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Always a War Poet: Randall Jarrell and the Returns of Twentieth-Century War

“The real war poets are always war poets, peace or any time.”

EVEN BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR HAD ENDED, IT HAD become a commonplace that men and women now occupied a different position in twentieth century time and that the perception of time's passing, of history itself had changed. An illustrative moment, chosen from an almost limitless array of similar moments, comes as Vera Brittain surveys the meaning of the armistice for her: “Already this was a different world from the one that I had known during four life-long years... And in that brightly lit, alien world I should have no part... The war was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return.”² She was twenty-five at this moment, and yet she speaks as though she were generations older than those who are almost her contemporaries but have been untouched by war. A mere five years later, as she considers a proposal of marriage from George Catlin, she allows that he was “of the War generation, and that was all that really mattered. Had he been post-war I could not under any circumstances have married him, for within the range of my contemporaries a gulf wider than any decade divides those who experienced the War as adults from their juniors by only a year or two who grew up immediately afterwards.”³ Even at the remove of many

subsequent wars, in 1960, looking back across the temporal abysses that opened as new understandings of human nature and the nature of human collectives came terribly into being in the years between 1914 and 1918, Philip Larkin expresses the absolute and irrevocable divide made by the First, the Great War:

Never such innocence,
Never before or since,
As changed itself to past
Without a word⁴

Samuel Hynes describes the change in terms of a “war imagined,” a war whose remaking into myth revolved around violently altered temporalities:

Modernism means many things, but it is most fundamentally the forms that post-war artists found for their sense of modern history: history seen as discontinuous, the past remote and unavailable, or available only as the ruins of itself, and the present a formless space emptied of values.⁵

In the years that followed the Great War, this sense of moving in a new world can be discovered not only in writings specifically concerned with the War but in all manner of cultural productions. Of course, this widespread conviction of complete, general, and temporally dislocating change had occurred before in Western history, most recently a little more than a hundred years earlier, with the French Revolution. T. J. Clark, Richard Terdiman, Eric Hobsbawm, and Peter Fritzsche, among many others, have traced modern understandings of time to sensibilities shaped by that revolution and its aftermaths. Fritzsche isolates a characteristic phrase from a letter by Johannes von Muller to his brother, written in May 1797, a phrase compounded of anxiety, vertigo, and a sense of potential: “everything is becoming so different.”⁶ Terdiman’s description of the malady of nineteenth-century Western subjects applies equally to post-Great War inhabitants of the twentieth:

In this period people experienced the insecurity of their culture’s involvement with its past, the perturbation of the link to their own inheritance, as what I want to term a ‘memory crisis’: a sense that their past had somehow evaded memory, that recollection had ceased to integrate with consciousness. In this memory crisis the very coherence of time and of subjectivity seemed disarticulated.⁷

This “memory crisis” turns private and public understandings of time into objects of urgent study: “the functioning of memory itself, the institution of memory and thereby of history, became critical preoccupations in the effort to think through what intellectuals were coming to call the ‘modern.’”⁸ This “crisis” returns with augmented force in the years after the First World War. To be modern is to be uncertain of one’s place in time and in the temporal narratives we name history.

I wish to consider here what happens to the temporal sense of those so soon caught up in the twentieth-century’s Second World War, in the *return* of a cataclysmic, temporally defining event—a world war—within living personal and cultural memory, and the return of war over much of the same ground—war fought among the same belligerents, for provocations intimately connected to the earlier conflict. By the early to mid 1930s, it becomes evident that the past, at least in its martial lineaments, bleeds through onto every page of recent history and promises to color the coming days. Far from being remote, the injuries of the Great War reopen so readily that, clearly, they have never really healed. The very maps of Europe broadcast the form the past has decreed for the present. In the third and fourth decades of the century, those speaking on public affairs regularly invoke the experience and the legacies of the Great War. The First World War divided twentieth-century men and women forever from the nineteenth century, but the Second World War closes a circle with its precedent conflict and ties 1939 to 1914 in an awful knot of memory. The Second War inevitably provoked (and continues to provoke) comparison and connection with the First; to those who had lived through the years 1914-1918, history itself could seem caught in a pattern of traumatic recall.⁹ Consider the opening movement of “Burnt Norton,” with Eliot brooding over the mysterious, undeniable force with which the past is made manifest in the present. There are many ways to gloss Eliot’s obsession with time in this poem and throughout the *Quartets*, but readers today may miss the ironies contemporary history contributed to his insistence, in 1936, that

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.¹⁰

Time is of such importance in Eliot’s poem in part because the curve of time—the return of war and all that war entails—is so readily discernable in the late thirties and early forties. “History is now and England”¹¹ is an assertion that was made in comparable terms though with differing geographical reference, in tones ranging

from triumph to horror, by citizens all over the world as the twentieth century lived out its martial legacy from the Great War.

