

1966

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Recommended Citation

Blaisdell, Gus. "After Ground Zero: The Writings of Evan S. Connell, Jr.." *New Mexico Quarterly* 36, 2 (1966).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmq/vol36/iss2/16>

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After Ground Zero
The Writings of Evan S. Connell, Jr.

BY GUS BLAISDELL

I shall never forget how disturbed I was to discover the universe makes sense but has no meaning. — George Mills

HIROSHIMA, Nagasaki, and the fate of the unlucky Japanese fishermen aboard the "Lucky Dragon," changed the hearts of many men. They felt that because man had apparently reached the apogee of his destructive capabilities, war as a conventional means of arbitrating disputes seemed obsolete. Yet the comforts of a peace based upon arsenal rattling, gnawing anxieties over impending annihilation, and a terse skepticism of human rationality are dubious and precarious when the possibility of that peace rests on the poker-hand of policy backed by ICBMs. At best an uneasy and paranoid balance has been struck.

The contemporary conceptual scheme has come to resemble that of the Eskimo who, when asked by an anthropologist why he venerated so many gods, replied: "We do not believe; we fear." Even if his environment is less arctic, modern man is also beset by shadowy fears he cannot rationally dispel and by probabilities that he cannot rationally assess. Life could be annihilated swiftly, the earth transformed into an orbiting cinder. Presently we stand at the epicenter, at the ground zero of the human heart.

The people of Hiroshima experienced a disastrous event for which there was no precedent. New words and attitudes were born in them—*shogonai* (it's useless to try; the shrug of despair); fears of *genbakusho* (atomic disease) made hypochondriacs of the majority of the population since any disease might now be the result of radiation poisoning; the people's identity became that of the dead. Nature itself, almost sacred to the Japanese temper, had been killed by the atomic holocaust. Many survivors in the city compared their experience to an apocalyptic vision of Buddhist Hell. This class of persons and the attitudes characterizing them have come to be called *hibakusha* (those who experienced the bomb).¹

Although Evan S. Connell, Jr., was not at Hiroshima or Nagasaki, nor was he aboard the "Lucky Dragon," the themes of much of his writing reveal him as sharing the spirit of *hibakusha*. The fear of thermonuclear destruction does not obsess Connell. But what does anger him is the way in which the unimaginable power of today's weapons has reduced man to a cipher, nothing more than a statistic in a death-count. Connell's is a position of untempered humanism, primitively Christian at the core (Augustine, the Gnostics and Manichees), his outrage and indignation ameliorated by love. Siding with Augustine, Connell admonishes: "Let us doubt without unbelief of things to be believed."

Connell is *hibakusha* because those blinding flashes above the two Japanese cities seem to have scarred his heart and seared his imagination, and also because of his ingrained opposition to anything that degrades man—napalm, gas chambers and electric chairs, the Nazi extermination camps, and religious inquisition—his is a deeply religious loathing of fanaticism in any form. Neither on the side of fools nor angels, Connell, like Luther, has declared: *Hier stehe ich, ich kann nichts anders*. "Life is a condition of defeat," he has written; yet he is on the side of life alone, fragile in its beauties and terrible in its agonies.

Evan S. Connell, Jr., was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1924. He was graduated from high school in 1941 and served as a Navy aviator during World War II. After his discharge, he attended Kansas University, receiving his B.A. in 1947. Originally a premedical student, Connell studied fine arts and writing at the graduate schools of Columbia and Stanford universities. Until its demise a few years ago, he served as a senior editor on the staff of the distinguished San Francisco literary magazine, *Contact*. He is the author of three novels, two collections of stories, and a book of interlocking prophetic fragments dealing with the contemporary themes that have so deeply concerned him. His residence is San Francisco. Besides writing, Connell draws and paints.

Connell began his early writing career with a study of a middle-class, Kansas housewife; his newest novel deals with a monstrous nonentity obsessed with violence. There is a well-defined path of development linking his early work with his later, a path with a truly articulate direction.

Before attempting a novel, Connell mastered the short story. His first book was *The Anatomy Lesson and other stories*. He has acknowledged debts to Proust, Mann, and Chekhov, has studied under Wallace Stegner and Walter van Tilburg Clark, and has expressed his admiration for the historical fiction of Janet Lewis. The tone of a Connell story is unmistakably American; the perception is European. He can evoke a heightened moment of experience, relying less on plot than on innuendo. With Joyce and Flaubert, he shares a predilection for epiphanic detail and "the ineluctable modality of the possible." A Connell story is like the sieve of Eratosthenes: everything nonessential is filtered out until only what is prime remains. Grace and equipoise are properties of his work, and he is adept at rendering the ambiguity of an emotion or situation. Avoiding the beginning-middle-end artifice of narrative fiction, Connell creates the illusion that his stories are nothing more than textures or surfaces. Smooth overall, the narrative armature of a Connell story is oblique, helical, and sinusoidal. Here his affinities with Chekhov and Proust are apparent, particularly in his preference for the rough-edged story of mood. Shunning any realistic imitation of life, he unerringly achieves intense verisimilitude. With Joyce's godlike author, Connell remains aloof from his creations, completely outside them, in apotheosis, paring his fingernails.

"There is no weapon for the son to take from his father to conquer the forces of darkness and so to bring greatness to the people of earth,"

says Andrev Andraukov, the life-drawing teacher in the title story of *The Anatomy Lesson and other stories*. "Each time in history that people have shame, each time in history people hide from what they are," Andraukov lectures his uncomprehending students, "then in that age there is no meaning to life"; "I teach the hand. No man can teach the heart." But as the anatomy lesson progresses it reveals that Andraukov is more than a mere technician of skeletal structure and musculature.

To emphasize the three-dimensionality of the belly of a woman and to make the point that the navel is not to be represented on paper as a mere dot of ink, Andraukov withdraws a silver thimble from his vest and thrusts it slowly into the model's navel. Like a slap in the face, the class has an inkling of the mortality of the flesh and the dependency of the sexes. As Andraukov reveals in the closing lines of the story: "Then I will teach you. I teach of the human body and of the human soul. Now you are young, as once I was. Even as yours were my nostrils large. . . . I, too, have kissed the hot mouth of life, have shattered the night with cries. You will listen now! God is just! He gives you birth. He gives you death. He bids you to look, to learn, and so to live." The lesson is finished; the bells of the university toll in the quadrangle outside. The best picture of the human spirit, Connell says with Wittgenstein, is the human body.

