# THE COLLEGIAN

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Taylor and McGhee, Editors

# OPERATIONS RESEARCH

On the evening of Oct. 9, Mr. Hinnrichs gave to the college community a lecture entitled "OPERATIONS RESEARCH" O.R., as I shall hereafter refer to the project, is composed of a large and varied group of scientifically trained men whose job it is to be the components of a smaller group which pools its resources to solve a given problem. They must be able to apply their specific techniques in such a manner that their results are of cash value to their clients. This 'being of cash value' means that since they are efficiency experts, their recommendations must result in efficiency. This review will examine the procedure of a group of research-observers, op-searchers, noting how the subsequent synthesis of data supplied by that analysis results in the solution of the problem at hand.

In a given business it may happen that a responsible executive finds that in order to keep in business with his competitors he must radically change his procedure in the making of a particular part of his product. To accomplish this end, he sees that it is necessary to find a new and more economical use of his present personnel, or even to get some new machinery. There is, of course, a definite cost-limit over which he cannot go. The wise analysis of the problem, with a view to making the practical choice of alternatives, is a job that the op-searchers are well qualified to carry on. This being a fairly typical problem, the organizing agency at O.R. selects from its files of technicians on call, a team which, at first sight at least, is qualified to handle the intricacies of the problem. In this case the team would most probably consist of a man who would accurately record the motions of the personnel at their machines so that he would have the necessary data to send to another member of the team, a mathematician. This man would so analyze the findings of the first, that he could accurately judge if there were an appreciable amount of wasted effort on the part of the personnel. Then these findings are sent to still another member of the team who would see if a new method of working at the already existing equipment could be found. If so, the question would arise as to whether

or not this change was sufficient for the needs of the particular case. If not, then engineers would be contacted who would draw up plans for a machine fitting the given qualifications. The cost of such a machine would then be reckoned by a cost-accountant, and the final results of the whole procedure would be turned over to the client, these results being the factors governing his future choice.

The above example shows what it means for a team of men with certain necessary techniques at their disposal to employ these techniques so that they are able to give possible solutions to problems that men run up against in the course of action. These techniques are of special interest for they allow the experts, so-called, to couch the findings of others in such a manner that these data are susceptible of a quantitative, statistical analysis. The above example also serves to illustrate the need of teamwork as well as what the elements of the final analysis are - those things susceptible of a quantitative, statistical, analysis. This need for teamwork seems to arise naturally from the great complexity of the problems to which the diverse technologies of the modern world gives rise. Only as teams can men possibly have the know-how that the complex nature of the problems at hand call for.

In such an example as the one above, say in a $10,000,000 a year business, there seems to be very little place for questions concerning the necessity of such complex organizations as O.R. It does seem to me appropriate, however, to ask whether to seek an organization which has as its tools of analysis, mathematics in the wider sense of the word, and quantitative statistics in particular, with the end of asking for aid in the solving of questions of education and morality is valid. The U.S. government has asked O.R. for its aid on a number of occasions. Again, educators have employed the methods of O.R. in trying to solve the age-old problem of truancy in the schools. To say that



both areas of human endeavor do admit to the analysis of the modern scientist, that of mathematics, is to deny certain things regarding the capacity of men to see certain things for himself, as well as to say that he is partly, at least, of such a nature that he can be symbolized in the manner that algebra calls for. I think that both of these things are taken for granted by those who call upon O.R. and those in O.R., as well as those whose brain-child O.R. is.

It seems to me that the above men have decided that only through experience, that is in living and acting around men, does any man gain prudence. It is indisputible that experience is a necessary part of that discipline that leads one to prudence. I do not think that the Op-searchers admit that there are any other elements involved. What they do think is very well expressed by Hobbes in the first part of his book, "LEVIATHAN", and I quote; "And therefore he that has had most experience in any kind of business, has most signs, whereby to guess at the future time; and consequently, is the most prudent: and so much more prudent than he that is new in that kind of business, as not to be equalled by any advantage of natural or extemporary wit: though many young men think to the contrary." I stress this quote where I do because I think that the point of it lies in a certain low evaluation of the power of the intellect to see into the natures of things. In this point, at least, Hobbes and the men connected with O.R. are in perfect agreement. The prime example of this in the activities of O.R. is the preoccupation with the 'team'. For to see as necessary, to solve all the problems of men, several 'experts' who have at their disposal all of the experience of the laboratory experiments, is really nothing but to affirm the truth of the proverb that 'two heads are better than one'. This certainly according to Hobbes and, as it seems to me, also according to the men in O.R., means that irrespective of how good any one head might be, two less good heads, two having more experience than one, are better than one. To say that men are so illiberally endowed with the tools to see that a group must

tackle any problem if it is to be solved sucessfully, is a strange kind of assumption for these men to make. Hobbes, at least, saw a great many of the problems involved in saying either that men could or could not know. It was clear from the lecture that Mr. Himrichs had not made that search into the problem that is necessary if the answer is to be one based on more than the existing mode of opinion. It is incumbent upon all of us to make a very thorough search for truth, and, not finding it, then to say that perhaps there is this incapacity in men, before we can go along with the prejudices that those of O.R. seem to have. Also it is necessary for us to understand a great deal about mathematics before we can concur with some of the applications that O.R. has made. The role of the algebra in the mathematical part of the analysis is a great one for a good reason. DesCartes says in the 'Regulae', that algebra is a "compendious abbreviation of those objects that present themselves to our external sight". Does this not fit in very well with the need for experience? For with these abbreviations, one man, at a glance, can have the sight of ten times the number of things that one can have of these same things seen in their unabbreviated form.

With all these adverse criticisms it seems only fair that I point out some alternative method of making that accurate analysis that must precede a wise decision. O.R. stands under fire mainly because it seems to be based upon certain assumptions concerning very important matters, assumptions which are not wholly warrented. For to <u>begin</u> by saying that we men are incapable of seeing 'beyond our noses' is a serious mistake. Anyone who knows any geometry at all knows some things about the analitical method. He at least knows that if one starts without a statement, although that statement may be denied for the sake of the subsequent reductio ad absurdum, he is not going to find out a great deal. The tools that the men have at their disposal at O.R. are such



that they imply the lack of a 'statement'; i.e. that man can know, or that he can analyze a human problem and subsequently make a prudent decision. That the tools at their disposal imply this denial I think I can show by a quote from Hobbes that seems particularly relevant. An alternative approach that does not make this mistake shall be given by a quote from the dialogue, the "PHAEDO".

