

# ASPECTS OF AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE IN RANDALL JARRELL'S THE LOST WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

Popular culture is often defined through comparing it with high culture or culture of the elite. Its main concern is selling goods for people through decorating and redesigning products. In the modern age, it is associated with the art of gaining as more buyers as possible. Randall Jarrell (1914-1965) sheds light on the great threat which popular culture brings to American poetry. In popular culture, poetry is looked at as any other. This leaves the poet between two conflicting sides; having the individual unique character as a poet, and gaining the caring audience who supposedly have the real sense for the word "poetry". The present paper explores popular culture and traces its history and formation in America, the changes it brought to American life, its effect on Jarrell's generation. It also introduces on Jarrell's life and career, his attitude toward the phenomenon of popular culture, and finally the conflict between art and popular culture and how the latter devalues the role of poetry in American life, as reflected on Jarrell's *The Lost World* (1965).

Words fail me my lords, nothing I can say could  
possibly indicate the depth of my feelings in this matter.  
But I am speaking about this matter of mass culture, the  
mass media, not as an Emperor but as a fool.

Jarrell's "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket," 359

The popular culture – or, using some other names like mass audience, commercial culture, mass culture, the culture industry – does not have an independent agreed upon definition. It is studied and explained by comparing it to what is known as "high culture". There is a general belief that popular culture has an essentially negative place in the equation. The difference between the theory of popular culture and other forms of culture lies in the adoption of values as an abstract measurement for its people. People who stand with popular culture respond to what they consider as deeply rooted conviction in American radicalism and insist that high culture is an established phenomenon, but irredeemably polluted by its association with institutions, mainly the university. They see that it is preferable to deal with a famous T.V. program like "The Good Father", rather than with Wallace Stevens or Henry James, simply because T.V. programs clearly speak a cultural language that is meaningful to most of the population. Thus, popular culture moves away from much of the most important forms of modern art as it "offers no method for reading, nor pays any kind of interest to the content of the cultural objects it adopts."<sup>1</sup> Also, in popular culture the text is a cultural resource to be plundered or used in ways that are determined by the social interests of the reader or user, not by the structure of the text itself, nor by its author.

The popular products of this industry are mainly seen in the cheap library books of urban topics, the cinema and light music in all its forms. These popular products are substitutions for literature, painting and music. The debate of popular culture is essentially a debate about what is popular and the close connection to what is primitive.

Since the sixteenth century, the term "popular" was used by the European elite to distance and disqualify certain beliefs and practices of the lower classes. The term, "popular culture," was an idea emerged in the late eighteenth century. It was associated with a shift in attitude from the devaluation of the popular taste to a great consideration of what was popular. However, this shift kept the structure of other masses, like the high mass or the elite, the same.<sup>2</sup> The phrase, "popular culture," was first used by the German philosopher, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) to express the cultural forms that were preserved among rural people as an integrated, and organic whole. He was the first who used the term "low" and "high" to distinguish the culture of the people from the learned culture. He was also the first intellectual who spoke about cultures rather than culture in singular.<sup>3</sup> Herder remarked that:

Men of all the quarters of the globe, who have perished over the ages, you have not lived solely to manure the earth with your ashes, so that at the end of time your posterity should be made happy by European culture. The very thought of a superior European culture is a blatant insult to the majesty of Nature.<sup>4</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the term "popular culture" was changed that it was applied specifically to what was considered as a threat to the popular culture itself in its "folk inflection."<sup>5</sup> This threat was reflected on the commercially loaded culture whose consumers were the urban working class. People shifted from the rural life to the urban masses; or from culture made by people to culture made for making them merely consumers. As a result of this shift, the popular lost its independence in an organic community. Being a popular culture, or an artificial commercial culture imposed from outside, the intellectuals kept asking a serious question about the validity of popular culture and its effect upon people as consumers.

However, there is "a long tradition of conservative cultural criticism," says Stanly E. Hyman, which "links mass culture to a moral decadence and the decline of civilization."<sup>6</sup> The standardized goods produced in mass culture are governed by the external demands of making profits; thus, they are opposed to art which derives its critical demands from an internal aesthetic process. Hence, "mass culture's supposed aesthetic poverty," Elizabeth G. Traube writes, "is thus a function of its production as a market value and also the source of its ideological effect."<sup>7</sup> The external process of mass culture ideology aims at stimulating the external desires of people as consumers. If art is the creativity of the artist, "mass culture is defined as a form that systematically blocks vision of alternatives to the established order."<sup>8</sup>

Popular culture products lead to economic advancement and life easiness, which are only cultural privileges; as "ways of conserving power for one group."<sup>9</sup> They result in overvaluation of the taste of the lower layers of society. Popular culture also has an ideal which is "the natural evolution of the taste," as Hyman says. This was clearly the case after the World War II in which people had the will to choose whatever they liked and leave out whatever they disliked. It resulted in a totally new intellectuality, whose taste, in the eyes of the educated class, was corrupted. H. Stuart Hughes writes:

The taste of the masses, I believe, has always appeared more or less "corrupt" to the better educated ... At the same time (even under the favourable conditions) I do not believe the media capable for

the task of general education that their world –be reformers want to entrust them.<sup>10</sup>

The general evolution of the American taste pursued raising the personal status of the individual. This development came as a reaction to the flourishing of goods, magazines, TV shows and radio stations, which suited every taste of every American. Moreover, it reflected a complete change or a border line between the past and the present because the old songs; for example, are not favoured or even understood by most people of the present America<sup>11</sup>

Beside the ideal of the popular culture in America, there are some limitations that popular culture imposes on almost every aspect of life. As far as art is concerned, the limitation that popular culture imposes is related to "the nature of art itself":

As genuine art, advancing sensibility, stretching the limits of form, purifying the language of the tribe, it is always for an elite of education (which does not mean formal education), sensibility, and taste. When its freshness has grown somewhat stale, diluted by imitators and populizers, its audience widens, although if it is true art will always continue to demand more than a mass audience cares to give it.<sup>12</sup>

True art is changed in order to satisfy the mass taste of the audience, to please it and to be perceived and understood easily by the wider range of this audience. One can easily see how art is transformed into a form of a product that has to satisfy the consumer.

