The Buddhist tributary moves beyond the boundaries of the “Beats” to include the chance operations of John Cage and Jackson Mac Low, the Buddhist ethnographic details of Lucien Stryk, Garrett Fengo, and Sam Hamill, and the language experimentation of Leslie Scalapino and Norman Fischer, among many others. In each of these cases, Buddhist cultural and epistemological practices lead to important developments within American poetry, a national poetry traditionally linked to the Judeo-Christian-based transatlantic canons rather than its more contemporary transpecific association. Even though few religions can claim to have the high profile Zen has enjoyed among American poets over the last century, their poetry is in no way homogeneous but, in fact, demonstrates a surprisingly diverse array of aesthetic and epistemological characteristics. Each poet draws upon the three cultural streams—content, form, and epistemology—in different ways, so while it is helpful to discuss them as distinct phenomena, one can easily see how each often includes elements of the other. What is certain is that Japanese influences have increasingly enriched and changed the shape and texture of American letters and will likely continue to do so for some time to come.


Jonathan Stallings
final book, particularly in his three-part poem "The Lost World," in which he writes of his remorse at the pain he caused his grandparents by not writing to them. The title of this book refers both to childhood and to Harry O. Hoyt's silent picture of the same name. Hollywood, no doubt seemed like a fairy tale world to young Randall, a world in which one might see dinosaurs and pterodactyls with "[papier-mâché smiles, looking over the fence of Ol The Lost World."

After his parents' divorce, Randall was summoned back to Nashville, where he stayed with his mother and younger brother, Charles. As a senior in high school, Jarrell was already immensely well read and proving himself to be a capable writer. In 1931 after a fire destroyed his books, young Randall prepared a list of the destroyed or damaged books for an insurance claim. The list is impressive for its quality and diversity, containing such notable titles as Marcel Proust's Swann's Way, Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Collected Verse, Friedrich Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra, Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Jean Cocteau's Enfants Terribles, T.S. Eliot's Poems, and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. During this time he was writing reviews for the Humne-Fogg High School yearbook, Echo, which showed budding wit and critical discernment, two qualities that would characterize his adult criticism.

Hoping that Jarrell would work for the family candy company, his Uncle Howell Campbell sent Jarrell to a commercial school to study accounting, despite Jarrell's interest in literature and drama. So serious was his dislike for business that Jarrell became ill, spending his recovery studying philosophy and writing verse. Campbell ultimately decided to send Jarrell to Vanderbilt, where he met poets John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren. Quickly establishing himself as an enfant terrible, Jarrell took a degree in psychology. Nevertheless, he studied literature with a growing passion and placed several of his poems in the American Review before graduating. The poems were selected by Allen Tate to open a special poetry supplement that featured writers such as Warren, Ransom, Janet Lewis, and Mark van Doren. During his senior year at Vanderbilt, Jarrell was already sending poems to Warren, who had begun to edit the Southern Review along with C leanth Brooks.

After two years as a graduate student at Vanderbilt, Jarrell followed Ransom to Kenyon College. At Kenyon he met Robert Lowell, who along with Peter Taylor, roomed with Jarrell in Ransom's home. Both became Jarrell's lifelong friends. Jarrell's early career is marked by fortuitous friendships. Ransom, for instance, soon founded the Kenyon Review, in which Jarrell's poems commonly appeared. Likewise Tate encouraged James Laughlin at New Directions to include Jarrell's twenty-poem sequence "Rage for the Lost Penny" in Five American Poets (1940), where he would appear beside another lifelong friend, John Berryman. Tate also became an advocate for Jarrell's first book, Blood for a Stranger (1942), sending the manuscript to his own publishing house, Scribner's, and, finally, to Harcourt Brace, where the manuscript was published. Blood for a Stranger proved a solid debut, with poems such as "90 North" suggesting the powerfully personal poems of his last years.

In 1939 Jarrell began teaching at the University of Texas at Austin, where he met Mackie Langham, a colleague in the English Department who became his first wife. In 1942 Jarrell enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force, where he would stay until February 1946. Although he never saw combat, his experiences in the service as both a teacher and flight navigator affected his writing profoundly. The poems written during this period culminated in Little Friend, Little Friend, which appeared in 1945, and comprised a large percentage of Losses (1948). Poems such as " Eighth Air Force" and "Absent with Official Leave" demonstrate a departure from his earlier, more abstract, and Auden-esque style. "Absent with Official Leave," in particular, is, as Jarrell writes, "a quiet poem" comprised of subtle yet resonant images: "He covers his ears with his pillow, and begins to drift / (Like the plumes the barracks trail into the sky)." Similarly, "Eighth Air Force" paints a morally ambiguous yet ultimately sympathetic portrait of "murderers," that is, soldiers, at rest, awaiting their next bombing run. Though a puppy laps water from a flower can while a sergeant whistles an aria, "shall I say that man / Is not as men have said: a wolf to man?"