HOBBES: "For words are but wise men's counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the money of fools, that value them by the authority of an Aristotle, a Cicero, or a Thomas, or any other docto whatsoever, IF BUT A MAN."

SOCRATES: "It seemed to me to be necessary to take refuge in logos, seeking there for the truth of things which are, ...although I do not wholly grant that one who is examining things there is looking at them in an image rather than in actuallity."

We must all make our choice. Which is the correct one I cannot say. I can say, however, that the former one involving us as it does in the tradition of Hobbes, and therefore of fear, makes the latter a hard choice. I myself prefer to think of the cosmos as an ordered place, and therefore a friendly one, than as a place where all things are apart from one another; This includes men apart from other men as well as men apart from the ideas.

---Richard Carter

There has from the beginning of the New Program been a revolutionary atmosphere on the St. John's campus. In the 1930's, the John Dewey progressive education theories had very real and very practical control of most of American primary and secondary education, and the practice of the theories was beginning to appear in many colleges and universities. Progressive education in its beginnings was a radical attempt to include the new natural sciences into the liberal arts tradition. From a slightly more remote and inclusive point of view, progressive education was a chapter in the development of "scientific method". The power of the natural sciences in controlling nature was so great that a large segment of first, the intellectuals, and following them, the larger part of our middle class society, was seduced into believing that man's control of himself and his inner destiny was merely a matter of the proper application of laboratory method. If we could only find the secret of the laboratory technician as he took down his date, found a mathematical pattern, and formulated a law of nature, we should be able to control ourselves. John Dewey's analysis of ethics is essentially an attempt to abstract procedures from the laboratory processes and to apply them to human conduct. It was believed, and not entirely without reason, that the most absorbing human affairs were practical affairs and were consequently subject to experiment. The rise of psychology as a matural and experimental science gave great additional weight to this view. Many events of human behavior can be illuminated by the behavior of rats in a maze. But progressive education forgot one great lesson of the tradition, the levels of meaning and the "likely story", and it was the great insight of Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr that this must be restored to education. The essence of this insight is based on a paradox, the capacity of the human mind to know the truth and to know at the same time that it cannot completely formulate that truth. Insight is the essential



character of knowing, and no system of symbols can guarantee that insight will occur. But since we demand of ourselves that we know the truth and yet realize that we cannot guarantee that it will be passed on to others, what are we to do? And indeed how do we discover it ourselves? How can one educate or be educated?

The great practical wisdom of the founding fathers of the New Program instinctively furnished the answer - by a revolution. Revolution is more than a movement in opposition to the status quo. It is the inevitable spilling over of a genuine insight into the realm of practical affairs. The course of a real revolution follows a line of development which I think can, in general, be traced, and in terms of which one might almost be able to judge the revolutionary character of any given series of events. I should like to sketch in this development and to use it as a critique of practical judgment about the last fifteen years at St. John's.

The cause of a revolution is an insight. I want to use this term in its full strength. Insight is an intellectual virtue and a revolution is at its conception, intellectual. As a revolutionary movement comes to be born, it overflows the limits of strict intellectuality and becomes political in the most general sense of that word, that is the revolution becomes a practical program. The organization of the practical program has for its model the internal order of the original insight. The context of feeling which surrounds the insight is one of discovery rather than fabrication and manufacture. There is the sense that the so called new idea has been right in front of you all time, and that the strange thing is that it has remained invisible and undiscovered for so long. When one sees the idea there is no question of what it means, or of how it is to be interpreted. The idea is what it appears to be and if it is not immediately seen to be what it is, then either it is not being seen or it is not a true revolutionary insight. The question "Is it true?" is never a formula with which to begin the investigation of the idea. The idea, once seen, is immediately apprehended and there are only two possible reactions - either a judgment

is made that the idea exists, that is to say that it is true; or one must judge that it is not an idea, that it has no existence, and that it is consequently false in the only way an idea can be false, that is, it is an illusion.

Then, the revolutionary idea overflows the limits of strict intellectuality and becomes a conviction, conviction demands action, and a program of action naturally develops from the pattern of the original idea, just as the theorems of Euclid naturally flow from the basic assumptions of the definitions, axioms, and postulates. And wherever there is conviction there is devotion, and for the devout there are no possible half-way measures. The devout revolutionary will not admit a lukewarm comrade in arms. Whoever is not for the revolution is against it; and those who are against it must be blind, for the idea requires only to be seen to be understood, and only to be understood to be acted upon. And so all who are concerned take up arms; there are only friends and enemies.

The development of a revolutionary idea into a revolutionary movement is spontaneous, if the idea is vigorous. The discovery that levels of meaning and the likely story were quintessential parts of a liberal arts education simply demanded that they be restored to education. They exist in only the greatest works of the western tradition. Thus these must be studied. As a matter of fact, the initial form of the new program has a rather clear genetic history. But in retrospect, the use of the great books as texts seems inevitable. But that they should be read in historical order, that tutorials, seminars, laboratories, and lectures should assume the form they did, was not inevitable. These characteristics of the program were merely initial instruments that were not contrary to the revolutionary idea. As we began to read the books, new devices seemed almost to suggest themselves, and it was known



from the beginning that no particular set of tricks of the trade were essential to the success of the revolution. The sole function of annual essays, don rays, oral and enabling exams, senior theses and all such characteristic St. John's devices was to assist in the reading of the books. As they more or less successfully fulfilled this function, certain devices were discarded or improved, and other instruments were contrived and added.

One of the most striking aspects of the revolution was a sense of the irrelevance of all other activities. At times this seemed to degenerate into a graceless snobbism, but at its best it was devotion to an ideal. A frequent criticism of St. John's in those days was built around the "ivory tower" accusation. It was charged that to read books was to escape from reality. No charge could have missed the mark more widely. But the reality to which the books led both students and faculty made the world beyond the campus seem very remote and very pale. There was on the campus an all-attractive excitement. Sometimes the excitement was frenzy, sometimes it was madness. But it most often functioned as an attractive force that kept the attention of the community on the essential task and which drew outsiders into the orbit of the revolution.

The excitement which accompanied the revolution was often, in itself, attractive. Even at the beginning the excitement was occasionally mistaken for the main task. Some members of the student body and some members of the faculty felt that the revolution was failing as the excitement died down. The coffee shop shook with metaphysical speculation for only eighteen instead of twenty-four hours a day.