"The Fisherman from Chihuahua," a story that has won acclaim, embodies the savage song of life, the plaintive wail born of poverty, disease, and defeat. Damaso, the singer, symbolizes both the primordial and contemporary, perhaps the lost roots of human consciousness, the ties of blood and earth lost in Eden, as well as the suffering of humanity, the inhuman crucifixion on Golgotha. Damaso's song is inarticulate, without beginning or end, and it is an expression of his painful and unexpressible perception that life is a condition of defeat, history the chronicle of that condition. Unlike Andraukov, Damaso is incapable of saying what he knows. He is on the brink of despair; suicide is suggested in the story and it is a possible out for Damaso. His passion and ferocity are admirable even though from beginning to end he remains an ungrounded symbol, enigmatic, romantic, baffling. An insinuation of meaning is not enough to establish significance, and because the story presents merely the illuminated detail of Damaso's song, an image which can be judged in many ways, it is open to and encourages outlandish interpretations. Here Connell's richness and sideways approach to his subject have resulted in inscrutability.

An elliptical dialogue between practical reason and the imagination is the basis for "The Trellis," a gothic little tale using the form of a detective story. What is particularly fine in this story is the way Connell manages to merge the characters, each man playing the other's role until all that remains is the theme of ancient opposition between reason and unreason. The dialogue is purposely stilted, often pompous and oratorical as Tony Miula, a silversmith, relates the life of Alan Ehe who has committed suicide under the arbor between Tony's house and his own. As Tony tells Inspector Polajenko about Alan, a typical artist manqué, it may be that Tony is telling about himself in disguise. As the story unfolds, Tony is seen to be an empty symbol. His perceptions are outside of himself, externalized and reified: he collects stamps and cuts pictures out of magazines. Perhaps he is an emotional vampire living his life through the lives of other people; or, paradoxically, if the narrative of Alan Ehe is really about Alan Ehe, Tony allows other people to live their lives through him. As the story ends a crowd has gathered around the arbor to watch Alan's body removed. A man in the crowd stoops down and picks up one of the many cigarette butts Alan left on the lawn. The man thrusts the butt into his pocket as if it were a relic. Tony remarks, "with Plymouth abstinence we ignore the soul of man." The Inspector, rigorously logical, the absolute interrogator, states that Tony is a man "Diogenes passed by," and Tony counters that Polajenko is a man whose "center of gravity is outside himself." The war within a man himself, as the various parts of the soul contend for supremacy, is the tale told in "The Trellis."

"The Yellow Raft," whose themes will be broadened and detailed in Connell's second novel, *The Patriot*, is the major achievement in *The Anatomy Lesson*. Less than six pages in length, it tells of the crash of a Navy fighter somewhere in the Solomon Islands. The pilot escapes from the wreck and waits for the rescue plane to arrive. During the night a storm arises, the pilot is washed overboard, and the next morning the rescue plane arrives, a lumbering PBY that circles the empty raft most of the day. At one point a plexiglass blister opens in the tail of the PBY and beer cans and waxed papers float down on the sea. The flying boat has relieved itself. Then, "as a dowager might stoop to retrieve a glove," the PBY dives on the raft and machine-guns it, turns, and flies away. The raft begins sinking; a green dye spreads on the sea.

There is nothing human in this story, only objects: the downed

fighter, the pilot, and the PBY. The pilot, as he escapes from his plane, is simply a "bloody human hand." During the storm his only defiance of the sea is to blow smoke rings at the onrushing waves. The story is about the engines of war, what Connell in *The Patriot* will call "the mindless mechanical conviction" of the planes. The pilot is nothing, important only insofar as he can operate a giant weapon. The PBY is searching for the plane, only incidentally for the pilot, and not being able to find its fallen offspring, removes the final trace—the raft, as inhuman as the planes themselves.

Using a straightforward, clinical style, and without ever stating it in the story, Connell's rage is an ever-present undercurrent: *But a man has died!* Could the pilot's death have been avoided? The suggestion in the story is that it was both inevitable and adventitious; given the setting of combat and war, the adventitious and the inevitable are indistinguishable. That is the terror.

Leon and Bébert occupy three stories in Connell's second collection, *At the Crossroads*. They are a pair of empty resortites who dote on trivia and talk endlessly. They are a measure of moral weakness, for although their logic is a tight system, it has no relevance to living, never catching hold of the world. Their concerns are ephemeral and empty. Leon and Bébert are very funny, in a black and absurd way; they are also terrifying. For them all human feeling has dried up, despair and suicide are but a pair among poses, and people, no matter how desperate their situations, are merely acting out some role or other. Everything in the world is inauthentic, boring, a fake. Therefore Leon and Bébert can sail boats, eat at restaurants, while away days in bars playing chess, and talk—for only unending talk can erect a barrier against the oblivion both of them sense. They are a pair of semi-effeminate parrots endlessly squawking. They are what happens to dilettantes at menopause. They camp.

Mrs. Bridge is Connell's first novel. It was a critical success and has remained in print since its original publication in 1959. Connell has said of the book: "I believe it was Chekhov who observed that people do not go to the North Pole, or whatever; they eat cabbage soup and fall off stepladders, I think he was right, which is why there is no extraordinary event in the life of Mrs. Bridge."²

A novel of 254 pages and 117 chapters, the structure of *Mrs. Bridge* has been characterized as pointillist or mosaic. Each chapter, like a dot

of paint or chip of glass, is complete within itself. To see the whole, one must attain some distance. Details are amassed slowly and with an apparent randomness that lends the book its reality. It could have been called "A Life," as Maupassant might have titled it, for that is what it is. *Mrs. Bridge* is a masterpiece, as many critics have said, but in comparison with the breadth of Connell's later work, it is a very small masterpiece. ☞

India Bridge, who could never get used to her exotic first name, is the wife of a successful Kansas lawyer and the mother of three children. The family is probably upper-middle class in income, completely middle class in taste and temper. Mrs. Bridge learned early that "though marriage may be equitable, love itself was not." The children grow away from her: Ruth into an emancipated semi-Bohemian, representing the sensual that escapes Mrs. Bridge; Carolyn into the spoiled child of leisure, wanting only the country club and golf; and Douglas, the youngest, grows up to be something Mrs. Bridge could never understand—a self-sufficient young man.

For India Bridge the virtues to be emulated and admired are "pleasantness, cleanliness, and mannerliness." She is vapid. Able to realize dimly that love is not equitable, Mrs. Bridge never learns that life itself is an enormous inequality. Her sanguine, saccharine nature is her insulation. She is abjectly purblind. But she is not totally empty even though her important perceptions are inarticulate; life happens all around her but seldom to her; she is befuddled and fumbling; she is eternally outside looking in, even outside of herself. India Bridge is the mother of most Americans, a fact that makes her pitiful, real, and worthy of compassion, as evidenced by Douglas' behavior during his father's funeral—he immediately becomes the man of the house because he understands his mother's inability to cope, finding it both natural and sad.