In the late 1960s, interests in the study of the history of working-class movements and the study of the worker's cultural movements increased. Their movements and their effect changed the postwar culture of America. What happened to the working class, Adelheid von Saldern summarizes, was the resulting political and cultural system in the postwar world, which had destroyed the working class movement so fundamentally that "no convalescence was possible."<sup>13</sup> The resulting system was peculiarly characterized by mass culture. Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, when mass culture became dominant, it appeared that this had happened "without severe clash with working-class culture."<sup>14</sup> On the contrary, marketers dedicated great attention to the taste of the working class; the taste which was once out of the buyers' sight and insight. The postwar changes represented tremendous life advancement almost in every aspect. In a lecture entitled "American Culture and the Voice of Poetry," Robert Pinsky says: "American culture as I experienced it seems so much in process, so brilliantly and brutally in motion, that standard models for it fails to apply."<sup>15</sup> However, within these severe changes, man fails to adopt his self-comfort with this new completely different condition. Nevertheless, Alexis de Tocqueville<sup>16</sup> writes that:

The destinies of mankind, man himself taken aloof from his country and his age and standing in the presence of Nature and God, with his passion, his doubts, his rare prosperities and inconceivable wretchedness, will become the chief, if not the sole theme of poetry.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, the most important characteristic of modern culture is the rapid development of technology; thus, Andreas Huyssen remarks that mass culture in the West would be unthinkable without 20th century techno-media technology, technologies of transportations (public or private), the household, and leisure technologies. Two processes were mainly adopted by popular culture: technologies of mass production and reproduction and the "homogenization of the difference."<sup>18</sup> Technology generally transformed everyday life

in the twentieth century. Accordingly, the experience of an increasingly technologized life had radically transformed art. Art, in American society, is like food or clothing or transportation equipment. Thus, people judge art as they judge any other object which is eventually an evaluation for the artist himself. Art preserves a semi-sacred character for the artist, but not for the consumer.<sup>19</sup> Before the twentieth century, art's relationship with people reflected an aesthetic contact, which the elite very much appreciated. In other words, art's production and consumption were for art's own sake, a thorough conception which was considered as a social institution and a concrete social and interpersonal relationship preserving the prestige of art. With the coming of the twentieth-century market, Fredric Jameson says: "this institutional status of artistic consumption and production vanishes: art becomes one more branch of commodity production, the artist loses all social status and faces the options of becoming a poet maudit [a cursed poet] or a journalist."<sup>20</sup> Yet, the function of art has also been converted to have "a narrowly decorative, or status conferring, function."<sup>21</sup> Art has to make everyday objects more attractive through re-designing or packaging.

The ghost of popular culture haunted a group of American young poets in the middle of the twentieth century. Those young poets are known as the "middle generation"; a term originally used by George P. Elliott to denote Robert Lowell (1917-1977), Randall Jarrell (1914-1965), Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), John Berryman (1914-1972), and Delmore Schwartz (1913-1966). In his book, *Reading the Middle Generation Anew* (2006), Eric Haralson states that these poets acquired the term "middle generation" because their poetry came between the 1940s and 1970s, a period which constitutes the centre of twentieth-century American poetry.<sup>22</sup> The poets of this period inherited the great production of modernism in the late 1940s and 1950s; hence, Jarrell announced the death of modernism in his essay "The End of the Line" (1941), saying that "Modernism, As We know It- the most successful and influential body of poetry of this century- is dead."<sup>23</sup> American poetry since the World War II is clearly brilliant, dynamic, and new in the sense that it portrays fresh images of contemporary places, persons and activities. With a resolution, "it stirs the reader into an intense awareness to what it means to be alive in the middle of the twentieth century."<sup>24</sup> The mid-twentieth-century poets witnessed the tremendous cultural change after the World Wars which accompanied their life. The mid-century risk was people's inevitable submission for postwar culture, mainly characterized by a negative conformity.<sup>25</sup> However, the 'middle generation' represents a new term in modern American poetry because the poets reflect the great change in the language of poetry. In other words, they reflect "what the English language is becoming under the stresses and strains of American life."<sup>26</sup> The changes in mid-twentieth century American poetry include a huge change in language due to the rapid changes in life. It is a life "resounding everyday with the triumphs of slanted news and brain-washed politics."<sup>27</sup> The Americans finally get so much time and more money which keep them away from disturbing themselves by challenging, physically or mentally, difficult matters; thus, Robert Lowell called it "the tranquilized fifties."<sup>28</sup>

There are two main cultural forces that give confessional poetry its unavoidable concern: "the awareness of the emotional vacuity of public language in America," which results from the industrialized intellectuals of the postwar era, and the increasing of consumerism, or the attempt of agitating people's desires especially the labors.<sup>29</sup> Randall Jarrell, however, was the only confessional poet of his generation who engaged in an extended, and descriptive debate with social scientists and cultural critics about the effect of popular and consumer culture on art, the artist, and the general populace.<sup>30</sup>