But a new tension was forcing its way onto the campus, and another kind of excitement was provided for the old. The second world was on before the revolution of St. John's was completed. The program of great books continued, but the war split the attention of the college. The single minded revolutionary zeal for the program diminished as the war developed to its climax.

Some members of the community felt that the college should close for the "duration". The college remained open throughout the war, but the revolution was over; finished before it had properly matured.

But it is important to distinguish the sense in which the revolution was over. This sense, I think, is very clear. The new program of studies was not only established philosophically as the proper form of liberal education for our time, but the embodiment of that philosophical understanding had revived a moribund institution and was to survive the greatest social upheaval of the twentieth century, that is the second world war. The essential vigor of the original idea was thus verified beyond any reasonable doubt.

The sense in which the revolution had not properly matured is somewhat more difficult to establish. The world war scattered, literally to the four ends of the earth, a large part of the original St. John's army of revolution. A large part of the student body and many of the younger faculty members went into the armed services. The faculty members who remained at the College, fortunately the more mature teachers, had to close ranks in order to survive. And the fact that St. John's College today is still offering a liberal arts education without serious deviation from the original purpose of freeing men's minds is largely due to the staff that simultaneously fought two wars on College Creek in 1941 to 1946, the World War and the St. John's war for survival. The latter war had an appropriate culmination in the defeat of the Navy's attempt to condemn and appropriate for military purposes the campus and buildings of St. John's.

But while the war for survival was won, it was a war that had no relevance to the main revolutionary effort. But there was a much worse aspect. The war for survival occured during the period when the revolution should have been maturing, when the formulation or orderly procedures for the continuation of



the new program should have been taking place. The energy and attention of the faculty and student body would normally at this point have been turned towards the "institutionalization" of the great revolutionary insights and advances of the previous five or six years.

For it was time to settle down, to regularize, to functionalize, to dig channels through which the ordinary business of the College could be conducted. No revolution can or should be prolonged indefinitely. It is emotionally impossible to maintain the original zeal forever; it is immature to expect it to be maintained; and it is unreasonable to attempt to maintain it beyond the point of the fullest development of the revolutionary idea. Overextended zeal becomes frenzy; attenuated revolution becomes anarchy.

And so the College community was denied the satisfactions of seeing the fruit of their labor, whole and good, and at the normal time in the development of the revolution. For these satisfactions was substituted a relief at the removal of the threats to survival. And the task of consolidating the gains of the revolution had yet to be done.

It was, I believe, not clearly understood at the end of the war that this was the all important job, for there were obstacles to the clear view. The veterans of the war began to matriculate in the fall of 1945 and in eighteen months they were the major concern of the College. On the whole they were ignorant of what had happened on the campus from 1937 to 1945. They were high strung because of their war experiences; and, because the war was now behind them, as they thought, they also felt let down. Their demands on the College were, by ordinary standards, exhorbitant, and the College felt a deep responsibility to try to satisfy the demands. Even on the orthodox campuses of the country where the formulae of instruction are at least clear, if often petty, the strains were great. At St. John's, the formulae of instruction were not at all clear. This was true not because there was obscurity

or disagreement about the ends, and indeed about most of the means of liberal education, but because the natural maturation of the educational principles, which were clear in themselves, into rules for the conduct of classes, for example, had been interrupted by the world war and the local war for survival. The high tensions in the veterans themselves fostered the growth of the disorder that this fault in the College caused. This fault in the College was nobody's fault, except perhaps Hitler's.

I should like to give you examples of what I mean. There was a rule then, as now, that attendance at all classes was required, except under certain clearly specified conditions. When one reads the rule in the catalogue it seems quite easy to understand. The rule was originally formulated as part and parcel of the principle that there is no election of courses, no adding up of credits, no part of the program that can be omitted from the whole. But there was never from the very beginning any simple-minded hope that all students would go to all classes unless they were flat on their backs in the Infirmary with a fever of 105 degrees Fahrenheit. The purpose of the rule was to declare an important principle, that responsibility for his intellectual development lies ultimately and irrevocably with the student himself. But attendance at classes in those days can only be described as scandalous. What then did the application of the rule, if it can be called such, consist of? It consisted simply of reminding the student of his responsibility to himself and a reiteration of the principle that coercion is foreign to that responsibility. What then happened when a student day after day, month after month did not go to classes, for of course there were such cases. In almost every case the student found his inability to shoulder his responsibility unbearable, and he voluntarily withdrew from the College. The mortality, for that is the very descriptive technical term which deans and registrars use for students who drop out of College, was



frightfully high. And all of you can recognize that this situation is a paradigm for others repeated many times and in many other contexts.

I should like to give one other example. In 1948 I was talking to a fellow tutor about a set of don rags that had just ended. This tutor had his first tutorial of the day at 10:00 A.M. We were discussing the attendance problem. He said that attendance in his classes was normal, that is three to five students out of twelve attended most of the time. I asked what he had said about this in the don rags. He replied that there was an almost universal student comment something like this, "I'm sorry that I can't get to tutorial, but I don't hear the alarm clock in the morning." And the student would go on to say, "This is one of the most serious problems in my life at St. John's. I think we should devote the don rag to a discussion of how I can get up in the morning." The tutor then said to me almost with tears in his voice, "At the next don rags I shall begin each one by specifically prohibiting the mention of an alarm clock. If the fate of St. John's hangs on a Big Ben alarm clock, then we are doomed." And he walked sadly away.

The mournful part of this anecdote is that getting up in the morning <u>was</u> a serious problem for the student. But worst of all, how is one to discuss such a problem rationally? The dreadful task of tearing oneself out of sleep and out of bed in the morning cannot be made less painful by all the very best dialectic from Plato to Whitehead.

I do not mean to imply that the College had lost its way at this time. It is an amazing tribute to the strength and clarity of the original revolutionary insight that the program of studies remains essentially the same after so many years of so much tribulation. And even in the darkest times the reading of the best books of the western tradition continued; and there was some dialectic in the coffee shop.

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I have spoken of all this for you (students) who are now here are heirs to it

all. Much of what I have said you are explicitly aware of. The rest I am sure you have sensed. But the immanent occasion which has prompted me to try to tell you what you already know is an attitude occasionally encountered on this campus of a nostalgia for the "golden age". There is no doubt that there was an age different from the one we are now experiencing, and I have tried to characterize it as revolutionary. The implication of the golden age story, namely, that it was a time we should try to copy, I flatly deny. Revolutions have a natural life span, and although it is understandable that some members of the St. John's community should want to prolong that extraordinary excitement which always accompanies a revolution, this by no means implies that it is a wise course of action. The disorder, and it must be described as disorder, which was so obvious at St. John's from 1945 to the present has had two causes. The first I have characterized as a failure of the revolution to mature into well-understood forms of social organization and communication. This defect of the College as a social institution was magnified by the unusual tasks which the College undertook for the war veterans.

