroidery, and would often incorporate elements of Zen Buddhism, emphasising the syncretism of the teachings (36-7). The culture of openness he promoted in the group appealed to Carrington and she paid frequent visits to the Fremantle household on Calle Santísimo in San Ángel, seeking out connections between mystical teachings and her artistic practice (30-1).

Although Collin also encouraged his followers to find their own way, having been prompted to do so by Ouspensky on his deathbed, Carrington had much less patience for his preferred combination of Gurdjieff and Catholicism. Collin claimed that Catholicism was "the greatest reserve of esoteric truth" and thus compatible with the Fourth Way (Webb 492). However, by this stage, Carrington was thoroughly disillusioned with the religion of her youth and any association with the Fourth Way was ultimately damaging to her interest in participating more fully with the Gurdjieff group, as we see in her novel. It is clear then, that Carrington read Fourth Way texts and was in direct, active contact with Gurdjieffians in Mexico, even participating in their groups. It also emerges that she was not prepared to fully embrace the Work. If Dr. Gambit can be convincingly identified as a parody of Gurdjieff, then the novel can offer an insight into the tenor of Carrington's reservations, cast so vividly in the sarcasm of Pontiatowska's *Leonora*. In order to do this, it is first important to establish the intellectual content of the Fourth Way that may have exacerbated the

antipathy generated in Carrington by the dynamics of the Gurdjieff group activities she observed.

The Role of the Master in the Fourth Way

The Master-Student relationship is central to Gurdjieff's teachings. Ouspensky dedicates most of chapters 5 and 6 of *In Search of the Miraculous* to asserting the importance of finding the right teacher and the dangers of aligning oneself with a teacher of poor calibre (Chapter 10). Whilst Ouspensky presents this relationship as an element of the path to self-mastery, playing down the rhetoric of subservience, there is still a definite hierarchy maintained (203, 222). Dikrán, in a book that was owned by Carrington's study partner Varo, also outlines the necessity of a master as one of the foundational requirements for attaining knowledge of oneself (74). In his analysis, the justification in Gurdjieff's teaching is based on the claim that the freedom to make decisions for oneself is already an illusion, as one is always under the influence of external forces (Dikrán 74-75). Those seeking to learn from Gurdjieff did not always accept this unquestioningly. John Shirley expresses the personal resistance that some students had to the pedagogical style employed by Gurdjieff: "As a teacher, Gurdjieff had a tendency to rely on authoritarianism in a way that Americans, at least, react against" (218). Louis Pauwels also emphasizes this relationship of power, writing that, "Gurdjieff demanded and received absolute obedience from every one of his pupils. His word was law, and he reigned as a tyrant among devoted slaves" (154). Yet many were uncomfortable with the power balance in this relationship, despite the metaphysical rationale included in the teachings.

Perhaps most interestingly, we find reservations about Gurdjieff's person in Ouspensky's text. Towards the end of the book, he explains that he began "to separate G. and the *ideas*" (373). He asserts his commitment to these ideas but casts doubt over Gurdjieff's leadership, although he is careful to temper any criticism of his "actions or methods," stating instead that "they failed to respond to what I expected" (373). He elaborates later in the book where he claims that Gurdjieff was leading the group along the "way of religion," with all its attendant forms and ceremonies. This change seems to represent the "destructive elements" that Ouspensky felt would tear the project apart and which led to his definitive break with Gurdjieff in 1924 (389). It is clear that Ouspensky had identified Gurdjieff's dark side; one that he felt was potentially dangerous to those around him.

The prominence of the guru and his perception that the individual search was being incorporated into a religious practice, led Ouspensky to distance himself from his master despite still regarding the content of his teachings as Truth. Given Carrington's distaste for religious institution, it is reasonable to assume that she would have agreed with Ouspensky. The contradiction between her interest in the Fourth Way and her parody of the master can be seen as an echo of Ouspensky's experience. However, given the feminist slant of *The Hearing Trumpet*, it is undoubtedly safe to say that Carrington was also irked by the flagrant chauvinism of the teachings. Although this has not been subject to in-depth analysis to date, there are indications that pockets of resistance did emerge among within Fourth Way groups. Paul Beekman Taylor records Jessie Orage's reservations about Gurdjieff's manner and his potential for exploitation. In *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium*, he records an incident wherein Jessie's husband A. R. Orage -- a central figure in the New Age

and a student of the Fourth Way -- received a letter from Gurdjieff that Jessie perceived as a threat (184). Beekman Taylor reproduces a poem she wrote in disgust:

He calls himself, deluded man,

The Tiger of the Turkestan,

And greater than God or Devil

Eschewing good and preaching evil.

