

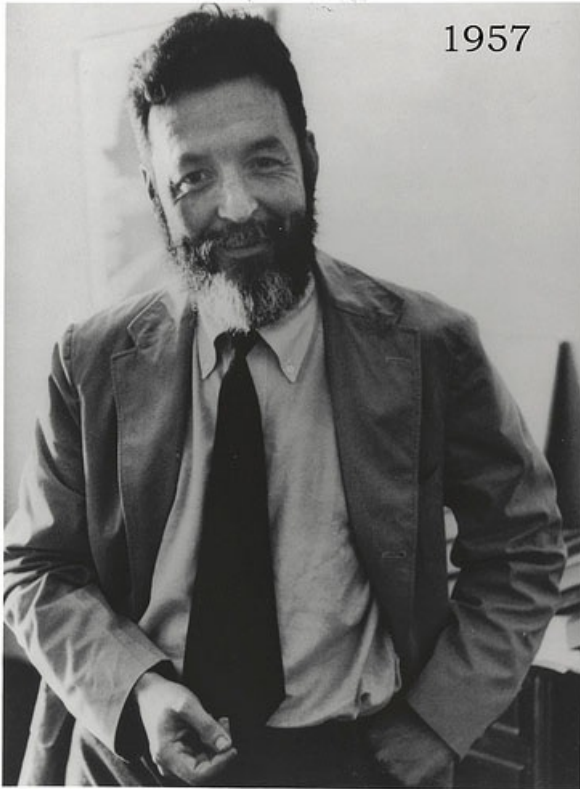
Jarrell, Randall ^[1]

Jarrell, Randall

by Mary Farnham, 1988

6 May 1914–14 Oct. 1965

Randall Jarrell, poet, critic, and teacher, was born in Nashville, Tenn., the son of Owen and Anna Campbell Jarrell. Owing to his parents' divorce, much of his childhood through 1927 was spent in central and southern California. Returning to



Randall Jarrell. Photo is courtesy from flickr.

^[2]Nashville in 1928, he attended high school and was graduated from Vanderbilt University with a B.S. degree in psychology in 1935. During the next two years he pursued graduate work at Vanderbilt, where he fell under the spell of the famed Fugitive and Agrarian poets. With the growth of his own poetic skills, he won the Poetry Prize from *The Southern Review* in 1936.

Jarrell taught at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, from 1937 to 1939, beginning a long career in the classroom and forming lasting friendships with John Crowe Ransom and the young poet Robert Lowell. In 1938 he received an M.A. degree in English from Vanderbilt; his thesis was on the poet A. E. Housman. After leaving Kenyon, Jarrell taught at the University of Texas until 1942, when he published his first collection of poems, *Blood for a Stranger* ^[3]. In 1940 he married Mackie Langham, who also taught in the English Department at the University of Texas, but they were divorced in 1951.

World War II claimed Jarrell's time from 1942 to 1946. He aspired to be a pilot but ultimately served in the Air Force as a Celestial Navigation tower operator, principally in Arizona. Even these years were productive for his poetry; in fact, his second volume of verses, *Little Friend, Little Friend* ^[4] (1945), grew directly from his war experiences and feelings about the war. Its best-known poem is the last, "*The Death of the Ball-Turret Gunner*" ^[5].

Immediately after the war Jarrell received a Guggenheim Fellowship, the culmination of growing critical acclaim which included the Jeanette Sewall Davis Prize from *Poetry* magazine and the John Peale Bishop Memorial Literary Prize from *The Sewanee Review*. Combining his triple role as creator, critic, and teacher, Jarrell taught at Sarah Lawrence College in 1946–47 while continuing his writing and serving as literary editor of *The Nation*.

In 1947 Jarrell began a long and important association with North Carolina, becoming associate, then full professor of English at the Woman's College of The University of North Carolina (now [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#) ^[6]). Though he took leaves of absence to teach at the Salzburg Seminar in American Civilization, Princeton, the University of Indiana, and the University of Illinois, and to accept an appointment as Consultant in Poetry at the Library of Congress (1956–58), he remained centered in [Greensboro](#) ^[7] where his affection for the college and its students grew over the years. In 1961 he chose to receive the National Book Award at [The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#), ^[8] and in