The second cause lies in the normal development of an institution based on a revolutionary principle. The grand period of revolution is usually succeeded by a secondary period of adjustment, a period which I think is properly denominated rebellious. For the College, this period began in 1946 and is now coming slowly to a close. In the normal development of the forces now active in the College, the current period of rebellion will be followed by an era of relative calm, quiet, and <u>obvious</u> social worth. But I should say more about rebellion.

It is sometimes difficult to distinguish rebellion from revolution. Rebellion is a smaller movement, less ambitious, less grand than revolution. Its aims are often confused and mingled and it is never idealistic as I have described revolution. It is often occasioned by a conflict of personalities,



and it is frequently a fight for power. A revolution in its conception is spontaneous (I do not mean instantaneous) and at its beginning is no-institutional for there are no institutional forms in existence capable of carrying the revolutionary idea. The institutions must be created from the whole cloth of the revolutionary idea. Rebellion always uses the current institutions, though it may change them drastically. A revolution fulfills a need which can no longer be denied. Rebellion fosters an adjustment which is more or less good. Revolution fills a vacuum; rebellion replaces. A revolution is complete when it becomes embodied; a rebellion is over when the "outs" are in. Revolution is organic; rebellion is artificial. Rebellions come after revolutions in time.

The major source of confusion between the two movements is in the amount of excitement they create. Rebellions can be fanatic. And at St. John's I think that the current rebellious fevers are sometimes mistaken by the rebels of both sides for the animation of revolution. But I am sure that the revolution is over.

Rebels often sense that their cause lacks the grandeur of revolution, and it is specifically this sense at St. John's that has led rebels and counter rebels, for we are all at the moment one or the other, either to long for the good old days of revolution or to overemphasize the defects of the good old days. This is normal for the current period of adjustment. The events in this adjustment have been important, but not grand. The major phases of adjustment are easy to list: the departure of the founding administration in 1946-47; the formation of first a temporary administration, its development into a more permanent form and its sudden replacement by the present administration; the reorganization of the language tutorials and laboratory which began as a conscious reform in 1948 and is still continuing; the admission of women; and recently the accreditation of the College by the Middle Atlantic States Association; the new rules of residence; the sale of the Brice House; the progress of the current financial campaign; the student

procurement program; the general trend of the College toward respectability. Any one or combination of these might be a death blow or life-saver for the College, and in this sense these events are extremely important. But in the revolutionary days they would have had an importance secondary to the development of the major ideas of the program.

But some of you have expressed the fear to me that these events are indicative of a counter revolution that will dissipate the accomplishments of the revolution. I do not think that they are, but I understand your concern. I think you are sometimes simply looking for trouble. When I returned to the College last September, I found, for the first time at St. John's, women in my classes. I was asked how it seemed to have women in my classes. The best answer I could manufacture was, "Well, it seems a good deal like having women in my classes." Actually the question had a kind of irrelevance I did not know how to cope with. The problem seemed to me to be, not women in the classes at St. John's, but the importance attached to their presence. And I apologize in advance for an apparent lack of gallantry, but I think the presence of women students at St. John's makes very little difference to the College.

You do well, however, to be critical of these developments, for there are certainly possibilities of counter-revolutionary moves. I would be very sceptical of a major move towards inter-collegiate athletics. But I am at the same time regretful that there is not more participation in the intra-mural program we have.

There is one great defense against the counter-revolution. This defense consists of the revolution which the program conceives and fosters in each of you. No student can come to St. John's and participate in the program without having a revolution take place inside him. If this ever ceases to be true, then the program will be dead. The whole point of the regularization that has taken place since 1946 is to create the optimum conditions for that individual revolution to take place by eliminating the distracting and irrelevant influences.



In 48 hours, you, the class of 1953 will become alumni. Someday sooner or later you will return to visit the College. Someday sooner or later you will have to make some kind of judgment about the College. You will surely be asked to contribute money to the College and to make certain efforts in its behalf. How will you know that the College has not undergone an effective counter-revolution? After all it is hard enough to understand what the College is doing while you are here. I do not know the answer to that question, and I'm sure that no one else does. But I can warn you not to confuse revolution with rebellion.

From this point on most of you graduates will metamorphose from revolutionaries to rebels to solid members of your community. In these transitions you do not have to lose your critical faculties; you should sharpen them. And don't be dispirited. Growing up, becoming more mature is a painful process, but to be an adult is not necessarily to be dead. I don't think you should be surprised if the College continues to grow up and to settle down.

Bon Voyage.

---Raymond Wilburn

(This article is substantially the text of Mr. Wilburn's address at the class day exercises of June 13, 1953. - editors)

The Chorus Comments on the Death of Dylan Thomas

On Monday was the turning of the tide,
The fierce rhythm broken, and old Arionrhod,
Screaming her hysteric lust, stabbed the swaggering Sun.
In sudden night the rebel current was revoked;
The bitch reclaimed her child.

In the attic, we saw it happen:
The quick flash presaging quiet dust.
Then the rain, warm on futile pavements,
Mimicked our dry tears. Unconvinced,
We watched the notaries fill out the register,
We lined your grave with cautious metaphors
And waited, no requiem to justify your bones.

Death was a hoax. Your legacy was from the start,
A spell of violence and blood. The crazy bell
Sang in the swaying steeple,
Finding a sterile echo in shriller voices.
You lured us through the vortex of our senses,
A grubby wunderkind, forging sacraments of slime and sex.
Your liturgy was anarchy for us; we seized the Chaos, not the Word.

And now your ghost still tracks us down,
And molds our mourning to your image. A ruined generation
Is your monument. O poet: we the living
Regret you. We see today our cold responsibilities
Through your dead eyes, and long for what is lost.

—James Taylor



George Orwell once composed a sentence to illustrate some horrors of bad writing: "Objective consideration of contemporary phenomena compels the conclusion that success or failure in competitive activities exhibits no tendency to be commensurate with innate capacity, but that a considerable element of the unpredictable must be taken into account." You begin to get Mr. Orwell's point, or points, when you read the verse in Ecclesiastes which is his original: "I returned, and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all."