His followers whom he does glut on

Are for him naught but wool and mutton,

And still they come and sit agape

With Tiger's rage and Tiger's rape.

Why not, they say, The man's a god;

We have it on the sacred word.

His book will set the world on fire.

He says so – so can God be a liar?

But what is woman, says Gurdjieff,

Just nothing but man's handkerchief.

I need a new one every day,

Let the others for the washing pay. (184)

Along with a general accusation that Gurdjieff preys on his students, Jessie Orage alludes to his misogyny, which Shirley confirms in his record of their relationship: "Gurdjieff regarded Jessie as pampered and domineering, and dominant women were something he regarded as a regrettable abnormality typical of modern life" (254). For his part, Beekman Taylor admits that for Gurdjieff "women are ontologically inferior to men" (243), and includes the guru's remark to A.R. Orage that "the cause of every anomaly can be found in woman."[7] He does attempt to address the topic of Gurdjieff's alleged "anti-feminism," claiming that within the teaching both men and women are capable of reaching higher consciousness, but that the task is more difficult for women (Beekman Taylor 243). He offers a defence based on a talk delivered in New York on 13 February 1924, in which he understands Gurdjieff to have represented men and women as equally capable of self-actualization:

> He explained, in keeping with conventional European lore, that men are A-types featuring an intellectual centre, women are B-types featuring an emotional centre, but that a merger of intellect with emotional produces a C-type human being. (184)

Beekman Taylor suggests that men and women are fundamentally different, but that this difference must be overcome to develop higher consciousness. Aspects of Gurdjieff's administration of the Fourth Way appear to corroborate Beekman Taylor's

[7] 243. It is worth noting that A.R. Orage did not subscribe to the same idea of women and had eagerly promoted the cause of the Suffragettes in the *Theosophical Review* in January 1907 (Beekman Taylor 3).

defence. Gurdjieff did offer access to women, most notably the women of The Rope, a women-only group that Gurdjieff set up in Paris in the 1930s. He also appointed women to central roles in the organization of the teaching. For example, Jeanne de Salzmann was charged with overseeing the legacy of the Work and took charge of the distribution of official teachings after his death.

Nevertheless, Gurdjieff is often associated with patriarchy and accusations of sexual impropriety in the mainstream imaginary, as is often the case with modern gurus. This fact alone makes it easy to see why Carrington -- who only knew Gurdjieff through second-hand accounts -- may have felt ill disposed towards him. It is also the case that she would have found ample material in Gurdjieff's *oeuvre* that ran counter to her commitment to gender equality. While Carrington did not know Gurdjieff personally, his misogynistic attitude outlined above is also evident in his major work*, Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*. Negative references to women are peppered throughout the text, but the chapter that would have most vexed Carrington would certainly have been that on France.[8] There, the tales' narrator Beelzebub presents aspects of modern culture associated with women's liberation in a decidedly traditional manner. For example, he describes women cutting their hair short as a "maleficent invention" and praises French women for abstaining because their "feelings of morality and patriarcality were still very strong" (689), unlike those "beings of the same sex" in England and America. Beelzebub denigrates the practice because he claims long hair "is adapted also by Great Nature for certain exchanges of

[8] 669-693. See also the chapter entitled "Beelzebub's Opinion of War", where Beelzebub records the practice of segregating menstruating women in the time of Solomon so that they would not distract the men with their "hysteria" and could concentrate on conserving energy for motherhood (1108-1113).

cosmic substances," and thus its absence causes abnormalities, such as "Amazons," "the religion of the poetess Sappho," "suffragettes," "Christian scientists," and "theosophists" (690). It is clear why this hostility to modern icons of female empowerment would have been badly received, but the tale becomes more vitriolic when Beelzebub suggests that in the act of cutting their hair women invite "various sorts of venereal inflammations of the sexual organs, such as 'vaginitis,' 'uteritus,' 'ovaritus,' and what they call 'cancer'" (690). Beelzebub then goes on to assign women's role as the "negative" or "passive principle" in the transformation of cosmic substances (691): "That is just why these sources which serve as the passive principle cannot be responsible for their manifestations, that is, they cannot be, as they say, 'major'" (692). He thus perpetuates a traditional patriarchy that maintains long-established inequalities of power that for Carrington was grist to the mill.[9]

