"The Development of
Randall Jarrell
As a Creative Writer"

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by

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The creative works of Randall Jarrell offer a wide range of materials; poetry—personal and impersonal, serious, searching; prose—witty, sophisticated, sardonic. The content varies from the sinking of an aircraft carrier to the hiring of a college professor, and the form shifts from traditional stanzaic verse to blank verse (shades of Auden and Eliot) to a polished, flowing prose style.

These different aspects of Jarrell's work may be roughly equated with different stages of his career. While these differences in his work seem great when each piece is considered in isolation, when viewed as an interwoven and developing whole the various parts fall together to form a coherent and eloquent statement on our time.

Jarrell, who was born in 1914, reflects times of momentous social and historical happenings in his works. However, it is important to realize that significant aspects of his own private life are mirrored in his writings. For instance, the impact of Jarrell's educational and cultural background upon his work is undeniable. From his attendance of Hume-Fogg High School in Nashville, Tennessee, to the present, a great part of Jarrell's life has been spent in an academic setting. Since earning his A.B. and M.A. at Vanderbilt University, he has taught at the following colleges and universities: Kenyon College, 1937-39; University of Texas, 1939-42; Sarah Lawrence College, 1946-47; Princeton University, 1951-52; University of Illinois, 1953; and the Woman's College of the University
of North Carolina, 1947-51, 1953-56, and from 1958 to the present. In 1948, he attended the Salzburg Seminar in American Civilization, Salzburg, Austria.

Jarrell's knowledge of academic life has given him a wide scope of materials to work with in his writing. Like Eliot, Jarrell contrasts past ages as he knows them academically with present times which he knows from his own experience. If there is a single mark which characterizes all of Jarrell's work, it is probably a cultured, civilized tone—a echoing of literary, historical, and musical allusions.

Another phase of Jarrell's life which seems to have deeply influenced his work was his service with the United States Army Air Force from 1942 to 1946. The dominance of a strongly realistic element in his work at this time shows the great impression that first-hand experience with the war made on Jarrell. This stage in Jarrell's life is probably one of the most important in the development of his career.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the development of Jarrell's creative works through its various stages and to show the unity underlying these stages. Roughly four stages or categories of work will be considered here:

1. Early poetic works as represented by selections of pre- and early war poems from Blood for a Stranger, published in 1942.

2. Middle poetic works, war poems selected from Losses,
published in 1948.


Within each of the four sections of this paper I will attempt to point out changes in style as they correlate with changes in content and theme. I will also try to show how changes within the different sections relate to each other as a part of the broad philosophic view presented by the works of Jarrell as an entity.

First to be considered, and comprising the largest part of this paper, is the poetry of Jarrell. In this poetry, three main variations in approach are apparent; these are reflected in both style and content. Although different approaches predominate at different stages of Jarrell's career, the beginning of all three types can be observed in one of his earliest collected volumes, Blood For A Stranger, and elements of all three continue to exist to some degree in his latest collected edition, Woman at the Washington Zoo.

These three types of poems may be broadly categorized by the following elements:

1. A personal, sometimes sentimental, quality which is found mainly in his earlier works.

2. An objective, usually realistic treatment which dominates the war poems.
3. A synthesis of the first two approaches resulting in something like surrealism which is found mainly in Woman at the Washington Zoo.

Examples from Blood for a Stranger may show the qualities of style and content which distinguish the three types.

Of the forty-six poems in this volume, less than half of the poems deals directly with war, but the chaos of a war-racked world is clearly the subject of the entire volume. The contents range from a parting scene at a railway platform ("On the Railway Platform") to a simple lament by a lover for a lost love ("The Lost Love") to a cynical parody of the nursery rhyme, "Old Mother Hubbard" ("Song: Not There"). Through all the works runs the thread of impending disaster, catastrophic change and unrest in which the individual is helplessly and confusedly caught up. War is thus presented remotely, but is not named or exemplified concretely in this volume. It must be remembered that this volume was written before Jarrell himself had had any actual war experience.

For instance, in "A Story," telling of a young boy's arrival at boarding school, the personal, subjective element is marked. Told in the first person, the child's view of this strange, new world is one of acute loneliness, loss of security, and a child's unconscious self-pity. Thrust from the secure world where mother says "Remember to change your stockings every day" into the new world where "When I go out these people hardly say/ a word to me---" the child concludes that his parents have "--forgotten me, they love their/ new friends better."
By its very nature the use of a child's point of view lends a subjective atmosphere to the poem. This atmosphere is heightened by the use of the sestina form (in the style of Auden).\footnote{Malcolm Cowley, Review of Blood for a Stranger, \textit{New Republic}, CVII (November 30, 1942), 718.} The end words thus arranged serve as an echo reinforcing the theme of loneliness and insecurity: empty, say, day, their, boys, lost; lost, empty, boys, say, their, day, etc. This device of repetition of words at the ends of lines, the child's viewpoint, and the theme of loss of security are repeated extensively in later works.