The qualities that make the prose of Ecclesiastes better than the monstrous stuff of the parody include many of the qualities of good writing. I want to discuss two of them.

In the first place, the writer of good prose ordinarily uses short words, mostly of native origin, rather than the learned polysyllables that have come to us directly or indirectly from Latin and Greek. Of course he does not always have a simple choice, since a long word of Latin or Greek origin may be more accurate than its shorter equivalent, as acquiesce and agree; or may carry connotations that the shorter word lacks, as conflagration and fire. But, as Winston Churchill has put it, "Broadly speaking, the short words are the best words; and the old words are best of all." The good writer usually chooses building, not edifice; brotherly love, not fraternal affection; end, not terminate; truth, not veracity; change, not transmogrify; spit, not expectorate; try, not endeavor. His hero does not become enamored, but falls in love; does not obtain a position, but gets a job. Good English is made up largely of short words.

This is a point that evidently needs to be made at St. John's. I have not seen much of the prose that St. Johnnies write; but what I have seen, and still more what I have heard and heard of, suggests that many St. Johnnies are victims of the poly-

syllabic plague. They are of course not the only ones, for the plague has infected many writers today; but here it seems unusually baneful. If this is true, there is probably no reason to blame the Books. The Books are good books, and the authors of good books aren't lazy or pretentious or timid, whereas people who habitually use imported polysyllables are. Lazy writers recoil from the task of thinking clearly, and welcome the great fuzzy words that merely fumble around a thought. Pretentious writers are simply impressed by size and sonority. Timid writers, those who are scared to commit themselves, scared of critical scrutiny, welcome long words precisely because these words don't say anything or say things ambiguously and with loopholes.

Whatever the reasons for this kind of writing, the dangers are clear. For one thing, a sentence like Mr. Orwell's parody doesn't say anything clearly to the reader, at least not till he has re-read it several times. And unless the reader himself is a skillfull translator, the most he can get from the sentence is something pretty shapeless. Trying to communicate an idea with such words is like heaving clumps of wool at a target instead of shooting an arrow at it. Hobbes calls the result of such language "palpable darkness." For another thing, the mind that habitually works with heavy, cumbersome tools is likely to turn out heavy, cumbersome thoughts; and after a time the tools fit the mind, and the mind the tools. Somewhere you want to put an end to this process, and it's certainly easier to begin with the words than the thoughts.

Another mark of good writing is that it is concrete. That is, it strikes the senses: it evokes pictures, sounds, smells, sensations of taste and touch. More broadly, concreteness includes not only sense-impressions but all sorts of details--instances, actions, examples, illustrations, stories, statistics, descriptions. Without them no writing is interesting; without them no writing is likely even to be clear. The opposite of concrete is abstract; and abstract writing--generalizations, inclusive statements, abstracted from particulars--soon grows dull, irritating, mystifying. Though most people know that as readers they prefer the concrete, nevertheless as writers they



are guilty of monotonour abstraction. Most amateur writing is a string of "topic sentences," each of which shrieks its need of full development with details. In good writing the proportion of detail to generalization is often as high as ten to one. In Plato's Republic it is nine to one, if we use the book-divisions as our units of counting: In Book I all the main ideas of the dialogue are stated abstractly, and as A. E. Taylor says, "their real significance only becomes apparent as they are clothed with concrete detail in the full-length picture of the good man and the good community." (Incidentally, Plato's use of the concrete dialogue form is one reason why he is easier to read than, say, Aristotle.) On a smaller scale, most good expository paragraphs consist of a generalization--perhaps only implied--and a mass of details. It is not enough to state the theme or topic or point of a paragraph. The reader of a generalization asks, "What do you mean, exactly?" or "I understand, I think, but what of it?" or "That's clear enough, and significant, but is it true?" So the good writer stays with his idea till he has amplified and elaborated upon his generalization, piling up details till he has answered all the questions of his reader. This is the universal way, because it is the best way to communicate. You can see it in Darwin, for example, or Gibbon. It is used over and over by Plato; for example, in The Republic, when Adeimantus agrees with Socrates that the young must not hear poetry that distorts the nature of gods and heroes, he yet asks--as any reader would--"but just what do we mean and what particular things?" and Socrates answers by citing and quoting Hesiod and Homer and Aeschylus, and by analyzing and commenting on them. Perhaps more often, Socrates proceeds inductively, the details coming first, and then the abstraction from those details. How often, in his pursuit of abstract truth, does he speak of pilot and physician, horses and dogs, lyres and sandals and boxers and bees. How often does he resort to parables to make concrete, and therefore clear, the

most metaphysical notions.

The good writer not only is lavish with detail but chooses concrete words. When he has to use abstract words, he follows with a concrete rephrasing of the thought. He knows that sword is more effective than weapon, and rapier, saber, cutlass even more effective. Instead of vague verbs like walk, he uses sidle, stride, plod, trudge. Instead of horse, he uses pinto, nag, filly. He uses strong, vivid verbs and nouns (much more often than adjectives and adverbs) to carry the weight of his idea. He uses concrete figures of speech, and even onomatopoetic words like bang and plunk and buzz.

Let me make it clear that these two imperatives, Use short words and Be concrete, apply with as much force to speaking as to writing. Good writing is, after all, good talk. St. Johnnies are reputed to be, and are, good talkers. But I think they would be better talkers if they used shorter words and spoke more concretely. It is a diverting indoor sport to listen for polysyllabic abstractions, yours and others', and silently rephrase them in short, concrete words. It is good practice, too.

This brings me to a well-known problem. I am told that St. Johnnies, when asked to write an essay, collapse into a twitching funk, stalk the campus like zombies, thresh about like impaled beetles, and shed more blood than ink. To the dozens of conjectures why this is so, I want to add another: They forget that good writing is just good talk. They think that the ordinary words of everyday use are unfit for paper, and they knock themselves out looking for magniloquent words and phrases that seem more like the writing in books. Of course there may be all sorts of other reasons, like lack of practice, fear of committing oneself, training in the quick stab-and-withdraw of the seminar as contrasted to the essay's requirement of continuous and controlled discourse, and so on. But I urge those who shudder at the thought of writing that they just listen to themselves out their ideas, and if what they hear sounds like decent talk, that they write it down word for word, not translate it into something allegedly loftier.