Dr. Gambit as Gurdjieff in *The Hearing Trumpet*

It is not difficult to see why Carrington felt compelled to parody Gurdjieff in her work, having had unfavorable encounters with his teachings in both her personal and intellectual life. Although Gurdjieff proposed a new path to Spiritual enlightenment, a Fourth Way, Carrington recognized in it a patriarchal mythology that echoed traditional religions in which she wished to play no part. This sentiment is expressed in a feminist poster she designed in 1972 entitled *Mujeres Conciencia* that, according

[9] It is important to note that the "negative" and "passive" forces are both essential parts of the system and are therefore both granted importance. My suggestion is that Carrington, as a radical feminist, wishes to overturn such metaphors for the sake of equality, as we see in *The Hearing Trumpet* when the world's axis is turned.

to Gloria Orenstein, "symbolises the new Eve returning the apple to the old Eve of the patriarchal Bible," and expresses a new Eve "who is on the rise" (Geis 21). We find this narrative of women's spiritual ascent already established twenty years earlier in *The Hearing Trumpet*.

The Hearing Trumpet tells the tale of ninety-two-year-old Marian Leatherby who is unable to hear without the aid of a hearing trumpet. She is despatched by her son to a retirement home run by the Well of Light Brotherhood, who -- another character informs us -- "are financed by a prominent American cereal company" (10) and have "the grim knowledge of what is better for other people and the iron determination to better them whether they like it or not."[10] The story follows Marian's adventure as she enters the institution and becomes embroiled in its intrigues. These include its former use as a convent run by an Abbess dedicated to overthrowing Christianity, the murder of a female resident (who turns out to be man) by poisoned fudge, and the beginning of a New Ice Age that gives rise to an eco-feminist vision of a reconfigured world.

The novel itself is full of surrealist humour and irony and occasionally veers off into embedded narratives that give voice to narrators other than Marian. Employing a classic move from the Surrealist playbook, the form of the novel encourages the reader to be attendant to multiple voices and possible imaginaries, undermining any hierarchy of reality. This formal instability is also a macrotextual echo of the novel's main polemic: the resistance to patriarchal power and its institutions (Suleiman 172). Marian, although initially compliant, undertakes an

[10] 12. Scholars agreed that Marian Leatherby is a parodic avatar of Carrington, while Carmella Velásquez--Marian's best friend--is Remedios Varo (Kaplan 95).

anarchic adventure that ends with the displacement of traditional seats of power. On the one hand, this is represented by doctrinal Christianity, which she questions openly, early in the novel:

> Strange how the bible always seems to end up in misery and cataclysm. I often wondered how their angry and vicious God became so popular. Humanity is very strange and I don't pretend to understand anything, however why worship something that only sends plagues and massacres? And why was Eve blamed for everything? (20)

On the other, patriarchal power is encapsulated by the character of Dr. Gambit, leader of the community at Lightsome Hall and a member of the "extremely sinister" (12) Well of Light Brotherhood. Dr. Gambit claims to offer a new, esoteric Christianity to his followers that chimes with modern alternatives to traditional doctrine, but is quickly exposed by Marian and co-conspirators, who are not convinced by his performance.[11] This double attack is of particular relevance to the history of modern art. While resistance to Christianity was *en vogue* among avant garde artists, many exercised their objection by participating in precisely the type of syncretic, individual-focused, spiritual teaching Gurdjieff offered. Carrington's scepticism is testament to the depth of her commitment to an intersectional, radical politics. She was simply not

[11] Georgina Sykes, for example, describes Dr. Gambit as "a kind of Sanctified Psychologist", stating that: "The result is Holy Reason like Freudian table turning. Quite frightful and as phoney as Hell. If one could only get out of this dump he would cease to be important" (33).

content to accept a Master-Student relationship that perpetuated the power inequalities she found unacceptable in Christianity.[12]

The reader is first introduced to Dr. Gambit by Marian's guide Anna Wertz, upon her arrival at Lightsome Hall. Outlining the daily routine observed there, Anna informs Marian of Gambit's insistence on regimented timekeeping, describing him as "a highly unreasonable person concerning time" (25). This is immediately unusual, as Anna's chaotic, stream-of-consciousness narration is in ironic contrast with the punctilious insistence on routine and ritual she describes. Right from the beginning, the reader has the sense that the guiding rhetoric of the institution is at odds with its reality. Anna's babbling also prefigures the discourse Marian will encounter in Dr. Gambit's teachings, as she moves chaotically between opinions on time, nature, human habit, and the difficulty of work.