I concern myself here with Randall Jarrell, one of the greatest poets of the Second World War. Having washed out of flight school, Jarrell served from 1944-1945 in various counseling and instructional capacities on a number of army air force bases in the United States during the war.¹² His writings about that war constitute a complex series of meditations on time, history, and memory. I look here only at some of his work in the first of his several volumes of poetry focused on the war, *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945), but I believe that my brief selection of work from this poet will enable us to consider general upheavals in Western understandings of the field of time that are particular to the return of world war in 1939.¹³ If World War I brought events so terrible that men and women learned to count time anew, with 1914 serving as zero, the end of one age and the grim inauguration of another, World War II brings repetitions, counting over again—the structure of irony itself now manifest in the circular progress of history and in the formal circuits of narrative and poetry: Charles Ryder standing tearfully on the edge of the valley overlooking Brideshead manor, thinking “I had been there before; I knew all about it”;¹⁴ *Between the Acts*, with its annual pageant, its characters playing parts they played last year and their parents played generations earlier, its ending with the most fundamental of returns to prehistoric beginnings: Giles and Isa alone in a “night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among the rocks.”¹⁵ And the first poem of *Little Friend, Little Friend*, “Second Air Force,” revealing the thoughts of a mother visiting her now-grown son at his base somewhere in the American desert, takes us on a journey that is part return, part appalling novelty, “so fresh, so old”:

Far off, above the plain the summer dries
The great loops of the hangars sway like hills.
Buses and weariness and loss, the nodding soldiers
Are wire, the bare frame building, and a pass
To what was hers; her head hides his square patch
And she thinks heavily: My son is grown.¹⁶

The great circuit that the mother has made—the trip back to what, in a time now as distant as the “far off” vistas that open this poem, had been most intimately “hers”—her son—is, most unsettlingly, a loop in time, so that the poem is a production more of memory than perception. The most vivid glimpse of war in

“Second Air Force” comes when the mother recalls “what she has read on the front page of her newspaper the week before, a conversation between a bomber, in flames over Germany, and the fighter protecting it”:¹⁷

Remembering,
She hears the bomber calling, *Little Friend!*
To the fighter hanging in the hostile sky

In remembering the newspaper article she proleptically imagines her son’s fate and also eerily evokes a past, since the desperate cry itself, which gives Jarrell his title for this book filled with death in so many forms, belongs to the world of children.¹⁸

Throughout Jarrell’s career, reviewers and critics noted how often his poetry revisits the emotional and perceptual states of childhood. This is the case not only in *The Lost World* (1965) and in the three books he wrote for children but, more disconcertingly, in a great deal of his poetry about war. Suzanne Ferguson explains that “[o]ne of Jarrell’s strongest intuitions about the enlisted men is that they revert to a childlike innocence in times of stress.”¹⁹ Her account is accurate, but I believe it is also important to approach the subject of childhood in Jarrell’s war poetry as one of the crucial arenas for his meditations on the temporal confusions in this time of war, confusions exacerbated by the fact that the soldiers themselves are “just kids out of high school,” as Jarrell explains in a bitter letter to Margaret Marshall, written in October of 1945: “[I] believe the majority of such people that died were too young to vote.”²⁰ The distraught and alienated mother of “Second Air Force” finds that her recollection of her son’s childhood and of her life up to this point force her to ask the obvious, essentially unanswerable question common to this time: “The years meant *this*?” Jarrell’s most famous war poem, “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner”—a poem chosen to conclude *Little Friend, Little Friend* and to introduce the war poetry in his *Complete Poems*—achieves much of its grotesque power from its monstrous revision of a scene of birth, a return to origins that finds, rather than a baby in its mother’s belly, pieces of a corpse in shattered glass. “A Pilot from the Carrier,” the second poem in *Little Friend, Little Friend*, similarly shows us a pilot’s brief, ironic second birth. Escaping with “sobbing breaths” from his bloody cockpit “into the sunlight of the upper sky,” he begins his slow descent to earth under his parachute, “a quiet bundle in the sky.” Momentarily safe, he imagines himself falling “the miles to warmth, to air, to waking” and also manages to glimpse his past, all pasts enacted below him:

