

21 February, 1952.

Mr Randall Jarrell,
14 Alexander Street,
Princeton, New Jersey.

Dear Mr Jarrell:

Once more, I hope you'll accept my apologies for what must seem an inordinate length of time between letters. For various reasons (chiefly to do with jury duty, which hit here like a plague) it was unavoidable, but I am sorry.

I'm afraid the consensus of opinion is much what I thought it would be. Pictures From An Institution has had no bad readings; rather, it delights all. But...readers are unanimous in urging for it more novelistic coherence. Not because they are annoyed or worried by the loose construction, but rather for those reasons which I cited in my last letter; all of which boil down finally to a very definite feeling that you place a possible barrier between your book and potential readers.

I was delighted to have your last letter because of all this. It seems to me that what you suggest in the way of new Benton and Gertrude material may be the very thing to turn the trick. It occurs to me also that you might be interested in some specific criticism readers here have had (including myself), so in consultation with them I've marked down a few as follows:

What purpose is served by the introduction of a wife for the narrator, who appears twice in a most ghostly fashion? Would it not be better to eliminate her entirely?

Although loved dearly by all, Constance and the Rosenbaums seem to go on at too great length in the last section. I would cite pages 109, 110, 113, and 116 through 120 as parts we all think could be dispensed with (and perhaps more, at your discretion).

Which brings us to the very last episode; for us this trails off in a rather dispiriting fashion when compared to the rest of the book: too pat, and tidied-up-hastily seeming for pleasant dishevelment of the whole. (I anticipate, in accordance with your new plan, that this will probably

work itself out automatically.)

I would think those to be the most specific faults that should be gone into at the moment. The really minor ones will depend on what you do in adding new material. I would hope that you will not simply add, but will also tighten throughout (by the kind of minor cutting I have suggested in the case of Constance and the Rosenbaums), in any way that strikes you as right, perhaps give the book somewhat more of a sense of logical progression, and think about the ending.

At the moment, I'm afraid, I'm not empowered to offer you anything other than our assurances that Pictures From An Institution will get the warmest welcome on its return. But, believe me, this is true. I hope to see it back soon.

Do I assume correctly that you want the manuscript back? Or perhaps you're working with a carbon, and are way ahead of me? Do let me know.

What of the book of criticism? After the Kenyon essay on Whitman, I look forward to it very much. I was fascinated by your fierce reclamation. Perhaps it protested too much (we anti-Whitmanites are a tough crew, and crafty; we know that the old man always sounds better out of context), but it sent me back to him, and this time it's kill or cure.

With all good wishes, and apologies again for the length of time it's taken us to make up our minds.

Harry Ford.