-James Tolbert



## Nature in the Films

A quick review of the term's RAM programs so far brings to mind at first a succession of Saturday night disappointments. Many of us who went to see films we had been looking forward too because their advanced reputation promised them to be exceptionally instructive and entertaining later found ourselves leaving the gym feeling it was an effort to have sat still in one place for so long. But the same retrospection also recalls an interesting theme that could be traced through at least four of the films I saw, which were "Beaver Valley", "Nature's Half-Acre", "Land Without Bread" and "Nannok of the North", all of which seemed to offer some comment on the subject of Man and Nature.

Of course, I mean Nature here in the rather common non-philosophic sense - that is, it consists of the World Outdoors: trees, plants, animals, streams, and the phenomena of the seasons. In the Walt Disney films, this world specifically excludes man, who is by implication an outsider to it; Nature surrounds him, but he disregards it, and stumbles accross it generally by accident every so often. On these occasions, he feels he has made a discovery of something both wonderful and terrible, but always fascinating, and inevitably attempts to relate it to his own ordinary experience. This, I suspect, is what Disney has done for us in "Nature's Half Acre" and "Beaver Valley". His camera crews have penetrated relatively remote, uncleared areas of this country and have captured with some accuracy what usually goes on in the natural world when it is undisturbed by a foreign intruder; the audience is being given a rare privileged peek at what Nature really is like. But in making the final movie, a number of significant changes happen to what the camera has recorded, so that the total experience is something quite different from the original events. Nature is treated as a body of actors, and since none of these actors was rehearsed, Mr. Disney has provided scripts for them through skillful editing, spoken commentary, and a suggestive musical background.

Without doubt there is both wonder and terror in these films, and even those of us who have become numb to such things through being stultified with clinches about Primordial Life-Urges, and Nature's Cruel Extravagance etc. must have been really moved and impressed - at times. But the emotional experience was radically limited; the narrator may have been only too literal in reminding us that Nature's Half Acre might be in our own back yard, since the animals and plants are made into familiar human prototypes, and their habits evoke very ordinary emotional responses. You admire, or maybe deplore the sober industriousness of the humorless beaver, you are amused by the antics of the rascally, impertinent otters, you despise the vile, predatory jackal, and almost invariably you say "aww-h-h" at the cute, cuddly, little baby animals. The clever use of musical as well as spoken analogies reveals a view of Nature that is remarkably like the one in children's literature where alliteratively named creatures, (e.e. Buddy Beaver, Charlie Chipmunk, and also Mr. Disney's Donald Duck) are made to go through plausibly human adventures. I may be misinterpreting Disney's intention here; it is not impossible that he is insisting that we too are ultinately a part of Nature, and share certain elementary experiences with the other creatures. But what emerges much more convincingly is a systematic reduction of Nature to human commonplaces, through which this unknown, fascinating world is shown to be reassuringly like our own, and there's nothing more to worry about.

"Land Without Bread" is a rather difficult essay to evaluate, if only for purely mechanical reasons, such as the inaudible narrative. The film was apparently devoted to a study of the Hildanos, a little known race of people who live in the mountains of central Spain under conditions of incredible poverty and degredation. Here again, Nature is an object of fascination, but in this case a wholly negative fascination. In this country we are introduced to a demonic, actively hostile, menacing agency that fights back the feeble efforts of the Hildanos and their domestic beasts for survival. Actually, this became so exaggerated as to seem false and monstrous; after a certain



point, I thought that the stinking-corpse-with-maggots motif was being rubbed in my face rather gratuitously. If the producer, Luis Bunuel intended his movie as an instrument of Social Protest, its rhetorical effectiveness is doubtful. It would be difficult to feel real pity for these deformed degraded beings from whom the human spirit seemed almost completely missing, and the film became the pointless display of a horrible anomaly. The most probable reaction was not "Something ought to be done..." but a compulsive shudder. For this discussion, however, "Land Without Bread" is a remarkable counterpart to the Disney pictures. It also reworks the recorded observations of the camera into terms of human conventions, in this case making a continuity out of isolated events that are upsetting and repugnant to human sensibility.

"Nanook of the North" present a radically different treatment of Nature. Here we have neither Mr. Disney's sunny back yard where the wild creatures perform a staid ballet to the predictable tune of the seasons, nor the demonic, malevolent destructiveness of the land without bread. If it is anything, Nature in this film is a world that includes man, i.e. Nanook and his family, as an integral part and is neither sheltering nor hostile, although both these aspects might be read in arbitrarily. Although I am informed that the print of "Nanook" we say was substantially and insensitively cut, enough integrity remained to make an intelligible pattern discernable. What is striking, even astonishing, is the artlessness of this film; the camera was not a furtive eye, spying on unknowing actors, but a real participant in the life being recorded by Robert Flaherty. The absence of spectacular photography in a setting that almost begged for it, and the flat, neutral tone of the narrative may have caused a few dull spots, but also pointed toward a view of Nature as simply impersonal, nothing more than the summation of the realities of survival. In these surroundings from which he is inseparable, Nanook is seen as a creature of virtue and dignity who is too immediately and vitally concerned

with finding food and shelter for himself and his family to detach himself from Nature, and then to objectify it. Food is there, and Nanook has to hunt it out; the same snow freezes his face and chills his bones and provides a house. We probably admire Nanook for his strength and skill in his fight for survival, but the fight is always with this seal or that storm, and not with mysterious powers and agencies.

We seem to have at least three definitions of Nature implied in the films we are considering here, all of which can be related to certain familiar traditions. Disney gives us a Nature in terms of a comfortable, prossaic folklore, Bunuel states the extreme of the "red in tooth and claw" myth of the romantics, making Nature a cruel and inimical force that bears for man a morbid, obsessive fascination. Flaherty, in the middle of these two, suggests a Nature in which man is another species that fights like the others to exist, distinguished only by his arts and his concern with the family. But strangely in this picture, which we have claimed to be the most faithful to Nature, there is no Nature, only the natural world, which is quite a different thing.

In this way, the films offer a rather striking demonstration of an idea that we are probably all aware of: that only man, after having detached himself from the natural world, looks back on it and rediscovers it as Nature. The abstract and fictive quality of that term itself implies the transformation that actually took place between the evidence of the camera and the final product in two of the instances we have cited, since in "Nanook" where transformation was at a minimum, Nature was never more than a succession of numerous particular events. This is not to say that the Disney and Bunuel efforts are necessarily invalid on that account, although my opinion remains that they are not successful films. The important thing that emerges from this study is the fact that Nature is a fiction that results from the imposition of the art of the film on the raw material that the camera sees, but it is never properly speaking the real object of the camera. For whatever significance this fiction has, and from its repeated occurrence in literature, graphic represemtation, and our ordinary experience I suspect it is a highly significant



one, we must look not to the natural world but to the mind of man as artist, and should expect to find something of the answer in the rules of his art.