He is alone; and hangs in knowledge
Slight, separate, estranged: a lonely eye
Reading a child's first scrawl, the carrier's wake—

In a bleak twist on a child's common observation that things seen from a distance look like toys, Jarrell ends his poem with a "toy-like," "fragile" enemy plane intent on killing this vulnerable, new-born man, who watches from suddenly diminishing distance as the plane "grows to him, rubbed silver-tipped with flame." Time past and time future collapse, as is so often the case in Jarrell's war poetry, into the open grave of the present moment.

Two-thirds of the way through *Little Friend, Little Friend*, having spent much of their time immersed in the conditions of current war, Jarrell's first readers of his second book of poetry came upon a prose-poem that explicitly positioned itself at the edge of that earlier and related brink in the twentieth century: "1914." The poet interrupts his poems of the present—and signals that interruption immediately by casting this composition in a form unique in *Little Friend, Little Friend*—so that he can clarify where he and his audience stand:

Now it is no longer the war, but a war: our own has taken its place. The World War is only the First World War; and, truly, these are photographs not of the world, but of the first world.

The poem's first word, "now," serves as the fixed point from which this meditation on history unfolds. The shift of article, from "the" to "a," as well as the rueful possessive adjective, "our," immediately conveys what will preoccupy the poet as he considers the Great War from the position of a war that has proved even greater: the formerly unimaginable reduction in scale of the First World War caused by the twentieth century's augmenting series of horrors. Employing the disturbing narrative device that he is pouring over an old photograph album, Jarrell considers what it means to live in a century that has had to number its world wars. As an adult returns, through images from the past, to "the first world," the world of childhood, so this all-too-grown-up narrator takes us back to a war that, in the terms taught us by the next, now seems almost quaint.²¹ The voice speaking "1914," for all who have come of age with the century, ponders what it means when circumstances force one to reconceive one's idea of war and of death, to abandon a set of images that had achieved the permanence of myth: "But for twenty years, while the wire and trenches in the mud were everybody's future, how could any of it seem

old-fashioned to us?—it was our death.”²² Knowing for more than a decade that another war was imminent, fully possessed by the imagination of a landscape that seemed so deeply and in so many ways connected with modernity itself, “everybody” now muses over this not wholly innocent “first world” from the other side of a new, more modern grave: “But when we died differently we saw that it was old.”

Jarrell often writes his war poetry from this impossible perspective.²³ Speaking as one newly dead not only fits the telos of these times; it allows for precisely ironic measurements of temporal distances, since one’s own position in time is fixed. With this casualty of the Second War guiding us, then, we turn to the first “old” image: the moment on 28 June 1914, just after Gavrilo Princip has assassinated the Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo:

The men who seize Princip wear little vests and sashes, skirts with underleggings, fezzes; one tugs at his arm in a stand-up collar, peg-top trousers, and a chauffeur’s cap; and he himself has hair like a rope wig, a face the camera draws out into the Mad Hatter’s.

The scene is zany—something that we might watch played out in jerky motion on the silent screen, noting the costumes of these actors in this historical drama but not really taking them entirely seriously. Not, that is, until we glimpse the body at the center of this slightly comical furor and the distance between us and this consequential death partly collapses: “The Archduke, spotted with the blood that does, indeed, look exactly like our own (the trees, too, are human), has moustaches like a Keystone Cop’s. No one is laughing.” Fashions change but trees and blood force us to understand that this photograph gestures toward something that is real and of immediate impact. With shocking speed, the next image is upon us: “This, next week, is the war the crowds hear. The crowds in their stiff straw hats, their starched high collars.” And we are in Berlin or London or Paris or Saint Petersburg, watching the first of this war’s many great assemblies of people. As have all writers who describe these late-summer gatherings of a bellicose and naïve public, eager for news and ardent for what will soon become an antique honor, Jarrell calls attention to this period as a time when history itself seems visible, made manifest to its participants by the immediately evident significance of events: “Time hesitates: Surely these States are eternal? Troops march through the crowds.” Temporal and geopolitical States will remain suspended, however, only for a few more balmy weeks before the “first world”—the brutal childhood of modernity—commences.

