



The Märchen

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

“The Märchen” is one of Jarrell’s longest and most difficult poems, which merges the stories of the Brothers Grimm to produce a complicated meditation on the relations between a person’s stories, one’s grand narratives, and a person’s life. The forest in which all the events happen is both reality and the stories people create. The main character is Hansel, but he is also identified with Christ. He does not follow a variation of Hansel’s actions alone but also follows the stories of other characters in the Grimm stories. Thus, the title, “The Märchen,” suggests the fairy tales or folktales, all taken together. The narrative is a melange of many fairy tales and other stories as well, including the Christian story. Difficulty with the narrative itself may be one of the reason that few critics have discussed this poem, and those who do come up with differing interpretations.

The forest is filled with actions and wishes, odd crossings of fairy tale characters, superstitions, and beliefs. Hansel is a suffering hero whose destiny seems to be to suffer for others. He is a part of all the stories about heroes who are invented to overcome all the evils of the world, represented as witches, wicked stepparents, darkness, death—all the dark threats which cannot really be overcome in life. Motives and reasons are lost in the forest, and the narrative shifts from dream to action, from reality to imagination, abruptly and without transition. All the archetypal heroes of the folktales merge and mesh. The only way to escape from the predestined doomed endings is to change—a difficult, if not impossible, task. At the end the speaker asks, “Have we not learned/ Neither of beasts nor kingdoms nor their Lord . . . /Neither to rule nor die? To change, to change!”

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.

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