A more strikingly personal (even sentimental) example is "The Christmas Roses." Here a wounded soldier in a veteran's hospital gives vent to his self-pity in a maudlin soliloquy. Grouped in five sections of nine unrimed lines, the poem expresses the total dejection of the soldier—"if I'm thirsty no one minds"—and his frantic clinging to a human companion as his only hope of something secure in the chaotic world:

How can I die without you?  
Touch me and I won't die,  
I'll look at you,  
And I won't die, I'll look at you,  
I'll look at you.

In this poem the war is seen only as a personal tragedy for this one soldier. The terrible inclusiveness of war is mentioned only in passing:

But I was lucky: the mortality's so high  
They put it in a foot-note or don't mention it.
In direct contrast to this romantic stress upon the individual in war, poems such as "For the Madrid Road" are concerned with the more general, realistic theme of war as a futile, inevitable force ("But when were lives men's own") to which man is subjugated with a consequent loss of his individual identity. The "Stranger" addressed is no particular stranger, but rather an abstract representation of a whole category of strangers. Likewise, the speaker is not an individual but "we"—"Here we and the strangers died."

The grim realism of tone is a product of the form of the poem as well as its content. In seventeen semi-rimed lines, the subject is presented in a conversational monologue of utmost simplicity. It is this simplicity of address which outlines so sharply war's hypocrisy ("The private guilt, the general grave/ are debts of yours; or so men say") and futility ("We perished, if you like, for you;/ We died that—that you may die"). It is the helplessness of men who, with stark realization of this hypocrisy and futility, are nevertheless committed to the struggle, which is the major theme of this poem and of this entire volume (Blood for a Stranger).\(^2\)

This theme of the helplessness of the individual manipulated by circumstance (war in this case) is also exemplified in "A Description of Some Confederate Soldiers." After a thoroughly

realistic description of the dead soldiers and their surroundings, two simple lines express this theme:

Necessity instructed and destroyed.
There is no hesitation in those eyes.

In this poem like "For the Madrid Road," the realistic presentation has none of the romantic emotionalism of "The Christmas Roses." Here the scene is described in an objectively meditative fashion. For instance, in the first of the nine, unrimed, four-line stanzas, the first three and a half lines are one smooth descriptive sentence, while the last half line gives added detail as though one were contemplating the scene quite calmly and analytically—"the laurels are faded." The symbolic connotations of this brief sentence reinforce the calculated, controlled tone of the poem. This cool objectivity is illustrated throughout the poem by punctuation setting off bits of descriptive detail and comparison. The dashes in stanza three serve this purpose. In this stanza the little expression "fatal waxworks" brings in an even more objective note—it brings to mind a display of wax figures which one calmly ponders representations of life and death.3

Continuing this objectivity but adding to it some of the subjectivity mentioned earlier, "Children Selecting Books in a Library" is representative of the third variety of poetry found in Blood for a Stranger.

The rather meditative, detached tone of the two previous poems also characterizes "Children Selecting Books." Again, this tone is achieved primarily by the prose-like line scheme interjected frequently with explanatory or descriptive detail. For instance, in the third stanza the first line and a half of the six lines present an idea while the lines following the colon comment upon it:

Their tales are full of sorcerers and ogres
Because their lives are: the capricious infinite
That, like parents, no one has yet escaped
Except by luck or magic...

As shown in this section, not only the style but also the content and theme of this poem are obviously non-romantic. These hypothetical children are not carefree, basking in their innocence in the romantic tradition, but rather, according to a more Freudian line of thought, they are filled with the multiple anxieties and fears of childhood. In their helplessness against the "sorcerers and ogres" of the world, the children turn to escape through fictional sorcerers and ogres. This theme of helpless loss of security is summarized in the phrase "maze of the world." As Richard Fein points out, in later poems of this same theme the "maze" of the normal world becomes the maze of war in which the individual is, once again, lost as helplessly as a child.

This poem, however, is not a strictly impersonal work.