Jarrell captures the transition from one age to the next in a comparison of two aesthetically related images. In the first, a soldier, “smoking a cigar,” “breaks ranks to take the bouquet of a middle-aged woman, who holds the flowers out with her left hand and bows her head so that her face is hidden.” Flower and cigars vanish in the next sentence, and the woman we now see has, fittingly, aged:

Next page an old woman walking along a road, leading a white horse—he is pulling off her home, in a wooden cart half again as high as she—bows her head exactly as far.

The aesthetic link is also a moral one—the woman’s attitude expressing the trajectory from modesty or deference to sheer weariness that civilians’ lives follow in every war. Jarrell ends this verse paragraph on the war’s beginnings with a shift to present tense, since we can be certain that this old woman today still walks with bowed head before the pieces of her life: “These are the poor, whom we have with us: in their shoulders there is neither grief nor joy, something more passive than acceptance.”²⁴

The next two photographs from this sobering album (there are a dozen in all) carry us not quite into battle but into suspended moments in a time of war (in his poem “The Lines,” his “armiest army poem,” Jarrell shows us that soldiers are forced to wait in line for everything that comes to them, even death itself).²⁵ The first image captures the conjunction of the surreal and the ordinary that marks so many accounts of war:

The wet sand is torn by feet, the grass blows by the marsh’s edge; here, lost in the flat land, seven soldiers are waiting. They lie, looking into the horizon, around the machine-gun they have brought here on a cart; to the cart a dog is harnessed—a spotted, medium-sized dog, who stares backward and upward into the eyes of man. *Unorganized Innocence: an impossibility*, said Blake, but this was possible; and it vanishes, leaving only this print

This print’s “flat land” and, we might guess, the Belgian lowlands themselves both register the impressions made by these soldiers and record, too, the soldiers’ barbarous ingenuity. These men have cast the previous scene of transport into a martial key, demonstrating innocence organized for lethal ends—a dog in harness, a machine gun on a cart. Before vanishing into battle, into the next print, they

have advanced our estimations of what was possible in their time and in the future. “Only this print,” Jarrell tells us, survives “the wave that goose-steps into Brussels.” Dated and enduring images themselves may speak, paradoxically, more of losses and time passing than of permanence. The officer on his horse in the next print holds “his sabre out like Ney,” but his men on foot, having been more intimately affected by the actual conditions of the current war, “know better than their game,” possessing a modern understanding of how far the conditions of battle have changed in the century since Napoleon and his marshals commanded Europe.

As we turn the rest of this album’s pages, however, moving further into the war itself and focusing more closely on ordinary soldiers, we find fewer and fewer archaisms. The quaint clothes and postures of the subjects at the beginning of the collection and the start of the war give way to unfashionable but never outdated bodies of the unclad dead:

Now the forts of Antwerp, broken into blocks, slide into a moat as bergs
break off into the sea; the blocks, metamorphosed into the dead, sprawl
naked as grave-mounds in the stinky fields[.]

We again glimpse the child’s world, in the “blocks” of Belgian forts destroyed by the great German siege guns in the winter of 1914, and yet it is the dead who dominate this next section of the poem, moving us beyond clear temporal coordinates. Nothing stays still or fixed, as these black and white images work in the poet’s mind: forts turn into blocks, which turn into bodies, which become their own grave-mounds. In a related image, the soldiers seem now to be burying themselves, so quickly are they dying: “the innocent armies, marching over the meadows to three haystacks, a mill-dam, and a hedge, dig a trench for their dead and vanish there.” Mass death twists the prose-poetry into surreal contortions; Jarrell presents us with images that conflate bodies with the language that will memorialize them—starting with their names: “black crowds, their faces fiery with evening, stumble through the typed bodies nailed in rows outside a postoffice.” “1914” connects the efficient, mechanized slaughter of millions to the production of language itself. Over the soldiers who fall obediently into the earth,

the machine-guns hammer, like presses, the speeches into a common
tongue: the object-language of the Old Man of Laputa; here is the
fetishism of one commodity, all the values translated into a piece of meat.