Mrs. Bridge's antagonist is Grace Barron. Grace does not know her place. She argues art, politics, and literature with men, and goes to the shopping center in Levi's, tennis shoes, and a sweatshirt; she has been known to play football with the neighborhood children. Grace complains to Mrs. Bridge that "the orbit is too small." Finally, despairing over her washing machine, Grace retreats into madness, eventually committing suicide. Mrs. Bridge's reaction to Grace's suicide is typical: writing to Ruth in New York she says that the causes of Grace's death are unknown but rotten tuna-fish salad is suspected.

Visiting Grace before the suicide, Mrs. Bridge is silent because "here was someone less confident of the future than herself. An evil, a malignancy, was at work. Its nature she could not discern, though she had known its carbuncular presence for many years. . . , a sour taste in the mouth and a wild, wild desire."

One rainy night Mrs. Bridge is filled with self-pity, desire rises in her, and she wishes tenderly to declare her love for her husband. Hearing him enter the hall, she runs to greet him, overflowing with emotion. "I see your forgot to have the car lubricated," he says.

Another night, during a thunderstorm, Mrs. Bridge sees lightning flash. It illuminates the room in which she is sitting. Her husband glances up from his paper, asks her if the clock struck, and she answers that she does not think so. "She never forgot this moment when she had almost apprehended the very meaning of life, and of the stars and the planets, yes, and the flight of the earth." The key to this passage is Matsuo Basho's famous haiku about the person who, seeing summer lightning flash, does not feel that life is fleeting. With a few deft strokes Connell establishes a basic difference between India and Walter Bridge.

Creaming her face before going to bed, Mrs. Bridge becomes aware that "soundlessly, she was disappearing into white, sweetly scented anonymity. Gratified by this she smiled, and perceived a few seconds later that beneath the mask she was not smiling."

Connell might well have left India Bridge here. Instead she ends trapped in her Lincoln, "half inside and half outside"—her position throughout the novel—calling for help—"Hello? Hello out there?"—but "no one answered unless it was the falling snow."

Mrs. Bridge is a singular formal achievement. It is circumspect and gracious in style, oblique but with the center always in view. Nevertheless, because the central character is vapid and monolinear we are continually returned to her inability to come to grips with anything. India Bridge is overestablished; she learns nothing throughout the course of the entire novel. As Grace Barron said, "the orbit is too small."

THE ATTENTION WON by *The Patriot* is attested to by the fact that the original hardbound copy is available for fifty cents or a dollar on the remainder racks. It received scant critical attention, an event partially attributable to the fact that Connell is always billed as "the author of

Mrs. Bridge." But Connell is first an artist and his work cannot be judged in terms of, nor be expected to conform to, a single critical success. *Mrs. Bridge* is a book readily available to the reading public; there is nothing turgid or nasty or obscene in it; anybody's mother can pick it up and read it and enjoy it; it makes an excellent Christmas present.

The Patriot is a bigger book in every way—both physically and in theme—and it is a book obviously close to Connell, perhaps the most autobiographical of his works. The only comparison between the two books is that the same man wrote both. If reviewers felt that this second novel suffered badly when compared with Connell's "masterpiece," then their first obligation was to notice that because the two books were radically different, they were not formally comparable—the difference between a Kansas housewife and a young Naval air cadet. When a book like *The Patriot* suffers at the hands of reviewers with paradigms in mind, then the criteria used for comparison are invidious.

The Patriot tells the story of Melvin Isaacs. Fresh out of high school, Melvin enters Naval air-cadet training, washes himself out on purpose, enters college after his discharge, and finally refuses to report for a physical examination when the Korean War breaks out.

At Saufley Field, the station where no cadet washes out, Melvin, having come to understand and believe that war is senseless and absurd, decides to kill himself. During his flight training he has learned that death is a random, inexplicable, and unexpected event. It can take any life at any time. Melvin's antagonist, Sam Horne, believes that death is just a mistake, something that happens when a man does not follow the rules laid down in a flight manual or in a military code. For Melvin, the mere existence of a rule is not enough: a rule must be backed by a reason and its mere existence is not an explanation of its validity. But such is the nature of military life and, as Melvin learns, military life resembles the world of children—rule-governed but irrational. Rules must be questioned and asking why is as natural as breathing to Melvin. His trouble is that he wants reasons for doing things.

On a bombing run Melvin hits the target dead center. Everybody knows it was an accident, pure luck. "Yes," Melvin says to Horne, "I was aiming at that peg—aiming right at it—but the fact that I hit it was an accident. . . . Now should I receive credit or not? . . . Or

suppose you take another situation entirely—don't you see how odd it could become?" Horne, of course, sees nothing of the sort, but Melvin is beginning to see clearly.

Melvin recalls a night when he was leading the cadets in a flight. He mistook Mars for the tail-light of a plane and flew toward it, the rest of the cadet squadron following blindly after "like lemmings." Unlike Horne, Melvin is always able to visualize himself as a victim; his flight training has not made him special or exempt. He remembers the deaths in training—a pilot who knew how to fly crashes and dies; another, during gunnery practice, hits the sleeve that Melvin is towing and crashes in the Gulf. Half asleep, clumsy and young, a bumbler, Melvin becomes conscious of his duties to himself and to other human beings. He senses a fundamental dignity in living, something to be preserved; but not by fighting. A moment of despair comes with this newly found knowledge and Melvin decides to kill himself.

Choosing an old warhorse of an SBD Dauntless, its white stars eaten away by rust and Japanese flags stenciled on its fuselage, Melvin has picked the weapon he knows best. It is ironically appropriate that he should choose this plane, one that has seen and survived the combat he will never know. But on trying to enter the cockpit Melvin finds the greenhouse rusted shut—"when he found himself locked out—he remembered how often he had wanted something and had been denied." He pounds on the rusted canopy till it opens.

Melvin's death in the plane is not meant to be as simple as he had expected. He is a pilot now, thoroughly trained, and nearly as automatic in his reactions as the "mindless mechanical conviction" of his aircraft. He puts the plane into a climb, higher and higher, the air becoming thinner, until the vibrations begin to shake the plane apart, then noses it over in a dive, flaps retracted. Bemused, Melvin sits in the cockpit with arms folded, "in dreamy indecision," and has a vision of the nature of the world: "each event in human history was antedated by another, and from it developed." Knowing this, Melvin gives himself up to oblivion, resigned like a Buddhist to the blue annihilation of the Gulf rushing to meet his diving plane.

Slowly but inexorably, and against his straining will, Melvin watches his hand move forward toward the stick; then the other hand; then both of them around the stick and pulling it back, trying to bring the nose of the shuddering monster up, out of its dive. He watches his body from a distance, at one remove, both fascinated and aghast that

it will not do his bidding. He is simultaneously participant and witness, as if under the influence of some hallucinogenic drug. Then he blacks out. On regaining consciousness, Melvin discovers his feet are pressed against the instrument panel, the dials smashed and broken, and blood is running from his nostrils. The plane, now safely out of its dive, is nevertheless going to crash and Melvin must decide whether to ditch in the Gulf or try to fly it in for a crash landing. He knows he could easily escape being washed out simply by ditching, but he would rather face scorn publicly than live with a lie privately. Again, the bizarre aspect of the situation presents itself to Melvin. The plane is old, unflightworthy, and if he ditches he could cite his reasons, telling a lie without lying! That might be Horne's way; Melvin refuses.