The American poet and critic, Randall Jarrell was born on May 6, 1914, in Nashville, Tennessee; the son of Owen and Anna Campbell Jarrell. He spent his childhood in Hollywood, California with his family. Jarrell's parents separated in 1925 and his mother returned to Nashville with her two sons, Randall and Charles. In his youth, Jarrell maintained his Tennessee mountaineer's decorum and naiveté by refusing alcohol, tobacco gossip, and racy talk. Although he majored psychology in his undergraduate years at Vanderbilt, he studied under the "Fugitive Agrarians", John Crowe Ransom and Robert Penn Warren, and demonstrated a remarkable intellectual range and gift for language and analysis. In 1938, Jarrell completed an M.A. in English and taught at Kenyon College until 1939, when he joined the faculty of the University of Texas and married his first wife, Mackie Langbaum.<sup>31</sup>

The World War II opened the mature poetic life of Jarrell; hence it was his war poems that solidified the poetic reputation he had started to build in 1942 with his first collection of war poems entitled, *A Blood for a Stranger*.<sup>32</sup> The war was against mass culture and mass media, and their severe attempts to mechanize people's minds. Later in 1960, Jarrell described media, saying:

Advertising men, businessmen, speak continually of "media" or "the media" or "the mass media" – one of their trade journals is named, simply, *Media*. It is an impressive word: one imagines Mephistopheles offering Faust media that no man has ever known; one feels, while the word is in one's ear, that abstract, overmastering powers, of a scale and intensity unimagined yesterday, are being offered one by the technicians who discovered and control them – offered, and at a price.<sup>33</sup>

The media is reflected by celebrities and photo magazines, television programs of all sorts, popular music, and especially advertising. It kills people's ability to understand and appreciate real art of any kind. Thus, it consumes their time and energy by offering products that relax their nerves.

Jarrell's arguments were originally formulated by contemporary cultural experts who made the cultural impacts of mass culture more popular, most notably Dwight MacDonald (1906-1982), Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), and David Riesman (1909-2002). MacDonald shared with Jarrell his own view of mass culture. In his article "A Theory of Mass Culture," he "bemoaned the homogenizing influence of mass culture" and how it constituted a high culture; a culture bound together by common interests and activities. He referred to the notions of high, middle, and low brow in culture which paved the way for a theoretical framework of Jarrell's most emotional arguments about mass culture.<sup>34</sup>

The changes of culture can be best viewed by the successful art which enables its audience to plainly see them because art is seen as a kind of spy on culture. McLuhan focused his studies and deep analysis on how modern technology shaped the modern American society and its individuals. However, Riesman paid heavy attention to the changes that happened to the American character in his article, "The Only Character" (1950).<sup>35</sup> He was more concerned about the state of the individuals after the homogenizing power of modern advancement. For Riesman, "the production of standardized things demands also the production of standardized persons."<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, the more the standardized persons increase, the more art and artist are being isolated.

After reading many of her books, Jarrell engaged in comprehensive discussions with Hannah Arendt, the German philosopher and Jarrell's close friend, about the condition of

modern man in the modern age. He met her in 1946 when he was in New York editing book reviews in *The Nation*; the oldest continuously published weekly magazine devoted to politics and culture. He was very much influenced by her book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1950), which he described as "one of the best historical books I've ever read,"<sup>37</sup> considering Arendt his closest ally. The connections between their thinking are found in their depiction of modern society. She attacks the "perversion of equality from a political into social concept"<sup>38</sup> and this change risks creating a society in which "every individual ... is 'normal' if he is like everybody else and 'abnormal' if he happens to be different."<sup>39</sup> The pervasive concepts of equality, as Arendt considers them, are mostly found in Jarrell's literary essays. In his "The Obscurity of the Poet" (1951), Jarrell comments on the situation of modern America, saying:

The truth that all men are politically equal, the recognition of the injustice of fictitious, becomes a belief in the fictitiousness of differences, a conviction that it is reaction or snobbishness or Fascism to believe that any individual differences of real importance can exist.<sup>40</sup>

The critical changes in the American society and its individuals are widely elaborated in Jarrell's essay, "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket" (1960). He shows how these changes have effects on even the way modern man looks at himself or how other cultural institutions, newspapers or marketers, look at man. Society, says Jarrell, "needs for us to do or be many things... But first of all, last of all, it needs for us to do or be buyers, consumers, being who want much and will want more – who want consistently and insatiably."<sup>41</sup> It also contains a multi-purpose aspect. Its primary function is to retail but as well aims to provide amusement and entertainment. In brief, in a commodity culture that society embraces firmly, the shopping markets are there to provide everything the consumer needs materially but spiritually.

The act of buying is at the heart of the Americans, a prerequisite which Jarrell sees as the sole need for people and which sellers do their best to satisfy it. Thus, he satirically comments, saying:

The act of buying is something at the root of our world: if anyone wishes to paint the beginning of things in our society, he will paint a picture of God holding out Adam a checkbook or a credit card or Charge-A-Plate. But how quickly our poor naked Adam is turned into a consumer, is linked to others by the great chain of buying.<sup>42</sup>

More precisely, people in America are raised side by side with the act of buying. Sellers look at people as merely consumers of their projects who are "interviewed and analyzed so as to be stimulated to buy."<sup>43</sup> An imaginable interview that Jarrell makes for a reader of a famous American magazine, *The Medium*, shows that the one who does not buy is thought of as not American, saying:

Reader, isn't buying or fantasy-buying an important part of your and my emotional life? (If you reply, No, I'll think of you with bitter and envy as more than merely human; as deeply un-American). It is a standard joke of our culture that when a woman is bored or sad she buys something to make herself feel better, but in this respect we are all women together, and hear complacently the reminder of how feminine this consumer-world of ours is.<sup>44</sup>

Consumerism is a specialty of the American woman who Jarrell addresses as the essence of the boredom and sadness in modern American life, referring to her as Miss

America. In an imaginative interview, he asks her: "But while you waited for Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles what did you do? She answers: "I bought something."<sup>45</sup>

The growing of consumerism leads to the professionalization of almost every aspect of life including art. Art, to be successful, has to please as many people as possible which results in an artist writing for others' feelings rather than his own. The poet is more worried and concerned with the taste of the masses. Thus, poetry becomes the poetry of the masses written by the hands of the poet. People spend much of the time, which once they used to read and enjoy poetry, to rest their body or sight and satisfy their desires. However, the poet is popularized in body and mind and this means that the poet is no longer looked at as sensitive man with unique talent. Popular culture means that only what is the same is popular, and what is popular is normal, which leaves the poet in an undetermined layer. The look for all and the sense of sameness constitute the modern American popular culture.