The speeches of nations are translated by guns into bodies—the “meat” that ideologies require if they are to be declared substantial—even though this translation ironically renders the speeches obscene and leaves us finally without words but only manufactured corpses or their silent images.²⁶ Swift’s “Academy of Projectors” in Lagado had imagined that their talking with things instead of words would produce a “universal language to be understood in all civilized nations.” Jarrell shows us the twentieth-century’s version of the dreadful, literal exchanges of things among nations: an object-speaking that is immediately intelligible and, also, utterly absurd—made possible by the conjunction of science and technology in modern war. The staggering volume of the elemental commodity thus produced overwhelms the eye and the mind, leaving Jarrell dazzled; he discovers an apt figure for their numbers in a phenomenon of nature:

The winter comes now, flake by flake; the snowflakes or soldiers (it is impossible to distinguish—under the microscope each one is individual) are numbered by accountants who trace with their fingers, in black trenches filled with the dancing snow, the unlikely figures of the dead.

The figures are “unlikely” in their attitudes and in their astonishing numbers. Time asserts its power in the photograph—the print’s gradual fading a fit memorial for these accumulating bodies in an enduring winter: “the last figures, whitening, whitening, vanish into their shining ground . . .” Jarrell ends this paragraph with ellipses; there is no end to this vanishing of subjects into ground.

The final photograph forces us to cast particular histories aside, presenting us with an elemental image—“But before, somewhere else, there is a soldier”—that has been fixed almost since men and women began reckoning time, long before 1914 or 1939. Like the bodies that turned to snow and gradually disappeared into the trenches, this body has also lost its powers of articulation. Here is an undifferentiated, monochromatic corpse: “He is dressed all in grey—even his boots are grey, and merge imperceptibly into his trousers, just as his coat and hat merge imperceptibly into his face.” Jarrell glances back to the previous image of soldiers falling like snow (and continues to gesture toward the “before” of childhood’s “first world”) as he pours over the details of this last, close-up shot: “he has become grey as a snowman is white.” The soldier can only be slightly animated by the figurative energies of the language: “He has pushed his grey hand between his grey knees . . . as if it were cold; but his dark brown hand is folded under his head as if he were leaning on it patiently or thoughtfully.” Blood, which we recall from the first photograph (of

the Archduke Ferdinand) as looking “like our own” has turned under time’s hand to “trickles of dark brown,” but the film registers the color of bone perfectly: “his nose is the white bill of a goose.” The poet gestures incompletely toward the world of nursery rhymes, but the metaphor only emphasizes how a human face can turn monstrous.

This body at the end of “1914” forces Jarrell to revise his opening assessment of the First World War as “old”; the dead soldier has come unstuck in time: “He has been dead for months—that is to say for minutes, for a century.” Jarrell was surrounded, as he wrote this poem, by innumerable assertions of death’s meaning in wartime. When *Life* magazine first ran a photograph of dead American soldiers, for example, in September 1943, the editors called the bodies “three fragments of that life we call American life: three units of freedom.”²⁷ And Jarrell bitterly grants some truth to these patriotic acts of naming and exhortation, with a cruel qualification: “if because of his death his armies have conquered the world, and have brought to its peoples food, justice, and art, it has been a good bargain for all of them but him.” *Life* closes its essay accompanying the photograph of the dead G.I.s on the shore of Buna, New Guinea by urging its readers to cause America “to rise again: not in living units, which we cannot make and to which we cannot give life, but in the mighty symbol, America, the beacon for all men, which is ours to have, to hold, and to increase.”²⁸ Jarrell’s grey soldier, in contrast, precipitates an unmaking of the world at the end of “1914”:

Underneath his picture there is written, about his life, his death, or his war: *Es war ein Traum*.

It is the dream from which no one wakes.