Heading in for a fiery crash that he does not know he will survive, his radio and instruments gone, the canopy covered with oil, and the screaming plane coming apart bolt by bolt, Melvin has achieved a kind of enlightenment.

The details and quality of the writing in this section are as fine, if not better, than anything Connell rendered in *Mrs. Bridge*. The amassing of minutiae on flying and military life in the preceding chapters is made to pay rich dividends here. Connell has attained an artistic peak that would seem hard to duplicate, and his comment on war, the machines of war, and the men trained to operate those machines—as well as the perception of the mind-body relationship (Melvin's *body* will not let *him* kill it!)—is without parallel.

Melvin's suicide attempt represents the formal denouement of the novel. But Melvin still has a long way to go before he is able to shake off the torpor clouding his spirit.

After being washed out of the aviation program, Melvin is assigned to an officers' club in Texas where he shags golf balls on the driving range for the duration. There, in relative peace, drawing pictures while he sits behind the signs marking the range, Melvin learns that the war is ended and reads of the horrors of Hiroshima: "There was a woman whose skin slipped from her body in huge, glovelike pieces. A group of children stood in a circle holding hands; their eyes had melted and the fluid ran down their cheeks." By juxtaposing the idyll of a country club with Hiroshima, Connell demonstrates the absurd inequities of war—officers lounging in the Texas sun and drinking while women and children die and other officers go down in flames.

Discharged, Melvin enters the university. As he had in service, he

infuriates his professors by continually wanting reasons and causes. During a fraternity initiation, when he remembers a photograph of an Australian prisoner about to be beheaded by the Japanese, Melvin refuses to kneel. He has voluntarily washed out again, rather than submit to a meaningless ritual without any justification other than its mere existence.

Melvin Isaacs, the patriot, will continue to question, to do what he believes is right even when no reason can be given. He is well aware of the enormity of life, of the complexity of even the simplest decision. His is an unerring sense of moral smell, a nose for the ethical, even if his final stand is knowing what he will do without being able to state the grounds for his action. The false patriot is Jake Isaacs, Melvin's father, whose political philosophy is as subtle as a Rough Rider's. He is a jingoist; his is a historically informed but uncritical patriotism based on flag, mother, and country—that you are called is reason enough. But not for Melvin. His ethical revolt against both his father and his country is based on the principle that a man ought not to do what he knows to be pointless, brutal, mindless, and wrong, even if such acts are sanctioned: the dignity of the individual and of life is more crucial.

In the final scene of the novel, a chapter both hilarious and grim, Melvin has refused to report for a physical examination. Korea has erupted. Melvin's father has been marking the Conelrad frequencies on Melvin's radio and has brought a garbage can (for water in case of atomic attack) and a manual for survival. Grabbing the manual, Melvin tears it in two, tosses it into the garbage can, and tells his father to get out. "I know what I won't do," are Melvin's final words. One of the things he refuses to do is to live in fear of disaster or to contribute to the construction of a necropolis of fallout shelters. This would be to live on the side of death, not life, and Melvin has learned that death is the most ancient enemy, always the final victor. Yet Melvin is no longer naive: he knows that even in a utopia children will still die.

Notes from a Bottle Found on the Beach at Carmel stands as an apparent hiatus in Connell's formal development. But the peculiar nature of the work is only partly structural—the mosaic technique carried a step further—and the themes it develops are consistent with the rest of Connell's canon. The main interest of the work resides in

the voice or tone of the narrator and in the formal assumptions necessary to this kind of writing, a form that appears essentially new.

A fragment of *Notes*, more provincial, lumpy, prosy, and less interesting, appeared in 1959 in *Contact* 3. Connell there remarked that he frankly did not know what the writing amounted to but that it had a curious fascination for him, like doing a complicated, private dance unobserved. Three years later, very much altered and enriched, the work appeared in full in *Contact* and was brought out the following year in a hardbound edition by Viking.

Kenneth Lamott, speaking for the editors when *Contact* devoted the December 1962 issue to *Notes*, characterized the writing: "It eludes the usual categories of literature, falling somewhere in that dimly defined but extraordinarily fertile area where prose and verse, fiction and nonfiction, metaphysics and science meet." Connell himself has said of the work: "I think of it as a work of close association rather than free association"; on the form . . . "'cohesion' is as close to 'structure' as I'd care to make it." At the end of the editors' introduction in *Contact*, writing in the style of the work itself, Connell declares his intention: "It is incumbent upon me to establish some / image whereby / all men must judge / future interpretations, believing / in the value of mine. This I do tenderly, / humbly / and with a knowledge of utter obligation." For lack of a better term, such writing can be called "vatic."³

Works of vatic literature are as unpopular as they are infrequent in contemporary American writing. It is only a bold or foolish writer who would undertake a work that is in direct opposition to the inherent skepticism of the American temper, that empirical or pragmatic attitude that judges all prophets false until proven valid, and then, at best, as highly dubious. Yet far more important than the climate opposed to such writing are the pitfalls within the medium itself, stumbling blocks that would seem to preclude success from the beginning.

In a sense, vatic writing, like art for art's sake, is writing for the sake of writing. Its joys are the density of prose often archaic in syntax and diction; a delight in (and attention to) rhythm and the well-turned phrase; the precise perception; the terse tautness of apothegm and aphorism; the use of myth, esoteric lore, and bizarre facts; and the viable image. Already the writer has assumed a heavy mantle and runs many risks.

Should the fatidic tone fail, vatic writing results in rhetorical flatulence. The hyperbolic or elliptical style, together with the mythic lore, may prove elusive. If an image or myth fails to properly illuminate a part of the theme, the writing degenerates into inscrutability. In its attempt to partake of the best of prose and verse, vatic writing raises the question of how far the lyric impulse can be stretched. Or, more generally, as John Wisdom once wrote on the nature of early analytic philosophy: "It is not the stuff but the style that stupefies." For a writer of Connell's ability the mere stupefaction of style would be a disastrous result.

Unlike the novel or sonnet, vatic literature is not a literary form as much as it is a style or posture or stance. A prophetic or oracular voice is assumed together with a style appropriate to the fullest possible expression of that voice. Thus it can also suffer from over-richness. There are a number of interesting assumptions that must be made and met: these are the properties of the terrain as illustrated by Notes.