Anna seems broken, both to the reader and to Marian. It is as if she is obsessed with self-remembering -- which we soon learn is Dr. Gambit's central doctrine. Yet, it appears that constant self-reflection is impeding the personal conviction she espouses in her diatribes, which is aimed at forming close relationships with other people. This inconsistency is emphasised by Marian, who reports making "several futile attempts to tell her that I heartily agreed with her philosophy of life" (26), but who cannot even find out Anna's name. Marian cannot help but wonder, "what sort of terrible toil had deranged the poor woman? Would I have to work day

[12] Wallraven recognises Carrington's "patriarchal notions of religious truth as well as self-styled gurus (embodied by Dr. Gambit)" (113). She notes that Gurdjieff is associated with '"masculine" spirituality (114) in the book, making Carrington's parodic representation an attack on his "empty phrases" (114).

and night until I couldn't stop talking?" (26). Her rhetorical question expresses her growing concerns about the practices employed at the institution.

Marian's first encounter with Dr. Gambit himself occurs in a group setting, over dinner. The patriarchal organisation of the group is established immediately. It is communicated, as is the case throughout the novel, by way of ironic throwaway comments. In this instance, Marian notes: "He sat at the head of the table, which was natural I suppose, he being the only gentleman present" (27). Describing dinner, Marian presents a scene not unlike those recorded by Elizabeth Bennett in her memoir *Idiots in Paris*, with Dr. Gambit initially coming across as an imperious presence. He interrupts the babbling Anna by commanding, "Silence, Anna Wertz, hold your peace" (28) -- and exerting the control of a master over a student. In fact, his directive takes on a magical quality when Marian finds that she can hear it without the assistance of her hearing trumpet -- an event she finds uncanny.

The power communicated in this exchange soon dissipates as Marian describes Dr. Gambit's appearance. She begins by making a clear connection to the common depiction of Gurdjieff as a mysterious guru from the east, but ends up emphasising his naïveté, and criticising his ability to see anything clearly:

> The first impression he gave was of being bald, almost starkly bald, very plump and nervous. It was difficult to see his eyes with dark lashes, rather incongruous in such a face; they looked like the eyes of a child. They were eyes that looked at nothing. I suppose he was so short-sighted that there was nothing much he could see anyhow, poor man. (28)

There are also hints at Gurdjieff's reputed sexual appetite in the way other members of the Lightsome community describe his fictitious equivalent Dr. Gambit. For example, another resident, Georgina Sykes, tells Marian that the doctor's wife loathes her because of the way her husband leers: "He is a libidinous fellow and stares and stares at me during meals, this makes Rachel Rictus [nickname for Mrs. Gambit] squirm with fury. Of course how can I stop her beastly husband devouring me during meals? … And he is always making excuses to get me into his boudoir for cosy talks" (33). This image of Dr. Gambit tallies with memories of Gurdjieff's students. John Bennett describes this side of the guru as follows:

> His sexual life was strange in its unpredictability. At certain times he led a strict, almost ascetic life, having no relation with women at all. At other times, his sex life seemed to go wild and it must be said that his unbridled periods were more frequent than the ascetic. At times, he had sexual relationships not only with almost any woman who happened to come within the sphere of his influence, but also with his own pupils. Quite a number of his women pupils bore him children and some of them remained closely connected with him all their lives. Others were just as close to him, as far as one could tell, without a sexual relationship. (John G. Bennett 231-232)

These memories, perhaps inadvertently, present Gurdjieff as someone whose teachings exposed vulnerabilities that were sometimes exploited for his own

economic or sexual profit. Students may have consented to sex as part of the spiritual exercise Gurdjieff promoted but, as James Webb asks, "under what conditions did these relationships take place and what was the effect of Gurdjieff's promiscuity on the women who became his sexual partners? If Gurdjieff merely used the power of his position to persuade girls to sleep with him, is this a serious offense?" (Webb 331-332, 419). These questions are intensified by knowledge of Gurdjieff's dictatorial rule of the groups, wherein participants risked expulsion for failing to carry out his wishes (Webb 331-332). In Carrington's novel, Georgina Sykes temporarily faces the same fate, when Natacha suggests she should not be allowed to be part of their community on account of her going "around the whole Institution telling people that you [Dr. Gambit] are trying to seduce her, and even tried entering her bungalow at night" (49). Dr. Gambit is subsequently described as having "forgotten about Blissful Serenity" (49), upon which he had just been expounding, as he struggles to find a solution, bound by the fact that Georgina "pays twice as much as anybody else" (49). It is at this point that the doctor's stature as a guru begins to crumble as Marian and her friends gradually expose his fears, worries, and lack of power.