In the love scene from Goethe’s *Faust* to which Jarrell here alludes, the phantom Helena comes to believe herself substantial and alive again, while Faust, overwhelmed by the miracle of his blessing, says “this is a dream.”²⁹ This soldier has been forced to participate in a “bargain” for the redemption of civilization, for aesthetic, social, and economic progress ironically shadowed by his corpse. “Dream” reaches out to include not only whatever pertains to this dead soldier but, in Jarrell’s last line, all of our lives—our pasts, presents, and futures. Time lapses unsubstantial; 1914 and 1939 join all the other years when the world bought progress using a currency that Jarrell will not allow us to forget. Recall his well-known fury at Marianne Moore’s “In Distrust of Merits”—particularly the point where she forces herself to look at a body’s “quiet form upon the dust,” a scene that

Jarrell revises in “1914.” Moore urges herself and her audience to sanctify the dead by thinking on lessons derived from their sacrifice:

I cannot look
And yet I must. If these great patient
dyings—all these agonies
and wound-bearings and bloodshed—
can teach us how to live, these
dyings were not wasted.³⁰

Jarrell will have none of this romantic recuperation of the ruined life:

The armies and the people died, and it meant that Beauty is eternal. Since Pharaoh’s bits were pushed into the jaws of the kings, these dyings—patient or impatient, but dyings—have happened, by the hundreds of millions; they were all wasted. They taught us to kill others and to die ourselves, but never how to live. Who is “taught to live” by cruelty, suffering, stupidity, and that occupational disease of soldiers, death? The moral equivalent of war! Peace, our peace, is the moral equivalent of war.³¹

Chief among the ironies vexing modernity, for Jarrell (as for many others living and writing in the interwar years and after), is the widespread embrace of the primitive and enduring idea that civilizations can measure progress while counting their sacrificed dead. *Little Friend, Little Friend* dwells relentlessly on the consequences of this tainted belief—on bitter, all-too-familiar endings and on beginnings that have been maimed at the start by the return of a war greater than the Great War. In a poem that is itself saturated with resonances from the “soldier’s home” narratives of the First World War, Jarrell presents us with a wounded airman, “Siegfried,” who has come home and spends much of his time now

Reading of victories and sales and nations
Under the changed maps, in the sunlit papers;
Stumbling to the toilet on one clever leg
Of leather, wire, and willow.

In an assessment of what it means to be alive and crippled for this latest changing of the maps, Jarrell explains to Siegfried why it is “different, different” now at home:

“you have understood / Your world at last; you have tasted your own blood.” Like “1914,” and “Second Air Force,” and “The Death of a Ball-Turret Gunner,” and so much else that Jarrell wrote during this war, “Siegfried” completes an unnatural circle. To taste one’s own blood is, in a sense, another form of experiencing the upheavals of memory around which so much war writing is structured. Siegfried’s present is burdened by his too-intimate knowledge of death: in the form of past trauma—a “first world” where the young man realizes how proximate death is—and the certainty of another, mortal encounter in the time to come. In this context, we may discover another meaning to the line from “1914”: “when we died differently we saw that it was old”—an assertion not simply that World War I looked suddenly “old” to those in World War II, but that the fact of death itself—particularly death in war—was already “old” four decades into the twentieth century. Jarrell’s poetry of the Second World War presents us with a perverted sacrament—“you have tasted your own blood”—by way of confirming the return, in all essential aspects, of 1914 in 1939, or any time of war in the years of war to come.

Notes

1. Randall Jarrell, “Poetry in War and Peace,” in *Kipling, Auden & Co.: Essays and Reviews, 1935-1964* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 129.
2. Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 462-63.
3. Brittain, *Testament*, 617-18.
4. Philip Larkin, “MCMXIV,” *Collected Poems* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), 127.
5. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Atheneum, 1991), 433.
6. Peter Fritzsche, “The Case of Modern Memory,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73 (March 2001), 116.
7. Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernism and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3-4.
8. Terdiman, *Present Past*, 5.
9. Randall Jarrell was born on 6 May 1914, and though he did not “live through” World War I the way the first-generation modernists did, he nevertheless experienced some version of the “memory loop” to which I here refer.
10. T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton,” *Four Quartets*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971), 118.

