



# About Larkin

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## Editorial

Larkin wrote that his work was 'nothing if not personal'. Impersonal though its rhetorical strategies are, lyric poetry is always on one level a kind of autobiography. The current issue of *About Larkin* affords some unfamiliar insights into the biographical context of Larkin's poetry.

The earliest of Larkin's muses, we now discover, was Penelope Scott Stokes, the 'girl resembling an Eton boy', to whom he was 'gently attracted' in 1942. (Subscribers should lose no time in correcting James Booth's crude mistranscription of Larkin's 'gently' as 'greatly' in their copies of *About Larkin* 24, p.5). It has been known for some time that Poem XXX in *The North Ship* is addressed to Penelope. In this issue 'Pen's' daughter reveals the fuller story, from the initial Beatrice-glimpse of the refused tea-invitation to the later correspondence between poet and former muse.

We intend to feature more of Penelope Scott Stokes's quietly spoken but powerful poems in a future issue. Here we publish an elegant homage to Larkin by Jane Moth and a sonnet of daughterly love by Alison Mace, which won third prize in the Open Poetry 2007 International Sonnet Competition, the anthology of which, *Hand Luggage Only*, will be available in June from [www.openpoetry.org.uk](http://www.openpoetry.org.uk)

Don Lee's Warwick Trail took Society members to 73 Coten End, Warwick, where the undergraduate poet longed to have done with the carefully cut sandwiches of his parents' love ('Poem for Penelope'), and where later, grieving for his father, he looked down from his high window on the plum trees below ('An April Sunday brings the snow'). The letters deposited by the poet's niece in the Brynmor Jones Library reveal his deep affection for both parents. The 'unpleasant' Larkin of journalistic myth is shown to have been a caring son, writing regular gossip and reassurance to his mother every few days throughout the three decades of her widowhood.

Also in this issue we feature an interview with Archie Burnett, the chosen editor of Larkin's *Complete Poems*. His 'complete and accurate record for study' will be the labour of many years. In the mean time Faber has decreed that 'An April Sunday', 'Love Again', 'Morning at last, there in the snow', and other key poems are to remain indefinitely out of print in any edition, popular or scholarly. Baffled readers will search in vain for these works in the *Collected Poems* of 2003.

Larkin's enthusiasms for Thomas Hardy and for American jazz are here celebrated in the accounts of Society talks by Jane Thomas and James Connelly. In a welcome article, Jim Orwin meticulously sets the record straight concerning the supposed 'newly discovered' Larkin tapes, which caused such a stir recently in the media. John Gilroy reviews John Osborne's spirited defence of the poet against distortion (publisher's special offer enclosed). The younger generation, unaware of such disputes, gives its refreshing take on the poet in the account of the Larkin Study Day in March 2008. Finally, the thoughtful, kind-hearted Larkin features once again in the delicate occasional verses for his secretary, Betty Mackereth, written on the fiftieth anniversary of the Library's foundation in 1979 and published here for the first time.

**Janet Brennan**  
**James Booth**



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*About Larkin* is produced twice yearly by The Philip Larkin Society.  
The articles in the Journal reflect the personal opinions of the contributors and not those  
of the Society as a whole.



# Forthcoming Events

**Saturday 7 June 2008**

*Annual General Meeting 12.00 a.m.  
followed by a buffet lunch with wine; then at 2.00 pm:*

*Distinguished Guest Lecture*

**Anthony Thwaite**  
(President of the Larkin Society)

*Philip to Monica*

The poet's most intimate letters

*Venue: The Lawns Centre, Cottingham*

*Admission to the lecture: Members free; non-members £5.00*

**Thursday 10 July 2008 – 8.15 pm for a prompt 8.30 pm start**

**Joint Event with the Manchester Jazz Society**  
**Paraffin Joe and his Nitelites; Nancy with the Laughing Face**

As part of their weekly Thursday programme of record recitals, the Manchester Jazz Society (President Steve Voss, see *Selected Letters*) is running a session at which Don Lee will be presenting the set. The first part, 'Paraffin Joe and his Nitelites: Larkin's Take on Jazz' will highlight some varied and provocative tracks (see *All What Jazz*, 226). The second session, 'Nancy with the Laughing Face', will take the form of a musical tribute to jazz fan and loyal Larkin Society member David Gerard. Members will recall David's pertinent contributions during the Society's 'Birthday Walks'. Like Larkin, David Gerard held a prominent post as a librarian and, like Larkin, whom he met several times, he was an ardent devotee of jazz.