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2Ibid., p. 16.
A subjective empathy of the speaker for the child's world is shown by lines such as these:

We wept so? How well we all forget!
One taste of memory (like Fafnir's blood)
Makes all their language sensible, one's ears
Burn with the child's peculiar gift for pain.

This reference to the past, - the emotional past of the speaker - brings a personal element into the objectivity of the poem.

Another poem showing this blended treatment is "90 North."
The child's point of view is used again, but this time only in retrospect. The complete egocentricity of childhood is recaptured in stanza four in which the child dreams of discovering the North Pole:

Turn as I please, my step is to the south.
The world--my world spins on this final point
Of cold and wretchedness; All lines, all winds
End in this whirlpool I at last discover.

However, the subjectivity of the remembered child's world with its reassuring references to the security of "home" and "flannel gown" vanishes as the speaker switches back to the real adult world. In a comparison between the two viewpoints, the speaker implies that the difference is that the child still hopes to find meaning and security in life while the adult feels that these things do not exist. He says:

--------------In the child's bed
After the night's voyage, in that warm world (stanza 5)

--------I reached my North and it had meaning.
Here at the actual pole of my existence,
Where all that I have done is meaningless,
Where I die or live by accident alone--(stanza 6)
I see at last that all the knowledge (stanza 7)
-----------Is worthless as ignorance--(stanza 8)

Thus a balance between extreme realism and extreme romanticism is achieved in this poem. This blended or balanced type of poetry is polished and used in a later volume of poetry, The Woman at the Washington Zoo, which will be discussed in another section of this paper.

Examples of the three types of poetry present in Blood for a Stranger may also be found in Jarrell's third collected volume, Losses (1948), but various changes are noticeable. First of all, the majority of these works are in the objective, realistic genre. This is probably because the main content of these poems—war—lends itself best to this type of treatment. If one tries to treat war in a subjective manner, there is, apparently, a danger that the very intensity of the elements involved may lead to an extreme emotionalization verging on sentimentality. Perhaps the best method of presenting the grim, cold consequences of war is to present the world of war as one sees it and to count upon the reader's sensitivities to grasp the emotional repercussions of the

6In effect, in blending these two elements (realism and romanticism for want of better words) Jarrell is also synthesizing the various experiences of his own life—the academic, idealistic, and the realistic. It is perhaps Jarrell's ability to perform this process of synthesis which accounts for his recognized success as a creative writer. Randall Jarrell has received the following honors: The National Book Award for Poetry, 1960,; the National Book Award for Fiction, 1962, the O. Max Gardner Award, 1962. He is a Fellow of the School of Letters of the University of Indiana and a Phi Beta Kappan.
stark realities. Jarrell may well have concluded this himself after reading the criticisms of his earlier works, for his more romantic war poems were frequently disparaged.7

In content Losses varies from the death of a little Negro girl ("Lady Bates"), to a monologue by a materialist ("Money"), to the destruction of an aircraft carrier ("Pilots, Man Your Planes"). However, out of the thirty-one poems in this volume, all but four of them are concerned directly with war and consist largely of the objective description of war.

Some remnants of the more romantic poems do exist in this book, however. One of these is "When I Was Home Last Christmas," composed of five traditional ballad stanzas expressing the traditional lament for personal loss in war. The first three and a half stanzas recall sentimentally the last visit home of the "I" of the poem—"Your aunts and your mother, your sister;/ They were kind as ever to me"—while the last stanza and a half state the loss of all these things which constitute "home."

Contrasting sharply with this highly personal poem is "The Lines," a compact poem in which style and content are admirably complementary in their objectivity. In fact, Gauco Gambon considers this one of Jarrell's best poems in terms of artistic form.8

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8Gambon, op. cit., p. 11.
In a series of headlong clauses started by five consecutive, breathless "afters," the controlled, rushed tedium of military life is evoked in an unemotional, plain-spoken manner. There is no pause in the flow of the nineteen lines until the last half of the last line, when "the men are free." As an equally objective poem, "Pilots Man Your Planes" is a longer (95 lines), unrhymed blank verse work in four sections. The flowing, prosy lines of this piece are perfectly suited to the graphically realistic description of the situation. The first twenty lines are one, slow, ponderous sentence describing minutely the heavy enormity of an aircraft carrier. Then, in the same carefully analytic manner, the destruction of the carrier and the chaos surrounding the destruction are related. When the carrier, representing a purely fundamental security to its dependent planes and crew, sinks, "the planes fly off looking for a carrier." Those men who remain--"Oil-blackened and fire-blistered, saved or dying men/ Cling with cramped shaking fingers to the lines/ Lowered from their old life," cling to the old, lost security until a new one can be found.