The medium of the writing is atemporal, allowing the narrator to range at will through time; the stage is epic. Another premise is that there are necessary, causal connections between past events and future ones; that the past, if it does not completely prefigure the future, is at least exemplary or emblematic of events to come. Unlike the Humean universe of discrete, noncausal particulars, the universe assumed here is well-ordered. The task set the narrator is to illumine the teleology of the world. The point of view is *sub specie aeternitate*, assuming the unity of human nature and human purpose, and the position of the narrator is that of the mystic who, as Wittgenstein wrote, views "the world as a limited whole." The world of Notes, similar to Wittgenstein's world in the *Tractatus*, "waxes and wanes as a whole," and the narrator records this. Atrocity and brutality are the dark of the moon; love and beauty, the full moon. There is, in Notes, an element of Yeats' philosophy based upon the phases of the moon.

A crucial problem in this kind of writing, and one tied intimately to the atemporal structure, is the use of a *disembodied* voice, a narrator without individual, personal identity who changes masks at will; all the masks of time are available to him—he can be all men at all times, a particular man at a particular time—a device that results in the uneasy fact that he is nobody in particular. Space and time become points of recapitulation, coordinates for heraldic moments in the history of the human spirit.

Because individual characterization does not occur in vatic writing, there is little if any distance between author and reader, the only buffer being the elegance of the prose, the odd lore, and the incisiveness of the imagery. There is no possibility of suspending disbelief or of learning through the experiences of a character, as in a novel. Consequently, we are given the author's truths without first having been seduced into sharing his doubts. The relationship between author and reader is *litanical*—prayer and response, incantation and reaction. Perhaps the greatest single risk here is that all the rich embroidery of a Penelope may issue in little more than a sampler to be hung on the wall; in this case, should Connell fail totally, instead of "God Bless Our Happy Home" we would be handed "God Damn Our Rotten World."

IF Mrs. Bridge is characterized as a mosaic form, *Notes*, moving even further into the fragmentary, is kaleidoscopic. Connell seems to have had something like this in mind when the voyager of *Notes* writes: "The barrel turns, the crystals tumble." This kaleidoscopic form poses an interesting metaphysical position in the book.

In a kaleidoscope a pair of plane mirrors provides the viewer with an illusion of symmetry. Each time the tube is turned, the pile of glass changes position and the symmetry reappears under a different guise. In terms of this metaphor, the reader's task is to unearth the principle of order, thereby arriving at the crucial concerns of the work. Ideally, as in the toy, the symmetry should always be present. It is the cohesive constant.

Connell has further extended this notion to provide *Notes* with a cosmological model of reality. The world, like the chips in the kaleidoscope, can only be seen as ordered in a particular way. Unlike the toy, in the real world man can never get through the illusory order to that hypostatized world beyond, which W. V. O. Quine has called "a fancifully fanciless medium of unvarnished news." Connell in *Notes* asks us to remove our conventional spectacles, to break down the barriers and masks of our vision, and to return from our lethargic atavism with new eyes. If *Notes* is to be successful, something like an epiphany must take place.

THE VOICE OF THE VOYAGER-NARRATOR is basically that of Magus—magician, seer, alchemist, sailor, conquistador, warrior, victim, poet,

church father, anchorite, heresiarch, philosopher, executioner, and scientist. The major theme of the voyage is to be found in the recurrence of alchemical imagery. The voyager's quest is to discover within the soul of man a formula that will transform the gross spirit into something precious. The soul is bipolar, bifurcated, Gnostic and Manichean in Connell's world, and he continually juxtaposes prayer and creativity with brutality, as in the opening sections where he quotes in Latin the Lord's Prayer, then delineates the butchering of a saint. The beauties of nature are opposed to the atrocities of Hiroshima and the Nazi extermination camps. Animals throughout become insignias of the beasts within the spirit of man, sometimes beautiful in their symbolic expression of human longing; at others, hideous in their viciousness. During the voyage, prehistoric monsters are found still living off the shores of Madagascar and Australia and these merge with the man-made mutants of Japan and Bikini Atoll. Astronomical theories of the destruction of the solar system are paralleled with thermonuclear annihilation; the ritual of execution, particularly the ghastly ceremonialism of gas chamber and electric chair, coincides with the *deus ex machina* morality of Dachau and Belsen.

"Perhaps it is true, / we are like those doves that stand / between cathedral bells / until they have lost all sense of hearing," notes the voyager, a man who has despaired of Western tradition because of the crimes perpetrated in its name—"We live in the final tepid rays of Christianity"—and who has turned to the Black Arts, Finnish magic, shamanism, and lycanthropy. "Mankind yearns for annihilation. / The earth shall revert to worms and the rolling sea / to plankton." Reflecting on the great New World civilizations of the Maya, Inca, and Aztec, the voyager expresses his fear of a world reduced to dolmens and stelae. "One heart, one way," he admonishes: "Pass by that which you cannot love."

Man's fall, like that of the Wandering Jew, is consciousness—to suffer in anticipation, actuality, and recollection. "Natural things look upon us / and our wonders with repugnance." The voyager asks what is the color of wisdom and announces that it must have the color of snow.

In Connell's view, man is caught halfway between the beast and the angel, both locked in mortal combat for the possession of the soul of which they are essential complements. We may take the beast to our graves, but during our lifetimes it is capable of atrocities outstripping the imagination. The plea of the voyager asks of our humanity that it

be gentle and tender, that it relinquish the ways of terror and look lovingly upon the wonders of the world. The anguish of the voice is familiar: it is Damaso, the fisherman from Chihuahua, at the height of his song; the voice of the young Augustine in the throes of doubt and longing. Magus himself, "poised between the dream and the act," informs us that "credulity is greatest in times of calamity," and that the millenium shall arrive when mankind has become unbelievably atrocious.

Taking a point from an entry in Wittgenstein's *Notebooks*—"To pray is to think on the meaning of life."—Notes may best be regarded as a psalter for post-thermonuclear man, the palimpsest of *hibakusha*.

... there is a person who abandons his choice, against right principle, under the influence of passion, who is mastered by passion sufficiently for him not to act in accord with right principle, but not so completely as to be of such a character as to believe that the reckless pursuit of pleasure is right. — Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics.

DURING THE YEARS, Connell has devoted nearly two hundred pages to Muhlbach. This character first appears in "Arcturus," a novella-length story in *The Anatomy Lesson*. He occupies three stories—"St. Augustine's Pigeon," "The Mountains of Guatemala," and "Otto and the Magi"—in Connell's second collection of stories, *At the Crossroads*.

"Arcturus" is prefaced with a quotation from Goethe, to whom Muhlbach is distantly related—"Linger awhile, thou art so fair."—and the story deals with a distasteful incident. Joyce, Muhlbach's wife, once a beauty and femme fatale, is suffering from a terminal illness. Motivated by sentimentality and by a desire to hold on to what little of life remains, Joyce retreats into the past, inviting Sandy Kirk, an ex-lover, to dinner. Muhlbach has obviously permitted this against his better judgement and is an embarrassed and uneasy conspirator throughout the story.