*Venue: The Unicorn Hotel (upstairs room), Church Street, Manchester City Centre*

*Admission: £1 (no prior booking or membership required)*

**Thursday 16 October 2008 - 7.30 pm for 8.00 pm**

**Graham Chesters: Letters Home**

Professor Chesters is currently cataloguing the Larkin family correspondence, now deposited in the Brynmor Jones Library. In this talk, he gives his first impressions of Philip's early correspondence with his father, mother and sister.

*Venue: The Tranby Room, Staff House, University of Hull.*

*Members £3.00 Non-Members £5.00*

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# *From Willow Gables to 'Aubade': Penelope Scott Stokes and Philip Larkin: Part 1*

*Susannah Tarbush*

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When my mother Penelope Scott Stokes was in her first term at Oxford in 1941, she played Viola in a Somerville College production of *Twelfth Night*, 'eliciting from my tutor a less than fulsome comment':

Plainly she thought I'd made it all a bit sentimental. But I was happy to receive a beautifully penned fan letter from an unknown Philip Larkin, asking me to tea. No, I never went. I was 'going out' with another and I didn't think he would like it.

All she knew of Larkin at the time was that he was 'possibly an important person in the English Club'.



*Penelope Scott Stokes*  
Photograph © Susannah Tarbush

Fifty-five years later, in 1996, she wrote:

He invited me to tea, but I evaded that, making some paltry excuse. We're talking about 1941 when probably tea was just that. No bed glimpsed through carefully half-opened door. Just a bright fire, toast and cakes fetched from Oliver & Gurden. Having read anything on the subject of Philip that has come my way, I have to admit to naiveté. It seems his was not a very cloistered life. One way and another, perhaps at 18 I was wise! The girl-boy in me (Viola well chosen) he found provocative.

My mother had no idea in her Oxford days that she had inspired a poem by Larkin. More than 20 years would pass before he disclosed this to her in two letters. And she died in 1999 without knowing that she figured in certain other of his early writings and that he wrote a second, until now unpublished, poem 'for Penelope'.

Pen (as she was known to family and friends) was born in 1923, the second of four high-spirited daughters born to Harry and Elizabeth Scott Stokes between 1922 and 1928. A longed-for son would not appear until 1938, when Penelope was 15, followed the next year by a fifth daughter. Elizabeth was a Morland, a member of the Clark-Morland shoe and sheepskin Quaker dynasty of Glastonbury and Street. Morland's made sheepskin jackets, slippers and boots. Pen's father, Harry Scott Stokes, a scholar of Winchester College and of New College, Oxford, was Director, then Chairman of the firm for forty years. A Catholic by background, though lapsed, he won the Military Cross in the Great War, published a standard work on Dragons (*Perseus*, Kegan Paul 1924), a short history of Glastonbury, and many booklets including translations of the Glastonbury chronicles from the Latin. He was mayor of Glastonbury six times, and in August 1967 was the first person to be made a freeman of the town.<sup>1</sup> Like her father, Penelope would print and publish throughout her life. To this day I may come across an undiscovered seam of writing paper headed with one of her sketches, commissioned from a local printer, or an illustrated booklet of her poems, or an anthology of Glastonbury poets with some of her work.

Pen wrote of her first term as a student:

Oxford 1941. Arrived at Somerville College after weeks on the painful Waiting List, I was given a small ground floor room with dustbin outlook. No dawn chorus for me! My Scout Nellie of blessed memory at once came into my life. Showing daily concern for the newly homeless fledgling, she dusted my bits and pieces, changed my sheets and kept spotless the inside of my new and pretty teapot. Her gentle love of harmless gossip kept me laughing and her concern for my modest appearance ensured my adequate conformity. Happy enough in my soft blue school uniform, I was happier still when dressed for my favourite non-academic activity: hockey, at which I certainly excelled. Nellie called me 'Tommy', an affectionate pet name for the boy-girl. Cycling about Oxford on my old bike, I was exalted, 'Surprised by joy' and a thousand autumn leaves.

Penelope's first year at Oxford would turn out to be her last. In the summer of 1942 she met Kit Baily, an anti-tank officer on leave in her hometown of Glastonbury. He was a member of the other major tannery-based manufacturing family of the town, Baily's, particularly known for their boxing gloves. After a whirlwind Glastonbury romance, Pen abandoned her studies at Oxford to marry Kit on 6 October. She was 19, Kit 26.