James Taylor

# The English Tutorial: A First Report

When it was announced last spring that there would be an English tutorial in the sophomore year, two questions immediately arose: (1) Why, in terms of the stated purposes of the language tutorial, was it decided to make the change? and (2) What will be the particular aims and methods in the proposed tutorial? These questions are still being asked along with the question of whether the tutorial seems to be accomplishing its aims. I am aware of obvious difficulties in trying to answer these questions as a member of the tutorial and with less than a third of the year gone by. Still, there may be certain advantages in such a position.

The catalog states: "The two main purposes of the Language Tutorial are to make the student understand the nature of language as the human way to articulate and convey thoughts, especially with respect to their own mother tongue; and to support the seminar by a much closer scrutiny of texts. A third aim - and one of minor importance - is the learning of the three foreign languages themselves." The "Statement of Educational Policy and Program" of 1951 calls for "A greater emphasis on the means to articulate, to expound and to co-ordinate thoughts; i.e. a greater emphasis on the development of syntactical and rhetorical skills, best shown in writing. This, in turn, demands a greater concentration on grammar."

Clearly, communication requires a knowledge of grammar. Grammar enables us to arrange words in such a way as to make clear the particular relationship of the things which they signify, i.e. the intended meaning. And this same knowledge enables us, by examining a given arrangement of words, to discover the intended meaning. A sound knowledge of grammar is especially important in writing for one cannot ask a writer to explain what he means. It seems that because of the conscious effort required to understand the grammar of a passage in Greek, the meaning is made clear, often clearer than that of the English passages we read. On the other hand we are so accustomed to using English that we ordinarily get to the meaning of an English sentence without attacking the grammar. But, unfortunately, this familiarity often causes us to neglect the grammar,



which leads us to misunderstand what we are reading, and to fail to convey the intended meaning in what we write. This neglect seems to be the cause of what the 1949 College Catalog calls "babbling minds."

It appears then, that the syntactical analysis, examination of possible meanings of words, consideration of contexts, etc., learned and practiced in the Greek tutorial may very profitably be applied in examining the nature of the misunderstandings that occur in English. This may be done by writing with a conscious effort toward clarity, and analyzing the result in such a way as to avoid errors in reading and to discover the errors in writing. Especially in view of the difficulty in analyzing one's own writing in this way, this sort of analysis would seem to be an appropriate activity for a St. John's tutorial.

A great many students have so little formal knowledge of English grammar that some study of it in the tutorial seems necessary, to make possible the sort of writing and analysis I have described. Many of us even have a tendency to apply Greek grammar to English, where it sometimes fits and sometimes does not. For example, a sentence appeared in the tutorial which ended"... of that delineated," using delineated as a substantive participle. This is simply not English.

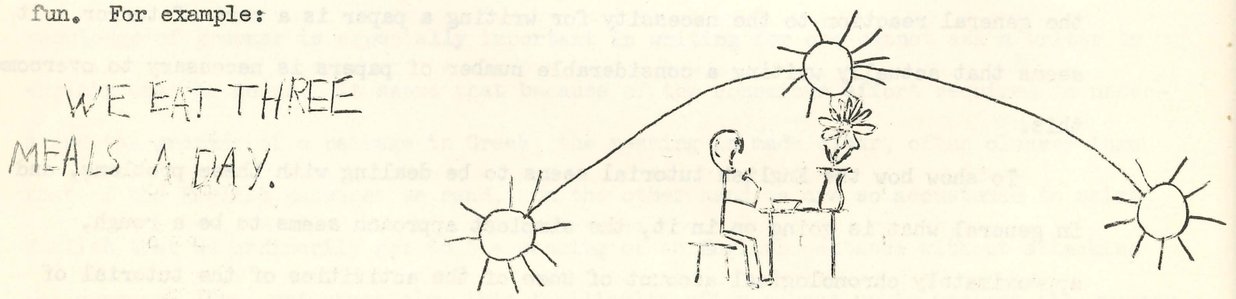
Besides the difficulties in regard to understanding English, there is the problem of constructing a coherent exposition of some subject, especially in writing a paper. Few of us have any adequate ability to do this as a legacy from our previous education. Fewer still, if any, are touched by the Muse. Consequently, the general reaction to the necessity for writing a paper is a sort of terror. It seems that actually writing a considerable number of papers is necessary to overcome this.

To show how the English tutorial seems to be dealing with these problems, and in general what is going on in it, the simplest approach seems to be a rough, approximately chronological account of some of the activities of the tutorial of

which I am a member, noting at the same time that the other two tutorials are apparently doing much the same thing.

We began by writing simple descriptions of objects. These descriptions were discussed in terms of the questions "What did the writer mean and how did he succeed or fail to convey his meaning?", and "With respect to what may a thing be described?" This latter question led to a discussion of the possible kinds of predication, largely in terms of the first nine chapters of the Categories of Aristotle. This one assignment, then, led to practice in analysis of writing, practice in paper-writing, and further, to a discussion of particular problems of language. Many subsequent assignments realized similar multiple purposes.

Next, the attempt to write a description of a description prompted a discussion of impositions. In describing a written word, one may consider its meaning, e.g., "The man is said to be old"; consider it just as a grammatical entity, e.g.,"'Man' is a noun" or "'Man' is used as a subject"; or consider it only as a physical object, e.g., "'Man' is made of ink." These are examples respectively of the first, second, and zero impositions. Describing a painting, and describing that description brought out new problems; for example, whether the painting itself was a description. Here the distinction first arose between a sign for something by convention, such as a word, and a sign by likeness, which is called an image. Attempts to communicate the meaning of a sentence by means of images indicated that there are some "things" which cannot be clearly communicated in this way. The attempts were in the form of a sort of cartoon drawing, great fun. For example:






Writing a summary of Categories 1-9 was valuable in showing clearly the two possible sources of error: misunderstanding of what was read, and failure to communicate the intended meaning. Making a simple, brief comparison of Genesis and Plato's Timaeus and trying to summarize Mr. Darkey's lecture on Virgil served similar purposes. We tried using Aristotle's categories as a method of analyzing an extremely complicated sentence from Virgil. This involved breaking down the sentence into propositions and then determining the category of each predicate. Then, turning to a little gray grammar, written by a Mr. Nesfield (it was selected, it seems, on account of being concise, unpretentious and inexpensive), we tried to make some sort of comparison between the categories and the "parts of speech."