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9 Cambon, Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., p. 12.
12 Ibid.
13 Fein, op. cit., p. 17.
This theme of loss of security, which appeared as an important secondary theme in the earlier volume, *Blood for a Stranger*, is the main one in this volume. In another poem, "Burning the Letters," the loss is enlarged to include the loss of a value system, a way of life, as well as a loss of material security.

In this poem a woman, burning the letters of her dead husband, is trying to free herself from the remains of her shattered, former life and beliefs. A recent article on Jarrell by Richard Fein compares the woman in this poem to the woman in Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning." It is true that these women have in common a loss of a former source of meaning in their lives and the necessity to establish a new meaning from the ruins of the old. However, the difference between these two characters is great, and it is a difference which clearly illustrates the pervasive abstraction and objectivity of Jarrell's work in this stage. The character of the woman in Stevens' work is made clear to us. She is the sensuous, luxury-loving personality who likes: "Complacencies of the peignoir, and late/ Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair," but who is startled out of her "green freedom" by the "dark encroachment of that old catastrophe"—her reoccurring guilt feelings aroused by her loss of religious faith. On the other hand, Jarrell's woman presents us with intellectual ideas of her character, but not with concrete expressions of it. We are told she is "that dreamed-out and wept-for wife" but no traces of her former tears or dreams distort the abstract logic of her

\[Text continues here\]
presentation. The woman herself says "The sea is empty/ As I am empty"—she has passed the point of troubled questioning which haunts the protagonist of "Sunday Morning" and has become, in her drained emotional state, the vehicle for Jarrell's ideas.¹⁵

Jarrell has been criticized by Richard Fein, James L. Dickey for creating "puppet" characters which have no artistic identity of their own, but serve merely as bearers of an abstract theme.¹⁶ Perhaps this is because his highly realistic, impersonal style at this stage of his career is less suited to the "personal" qualities of people than the cold impersonality of war.

At least one poem in this volume does come to grips with both the individual, human elements and the larger, ethical aspects of war. This poem is "Eighth Air Force," possibly the only poem in this book of the third category, that is, the blend of personal and impersonal approaches. The contrast of these two approaches in the presentation is particularly suited to the basic conflict of the poem—the conflict which the speaker feels exists between man in his civilized role and man in his murderous, military role.¹⁷

Introducing this conflict, the first stanza presents a realistic picture of the scene:

If, in an odd angle of the hutment,
A puppy laps the water from a can
Of flowers, and the drunk sergeant shaving
Whistles 'O Paradiso'—shall I say that man
Is not as men have said: a wolf to man?

¹⁵Ibid.
¹⁷Fein, op. cit., p. 18.
Although the flowers are, appropriate to their crude surroundings, pictured in a can, the mere presence of the flowers and the puppy adds a strangely personal note to the cold surroundings of war. Similarly, that the sergeant, supposedly returned from a day of slaughter, should be drunk is not surprising, but that he should be shaving and whistling in a thoroughly civilized manner is unsettling.

This mixture of gentle and brutal qualities is emphasized by the reference to the puppy and the wolf. In the next stanza man is recognized as a "Murderer," thus, the dual natures of both species are emphasized: man is to murderer as puppy is to wolf.

In the third stanza, the speaker begins to reach an acceptance of this duality. He says, "This is war," realizing that these men themselves may die and that they, like himself, are helpless to escape their roles as hired killers. He accepts them. This acceptance is stressed throughout the poem by repeated use of the same rhyming words echoing the questioning theme:

Can, man, man? (Stanza one)
One, one, done: (Stanza two)
Man, can, man! (Stanza three)
Man, can, man. (Stanza four)

Acceptance emerging as forgiveness, the last stanza rings with Biblical echoes. Man is compared to Christ (this last

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 19.
saviour, man,), and the speaker himself, in his suffering, seems a Christ image.\textsuperscript{21} The hand washing brings to mind the judge Pontius Pilate with whom the speaker, attempting to judge mankind, probably identifies. In the last, short, alliterative line, "I find no fault in this just man," a complete acceptance is reached.\textsuperscript{22}

With the shift from the war to post-war society, the theme of Jarrell's latest volume of poetry, The Woman at the Washington Zoo, shifts to encompass both the idea of helpless inevitability found in the first book (Blood for a Stranger) and the separation-from-basic-security theme of the third book (Losses). This new theme, as Peter Davison sees it, becomes the inevitable separation of one individual from another resulting from an inability to communicate.\textsuperscript{23} With this separation naturally comes the insecurity of modern man ironically alone amid his mass-communicated, multi-peopled world.