11. Eliot, "Little Gidding," 145.
12. For a full discussion of Jarrell's wartime experience, see William Pritchard, *Randall Jarrell: A Literary Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), chapter 4. See also Lorrie Goldensohn, "Randall Jarrell's War," *War, Literature and the Arts* 11:1 (Spring / Summer 1999): 42-69.
13. The count will vary between two and three, depending on whether the reader considers Jarrell's first book, *Blood for a Stranger* (1942), a book of war poems. *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948) are more wholly concerned with Jarrell's experiences and observations during World War II, but *Blood for a Stranger* has many poems that speak vividly to the experience of being in a world waiting for war and certain of its coming—the world of the late 1930s.
14. Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 17. It is, of course, Paul Fussell who argues that the Great War gave birth to modern forms of irony; see his *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). And even if we are unconvinced by Ryder's (and Waugh's) sentimentality here, and their actual, multiple failures of knowledge, the structure of return and the impulse to declare foreknowledge is characteristic of the time. For a powerful recent reading of Waugh's World War II work, see Marina MacKay, *Modernism and World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 5.
15. Virginia, Woolf, *Between the Acts* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969), 219.
16. Randall Jarrell, *The Complete Poems* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969). I will cite all of Jarrell's poetry from this edition.
17. I quote here from Jarrell's note to the poem, reprinted in *The Complete Poems*, 10.
18. The full text of the book's epigraph further evokes companionship and the comforts of nurture: "... Then I heard the bomber call me in: 'Little Friend, Little Friend, I got two engines on fire. Can you see me, Little Friend?' I said 'I'm crossing right over you. Let's go home.'"
19. Suzanne Ferguson, *The Poetry of Randall Jarrell* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 47. Another explanation for the predominance of childhood figurations in Jarrell's war poems connects his own vivid sense of childhood hardships with his glimpses of trauma in wartime. See Steven Gould Axelrod, "The Middle Generation and WWII: Jarrell, Shapiro, Brooks, Bishop, Lowell," *War, Literature & the Arts*, 11:1 (Spring / Summer 1999), 8.
20. *Randall Jarrell's Letters*, edited by Mary Jarrell (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 134.
21. Jarrell explicitly associates the phrase "the first world" with childhood in his last poem in *The Lost World* (1965), "Thinking of the Lost World": "Was that the first World War or the second? / Moving between the first world and the second, I hear a boy call, now that my beard's gray."
22. Samuel Hynes's ideas about the First World War being "a war imagined" are very much to the point here. See, especially, the last chapter of his book.
23. See, for example, the poems I discuss in this essay, as well as "Losses," "Jews at Haifa," "New Georgia," "The State," "Come to the Stone," "The Angels at Hamburg," "Protocols," "The Survivor among Graves," "Mother, Said the Child" "The Learners."

24. Jarrell's allusion to Jesus's words to Judas in *John* xii.8: "For the poor always ye have with you: but me ye have not always." Jarrell perhaps recalls the various World War I poems that discover Christ's sacrifice reenacted in the short lives of common soldiers and perhaps also suggests a quiet and fatal glorification to come of this poor woman, since Jesus utters these words after Mary has bathed his feet in precious oil and shortly before his final entry into Jerusalem.

25. Jarrell, "The Lines," *Poems*, 198; see also *Letters*, 140.

26. Jarrell's insight connecting ideology and corpses can be illuminatingly connected with the discussion of "The Structure of War: The Juxtaposition of Injured Bodies and Unanchored Issues," in Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), ch. 2.

27. Reprinted in *Reporting World War II: American Journalism 1938-1944*, part I (New York: Library of America, 1995), 643. The photograph was taken by George Strock; the editors wrote the copy; the article appeared in the 20 September 1943 issue of *Life*.

28. *Ibid.*, 643.

29. Goethe, *Faust*, part II, line 9414.

30. Marianne Moore, "In Distrust of Merits," in *The Complete Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 136. Susan Schweik, in "Writing War Poetry Like a Woman" (*Critical Inquiry* 13 [Spring 1987]: 532-56) provides a nuanced and appropriately complex reading of the interchange between Moore and Jarrell over the issue of writing poetry about war.

31. Jarrell's essay, "Poetry in War and Peace," was first printed in the *Partisan Review* (Winter 1945); I quote it from the volume in which it is reprinted, *Kipling, Auden & Co. Essays and Reviews, 1935-1964* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1980), 129. See also Marc D. Cyr, "Randall Jarrell's Answerable Style: Revision of Elegy in 'The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 46:1 (Spring 2004) for a discussion of Jarrell's refusal of the model of heroism Moore proposes in her essay.

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