Beside his essays, Jarrell wrote notable poetry that addressed consumer culture; such as *The Lost World* (1965), which is characterized by its "domestic, autobiographical narratives."<sup>46</sup> In this volume, Jarrell transforms his remembrance of his own childhood into dramatic poems seen from the perspective of the adult seeking to understand the present by recreation of the past. To the previous personae of the soldier, woman, and child, Jarrell adds a fourth spokesman, the observer, a "barely disgust self-portrait of the adult poet."<sup>47</sup> Some of these poems are written from the child's point of view, a convenient symbol of innocence for Jarrell, of what each man imagines himself to be in the secret center of his being, no matter how old he is, because there Jarrell can always resist the forces of circumstance, the agonies and corruptions of experience in popular culture. Jarrell feels pity for the child who inevitably becomes an adult by suffering the blows of popular culture and by assuming the guilt of his desires. This preoccupation with childhood is perhaps astonishing in the case of the least naive of all contemporary poets. Jarrell returns again and again to the theme of children lost in a dark world. Fairy-tale characters like Jack of beanstalk bring fame and populate the poems. No doubt Jarrell sees these figures as archetypes of human experience, as revelations like those of Freudian and Jungian psychology.<sup>48</sup>

In his "Hope," the speaker is a man married to a woman who exercises a motherly domination and his hope is to escape to freedom. The poem shows "how its frightening, transferential Mothers have been culturally produced."<sup>49</sup> The husband returns to his wife, to their fashionable apartment at two on Christmas morning. The man in the poem wishes to live a simple life, as it is clear from the beginning of the poem:

To prefer the nest in the linden  
By Apartment Eleven, the Shoreham  
Arms, to Apartment Eleven  
Would be childish. But we are children. (CP, 305)

It is a direct longing for a simple way of living away from the complexities of modern life that resembles the sense of loss in the voice of the man in front of the domination of the woman. The man longs for a kind of primitive life in which he has the most important role in leading the family. In modern life with its complexities, diverse relationships, new concepts, and the new roles of men and women inside the family, man feels as if he has lost the usual and privileged role he has occupied for centuries.

Although only the son expresses a wish to live as a squirrel, yet the father repeats the same notion with sympathy several times in the poem. Apparently, the father's voice gives a picture of a family that has a luxurious residence with various objects and furniture, ranging

from paintings and a harpsichord through a Kirman rug, an antique grandfather clock shaped like a large-breasted woman to:

That? That is Pennsylvania Dutch, a bear  
Used to mark butter. As for this,  
It is sheer alchemy:  
The only example of an atomic bomb  
Earlier than the eleventh century.  
It is attributed to a atelier  
Of an Albigensian,

Who, fortunately, was unable to explode it.  
We use it as a planter.

We feel that it is so American. (CP, 307)

These details of modern family do not bring happiness to people, exactly as the man's favorite television serial: "My favorite serial, A Sad / Heart at the Supermarket: / The Story of a Woman Who Had Everything" (CP, 308). Sadness is the title of the favorite television show of this man, resembling the absence of happiness in his life. Jarrell later made use of the title of this TV show as a title for his 1960 essay, "A Sad Heart at the Super Market," about the American obsession with buying and consuming things on the supposition that such things will satisfy emotional needs. As man's nature is double-sided, material and spiritual, there will be a continuous frustration because the spiritual side is not fulfilled. The man in the poem sees that his wife is very beautiful. Desire is translated into physical terms, but the speaker of the poem has a dream about elusiveness of physical satisfaction:

I think of God-Fish in a nightmare  
I had once: like giants in brown space-suits  
But like fish, also, they want upright through the streets  
And were useless to struggle with, but, struggled with,  
Showed me a story that, they said, was the story  
Of the Sleeping Beauty. It was the old story  
But ended differently: when the Prince kissed her on the lips  
She wiped her lips  
And with a little moue – in the dream, a little mouse –  
Turned over and went back to sleep. (CP, 308)

The reference to the "God-Fish," as Suzanne Ferguson notes, mocks the traditional sexual symbols "of dreams and the fertility myths associated with the Fisher-King or perhaps that preserver-god Vishnu, whose first avatar was a fish."<sup>50</sup> Jarrell retells here his own version of the famous "Sleeping Beauty" in which the sleeper does not wake up but goes on sleeping; the prince's longing is not fulfilled, but postponed. The speaker, then, wakes up and finds his wife asleep, but he cannot wake up her to tell her about his nightmare:

I woke, and went to tell my wife the story;  
And had she not resembled  
My mother as she slept, I had done it.(CP, 308)

The sleeping wife resembles the fainted mother from the speaker's childhood, "a scene called Mother Has Fainted." When the mother is awake, she dominates the children's lives, wishes and concerns, but when the mother is asleep or fainted, they begin to feel their independence and freedom. The speaker's wish not to awake his wife and remembering the



dominance of his mother show his deep concern with the new values that he has not yet accepted about family relationships and roles. The image of the mother appears in all the females that surround the speaker; his wife, the maid, and even his grandfather's clock. Women here are impatient with men and they want to go beyond the relationships with their husbands to become "Mothers" to assume the role of a governor or god.