The world created in this volume is the world of ordinary people under the stresses of ordinary conditions. The subjects range from a newspaper boy (Nestus Gurley), to the death of a child ("Requiem for the Death of a Boy"), to a lonely man surveying his neighborhood ("The Lonely Man"). Perhaps in keeping with the idea of communication difficulties, twelve of the twenty-six poems

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
in this volume are translations of Rilke, Raduskas, Goethe, Morike.

Correlated with the combining of themes and with the inclusion of the many varied and conflicting aspects of modern life is use of the style which synthesizes elements of both Jarrell's romantic and objective approaches. Most of the poems in this book are of this synthetic type.

The title piece of this volume shows obvious changes in style from the poems previously mentioned. The realistic description of the war poems is replaced by dramatic images evoking a romantic and vivid world:

The saris go by me from the embassies.
Cloth of the moon. Cloth from another planet.
They look at the leopard like the leopard.

Immediately, however, by the movement from the bright, gaudy markings of the leopard to the "dull, null navy" of the speaker's dress, it becomes apparent that this woman is cut off from the vital world around her.24 When she laments, "The world goes by my cage and never sees me," one senses something of the self-pity noted in some of Jarrell's earlier works. It is this rather neurotic characteristic of the woman at the zoo which caused Michel Benamow to refer to her as a "female Prufrock,"25 capable of sensing her emotional isolation but incapable of coping with it.


This Prufrock theme is balanced by the startling comparison between the "saris" from the "embassies" (evoking an image of Washington, D.C.) and the "leopard." This comparison between the human and the animal, according to critic Benamow, is carried out further by the image of the woman herself being "caged" by her own body like a beast. The strange Rilkean perception of herself in the reflection in the animal's eyes adds to this dual image. The animal-human theme is carried through to the very end of the poem where the woman appeals to the "vulture" for final salvation. This vulture might be, as Sister Bernetta points out, a "death-lover" to rescue her by ending her lonely existence or, following the earlier comparison made by Benamow, it might be the beast-like humans, the saris, who, by their attention, could transform her back into the more youthful animal she once was.

This animism is one way in which Jarrell's characters in The Woman at the Washington Zoo seek the communication they need so desperately. It is an attempt to find something natural

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 3.
28 Ibid.
30 Benamow, op. cit., p. 4.
31 Sister M. Bernetta, op. cit., p. 25.
in a highly sophisticated, modern world.

Various of these characters try to overcome the loneliness by reliance upon imagination as shown by various of Jarrell's characters. "Cinderella" is a good example of this.

"Cinderella," as indicated by the title is built upon the fairy tale. In this poem a little girl, like the original Cinderella seeks an escape from loneliness. She manufactures her own fairy godmother—"Her imaginary, playmate was a grown-up/in a sea-coal satin---." Just as the Cinderella in the fairy tale spent many hours before the fire dreaming, so this child Cinderella and her make-believe godmother "Sat by the fire and told each other stories." References to the fire before which both these lonely characters dream are found throughout the first of the six six-line stanzas: "flame-blue glances" (line 2), "ashes" (line 3), "old ember" (line 4).

In her solitary conversations with herself in the form of her godmother, the isolated child reinforces her own fear of people, particularly men. ("'What men want... said the godmother softly.") The real immediate object of the fear is probably the "Father" in the third line of the second stanza upon whom the child and her pretended companion turn eyes of "monumental marble." Then they withdraw from him into their more reassuring world of "gossip" and "tea."

By simple repetition of "tea" in the first line of the next stanza, a natural movement from stanza two, telling of actual childhood, to stanza three, telling of the girl's outward growth, is
is accomplished. The added detail, "cambric tea," shows the extent to which the child has grown inward---she takes great pains to fully elaborate her dream. However, the "But" indicates that, after all, she has not lost sight of reality entirely. She is "naked-eyed" about the necessities of material existence at least. Therefore, she plays the role expected of her by society and wins "The shy prince," who "drank a toast to her in champagne from her slipper."

However, inwardly, she is still the same scared, little girl, so: "She said to her godmother, 'Men!" Having committed her physical self to the real world by taking a real man in marriage, she wishes to be freed to return undisturbed to her dream world as shown by these lines:

And, later, looking down to see her flesh
Look back up from under lace, the ashy gauze
And pulsing marble of a bridal veil,
She wished it all a widow's coal-black weeds.

