

The New Criterion

Features

April 1999

“No other book”: Randall Jarrell's criticism

by [Brad Leithauser](#)

Randall Jarrell once wrote, in praise of William Carlos Williams, “When you have read *Paterson* you know for the rest of your life what it is like to be a waterfall.” Yet there’s another way to ascertain what it is to be a phenomenon that flows, coruscates, sings, and revitalizes: you might turn to the essays of Jarrell himself. Thirty-four years after his untimely death, at the age of fifty-one, he remains a bright, propulsive presence. A powerfully attractive personality —witty, affectionate, energetic, and positively brilliant—emerges in his letters; in his beautiful, piercing poems; in assorted memoirs and a biography; in his photographs (the camera loved his spirited brown eyes and lanky torso); in his comic novel, *Pictures from an Institution*, and his four children’s books; and in the various recordings he left behind, in which the voice breaks boyishly and sounds, oddly, appealingly, just a little ...

Brad Leithauser's most recent book is *The Art Student's War*.

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This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 17 April 1999, on page 19

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