Do all men's mothers perish through their sons?  
As the child starts into life, the woman dies  
Into a girl – and, scolding the doll she owns,  
The single scholar of her little school,  
Her task, her plaything, her possession,  
She assumes what is God's alone, responsibility. (CP, 311)

The male voice in the poem lives a luxurious life, but falls down under a long-time oppression of females – mother, wife, cook, and maid.

The sadness of the speaker's favorite serial, 'A Sad Heart at the Supermarket', in "Hope," is elaborated in "Next Day" and the woman here is the "Woman Who Had Everything". The speaker in "Next Day" is a middle-aged woman shopping in a supermarket. The poem, is "a direct result of Jarrell's involvement in the debate on mass media and consumer culture."<sup>51</sup> The woman here is unhappy and "old enough to command respect but no longer able to excite desire, old enough indeed to begin thinking [of death] at each funeral she attends."<sup>52</sup> This woman is not wealthy; rather she is ordinary and representative of the middle-class American, who shops at a supermarket and drives home in her own car.

The reader who is unaccustomed to Jarrell's use of verbal and material clichés would find the imagery strange. The first lines present such imagery:

Moving from Cheer to Joy, from Joy to All,  
I take a box  
And add it to my wild rice, my Cornish game hens.(CP, 279)

These names are for products of dishwashing liquids and detergents, chosen to give a sense of delight and satisfaction to the customer to encourage her to purchase them. The deliberate use of "Joy" and "Cheer" suggests that there is little cheer or joy in the speaker's life. The material imagery of the supermarket, with those details, is Jarrell's way of expressing "both the false promises and the shallow materialism of a customer society."<sup>53</sup> This woman achieves materialistic success: she has a husband, home, children and a maid. Thus, she has enough time to think of her life, what she has achieved and her present condition. Now, she has a different problem; her sense of aging.

What I've become  
Troubles me even if I shut my eyes.

When I was young and miserable and pretty  
And poor, I'd wish  
What all girls wish: to have a husband,  
A house and children. Now that I'm old, my wish  
Is womanish:  
That the boy putting groceries in my car

See me. It bewilders me that he doesn't see me.... (CP, 279)

The woman is not satisfied with what she has become. After the grocery boy's indifference to her, the woman starts contemplating her present condition. She is no longer wanted by men and this makes her worried. She compares herself to the fresh items in the supermarket. She differentiates herself from the rest of the housewives as an intellectual woman, mentioning William James: she sees the other housewives as "slacked or shorted, basketed, identical / Food-gathering flocks" (CP, 279). As she is shopping, she cannot stop herself from thinking that she is no longer "good enough to eat" (CP, 279). The woman measures herself and her beauty in terms of consumption.

When she leaves the supermarket, she feels good for a while and she longs for her family members who are all away, busy in their life. But she cannot escape the fact that she discovers this morning that she grows old:

I am afraid, this morning, of my face.  
It looks at me  
From the rear-view mirror, with the eyes I hate,  
The smile I hate. Its plain, lined look

Of gray discovery

Repeats to me: "You're old." That's all, I'm old. (CP, 280)

In the mirror of her car, she sees features of her aging, which immediately reminds her of the funeral of a friend she attended yesterday. She thinks the "cold made-up face, granite among its flowers, ... Were my face and body" (CP, 280). The imagery of change from youth to age in the woman's life is paralleled by the transfer from the "Cornish game hens" to her friend's face and body in the funeral. The "Next Day" refers to the future, yesterday reminds her of her friend's death, today is not satisfactory, but tomorrow (i.e. next day) may have a fearful change for the worse. This woman in the supermarket is "a paradigm for too many lives in society where all may be purchased except time and worth, a world which seldom lives up to its advertisements."<sup>54</sup> The names of the products are so delightful, but the lives of the people purchasing them are so miserable. The culture that controls the lives of people in this society advertises its products in a nice way, giving them attractive names to facilitate marketing and sales, giving people only illusions of fulfillment and leaving them empty from inside. The woman in the poem "has everything thought necessary to human happiness by modern American mythmakers (advertising agencies), yet she is not happy."<sup>55</sup> People continue pursuing pleasure in materialistic products, but get only emptiness, boredom and loneliness.

The play on the names of the products by the speaker is a Frostian effect, as Frost believed the poet's acting is a kind of performance, "The play's the thing. Play's the thing. All virtue in 'as if.'"<sup>56</sup> The smartness of the woman as she mentions William James is shown by her playing on one of her words, 'overlook,' and then using it to quote William James. Paradoxically, she is later overlooked by the boy who carries her grocery to the car.

Another poem in *The Lost World*, which depicts elements of popular culture in the modern age, is "Three Bills" (1961). The poem came at the same year as "Hope". The speaker, in "Three Bills," is an observer, "a barely disguised self-portrait of the adult poet,"<sup>57</sup> who is unobserved by the other participants in the situation of the poem. He only directs the reader to the center of the poem, but he himself is on the circumference, at the outer edge of the direct subject. He gives the details of the situation in a moment of observation of three strangers as they finish their meal and about to leave a restaurant in some hotel. The observer has no relation to any of the characters he tells about. Mary Jarrell writes that the poem was

actually the result of a conversation that she overheard when she and her husband were having breakfast at the Plaza Hotel in New York City.<sup>58</sup>