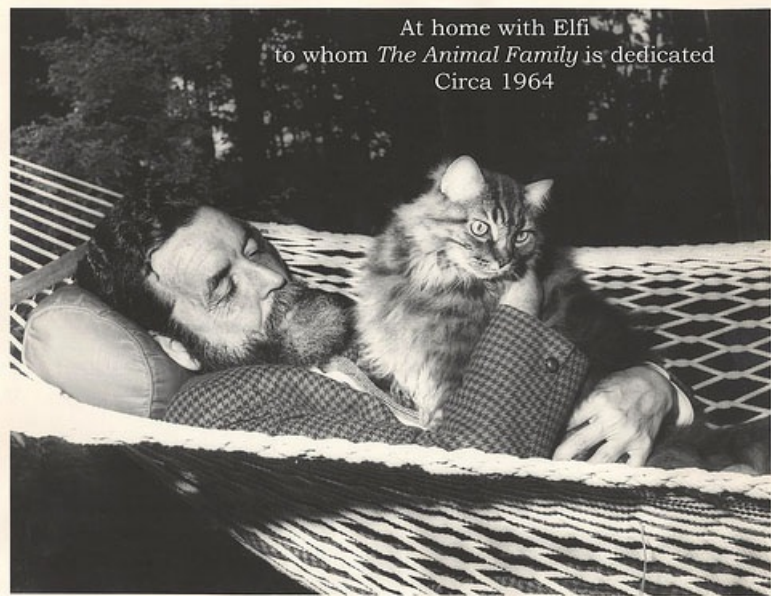
1962 he was presented the O. Max Gardner Award, one of the state's highest honors.

In addition to his classroom activities, Jarrell's interest in the arts spurred the founding of a literary magazine *Analects* [9], at Greensboro to which he contributed a number of his own works. In 1948, his first full year of residence in North Carolina, Jarrell published his third volume of poetry, *Losses* [10], with the fourth, *The Seven-League Crutches* [11], appearing in 1951. Of *Losses*, *Poetry* magazine stated: "The book contains war poems quite as good as any written in this century."

On 8 Nov. 1952, Jarrell married Mary Eloise von Schrader, who later wrote a memoir of their marriage and assisted in his posthumous publications.

As an outgrowth of his years as literary critic for *The Nation* and *The Partisan Review*, Jarrell's first book of literary criticism, *Poetry and the Age* [12], appeared in 1953. During the next decade he was a judge of such literary contests as the National Book Awards, was poetry critic for *The Yale Review* (1955–57), and was a member of the editorial board of *The American Scholar*. From 1949 until his death Jarrell was involved in selecting, editing, introducing, and sometimes translating works as diverse as Anton Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, two collections of Rudyard Kipling's stories, Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*, and *Selected Poems* by William Carlos Williams.

In 1954 the poet Jarrell's versatile talents took another turn with the publication of his only novel, the satire *Pictures from an Institution, a Comedy* [13], based on years of academic observations. The next year there appeared *Selected Poems* [14], published by Knopf, followed by *The Woman at the Washington Zoo: Poems and Translations* [15] in 1960. Another prose effort, *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket: Essays and Fables* [16], was published in 1962. A second volume of *Selected Poems* [17], this published by Atheneum, came out in 1964. Perhaps it was his i



Randall Jarrell and his cat Elfi. Photo is courtesy from flickr. [18]interest in fairy tales as a "metaphor for life" as well as his belief in the universal relevance of poetry that inspired Jarrell to write three sensitive children's books, *The Bat-Poet* [19] (1964) and *The Animal Family* [20] (1965), both illustrated by Maurice Sendak, and *The Gingerbread Rabbit* [21] (1964). For *The Bat-Poet* he won the American Association of University Women Children's Book Award.

In 1965, the year of his death, there appeared the last new collection of poems *The Lost World* [22], for which he received the Roanoke-Chowan Poetry Award. His widow, Mary Jarrell, describes his final year: "Signs of Randall's nervous breakdown had begun, but they fooled us into explaining them in other terms. Before the worst of it happened, he was granted a few magic weeks of Lisztian virtuosity." During the last months of his life Jarrell was teaching at The *University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill* [8]. One night, as he walked along a dark road in the town, he was struck by a car and killed. Jarrell was buried in New Garden Friends Cemetery, Greensboro.

His posthumous works include *The Third Book of Criticism* [23], published in 1969, and *The Complete Poems* [24], published in the United States in the same year and in England in 1971. *The Achievement of Randall Jarrell: A Comprehensive Selection of His Poems* [25] with a critical introduction by Frederick J. Hoffman appeared as part of the Modern Poets series in 1970, and *Jerome, the Biography of a Poem* [26], based on Jarrell's original contribution to *Analects* in 1960, was published in 1971. Unfinished at his death were anthologies, translations, individual poems, and another children's book.

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Additional Resources:

The University of North Carolina Greensboro, "Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections & University Archives: Randall Jarrell." University Libraries. http://library.uncg.edu/info/depts/scua/collections/rare_books/jarrell.aspx [27] (accessed March 5, 2013).

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