So, in her adult life, still unable to relate to other people, she continues her childhood escapism:

A sullen wife and reluctant mother,
She sat all day in silence by the fire.

Besides animism and fantasy, a reunion with nature through death is another way in which the modern society as portrayed by Jarrell in The Woman at the Washington Zoo attempts to escape his exclusion. This is the implied theme of "The Bronze David of Donatello."32

The style here is strikingly reminiscent of such war poems as "A Description of Some Confederate Soldiers" (Blood for a Stranger). The same meditative, detached tone is achieved here by the same method of straight-forward description. Again, there is the use of slow, flowing lines broken by descriptive detail as though one were slowly studying the statue which is the subject of the poem. For instance, the first two lines contain one major sentence and two short sentences adding information to the first:

A sword in his right hand, a stone in his left hand,  
He is naked. Shod and naked. Hatted and naked.

It can also be seen from these lines that, once again, repetition is the main device used to give momentum to the poem.

The slow, natural movement achieved by these techniques helps to suggest the theme of blending into nature through death. These lines serve as an example:

Strong in defeat, in death rewarded,  
The head dreams what has destroyed it  
And is untouched by its destruction.

Here the soft repetition of the suffix "d" and "ed" also seems to reinforce the theme.33

These various analytic, carefully controlled aspects of the poem make it probably the most thoroughly objective work in this volume.

33Ibid.
On the other hand, having some of the qualities of Jarrell's more subjective works is the lengthy poem, "The End of the Rainbow." The content of the poem is a description of the life of a middle-aged woman who has chosen a career as an artist in California instead of marrying her old lover in New England. In essence, she has chosen a world of objects rather than people. Her only living companion is her little dog Su-Su,--"A spirited/ dwarf Pekinese, exceptionally loving." In great detail, her world of objects is described in the poem: Her "turquoise, unfrequented store," the "irrigated land/ With its blond hills like breasts of hay,/ Its tall tan herds of eucalyptus grazing/ Above its lawns of ice-plants of geranium,/ Its meadows of eternal asphodel," the "Dark Ghosts" with whom she cannot communicate as people.

However, much of the description is of the woman herself, for, cut off from other people, her life is largely composed of herself, her objects, her fantasies of the past. She is described as "A painter; a painter of land-and seascapes," with "--spare, paint-spotted and age-spotted" hands and "long hair, finer and redder once/ than the finest of red sable brushes, [which] has now been brushed/ till it is silver" and rinsed "false blue" by a "hairdresser, drunk with sunlight." The dry, secluded quality of her life is implied by the following lines:

---her face is masked, her hands are gloved
With a mask and gloves of bright brown leather;
The hands of a lady left out in the weather
Of resorts; the face of a fine girl left out
in the years.
Not only does this "bright brown" condition of the painter seem to echo the dryness of the "blond hills" and "tall, tan herds" of the landscape, but the comparison to a mask and gloves seems to make clear the woman's isolation from meaningful contacts with people.

This isolation is perpetuated largely by the woman's retreat into fantasies of the past. She has continual reveries of her "Frog-Prince, Marsh-King" lover. Unlike her, he is simply and basically involved with life. He has, like a sensible frog, "married to a frog, has little frogs." It is probably significant that, in remembering him, she compares her lover to a frog. Not only does this indicate the very earthiness of his nature, but it is a return to the theme of animism as a means of communication. Although, when confronted with the immediate decision as to whether or not to marry him, she has found him "a risk, uncalculated, incalculable," now, in retrospect, she feels that he, like her dog, has the natural qualities she needs so desperately in her life.

In expressing this woman's search for real meaning in her life, the form of the poem becomes complicated. Starting in the third person, occasionally the person shifts to the first with little stream-of-consciousness sections interspersed with references and allusions.

For instance, the ninth section begins with the woman's thoughts as she remembers her New England youth: "A spider a
frying pan, and tonic/ and-fancy! Put tomatoes in their chowder." The next section continues this stream of consciousness in the first line, "Great me, great me, great me," which is reminiscent of the croaking of the frogs in her New England home. However, then the poem reverts to the third person for two and a half lines to be interrupted again by her thought, "Every maiden her own Merman," which is probably an allusion to Arnold's "Forsaken Merman." She, like the mermaid mother, has forsaken her uncomplicated lover for a different way of life. Again, after three more lines in the third person, her own thoughts intervene. Then, the eleventh section goes back to simple description in the third person.