The observer of the poem looked at the three figures and tagged them with the nickname 'three bills'. The observer starts describing them unsympathetically: "I heard three hundred-thousand-dollars bills / Talking at breakfast. One was male and two were female" (CP, 304). Tagging the three persons with 'bills' deprives them of human features and gives the sense that they are only remnants of humanity, now indulging with certain elevated materialistic life. Gradually, however, the voice in this dramatic monologue starts having certain feeling toward the blond woman, the friend of the wife in the poem. At the beginning of it, he describes her as giving a casual comment on the conversation between the wife and husband, as she says: "The blond female smiled with the remnants of a child's / Smile and said: 'What a pity that it's not St. Kitts!'" (CP, 304) Then, when the husband leaves the wife and goes to the lavatory, and the wife shows her concerns to her friend, the observer describes the blond woman as being sorry: "Her friend showed that she was sorry." Though he starts as indifferent to those people from the social elite who are indulged in money, now he is inclined to see humanity in this woman and her reaction to her friend:

I was sorry  
To see that the face of Woodrow Wilson on the blond  
Bill – the suffused face about to cry  
Or not to cry – was a face that under different  
Circumstances would have been beautiful, a woman's.(CP, 304)

The situation of the three figures is so condensed to the degree that it is almost impossible to penetrate into their solitude, a repeated theme in Jarrell's poetry.<sup>59</sup> Those people are deeply immersed in their world which has changed their characters and made their humanity almost disappear under a heavy barrier that separates them from others. They are lonely and empty and the observer sees them as "bills talking at breakfast". In spite of this, the speaking voice in the poem is able to change his attitude from a "totally insensitive judgment" to a degree of sympathy "as he comes to realize the depth of feeling implicit in his subject", as Beck notes.<sup>60</sup>

There is another poem related to Jarrell's critique of popular culture, but it is not referred to frequently. This poem is "The Wild Birds", in which the most important source of fear is that people reject change; they accept what is presented to them by popular culture and they are too lazy to look for, or even imagine, any possibility of change. The advertisers, year after year, succeed in making the mass wish what they want them to wish. They want to make people feel, desire, and taste the same way in order to predict and control their behavior:

In the clear atmosphere  
Of our wishes, of our interests, the advertisers  
Of the commodities of their and our  
Existence express their clear interests, their clear  
Wishes, clearly, year after year.  
What they say, as they say,  
Is in our interest, in theirs  
Explaining the inscrutable, denying the unbearable,  
Bespeaking for us (CP, 486-87)

The advertisers make people choose what they want them to choose, by gradually, and persistently, changing their thoughts and tastes to suit certain materialistic purposes. In

contrast to those advertisers, there are birds, which are wild, free, untamed, and away from the effect of those advertisers.

But these others—who we are not sure—  
Who say to us—but what we are not clear—  
From the atmosphere, dream-cleared, dream-darkened,  
In which the live their dark lives, die their light  
Deaths, in darkness or in light, obscurely  
As, mirrored in them, we who dream them are obscure:  
Those who call death death, life life,  
The unendurable what we endure:  
Those who beat all night at our beaks, and drop at morning  
Into our tame, stained beaks, the poison berry—  
O dark companions,  
You bring us the truth of love: the caged bird loves its bars.(CP, 487)

Jarrell's poem, "In Montecito," presents the death of a woman who seems to have lived an unhappy life, as she is described as "a scream with breasts," but she had some degree of a relaxed life. Montecito is the fashionable suburb in which this woman lived. The scream is described as being hanging alone in the night, while the woman herself, named Greenie in the poem, had gone to join the imaginary suburb that surrounds Montecito like the echo of the scream. She had supernatural powers of perception. The speaker describes the woman as "a scream with breasts" and how this scream was gradually stripped of its external beauty:

... As it hung there in the sweet air  
That was always the right temperature, the contractors  
Who had undertaken to dismantle it, stripped off  
The lips, let the air out of the breasts. (CP, 282)

The dead woman is reduced into a thing, "a house or automobile, vacated or abandoned and being demolished."<sup>61</sup> The body of the woman is a 'thing' that the 'contractors' would take the responsibility of burying. There is no sympathy with Greenie, or Montecito in the poem. In a horrid image, Greenie is treated as a 'thing' rather than as a 'human being' and Montecito is presented as a desolate place. It is clear that "Jarrell's condemnation broadens out to include the whole range of American materialistic values."<sup>62</sup>

The poem briefly presents the human soul lost in a materialistic world that would not satisfy or enrich the depth of life, but only gives a superficial gain. Once this woman is dead, the voice in the poem presents her as any other inanimate thing with no human touch. Her death has no impact on anyone, has no remembrance, and is shown as a trifling event in a quick dream the poet has. Humanity is shown in its littleness and brittleness is presented in such a way as to parallel materialistic things.

A scream hangs there in the night:  
They strip off the lips, let the air out of the breast,  
And Greenie has gone into Greater Montecito  
That surrounds Montecito like the echo of a scream.(CP, 282)

In "Thinking of the Lost World" (1965), the last poem in *The Lost World*, Jarrell looks back and writes "about the mystical meaning of life"<sup>63</sup>:

...I seem to see  
A shape in tennis shoes and khaki riding-pants  
Standing there empty-handed; I reach out to it  
Empty-handed, my hand comes back empty,

And yet my emptiness is traded for its emptiness, (CP, 338)

The poem contains scattered parts of Jarrell's past, all still residing in his memory. It is not spoken by a woman, nor does it concern a woman's experience. Spending many years distancing himself from the direct expression of personal feelings, Jarrell, in Longenback's words, "drop[s] the mask, speaking openly of his love of childhood, fairy tales, and pets."<sup>64</sup> The poem begins with the speaker's observation that the spoonful of chocolate tapioca pudding he has just put in his mouth tastes like, and reminds him of, the vanilla extract that Mama once told him not to drink. In the present, he and his wife are in Los Angeles, recalling his lost childhood:

Back in Los Angeles, we missed  
Los Angeles. The sunshine of the Land  
Of sunshine is a gray mist now, the atmosphere  
Of some factory planet: when you stand and look  
You see a block or two, and your eyes water. (CP, 336)