*Pen's wedding, 1942*  
*Photograph © Susannah Tarbush*

'Marriage of the Mayor of Glastonbury's daughter' ran a headline in the local newspaper. 'Well known local families

united. Interesting ceremony at St John's Church.' The newspaper noted that 'like her mother, she played hockey for Oxford University (women)'. My grandmother too had left Somerville to get married without finishing her degree, just after the First World War; four of her daughters would eventually be admitted to the college.

Nine months after Pen and Kit's wedding, their first child, John Sebastian (Kit had a passion for Bach) was born. At the end of the war the family settled in Chichester where Kit practised as a solicitor. Pen had six miscarriages and finally, after a course of progesterone injections, I was born in January 1950, and Christopher 18 months later. But in 1958 Pen and Kit's marriage ended and Christopher and I went to live with our grandparents in Glastonbury.

Christopher had been born three weeks premature, and nearly died as a baby. Academically and artistically gifted, he was of a delicate constitution and in adult life suffered from a schizophrenia-like illness. He happened to share his birthday, 9 August, with Philip Larkin; this coincidence was a germ of comfort for astrologically-inclined Pen in her later years. Chris died in 2004, five years after his mother.

My mother had clearly been following Larkin's literary progress after she left Oxford. The Larkin archive has yielded up a letter from Pen to Larkin dated 11 April 1947, the only letter from her to Larkin so far located:

Dear Philip Larkin,

I was so intrigued by *A Girl in Winter*. I specially liked the way it begins – perhaps that's because one pays tremendous attention to the beginning, trying to get the feel of the thing. You won't remember me (Somerville 1941-1942) but I remember you –

Yours sincerely

Penelope (Scott Stokes)

Mrs ---- Baily

Pen had not had a job outside the home during her marriage. After her marriage broke up, however, she learnt shorthand and typing at a local college in Street and by correspondence course, and went off to work in London. At the same time she pursued her interest in poetry and in Jungian psychology, particularly as a patient of the analytical psychologist Dr William Kraemer who remained a key figure in her life for many years. In 1965 Pen published, at her own expense, *A Rebel in Love*, under the name Pen Baily (Breakthru Publications, Haywards Heath, Sussex). The autobiographical tone of this collection of 27 poems is indicated by its section headings: Beginnings; Love at a Distance; Living in London; Loving in London; Convalescing after Breakdown; Happy; Sad; Learning.

She sent a copy to Larkin, elliptically inscribed 'To PAL by Pen', and received a reply dated 2 November 1965.

32 Pearson Park  
Hull

Dear Penelope,

Many thanks for the book. It's very handsome, and the poems are serious and unpretentious. I like 'Conformers' and 'Housewife': others too.

I'm sorry, however, that they're so sad. I hope things are better now.

I seem too busy to write anything these days, which is depressing. Recently I looked at my early poems, preparatory to writing a preface to them – did you know one was 'about' you? Insofar as anything was about anything in those days!

Yours sincerely  
Philip Larkin

These are the poems that Larkin mentions:

#### Conformers

We travel in twos or threes –  
The jungle, you see, is dangerous.  
Tigers wait for us  
And monkeys throw coconuts at us  
From the tops of trees –  
That is not all.

The one who goes alone  
Is different –  
He is not appalled by the smell of death.  
We shall probably find him crucified –  
What the ants have left of him.

We prefer, you see,  
To keep together –  
We must put up with the monkeys  
Laughing at us.

#### Housewife

Stranded, rebellious, in a Georgian city,  
Worse, in a street of historic importance,  
Waking each morning to scrubbed steps  
and window-boxes,  
I sleep at night too quiet under the stars.

And this morning's seagulls,  
Blown from the harbour,  
Tell to deaf ears their freedom,  
Beneath them new cars flash to offices  
And I, rebellious,  
Am hanging out the washing.

I have not traced Penelope's response, but it elicited a further letter from Larkin of 16 November 1965, elaborating on the intriguing hint concerning his poem 'about' her:

32 Pearson Park  
Hull

Dear Penelope,

Many thanks for your letter. I'm sorry you haven't been well: these temperamental things are the devil. As you say, they are often the reverse side of a happiness and vivacity above the average. My mother is rather given to depression, but not in the way you describe: just constantly moaning, which is probably where *I* get it from. Moan I do.