Kirk arrives with an empty little Bohemian danseuse, Dee Borowski, complete with a philosophy book under her arm. When Joyce appears like an awful apparition, Dee is fascinated, never having encountered the dying in her psuedo-intellectual circles. Kirk, who once loved Joyce, is unnerved, particularly when he discovers that he still loves her, a knowledge that Muhlbach has already perceived. Even though Kirk and Muhlbach share a similar experience—their love of Joyce—there is nothing in common between them. Kirk comes to understand that Muhlbach loves Joyce unreservedly and that she returns her husband's love both in kind and intensity.

Several salient facts about Muhlbach come to light in the story. He is a successful businessman, a specialist in fire insurance. He is very well read, a hunter, fond of astronomy, and when he talks he sounds like a ticker tape, the words coming from his mouth with the finality of epitaphs. Muhlbach, while he may appear sententious, is not trivial. This "solid pedestrian," who disconcerts the worldly Kirk, prefers intellectual pleasures to idle chatter.

"St. Augustine's Pigeon" resumes Muhlbach's course after Joyce's death. Distraught with grief and overwhelmed with desire, Muhlbach decides he needs a woman. He is hungry "for everything I am not but would like to be"; he wants "a taste of Hell." The story is the tale of his descent into a world that, as William S. Burroughs noted, is built on the premise that sexual desires are to be aroused but not satisfied. Finally, as the story ends, overcome with emotion and benumbed by the night's frustrations, Muhlbach grabs the wrist of a waitress as she sets his drink on the table. He could rape, an idea that startles but does not shock him. This provides Connell with an occasion to observe contemporary man; his portrait is a perfect picture of Aristotelean incontinence:

"Frustration, disgust, anger, disappointment, the badly stained and spattered image of himself, mauled dignity. . . . Yet he is a man. . . : lecherous and unrepentant in the depths of exhaustion; desirous of much more than can be reckoned; muddled by concupiscence; made wild with shadowy loves; halted by the short links of his mortality and deafened by conceit; seldom at peace; adulterous and bitter; rank with imagined sin; exiled forever and yet ever returning, such he is."

"The Mountains of Guatemala" takes Muhlbach to a Christmas party and is a story of *malentendu*, the empty cross-purposes and misunderstandings in a group which has lost the means of communicating



among its members. As Muhlbach rides the bus to the party, he has a vision of his own soul; where he had been incontinent and tormented in "Pigeon," he has resumed control in "Mountains": "an island swarming with gesticulating monstrosities. . . , the monsters his desperate thoughts released, soon to be summoned underground again, there to struggle against their chains and mutter in the night. Now they are free . . . [but] they are isolated and cannot swim. He sees one glare madly at the rippling surface, feels his vitals contract. Has one learned? But the dwarf flings up its hands, shrieks, and goes bounding back into the dance: Muhlbach realizes he has just drawn a heavy breath."

It is in "Mountains" that Muhlbach, fatigued by the emptiness of the Christmas party, states that he "accepts the madness of our time." In a sense he must accept that madness: he has been building a fallout shelter all winter, an odd occupation for a man of his sensibility. This is the occasion for "Otto and the Magi."

Waiting for the evening's guests to pick him up, Muhlbach recalls his son Otto's curious reaction when the plans for constructing the shelter originally arrived. His son was strangely silent, sullen and desultory when he did ask questions. Muhlbach himself found the model shelter in the brochure an anomaly: a wheel-less exercycle in one corner, a paleolithic painting of a bison on one wall, a child's rag doll lolling on a bookshelf. The dosimeter reminded Muhlbach of a cameo and the recessed TV of the blind eye of the future, mindless and gray and dull.

When the guests arrive, Muhlbach shows them the shelter, an uncomfortable experience for the women in the party. His next-door neighbor, a Chinese engineer, notices a poem above the door. The poem is by Boileau and it says that no matter what those Greek wise-men with the crazy names may have said, all men are fools despite whatever precautions they may take. Chong asks Muhlbach how he can ridicule his own work. Muhlbach replies that it is himself he ridicules.

Returned from the dinner party Muhlbach decides to spend the night in the shelter. He has just gotten into bed when Otto appears in the doorway and asks his father not to sleep there. Muhlbach tries to reason with the boy but Otto stubbornly persists in his demand. Finally, Muhlbach sends Otto back to bed and, for a moment, hears his son singing outside. Then he falls asleep, dreaming of World War

III, a world reduced to dolmens and stelae. A vampire bat attaches itself to his throat in the dream; silver objects plunge into the street and the sky is filled with the fire trails of missiles. Awakened with a start Muhlbach finds that he cannot breathe. The shelter is without air. He struggles from the shelter into the backyard where he finds a potato stuffed into the air-intake pipe. He recalls Otto's singing and begins to weep. Recovering his composure, Muhlbach says to the night, "Surely the boy cannot reject this age of reason."

In "Pigeon" and "Mountains" Connell develops a device as simple as it is ingenious. He dispenses with quotation marks, presenting all thoughts and remarks in the present and thus blurring the normal narrative distinction between what a person thinks and what he says. This simple principle allows Connell to strike a balance between first-person and third-person narrative, and makes Muhlbach absolutely central, as in "Mountains" where the richness of his thoughts is in marked contrast to the ticker-tape style of speaking "Arcturus" led us to expect of him. Though Muhlbach may talk like a machine, the richness of his inner life belies the public image of his pedestrian, burgherish mien. If Muhlbach is publically unremarkable, privately his mind is a spectrum of human emotion enriched with an ironic intelligence.

Or say that you draw pictures of a man and woman fulfilling the promise of love; you will be positively arrested, you will be imprisoned. You may represent hate in the most egregious fashion, you may picture all conceivable butcheries, that is permissible, but love is more alarming. — Connell

"THERE'S A SORT OF DREADFUL AUGURY in the birdcall screams of women," is one of Earl Summerfield's earliest entries in his diary, made after seeing three women fighting in the street. It is through the character of Earl Summerfield, his scrapbook, and his diary that Connell will show precisely how alarming love can be.

Earl Summerfield is the central character of *The Diary of a Rapist*. He is twenty-six years old. His nose is pointed, his hairline receding; he has winglike ears, a chipped tooth, bad breath, puckered lips, a bulgy forehead, a watery chin; he weighs one hundred sixty pounds and waddles because of middle-age spread and the stool upon which he perches at the Employment Bureau five days a week. He is not well, suffering aphasia, palpitations of the heart, attacks of vertigo, and shortness of breath. He sometimes loses his balance while walking and has blacked out a few times.

Earl characterizes the daily routine at the Bureau: "We may be figures in a yellowing myth—our pens scratching along under fluorescent lights, now and then the rattle of a bottle sliding down the trough of the Coke machine. Every time I hear that noise it frightens me."