During the early 1940s, Jarrell also developed and articulated a fairly elaborate theory of poetry, a theory first sketched in "A Note on Poetry," which appeared as a preface to the poems in Five American Poets (1940) and was later developed into "The End of the Line" (1942), first appearing in the Nation, a magazine for which he would later serve as literary editor. In the recently rediscovered and posthumously published talk "Levels and Opposites: Structure in Poetry," Jarrell expands on the theories suggested by these previous essays, outlining a dialectical theory, one that makes the startlingly post-modern claim that "there are no things in a poem, only processes," and that a poem is a dynamic function that hinges upon opposition, that it is as "static as an explosion." Thought to be lost, "Levels and Opposites" was a Muses lecture given by Jarrell at Princeton in April 1942 at the request of Allen Tate. The essay was rediscovered among Jarrell's papers by Thomas Travisano and was subsequently published in the Winter 1996 issue of the Georgia Review.

Jarrell was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in poetry in 1946 (which he did not accept until 1948) and then moved to New York. Here he worked as literary editor for the Nation and cultivated a lasting friendship
with Hannah Arendt and B.H. Haggin, who encouraged Jarrell’s interest in the ballet. For Lowell, Jarrell played the role of his Ezra Pound, offering detailed comments about his forthcoming _Lord Weary’s Castle_ (1946), helping him both before the poems were finished and after the book was published, championing his friend’s work tirelessly and honestly. Shortly thereafter, Jarrell moved to Greensboro, North Carolina, and began teaching at Woman’s College of the University of North Carolina, where he would stay until his death in 1965. Jarrell’s poetry of the time was loosening up considerably, much like the bat’s poetic development in _The Bat-Poet_, moving from stricter forms to an openness inspired by Williams. As he writes in John Ciardi’s _Mid-Century American Poetry_ (1950), “Rhyme as an automatic structural device, automatically attended to, is attractive to me, but like it best irregular, live, and heard.” The poems that would comprise his next collection, _Seven League Crutches_ (1951), exemplify this loosening style, especially the volume’s best pieces, such as “A Quilt Pattern,” “The Night Before the Night Before Christmas,” and “Seele im Raum,” the book’s finale, which begins with irregular—you heard—rhythms and rhymes: “It sat between my husband and my children / A place was set for it—a plate of greens. / It had been there: I had seen it / But not somehow... / Not seen it so that I knew I saw it.”

Promising as it was, however, _Seven League Crutches_ would be the last volume of new verse Jarrell would publish for nine years. The 1950s would see the end of Jarrell’s marriage to Mackie Langham and the beginning of his relationship and eventual marriage to Mary von Schrader, whom he met at the July 1951 Boulder, Colorado, Writers’ Conference. But a poetic aridness came with the happiness that life with Mary afforded him, a dry spell that lasted the whole decade. However, in those ten years he produced an impressive amount of prose, a writing streak initiated by his excellent and still-relevant essay “The Obscurity of the Poet,” which he presented at Harvard during the summer of 1950. Published in _Partisan_ soon thereafter, it would find its way into _Poetry and the Age_ (1953), Jarrell’s first book of criticism and a testament to the insightful prose he produced during those first years of the 1950s. This work includes essays and reviews that shaped the canon of American poetry and that inform our appraisal of poets such as Robert Frost, Robert Lowell, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Walt Whitman, Richard Wilbur, and William Carlos Williams. _Poetry and the Age_ was followed a year later by his only novel, _Pictures from an Institution_, a best seller, and then, in 1953, by an appointment to the prestigious position of poetry critic for the _Yale Review_, which he held until 1957. An American Horkheimer and Adorno (and many of his essays were contemporaneous with Horkheimer and Adorno’s indictment of the culture industry), Jarrell lamented in his prose what he thought was a deepening fissure between the poet and the public. As he would write in “Poets, Critics, and Readers,” “The public has an unusual relationship to the poet: it doesn’t even know that he is there.” Nevertheless, Jarrell had by this time become a public intellectual of great importance, his renown affirmed by his appointment to the office of the U.S. Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress in 1956, the office that would, in 1985, become the U.S. Poet Laureate. However, his appointment to the consultanship did not increase his poetic output, and, despite his many accomplishments during the Eisenhower years, Jarrell remained unhappy with his meager production of poetry, joking to Mary, “Help! Help! A wicked fairy has turned me into a prose writer!”

While Poetry Consultant (he held the office until 1958), Jarrell lived in Washington, D.C., where he was to keep office hours at the Library of Congress for four hours a day. During this period, Jarrell’s primary poetic outlet was his intermittent translating of Goethe’s _Faust_, written on the blank pages of the huge appointment calendar given to him by the Library of Congress. At this time, Jarrell also worked on translations of Kllke, translations that would comprise half of his book of poetry, _The Woman at the Washington Zoo_ (1960). Although _The Woman at the Washington Zoo_ won him the National Book Award, the fact that only half the book was original verse made him feel, according to Mary, only half a poet.

