



90 North

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

“90 North” is a poem of pained disillusion, one of Jarrell's early poems which makes vividly real the distance between the imagined world and the real one. The poem has two settings, the past, in which the child dreamed of discovering the North Pole, his dreams perhaps based on reading of Admiral Richard Byrd and his adventures. However, as an adult, he realizes that the child's dreams of conquest were meaningless. He revisits his child self arriving there at the imagined summit, surrounded by his dogs and the corpses of his frozen companions. Sheltered from the ice by his furs, he can only ask, “And now what? Why, go back.” His steps now must always be “to the south,” toward bitter awareness of the emptiness of his life. Only in the “Cloud-Cuckoo-Land” of dreams could he make a meaningful discovery; where he is in reality there is only darkness, ignorance, and pain. The last four lines have the word “darkness” repeated four times, and what comes from the darkness, according to the poem, is not enlightenment but pain. “And we call it wisdom. It is pain.” All dreams fail; all effort comes to nothing. This is one of the starkest of Jarrell's disillusionment poems, in which the reality of pain and darkness is contrasted not with what might have been but what he once dreamed might be.

Bibliography

Burt, Stephen. *Randall Jarrell and His Age*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.

Chappell, Fred. “The Indivisible Presence of Randall Jarrell.” *North Carolina Literary Review* 1, no. 1 (Summer, 1992): 8-13.

Cyr, Marc D. “Randall Jarrell's Answerable Style: Revision of Elegy in ‘The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner.’” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 46, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 92-106.

Flynn, Richard. *Randall Jarrell and the Lost World of Childhood*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990.

Hammer, Langdon. “Who Was Randall Jarrell?” *Yale Review* 79 (1990): 389-405.

Jarrell, Mary. *Remembering Randall: A Memoir of Poet, Critic, and Teacher Randall Jarrell*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.

Pritchard, William. *Randall Jarrell: A Literary Life*. New York: Farrar, 1990.

Quinn, Sr. Bernetta. *Randall Jarrell*. Boston: Twayne, 1981.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

90 North: 90 North

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/90-north-salem>