Every aspect of Earl's life is presided over by women. He was reared by maiden aunts. He is married to Bianca, a sour, infertile, nose-picking schoolteacher who reads the stockmarket page, is seven years Earl's senior, and whose sole ambition is to better her position within the administrative echelons of the school system. Besides Bianca, whom he hates ("but not enough to kill"; "I have the soul of a cocker spaniel."), there is Fensdeicke, his immediate supervisor at the Bureau, a sick and nervous old maid eternally coughing into a lace handkerchief. At one point Earl is assured of a promotion; but a woman is brought in from another part of the state to fill the job. Aneurine is the woman's name and she has a red, crippled leg. Later, one of Earl's colleagues, a drunken lecher, is promoted. There is no justice. If it were not for women, Earl knows that he would be famous—a professor on a world tour of lecturing or a great creative artist. Once he compares himself to the volatile Benvenuto Cellini. He desires to make the gossip columns, to be a figure of some public notice no matter how ephemeral.

It is not only women and the world that conspire against Earl. He is his own worst enemy and becomes possessed by precisely those "monstrosities" that Muhlbach was able to hold in check. The dwarfs in Earl's spirit have learned to swim. Unlike Muhlbach in "Pigeon," a man giving in to temptation but still in control, Earl's incontinence, combined with his bitter despair, becomes despotic. He is out of control; finally, nightmarishly monstrous. But Earl is never completely insane; madness for him would be a blessed and welcome release, the attainment of a desired end no matter how obsessive. For Earl, however, there is only demonic possession without insanity's surcease.

Prayer is equally inefficacious: "Have tried praying, it doesn't help. My knees hurt and the words break between my teeth like eggshells. What will become of me?"

As despair encroaches, Earl imagines that he tattooed the "Sign of the Cross on the soles of my feet. I was arrested and when they asked me what it meant I replied that in this way I mock Jesus by trampling upon him with every step." A transient feeling of prior existence comes over him and he writes: "My heart feels greasy, heavy as a lump of coal. . . . I'll wear dark glasses & stuff cotton in my ears." People have begun to look like figures seen through the wrong end of binoculars. The regression within is complete. Toward the end of the book, this entry: "If God has truly ordered the universe Man cannot do wrong. It is He who points out the direction to us & establishes the power of choice. It is He who places within our sight the objects of desire. Wherever we turn our faces we see what he has created. I believe this." But we are not dealing here with the holy man of the human spirit but with the black beast of its darkest environs. Earl is demonized, one upon whom the black ox has trod, and the voice in which he speaks, though couched in the diction of Augustine, is the maniacal voice of Restif de Bretonne or the Marquis de Sade.

Life rattles down its chute; Earl disintegrates before our eyes. He bays like a wounded animal, sometimes like an enraged one. Pitifully, he stoops in the street and writes, "SAVE US!"; he understands that in his anonymity the only way he could be noticeably different would be if he were to tattoo his face. Yet it is his essential cipherhood that allows him to pass unnoticed. As Djuna Barnes stated in *Nightwood*: "There is not one of us who, given an eternal incognito, a thumbprint set nowhere against our souls, would not commit rape, murder, and all abominations." It is Earl's facelessness that allows him to commit rape and establishes the fact that he will neither be caught nor suspected. This is only a part of the horror of Earl Summerfield: the hideousness of his soul is more appalling.

DENIED BOTH MADNESS AND PRAYER, Earl's suffering is almost unbearable, a human being submerged in lightless, oceanic depths of such great pressure that the slightest movement may result in the crushing of the organism. But Earl is permitted to fall in love, a state that can be joyous: only for Earl love results in his *willful suicide at the hands of another person*. In Dostoievski's sense, Earl Summerfield is one of the great sinners, and his ultimate redemption in death, unlike that of

the saint, will be his absolute annihilation, for him a state preferable to the torments of living.

At the annual Washington's Birthday festivities in Golden Gate Park, Earl sees Mara St. Johns win a beauty contest. He loathes the sight of her, wanting to pull her down from the platform and expose her for the exhibitionistic filth he knows her to be.

Before seeing Mara, Earl had begun keeping his scrapbook of horrors and sexual crimes, a companion volume of illustrations for his diary. He collects every item he can find that deals with sexual assault and violence. He dotes on descriptions of executions and the behavior of the men on Death Row, remarking in his diary that they were caught because they were either retarded or perverted. Being superior, Earl knows he is exempt; he is unable to visualize himself as a victim; "Knowing you are superior is a curse." For Earl the scrapbook is a banquet laid for a necrophagic feast.

Earl soon becomes a nocturnal hellhound. He begins peeking through windows, originally "in hopes of finding signs of life." All he sees are corpse-like creatures stunned into numbness by the phosphorescence of their TV sets. He steals underwear from clotheslines, spies on Bianca's girl tutees, dresses in his wife's clothes, photographs himself naked; he begins following women at night, probably molesting some; finally, he enters houses at night and leaves his "calling card," crawling about on the floors moaning like a distraught animal, sometimes blacking out and awakening with terror in somebody else's home. The Prince of Darkness already has Earl warmly enfolded in his cloak when Earl writes: "If a woman's asleep or dead she doesn't judge you, no need to be afraid." Here is the authentic voice of the rapist.

The reader is now embarked on a voyage through one of the darkest nights of the soul ever encountered in literature. Earl's downward progress is a perverse embodiment of St. John of the Cross's epigram, "I live and yet no true life I know / And living thus expectantly / I die because I do not die." While St. John longs for the mystical death of traditional Christianity, Earl, in Manichean opposition, becomes the black saint; maimed, he is one of the living dead; his androgynous soul pants its fetid dogbreath of loathing and hate as he descends deeper and deeper into the pits of Hell.

ON JULY 4, knowing that there will be a fireworks display on the Marina, Earl goes to the church where Mara teaches religious classes

at night. With the aid of a pair of garden shears stolen during one of his nocturnal prowls, he rapes Mara in the alley beside the church. This is the formal denouement of this spiralling novel. The act of rape totally transforms Earl's life, but with a metamorphosis for which he was totally unprepared. He falls hopelessly in love with his victim. Anonymously he sends Mara presents, calls her on the telephone; because he knows he can never possess her, these calls always end in obscenities for which Earl rebukes himself throughout the diary. Overwhelmed by his love for Mara, Earl decides to give himself up to her on Christmas day, to beg her for her forgiveness and to plead with her to return his love. The diary ends on Christmas, the last pages of the book bearing only the dates of the last six days in December.

AFTER THE ABOVE SUMMARY, to call *The Diary of a Rapist* a love story may sound outrageous and absurd, if not obscene. Nevertheless, black though it is in delineation, the book is a love story; Connell has shown one aspect of the alarmingness of love. If *Notes* was the psalter, *Diary* is the litany of the Black Mass to be celebrated for the damnation of post-thermonuclear man, whose only salvation, like Earl's, may lie in his utter destruction.