As an example of the things we discussed: - it was noticed that of all the parts of speech, Aristotle defines only "noun" and "verb," "noun" as a sign having no reference to time, "verb" as having a reference to time and as a sign which "indicated that something is asserted of something." One might, it was suggested, understand other parts of speech as nouns in Aristotle's sense. For example, "green," called an "adjective," is a "sign with no reference to time" for a certain quality, and that quality is a thing. Another thing discussed: - Aristotle refers to words in the sense of sounds or written marks as "signs by convention." But it seems that some interjections might be natural sounds, such as an inarticulate scream, while others, like "ouch," do seem to be signs by convention. For we say that "ouch" may be mispronounced (or if written, misspelled), while obviously no such thing may be said of the scream. But the distinction is perhaps shaky.

At about the same time as the "beginning of Nesfield," we read and attempted to paraphrase short, metaphor-laden poems by Emerson and Yeats. The variety of interpretations was startling. By syntactical analysis, careful examination of

the metaphors, etc., the various interpretations were finally narrowed, in each case, to something approaching a common understanding. As a final example, one which brings the account almost up to the present, here is part of a passage analyzed into implicit and explicit simple sentences: "One can make a determination. One can act in all circumstances the part of a good man. One must come to ruin. There are so many. They are not good. A ruler has wishes. He can maintain himself. He must learn. One can be not good. One can use that ability. One can neglect that ability. There are refinements." The source is Machiavelli's The Prince, Chapter 15. Try to reassemble this into the original version; it may lead, for one thing, to an appreciation of conjunctions.

I know nothing about the future course of the tutorial, except that there have been some vague hints about Shakespeare. Perhaps something will be done in accordance with Mr. Wilburn's recent observation that more attention should be paid to poetry. As to the evident achievements so far, English grammar is being learned; the members of the tutorial seem, in terms of both of the difficulties stated in the beginning, to be writing better; and the discussions in general have achieved an awareness of a great many problems of language. My vantage point is not one that permits a general evaluation of the English tutorial. Moreover, since the present plan of the tutorial is probably tentative, and since in the light of one year's experience changes will undoubtedly be made, it seems that no such evaluation will prove too meaningful until the tutorial has been tried for several years.

James W. Jobes



## METATHALAMION

"Having reach'd the age of discretion, I decided against marriage..."
Memoirs: E. Gordon-Maurie

I

We were poor and slept together
In iron beds whose decor,
Knobs and bars, as well were known
To each of us, not as stars -
Since the sky was never seen,
Nor had the meaning which the sly
Greeks have given -, but as our bodies,
Where each of three, nightly riven
By their love, which was habitual
And innocent, stood above
Excitement and were intimately
Bored.

When we woke, there, daily, light
Prevented us: dark was broken,
Fled in many forgotten pieces,
And washing earned each a penny
If our hands seemed newly clean,
And so we thought Daddy's lands,
Riches, skill were greater than
The most we knew; then the still
Growth had come, and I was left
To sleep alone; they had some,
The others, knowledge now
How poor we were.

II

Genny, Genny, Genny fair
Who alone can bear
The intimacy
Of me beside a thee.

Sister, sister, not of blood,
Of chance and not intent
Who alone will stem the flood
Of these, indifferent.

Blessed be thy birth
Which gave thy mother mirth.

And bless'd thy death,
Has given thee
Reality

III

In nineteen-fifteen, gold-toothed, cane a-twirl,
He saw from Pittsburgh's streets the world a-whirl
In chaos, for it's restless energies
Accomplished nothing much, were bent to seize
The means of all production, that is, squeeze
The profits from those cap'talistic swine,
Whose usuries forbade the poor to dine.



He, in ambition's slight illuminations,
Considered doubtfully his expectations
Within the context given; with the sight
Of sweat-shops as his surety of right,
He cheerfully opposed the settled might
Of habit, toppled inbred piety,
Haphazard formed our new society.

He organized the laborites in teams;
He fought the Wobblies, entered into schemes
To foster unions in the A.F.L.
"And boys," thus written, spoken, "give 'em Hell,
Go teach them bastards that'd gladly sell
Their mothers for a buck the little man's
Woke up: we're done with bein' also-rans!"

This shy and powerful and stunted man:
His hair was slick, his shoes were black and tan,
His grasp was sure, his loneliness acute,
Read Dante of a night and feared the brute,
His ignorance inside: he culled the loot
Of all he fought; mastered Latin, thought,
Read Wells and Shaw (whose works entire he bought)

He was as lonely as before - at meals,
Half-cooked in rented rooms, he heard the peals
Of children laughing; he heard the men content.
He belched his loneliness, felt sentiment
Too inbred, mocking his experiment.
He seldom cried, he often raged in vain;
He read his books; they did not ease his pain

Remembered thus, the temporal rythms that,
On foreign flesh begot his flesh - a spat,
He could not know, originated him,
A sexual argument, a tiff, a whim -
Gave purpose to the universe, the rim
Of all creation blurred into a child:
The desert spat the hermit out, defiled.

I am the visible mark of his sin,
The nocence unremitting entered in
By innocence, whose simple ecstasies
He trusted; I am whom he daily sees
By accident reforge eternities
That were his own, nor have I for him wept
But for his unfree love which he has kept.

IV

O, wish we never had each other met,
The rather than we knew each other well;
Beguile our years: admit not Adam's debt,
Where in Creation each, his father, fell.

In my fond and satyric morn, when my brute and animate nature lies awake in pleasure, have I not remembered thee, turned and kissed thine arm in satiate love?

Why, having this, must thou wish more,
And wish a wish that wounds me sore?



In sounds repeated, which is the womb of nomination, have I not named thee thy names: more infinite are thy names than the possible Names of God; nor is few the number of thy names actual.

Why having this, must thou wish more,
And wish a wish that wounds me sore?

In eating, in bread and salt and oil and wine, upon the table and the floor, and on the bed warms coffee in a cruet, have I not blessed thee, and given thee mine, and taken thine?

Why, having this, must thou wish more,
And wish a wish that wounds me sore?

I have pressed my warm and masculine-flowing veins against thy feminine-willing sides; upon thy vents and stops, thine orifices and mute flesh, have my hands, and, yea, my body grown tired in praise of thee.

Yet having this, thou dost wish more,
And wish a wish that wounds me sore.

--Bernard Jacob

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