These techniques which give a direct insight into the woman's character--her reading habits (Goethe, Emerson, Arnold) and her eating habits (she "eats/ at a little table in a sunny courtyard/ A date milkshake and an avocadoburger.")--lend a definitely personal quality to this work. However, unlike the earlier personal works, the methods of achieving this personal quality are artistically objective. Through technical skill, an artistic reality is established which presents a personal criticism of contemporary existence in an objective manner.

When Jarrell turns his hand to prose, he examines the multiple aspects of modern life as he did in The Woman at the Washington Zoo. However, in his prose criticisms of contemporary society, he shifts from the objectively artistic to the subjectively
clever. In prose Jarrell is a witty, rather cynical and some-
times cutting critic. Upon first starting to read *Pictures from
an Institution* (1954) or *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (1962)
one is struck by the apparent difference between the humorous
sophistication of the prose works and the haunting, dream-like
melancholy of Jarrell's poetry. However, as one continues to
read, certain themes have a strangely familiar sound and one
realises that there are, after all strong similarities in thought
in the two types of work. This similarity of theme is the only
notable resemblance between *A Sad Heart* and the poetry (probably
because *A Sad Heart* is a series of essays and, therefore, mainly
concerned with thought).

However, the tone and approach of *Pictures from an Institution*
can also be related to the previous volumes of poetry. First of all,
there is an objectivity about the characters that reminds one of
the characterization in the war poems. The characters are really
extensions of a type, not individuals. Once again, they seem to
have been created for the express purpose of carrying Jarrell's
wit and ideas out into the intellectual world. However, the surface
of this artificial world has the seeming reality of the poems in
the *Woman at the Washington Zoo*. The people move and speak like real
people, but they have no purpose or existence of their own.\(^3\)

\(^3\) Thomas Mabry, Review of *Pictures from an Institution*,
Of course, the seeming artificiality of characterization may be partly because of the restricted nature of the content: A study of the characters which make up the faculty of a college.

This study is in the form of a series of "pictures" of the faculty members posed in the midst of some of their more glamorous duties--sleek, glossy pictures of characters in a tableau vivant. The more grubby routine aspects of academic life are omitted. The plot, if one may call it a plot, is centered around Gertrude, a writer, who is really only a member of the faculty in order to be able to continue her writing. The book opens with the hiring of Gertrude and ends with her departure after she has completed her book--a book about her fellow faculty members.

Basically, Mr. Jarrell is concerned with this problem of patronage of the artist in modern context, that is, with the growing custom of university-support of promising artists as members of the faculty--members who, like Gertrude, obviously lend more to the school prestige than to the teaching staff.

Considered in this respect, Pictures from an Institution fits in nicely with Jarrell's previous works. For here the artist, torn free from earlier forms of patronage, seeks to find new security within the protective walls of the university. However,

here he is cut off from the everyday world and from all but a few people who are, by nature of their positions, all of a general inclination—scholastic inclination, of course. Hence, he is frustrated by a reduction in his powers of communication which were, after all, what he hoped to protect by gaining security.

Like the character in "Windows" (The Woman at the Washington Zoo), the artist stands outside the world of real people and imagines what must be inside. He projects these imaginings into a microcosm made up of impressions from his restricted environment and presents this as "The World."

Gertrude, the writer in Pictures, exemplifies this narrowed perspective. She observes the people around her at the college and feels them totally representative of people in general. In trying to transplant the fruits of her selective observations into the world of ordinary people (the details of which she noted very minutely although through a telescope, so to speak), she withered the human qualities of her characters:

Even the best of Gertrude's books were habitat groups in a Museum of Natural History: topography, correct; meteorological information, correct; condition of skins, good; mounting of horns, correct....Inside there were old newspapers, paper-mache, clockwork. And yet, mirabile dictu! the animals moved, a little stiffly, and gave the calls of their species, a little thinly—was it not a world?36

Jarrell's novel itself (Pictures) might be compared to one

of Gertrude's novels. Jarrell, too, is a writer and a college faculty member. As mentioned above, his view of faculty life is not a complete one, but rather a "picture"—a snapshot through telescopic lens—of some aspects of this life.

Much broader in its scope of subjects than Pictures, A Sad Heart at the Supermarket is a collection of essays the contents of which range from a dialogue on changes in educational methods ("The Schools of Yesteryear"), to a chapter telling how the author wrote "The Woman at the Washington Zoo." Being in essay form, A Sad Heart is also more personal in tone than Pictures.