In Earl's deranged mind Mara St. Johns becomes one of the great sorceresses of history and legend: Vivian, who held Merlin in thrall by the very spells he had taught her; Salome and Carmen, Delilah and Tosca. Earl Summerfield is a victim of the Medusas, women of such rare beauty that they turn men into monsters or stones.

When Earl rapes Mara he is Tarquin raping Lucrece, maddened by her unpossessable beauty. But when he is willing to expose himself publicly in order to profess his love, Earl is Holofernes approaching the tent of Judith. This is Connell's monumental irony: Earl, as Holofernes in reverse, knows that he will die. He knows that love is born of violence, as Venus came from the sea out of the dismembered arm of her father. Where he had once been superior, above and beyond punishment, his love has forced him to join the community of victims. As Connell wrote in *Notes*, perhaps taking his thought from Camus or Paz, "The community of victims is identical with the community of executioners." Michel Leiris makes the point admirably when he writes: ". . . what for me is the profound meaning of suicide: to become at the same time oneself and the other, male and female, subject and object, killed and killer—the only possibility of com-

munion with oneself. If I think of absolute love—that conjunction not of two beings (or of a being and the world) but rather of two great worlds—it seems to me that it cannot be achieved save by means of expiation, like that of Prometheus punished for having stolen fire. A punishment one inflicts on oneself in order to have the right to love oneself to excess—this, in the last analysis, is the meaning of suicide.”⁴

Although Earl is a man damned without any chance of salvation at the end of the book, his tragically perverted love and his entry into the world of the living, where he will be executed summarily, is indeed pitiful. One can and must weep for Earl Summerfield, which is a reason for the stature of Connell as an artist.

The Diary of a Rapist, grisly as it is, is Connell's masterpiece. It's landscape is Goya's in *The Disasters of War* etchings—the final human scream and agony of those broken on the wheel of atrocity. Earl Summerfield is the beast within us all, the Manichean purity and personification of Evil, here contending in ironic victory for the soul of mankind. Indicted by society, Earl is himself an indictment of society, of that terrain of violence, sexual advertisement, and aggression; heresy here is a pact between man and the modern environment.

As Earl disintegrates and falls in love, knowing this entails his death, he becomes prophetic and verges on being truly superior. Evil, Connell maintains against Scholasticism, is not an absence of good or a defect in the order of being—if it were, how could one be tempted?—but a force as positive as fire, and its contemporary manifestations, though fragmentary, may be found in today's weapons—napalm, execution chambers, and inquisition.

Earl's diet of horror is common enough food. It may be found in the newspapers or on the TV or on any drugstore newsstand—the he-man magazines that advertise “Jap and Nazi” atrocity photos in their back pages and whose covers are garishly decorated with scantily clad women (in outrageous underwear and wearing Gestapo armbands) who are busily torturing a group of GIs whose faces register the heights of ecstasy.

Meditating on the nature of women, Earl wrote: “They never experience the world as it truly is—always living within themselves brooding and calculating. What do they know about the human Spirit? The universe bores them. Their only urge is toward personal satisfaction, weakening a man and sucking away his power. Jellies, mold that grows on bread, rind of rotten fruit, infection, suppuration,

evil odors that drift around during the night, colorless poisons, caverns full of dead little bodies. Unclean alchemies. Yes, that tells the story of them."⁵

This is not only a perfect example of the blending of Notes and the themes of the Muhlbach stories, it also shows with what subtlety Connell moves from ordinary garbage in the kitchen to extraordinary filth in the soul. Like many of the afflicted forced to live within a delusional system, Earl has the uncanny ability of putting himself outside of himself, thereby absolving himself of guilt and allaying self-criticism. His observations of the external world are equally as true of the internal world of himself, *salve veritate*. When he made the above entry, Earl's metamorphosis was complete: he had become a gynandrous microcosm.

The final entry in the diary, made on Christmas day before Earl lovingly surrenders himself to the murderous hands of his Judith, is a chilling irony, the final twist of Connell's spiral-bladed knife: "In the sight of our Lord I must be one of many."

THE MANICHEAN AND Gnostic heresies may have been unsound theologically, but they are perceptive models for the nature of the human spirit. The problem with heresy is not that it is necessarily wrong but that it represents a hasty solution to the problem of evil. As Connell remarked in Notes: "For beatification two miracles are required / for martyrdom, none." Saint and heretic alike are martyred. For Connell evil must be recognized, reckoned with, and defeated, and he suggests that this is each man's individual battle, to be waged privately within himself. Only when the dark glass between man and his true self is removed, Connell maintains with Augustine, *shall our darkness be as noonday*. Connell may say with the anonymous meteorologist of *Last Letters from Stalingrad*, "I always thought in light years, but I felt in seconds," and with George Mills: "I live at the bottom of a well and see the stars by day."

✚ Gus Blaisdell has published poetry in *Salted Feathers* and *NMQ*. Tribal Press issued a volume of his verse in 1965 and will publish a second group of poems in the near future. He is an assistant editor at UNM Press.

NOTES

In order of appearance, the epigraphs introducing sections of the essay are from the following sources: George Mills, *Go I Know Not Where, Bring Back I Know Not What*, Denver: Alan Swallow, 1961; James Jerome Walsh, *Aristotle's Conception of Moral Weakness*, New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1963; Evan S. Connell, Jr., "A Brief Essay on the Subject of Celebrity with Numerous Digressions and Particular Attention to the Actress, Rita Hayworth," *Esquire*, Mar. 1965.

1. This paragraph is a paraphrase of Robert Jay Lifton, "Psychological Effects of the Atomic Bomb in Hiroshima—The Theme of Death," *Daedalus*, Vol. 92, No. 3, Summer 1963, pp. 462-97.

2. Neal Morgan, *Wilson Library Bulletin*, "WLB Biography: Evan S. Connell, Jr.," Apr. 1963, p. 695.

3. I owe a great debt for the sharpening of my ideas on vatic writing to correspondence with Luis Harss on Notes, which I gratefully acknowledge here. The quotation on cohesion is from personal correspondence with Connell: an undated letter ca. October, 1964.

4. Michel Leiris, *Manhood*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Grossman Publishers, 1963, p. 93; *passim*. The conceptual similarities between Leiris, Djuna Barnes, and Connell are extremely interesting in terms of *The Diary of a Rapist*, but that would require another essay.

5. Evan S. Connell, Jr., *The Diary of a Rapist*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1966, p. 73.

Unless otherwise noted all quotations from Connell are from the editions of his work listed at the end of the essay.

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The Anatomy Lesson and other stories, New York: The Viking Press, Inc., 1957

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