The parody of Gurdjieff is firmly established in the language used by Dr. Gambit. This becomes clear in the homily delivered over dinner on Marian's first evening at Lightsome. Although ostensibly an old people's home, Gambit describes "Our Little Society" in decidedly esoteric terms, outlining the community's "Purpose" in the paragraph below:

> We seek the inner Meaning of Christianity and comprehend the Original Teaching of the Master. You have heard me repeating these phrases many, many times, yet do we really grasp the meaning of such Work? Work it is and Work is shall remain. Before we begin to get even a faint glimmer of Truth we must strive for many years and lose hope time and time again before the first recompense is awarded us. ... These apparently simple, though infinitely difficult, principles are the core of Our Teaching… There are two little words which will ever supply the Key to the understanding of Inner Christianity. Self Remembering, my friends, are the words which we must strive to keep present though all our daily activities (28).

The liberal use of capitalisation draws a connection to the lexicon of Gurdjieff's teachings, especially as presented by Ouspensky. Certain phrases uttered by Dr. Gambit would not be out of place in the transcripts of meetings held in St. Petersburg or Fontainebleau. For example, "We Remember Ourselves in order to try and create objective observation of Personality" (29), or, "Personality is a Vampire and True Self can never emerge as long as Personality is dominant" (46), or, finally, "If you deliberately allow your lower centres to take hold of your organism you will soon become victims to a mass deterioration which may have serious consequences" (115). Those conversant with Fourth Way literature can clearly see references to Gurdjieff's teachings on a person's Centres, the importance of Self Remembering, and Personality and Essence.

However, in the novel, the character's reactions do not display the same reverence we find in accounts by the Bennetts, by the Women of the Rope, or in other first-hand memoirs. They are not simply rejected-- Marian often displays a humble intrigue before the teachings -- but emerge as coercive, confusing, or in places, simply amusing. Marian's reservations, which evolve into outright disdain, become clear in a number of incidents. During Dr. Gambit's sermon at dinner Marian spends her time half-listening, half-observing a painting of a nun with a "very strange and malicious face" (28) who she imagines winking at her with "a most disconcerting mixture of mockery and malevolence" (29). Her distraction is a clue to the alternative spiritual route Marian will take later in the novel, when the nun is revealed as an initiate of the Mother Goddess hell-bent on destroying institutional Christianity. Here, the association made between Dr. Gambit and Inner Christianity in his speech, emphasises his role as another Master to be resisted, as Marian becomes aligned with the troublesome abbess.

Such resistance emerges later at Marian's first one-on-one meeting with Dr. Gambit. Carrington presents him as the arch-syncretist, surrounded by arcana from different traditions -- sculptures of the Buddha and Christ, and different "archaeological miscellanea" (43). In their interview, the doctor diagnoses Marian's major vice as greed and informs her that "glands and their function are one of the first proofs of Will over Matter" (47), to which she responds indignantly, at pains to point out his hypocrisy:

> Surely anyone so fat must be at least as greedy as myself? … In any case all this talk about vicious Greed no doubt helped the economy of feeding senile old women. The drawers of that colossal desk of his were no doubt full of preserved fruits, sweet biscuits, jujubes and caramels. The top drawer was reserved, I supposed, for perishable foods such as cheese sandwiches and cold roast chicken, so they wouldn't get forgotten under some account book in a bottom drawer… Fat Little Whippersnapper telling me about my glands! (46-47)

Her disdain is clear in her jocular tone and signifies a changing power balance in their relationship. This is exemplified again in Marian's attitude to the Institute's dance classes, which parody Gurdjieff's teaching of Sacred Movements. These are presented to Marian by Dr. Gambit's wife who throughout the novel appears as both thoroughly subjugated -- she is servant to her husband and cook to all -- and convinced of the nobility of her role. She encourages Marian to participate in the movements and links them to the teachings already outlined by Dr. Gambit over dinner:

> "You had better hear at once about the Movements," she told me. "Anyone who does not understand their Significance can never get the full meaning of Inner Christianity. The Movements were given to us in the past by Somebody in the Tradition. They have their meanings. I am not at liberty to disclose to you yet as you have only just arrived, but I can say one of their outer meanings

> is the harmonious evolutions of the Whole organism to different Special rhythms which I play to you on the harmonium." (34)