When he tries to recall the memories of his lost childhood, he finds nothing but the sun turning to gray while old places and people vanished. The beautiful sunshine is replaced by the gray mist of industry that erases the natural and pure aspects of his lost past. He thinks of the young people he knows now in his life, those who cannot differentiate between the first and second World Wars. He hears the younger children calling him Santa Claus; he writes:

. . . A certain number of years after,  
Any time is Gay, to the new ones who ask:  
"Was that the first World War or the second?"  
I hear a boy call, now that my beard's gray:  
"Santa Claus! Hi, Santa Claus!" It is miraculous  
To have the children call you Santa Claus. (CP, 338)

At the beginning of the poem, the lost world of childhood is humorously compared to something published in a magazine column, which people experience every day. At the end of the poem, the speaker concludes that he eventually finds something in the advertisements of popular culture, but what he finds paradoxically is again mere loss.

I have found that Lost World in the Lost and Found  
Columns whose gray illegible advertisements  
My soul has memorized world after world.:  
LOST-NOTHING. STRAYED FROM NOWHERE.  
NO REWARD.  
I hold my own hands, in happiness,  
Nothing: the nothing for which there's no reward.(CP, 338)

The Lost and Found advertisements are the most casual items in a daily newspaper, without any depth of meaning. They are just rapid references and brief descriptions of stuff lost or found and being notified for. The speaker is unable to define himself after he lost every element that defines his personality. In "Thinking of the Lost World," Jarrell's true theme here is the creative act itself, the imaginative attempt to bridge the gap between the ideal, which is itself the product of imagination and its inscrutable memory. The imperfections of what one can see with jaded adult sight as merely fact, and out of which the reader's conception of the ideal has to arise. The poet, still endowed with something of his childhood brilliance, can restore the reader, if only partially and momentarily, to a fuller consciousness of the limitless potential of fact.<sup>65</sup>

At the end, reality has the final say, which demarcates a borderline between an old vanished culture and a new totalitarian one, in which everyone looks exactly like the other. Jarrell's early death broke off the ongoing tug-of-war between fact and imagination which preoccupies him throughout his career. The ecstatic resolution of "Thinking of the Lost World," to his readers at least, doesn't comprehend the anguish and irony of his social poetry.

### Notes

- 1 Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text*, no.1 (Winter, 1979): 130.
- 2 Elizabeth G. Traube, "'The Popular' in American Culture," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 25 (1996): 130.
- 3 Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, (California: University of California Press, 1991), 2.
- 4 E. M. Bernard, ed. and trans., *Herder on Social and Political Culture*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 310.
- 5 Traube, 132.
- 6 Stanley Edgar Hyman, "Ideals, dangers and Limitations of Mass Culture," *Daedalus* 89, no. 2 (Spring, 1960): 377.
- 7 Traube, 132.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (California: University of California Press, 1991), 176.
- 10 H. Stuart Hughes, "Mass Culture and Social Criticism," *Daedalus* 89, no. 2 (Spring, 1960): 389.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Hyman, 380.
- 13 Adelheid von Saldern, "The Hidden History of Mass Culture," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 37 (Spring, 1990):34.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Robert Pinsky, "American Culture and the Voice of Poetry," (Lecture: *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (Princeton University, April 4-6, 2001).
- 16 Alexis de Tocqueville (Alexis-Charles-Henri Clérel de Tocqueville) ( 29 July 1805, Paris – 16 April 1859, Cannes) was a French political thinker and historian best known for his *Democracy in America* (appearing in two volumes: 1835 and 1840) and *The Old Regime and the Revolution* (1856). In both of these works, he explored the effects of the rising

- equality of social conditions on the individual and the state in Western societies. *Democracy in America* (1835), his major work, published after his travels in the United States, is today considered a primary source for cultural, sociological and political studies. (Hugh Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville: Prophet of Democracy in the Age of Revolution* (London, MacGuru, 2006), 1-3.)
- 17 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., Henry Reeve, (Stilwell: Digireads.com RD, 2007), 54.
- 18 Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 9.
- 19 Edmund Burke Feldman, "The Artist and Mass Culture," *College Art Journal* 18, no. 4 (Summer, 1959):, 341.
- 20 Jameson, 137.
- 21 Feldman, 341.
- 22 Eric Haralson, ed., *Reading the Middle Generation Anew: Culture, Community, and Form in Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006), 1.
- 23 Randall Jarrell, *Kipling, Auden and Co.: Essays and Reviews* (New York: Farrar, Stratus, and Giroux, 1981), 81.
- 24 Stephen Stapanchev, *American Poetry Since 1945: A Critical Survey* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 1.
- 25 See Glauco Cambon, *Recent American Poetry* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 5-6.
- 26 Stapanchev, 1.
- 27 Northrop Frye, *The Modern Century* (Toronto: T.H. Best Printing Company Limited, 1967), 74.
- 28 Cited in Cambon, 7.
- 29 Charles Molesworth, "With Your Own Face On': The Origins and Consequences of Confessional Poetry," *Twentieth Century Literature* 22, no. 2 (May, 1976): 163.
- 30 Diederik Oostdijk, "Randall Jarrell and the Age of Consumer Culture," *Reading the Middle Generation Anew: Culture, Community, and Form in Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, ed., Eric Haralson (Iowa: Iowa University Press, 2006), 113.
- 31 Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *American Poets of the 20th Century* (Nebraska: IDG Books Worldwide, Inc., 2000), 148.