Doubtlessly, Jarrell’s disaffection with America during what Lowell calls “the tranquilized Fifties” in “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” had much to do with his turn from poetry. Lowell himself spent the 1950s struggling off and on with his autobiography and lost himself, too, in translating verse, turning to Racine’s _Phèdre_ and “imitating” (which is how he characterized a rather loose form of translation) a hodgepodge of European poems that would be released under the title _Imitations_ in 1961. Similarly, Berryman rang in the markedly antipoetic Eisenhower years with the publication of his critical biography of _Stephen Crane_ (1950). And, to round out Jarrell’s circle of friends (whom Travisano calls “the mid-century quarter”), Elizabeth Bishop also was writing prose, hers in the form of short stories for the _New Yorker_. Jarrell’s own translation of Goethe perhaps sums up his estrangement from the times: “Who is there nowadays that wants to read / A book of even the least intelligence?” Or, as Jarrell writes in “The End of the Rainbow,” figuring the closing down of creativity and perception in technological terms, “The doors shut themselves / Not helped by any human hand, mailboxes / Pull down their flags, the finest feelers / Of the television sets withdraw.”
At the end of his stint as Consultant in Poetry, Jarrell and Mary returned to Greensboro, North Carolina. In February 1962, Jarrell was hospitalized for hepatitis and related complications. Hospitalization did not lend itself to poem making. Although he did manage one poem, “The X-Ray Waiting Room in the Hospital,” his dry spell continued. However, Michael di Capua, a children's book editor for Macmillan, suggested that the recovering poet translate several fairy tales by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, a task Jarrell took up with relish. Jarrell found his work on the Grimms' translations therapeutic, and once he regained his health, di Capua invited him and his wife to New York to discuss further projects. It was at this meeting that Jarrell the children's book author was born.

The Gingerbread Rabbit and The Bat-Poet, his first two children's books, were both published in 1964. Illustrated by Garth Williams, The Gingerbread Rabbit was only moderately successful. It and the unpublished (and unfinished) “Reginald,” a story about a chipmunk whose father and mother get gobbled up, were largely private runs, neither as aesthetically satisfying as his later work. However, Jarrell proved a fast learner, for The Bat-Poet is a complex fairy tale that treats his two favorite subjects—childhood and poetry—with sophistication and without condescending to his child audience. As Flynn notes in Randall Jarrell and the Lost World of Childhood, The Bat-Poet involves a unique, talented child (but though he may be) who simultaneously wants to be exceptional and accepted. Flynn argues that Jarrell, who never had a stable family of his own, develops a consistent theme in his children's books: Our need for happy—yet “improbable”—families is so great that we must invent them. Like The Lost World (1965), his last—and, according to Lowell, his best—book of poetry, The Bat-Poet and The Animal Family, both illustrated by Maurice Sendak, deal profoundly with growing up and facing the moral ambiguities of family and desire. However, it was The Bat-Poet's duel treatment of childhood and poetics that, Mary claims, “triggered” The Lost World and broke the writer's block that kept him from making poetry. Indeed, The Lost World features three of the poems found in The Bat-Poet.

The central poem in The Lost World is marked by the tenderness and sensitivity with which Jarrell can handle the viewpoints of other people—young, old, male, female—even as it showcases his technical prowess as a poet. This poem, the eponymous “The Lost World,” is written in terza rima, a form Jarrell returns to in his last and only posthumously published children's book, Fly by Night. “The Lost World”—the poem and the book—is ripe with emotional intensity, humor, and perception. Unfortunately, early reviewers failed to notice the precision with which the poems were crafted and mistook his complicated rendering of childhood and, no doubt, femininity (the first poem in the collection, “Next Day,” has a female speaker) for sentimentality. His declining mental health, exacerbated by inconsistent and ineffectual medicinal therapies, led to a suicide attempt several days after Jarrell read Joseph Bennett's infamously cruel review of The Lost World.

Jarrell recovered well and resumed teaching in the fall of 1965. Tragically, after a brief hospital stay involving his injured wrist, he was struck by a car and killed on the twilight evening of October 14, 1965. His death prompted friends and acquaintances to produce a memorial volume of essays and remembrances, Randall Jarrell, 1914–1965. Edited by Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor, and Robert Penn Warren, Randall Jarrell speaks to the power and lasting influence of this brilliant critic and poet.


Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.

JAZZ

The pecking order of jazz and American poetry completely reversed itself over the course of the twentieth century. Jazz began as the primitive handmaiden to the high-art sublimity of poetry; later, poetry was the suppliant art, jazz the altar. To the poet, at the beginning, the jazz musician was the anonymous Negro, an occasion for poetry more than its real subject. Ultimately, the musician would become the reverently addressed Bird, or Lady, or Mingus, or “dear John, dear Coltrane,” to quote the title of a book by Michael Harper.

It is hard to say that the reverence was misplaced. Jazz- and blues-based music are America's art forms, the cultural exports that have won worldwide respect. It is