Perhaps it was indiscreet of me to mention the poem: it was XXX in *The North Ship* (1945), only the last word but one was misprinted – it should have been 'provincial'. Not that you'll see it, unless you remember next year – Fabers are doing a new edition, chiefly to spite the old publisher who never paid me anything. It's all terribly juvenile, I'm afraid.

Do you 'earn a living'? If so, how? You may know I'm a librarian, which is a pretty harmless sort of thing to be, or it was until the university expansion began. Now it's a combination of Henry Ford & Harold Wilson, or should I say Ian Smith.<sup>2</sup>

Yours sincerely,  
Philip

This is the poem:

#### Poem XXX (from *The North Ship*)

So through that unripe day you bore your head,  
And the day was plucked and tasted bitter,  
As if still cold among the leaves. Instead,  
It was your severed image that grew sweeter,  
That floated wing-stiff, focused in the sun  
Along uncertainty and gales of shame  
Blown out before I slept. Now you are one  
I dare not think alive: only a name  
That chimes occasionally, as a belief  
Long since embedded in the static past.

Summer broke and drained. Now we are safe.  
The days lose confidence, and can be faced  
Indoors. This is your last, meticulous hour,  
Cut, Gummed; pastime of a provincial winter.

Clearly my mother had appeared in the role of a kind of muse to the young poet, a sweet image of what might have been, safely embedded in a static past. As James Booth wrote to me when I first thought of writing this memoir:

His *most* delicately intense relationships are with women with whom he never gets to the level of 'real untidy air', or 'Bargains, suffering and love'. Larkin's muses are, as tradition dictates, distant, unattained, glimpsed. There is something courtly about this. But he is unusual in that his impersonal muse idealisation co-exists with a perfectly empirical sense of real girls in real places. He was friends with Winifred Arnott in quite an ordinary way, while at the same time writing 'Latest Face' and 'Maiden Name' about her. The paradox is even more acute in the case of Maeve Brennan.

In Pen's case perhaps we have the purest, simplest version. On one level she remained always the might-have-been of his first 'latest face' encounter with her, and that rebuffed tea-invitation. But the fact that she held this precious aesthetic significance for him made his feeling for her when he later encountered the real, suffering woman, the more poignant. The two levels must always remain fundamentally separate, but they can co-exist in the same relationship.

Booth told me that Don Lee, who was in charge of media relations at the Larkin Society, had uncovered more information on the Penelope-Larkin connection, and he put us in touch. Don proved to have been a digger *extraordinaire* in the archives. He sent me a dossier of photocopied pages of Penelope-related finds, one of which was a typed, unpublished earlier version of poem XXX, entitled 'Sonnet: Penelope, August 1942'. Don commented: 'It seems that Penelope was the first girl he bothered to write about'. The first ten lines, the extended 'octave' of the sonnet, are the same as in the final version except that 'embedded' in line 10 is the more immediately intense 'abandoned'. The four-line 'sestet', however, is quite different. It is, as James Booth puts it, 'more emotionally histrionic':

Now, when this intricate and shining grief  
Breaks next before your face, how shall I twist  
These crooked branches straight? and how ensure  
The day that falls drop riper than before?

The change to the bleaker, more resigned version seems to have been made after Larkin learned that Pen had left Oxford to get married.

The final version first appeared in *Poetry from Oxford in Wartime*, in 1945 from the Fortune Press, edited by William Bell. In the Larkin section (pages 72-78) none of the poems has a title, and they are referred to only by their first lines. The poem was published in *The North Ship* in 1945 as poem XXX, and Larkin abandoned the title, 'Sonnet: Penelope, August, 1942'. As Don Lee comments: 'Perhaps he was sore at losing Penelope'.

The conventional wisdom has been that the poems of *The*

*North Ship* are not to be considered as part of the main Larkin canon. The first edition of the *Collected Poems*, edited by Anthony Thwaite, consigned them to an appendix of juvenilia, and Thwaite wrote that 'the earliest poems which strike his characteristic note and carry his own voice were written in 1946'. However, Don Lee points out that Larkin often seemed to 'rescue' poem XXX, and it was 'one of the very few poems Larkin constantly recalled from *The North Ship*, poems which later in life he found to be an embarrassment'.