- 32 Sara Constantakis, *Poetry for Students: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Poetry*, Vol. 31 (Farmington Hills: Gale, 2010), 174.
- 33 Randall Jarrell, "A Sad Heart at the Supermarket," *Daedalus* 89, no. 2 (Spring, 1960): 359.
- 34 Randall Jarrell, "The Age of Criticism," *Poetry and the Age* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1953), 73.
- 35 See Haralson, 118-119.
- 36 David Riesman, "The Only Character," *Mass culture: The Popular Arts in America*, eds., Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (New York: The Free Press, 1957), 513.
- 37 As quoted in Stephen Burt, *Randall Jarrell and His Age* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2002), 53.
- 38 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), 188.
- 39 Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian, 1958), 54.
- 40 Randall Jarrell, "The Obscurity of the Poet," *Poetry and the Age*, 27.
- 41 Randall Jarrell, A Sad Heart, 360.
- 42 Ibid., Jarrell's use of the phrase, "The chain of buying", sprang from earlier use of the phrase, with little modification. The original phrase is "The Chain of Being", whose roots go back to the Plato and Aristotle. It was originated with the construing of the principle of plenitude, which was considered either religiously, as an expression of the faith in the divine goodness, or philosophically, as an implicate of the principle of reason. Hence, it was inconsistent with any belief of progress or any sort of significant change in the universe as a whole. The Chain of Being, in so far as its continuity and completeness were affirmed on the customary grounds, was a perfect example of an absolutely rigid and static scheme of things. Rationality has nothing to do with dates. If the non-existence of one of the links in the chain would be proof of the arbitrariness of the constitution of the world today, it would have been so yesterday, and would be so tomorrow. It implies that God always acts upon some ground or Reason, from which he had some Reason for Creation, otherwise, he never would have created at all. Having any Reason, that Reason was certainly the same from all Eternity that it was the same at any particular time. For instance, if Goodness was the Ground of his Creation, it follows that if it was good at any particular time, it was equally good from all Eternity. Again, if this is true, it must be true not only of the creation in general, but of every kind of being. It also implies that God cannot hereafter create any new Species of Beings; because, whatever it is good for him to create in time, it was equally good from all Eternity. (Arthur O. Lovejoy and Peter Stanlis, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 242.).

Out of all this scheme, Jarrell doomed the American culture with the act of buying, which become a great chain that neither man can change it, nor do God see any necessity in breaking this chain or creating a new one. What strikes more is the concept of equality which the chain of buying keeps for all buyers; that all people have the right to buy and



please themselves as the had the right to be equally created. Hence, mass culture imposes some sort of religious framework for American life, in which man has no right to violate the rules of being entangled in chain where all people are.

43 Ibid., 361.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 William Pritchard, *Randall Jarrell: Literary Life* (New York: Farrar, Stratus and Giroux, 1990),300.

47 Charlotte H. Beck, *Worlds and Lives: The Poetry of Randall Jarrell* (New York: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1983), 7.

48 Stepanchev, 40.

49 Burt, Jarrell and His Age, 193.

50 Suzann Ferguson, *The Poetry of Randall Jarrell* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 206.

51 Oostdijk, 125.

52 J. A. Bryant, Jr., *Understanding Randall Jarrell* (Colombia: South Carolina Press, 1986), 162.

53 Beck, 41.

54 Ibid., 43.

55 Ferguson, 188.

56 Cited in Robert Pack, *Belief And Uncertainty in The Poetry Of Robert Frost* (New England: University Press of New England, 2003), 165.

57 Beck, 7.

58 Mary Jarrell, ed., *Randall Jarrell's Letters: An Autobiographical and Literary Selection* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 1985), 16.

59 See Robert Lowell, "Randall Jarrell," in *Randall Jarrell 1914-1965*, eds., Robert Lowell, Peter Taylor and Robert Penn Warren (New York: Farrar, Stratus & Giroux, 1967),110.

60 Beck, 66.

61 Ferguson, 189-90.

62 Bryant, 163.

63 Florian Hild, "Randall Jarrell and Ludwig Wittgenstein: Poetic Philosophy," *Jarrell, Bishop, Lowell & CO.*, Suzanne Ferguson, , ed., (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003),142.

64 James Longenbach, *Modern Poetry After Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63.

65 Jonathan Galassi, "'Hansel and Gretel in America,' The Dynamics of Change and Loss in the Poetry of Randall Jarrell," *Poetry Nation*, no. 4 (1975): 119.

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جَوَانِبُ الثَّقَافَةِ الشَّعْبِيَّةِ الْأَمِيرِكِيَّةِ فِي  
"العَالَمِ الْمَقْفُودِ" لِرَانْدَالِ جَارِيلِ

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الخلاصة

الثقافة الشعبية طالما عُرِّفت عن طريق مقارنتها بالثقافة العالية او النخبة، إن اهتمامها الرئيس هو بيع السلع للناس من خلال تزيين المنتجات وإعادة تصميمها، في القرن العشرين ارتبطت الثقافة الشعبية بفن الحصول على اكثر عدد ممكن من المشترين.

يسلط راندال جارل (١٩١٤-١٩٦٥) الضوء على التهديد الكبير الذي جلبته الثقافة الشعبية على الشعر الاميركي، وهذا يترك الشاعر بين نقطتي صراع؛ تملكه الشخصية الفردية المميزة كشاعر، والحصول على جمهور مهتم الذي من المفترض ان يمتلك المعنى الحقيقي لكلمة "الشعر".

يناقش البحث الثقافة الشعبية ويتتبع تأريخها وتكوينها في اميركا، التغيرات التي جلبتها الى الحياة الاميركية، وتأثيرها على جيل جارل. كذلك يقدم هذا البحث حياة جارل وسيرته المهنية، موقفه تجاه ظاهرة الثقافة الشعبية، واخيرا الصراع بين الفن والثقافة الشعبية وكيف انها قللت من قيمة دور الشعر في الحياة الاميركية، متمثلة في "العالم المفقود" (١٩٦٥).