Once again, the parallel with work undertaken by Gurdjieff groups should be clear -- there are many records of Gurdjieff playing the harmonium, either at his flat on the Rue des Colonel Rénard or at Fontainbleau -- but, once again, Carrington parodies this work in the contempt shown by her avatar, Marian. The demonstration begins with Movement "Primary Zero," which Mrs. Gambit demonstrates for the group: "She paused, looked at the floor for a moment as if collecting herself, then started to rub her stomach in a circular clockwise movement and tap the top of her head with her other hand" (36). The movement will be familiar to anyone who has tried patting their head while rubbing their belly and Marian gratefully reports mastery of this "exercise," sardonically commenting, "I felt relieved as I had done this in the nursery and did not have much difficulty repeating Mrs. Gambit's movements" (36). Although the movements are described as getting more difficult, Marian breaks down in a fit of laughter and is ejected from the class. This leads to a reverie about her history of being "overtaken by spasms of uncontrollable laughter" (37), and in particular, its association with an absent character – Marlborough -- with whom she has the type of affective relationship she values and which, so far, seems alien to the teachings encountered in Lightsome Hall. In this shift, Carrington manages to ridicule the smoke and mirrors of a rigid institutional spiritual practice and emphasises the irony of a system of self-development that prevents the kind of inter-subjectivity necessary for such.

Overcoming the Master

These are only a few isolated examples of Carrington's parody of Gurdjieff in the novel. For her, Gurdjieff is a gambit. The implication is, at best, that he is another master offering a system that one should approach with caution. At worst, he is capitalizing on a calculated advantage over his followers. Carrington explores both possibilities, but the most interesting is her scepticism of the teaching that a master should control one's ability to achieve self-actualization. This becomes explicit late in the novel when Marian makes a journey into the underworld only to encounter herself, or her doppelgänger, as the agent of her own rebirth. Ultimately, she is responsible for her own self-actualization, which plays out in a specifically feminine idiom imbued with symbols of the Goddess and which indicate an alternative to the hierarchies of power encapsulated by Gambit.

Dr. Gambit does not feature as prominently in the second half of the novel, where the tale of the Goddess's grail quest unfolds. The residents gradually wrest power from Dr. Gambit, eventually overcoming his influence in a hunger strike, after which democracy is established (121-122). Marian's friend on the outside, Carmella, aids them by threatening to go to the press about the hunger strike and offering to hire two vacated residences at twice the price (123). She believes it is the latter that sways him, stating that "his eyeglasses positively twinkled with greed" (123). Dr. Gambit's true motives exposed, the women establish a new, collaborative organization. By the end of the book, the doctor and his wife no longer hold power and the narrator tells us that they have most likely been buried under the institution's wreckage by an

earthquake brought about by the world tipping on its axis (140) and which has left Mexico in the vicinity of Lapland. The ending of the book proposes a world re-aligned, literally and figuratively. In her tale, Carrington disposes of masters as part of a radical de-centering of the cosmos that sees traditional routes of power give way to a relational, non-anthropocentric cosmos, in which equality is asserted among sentient creatures. As Marian reports, "deer, pumas and even monkeys had come down from the mountains and wandered about in the region looking for food. We did not consider eating them. The New Ice Age should not be initiated with the slaughter of our fellow beings" (143). With Lightsome Hall in ruins, the order it attempted to establish is abolished and a new world is revealed, full of uncertainty, but divested of the powers that had restricted Marian's freedom from the beginning.

At the beginning of the novel, Marian lamented her proposed incarceration in Lightsome Hall, longing instead to retire to Lapland. In the final sentence of the book, she asserts a victory with the phrase, "If the old woman can't go to Lapland, then Lapland must come to the Old Woman" (158). Rather than search eternally for a guide to spiritual fulfilment, she prefers to rend the earth from its axis, and have it shrouded in darkness, leaving it ripe for re-construction from the bottom up. It has become clear that alongside the radical deconstruction of patriarchal power hierarchies, the reader finds in Carrington's novel a light-hearted but scathing criticism of New Age gurus. By reading beyond the Goddess mythology at the centre of the story, one finds it is based on a critique of a "'masculine spirituality" (Wallraven 114) exemplified by the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff, whose discourse, approach, and predilections are all parodied in the narrative. Carrington's novel displays the dissatisfaction she felt towards modern alternative spiritualties and sheds

light on reasons why feminist artists moved beyond the esoteric groupings popular in the early twentieth century towards models of female-focused spirituality, or towards a materialist feminism that eschewed the spiritual altogether.

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