However, the two books do not differ radically in views expressed. In fact, the opinions of some of the characters in the novel frequently reappear in the essays in strikingly similar form. For instance, Irene in Pictures believes of Americans: "We believe in Education and distrust anybody who is educated." Jarrell in A Sad Heart states: "Most of us distrust intellectuals as such: we feel that they must be abnormal or else they wouldn't be intellectuals."

Sections of A Sad Heart would fit in perfectly as speeches in Pictures. This seems to reinforce the criticism that Jarrell tends to create characters for the purpose of voicing his intellectual views.

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The themes of some of his other works are also restated in the book of essays. The concern with the artist or philosopher and his place in society as initiated in *Pictures* is continued. In *A Sad Heart* the chapter entitled "The Intellectual in America" is devoted to this subject.

Jarrell quotes Tocqueville's statement to the individualist in America over a hundred and twenty-five years ago: "You are free to think differently from me and to retain your life, your property, and all that you possess; but you are henceforth a stranger among your people." While Jarrell feels that the position of the artistic or intellectual individual in America today is not so unfortunate as Tocqueville prophesied, he also feels that these uniquely gifted people are not duly respected in our country. Their respect is based, he maintains, not upon the integrity of their efforts nor upon their contributions to the realms of knowledge and human understanding per se, but upon their benefits to the practical and material world about them. To secure some measure of respect from society and to survive financially the artist or the intellectual today is generally forced to take refuge in some practical and profitable occupation. Like Gertrude in *Pictures From an Institution*, he may go beneath the wings of some paternal institution. However, then he may truly become, as Tocqueville warned "A stranger among your people," and thus suffer a lessening of his creative powers.

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The theme of loss of security and change of values (Losses) is also reintroduced. In fact, it is a very strong thread running through all of *A Sad Heart*. It is expressed in this line from the essay called "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket":

Our culture is essentially periodical: we believe that all that is deserves to perish and to have something else put in its place.\(^1\)

Thus, throughout his creative works Jarrell's view of the modern world can be expressed by the various themes which do persist in his poetry and prose with greater or less force. For example, the loss of individual identity in the flux of war (*Blood for a Stranger*, 1942) was extended to the loss of individual identity in a highly mechanized society (*Woman at the Washington Zoo*, 1960).

Jarrell's concern for the individual and for the preservation of a basic humanism runs through all the works covered in this paper from *Blood for a Stranger* (1942) to *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (1962). As might be expected, these concerns also dominate his work of the past three years.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 72.

\(^2\)The content of his most recent work, however, has taken an interesting change of course--The *Bat Poet* (1963) and *The Gingerbread Rabbit* (1964) are both children's stories. In these stories Jarrell's charming use of imagination and his pervasive interest in childhood are both put to excellent use.

A somewhat traditional children's story (Reminding one of a tale called "The Gingerbread Boy"), *The Gingerbread Rabbit* tells how a rabbit made of gingerbread by a mother for her little girl comes to life and runs away to avoid being baked and eaten. The rabbit encounters a fox who masquerades as a big, red rabbit and almost succeeds in luring the naive bunny into his cave for dinner. However, the rabbit is saved by two real, childless
It seems that Jarrell has now developed such a facility and flexibility with the English language that several types of creative work might be expected from him in the future. More poetry of the type found in *The Woman at the Washington Zoo* (1960), prose of the sophisticated, intellectual variety found in *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (1962), or the new, poetic prose found in *The Bat Poet* (1963) are all possibilities for Jarrell's continuing career as a creative writer.

rabbits who adopt him, and all ends happily.

The Bat Poet tells of a young bat who, left alone on the porch by the other bats who moved to the barn, learns to stay awake during the day and to appreciate the world around him. His broadened appreciation of his environment and his admiration of the mockingbird's song lead him to write poetry expressing his feelings. A lone chipmunk appreciates his work. The bat is unable to communicate his efforts to his fellow bats, and the mockingbird is too conceited about his own abilities to listen with understanding. Thus the story ends with the bat poet, still hopeful of communicating with his fellow bats, falling asleep for the winter as his new poem escapes his groggy mind. While told in such a way as to be enjoyable to a child for its story alone, *The Bat Poet* is obviously a continuation of Jarrell's previous themes of the problems of the individual (especially the artist) in society and the problems of exclusion and lack of communication.

In *The Bat Poet* particularly, Jarrell shows that he can create prose works which have the haunting subtlety found in his better poetry and still retain the wit (though softened) and polish of his earlier prose works.
Bibliography

Books


• The Woman at the Washington Zoo. New York: Atheneum, 1960

Periodicals