In an interview with John Haffenden in 1981, Larkin mentioned a tape-recording he had made for America. He was, he said, 'putting in three *North Ship* poems – X, XIII and XXX – only because I think they're fairly acceptable as poems: they're not meant to be what I think good nowadays. I don't particularly like XXX except for the last quatrain. There are some pieces in the book I hate very much indeed'.<sup>3</sup> These tape-recordings featured in a news item on Radio Four's *Today* programme on 14 February 2006, when the copies belonging to the man who had made them, John Weeks, re-emerged from his Hornsea garage after his death. I found that Larkin's reading of poem XXX, a work that had carried such emotional significance for me these past more than 40 years, and especially in the seven years since my mother had died, delivered a visceral punch. It was moving to hear his deep, resonant voice addressing 'you'.<sup>4</sup>

On page 10 of 'Biographical Details: Oxford', compiled in October 1943, Larkin recalled the beginning of his third academic year in 1942:

I soon found out that Penelope Scott-Stokes,<sup>5</sup> a girl resembling an Eton boy and whom I had been gently<sup>6</sup> attracted to the term previously had left Somerville and been married. So a sonnet, 'So through that unripe day...' was proved correct.

Penelope's Eton crop made an impression on Larkin. She used to tell us how her father had wanted her to be a boy and thus had her hair cut short and dressed her in boy's clothes. When *The Times* published a one-page article headlined 'Larkin's tomboy first love is revealed in lost sonnet' on 1 October 2005, Penelope was 'outed' as 'a boyish Somerville College student with an Eton-crop haircut'. The article was the first occasion on which the first version of Poem XXX was published.

The ending of the poem reminds me of my mother's photograph album from her school and Oxford days. She removed many of the photographs over the years. Among what remains are photographs of named young men (no Philip Larkin among them) singly or in groups, often sitting on Oxford college lawns. In her 1979 piece 'Whose Oxford?' Pen wrote:

Going out – which meant toasting crumpets in  
Corpus, talking about Edward Thomas, wandering



by the canal – was the heart of Oxford days and Oxford evenings. Never Oxford nights. No Hite report for the Somervillians of those days, though there were one or two sophisticates whose reputations were excitingly spicy. Edward Thomas became part of my life. Helen Thomas too. All gratitude to the one with whom I was 'going out'. Why did I not keep those beautiful little letters, enclosed in beautiful little envelopes adorned with the college crest of the admirer? One cannot keep everything, but not to treasure one of those!

The *Times* article made much of my mother's tomboyishness. She was boyish, but never mannish, of a rounded rather than androgynous build. There was much femininity about her, and a flirtatious, seductive quality. She was what her father termed a 'honeypot'. She used to say that some young men in her Oxford days had thought she resembled Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She was small: five feet two and three quarter inches and eight and a half stone according to her final school report before she went up to Oxford. She was vivacious, uninhibited in her laughter, a good mimic. (I have a recording of her reading a poem in a convincing Margaret Thatcher voice.)

She was certainly sporty. She used to joke that, being born on 21 March, she was on the cusp of dreamy, artistic Pisces and fiery, sporty, energetic Aries, so had a poetic side and an extrovert, gamesy side. Her first Badminton School report, of autumn 1939, said she was, on the hockey field, 'a most useful player with plenty of dash', and had 'taken to Lacrosse remarkably and has reached a very good standard'. In the 1960s she took up golf and became the Wells Golf Club Ladies' champion. When she was interviewed by journalist Ed Behr for an article on the British middle classes under economic pressure, published in the 1 November 1976 edition of *Newsweek*, she was pictured on the Wells golf course, club in hand.

However she also liked to wear dresses and carry handbags; there were dresses she associated with 'dates' in London that she passed on to teenage me. Her favourite perfume in the mid-1960s was Worth's 'Je Reviens' perhaps as much for the name as the scent itself. Her hair retained most of its natural colour well into her old age, and there was something of the 'eternal girl' about her. She had a good eye for identifying choice pickings at charity shops and jumble sales, and wrote a poem on this theme.

As my mother herself was aware there was something piquant to the young Larkin about her androgynous aspect: 'The girl-boy in me (Viola well chosen) he found provocative'. This aspect led to her inclusion in the girl's school fiction Larkin wrote under the pseudonym, Brunette Coleman, in 1943 at the end of his Oxford period. Penelope appears under her own name as a character in *Michaelmas Term at St Bride's*. Set in an

Oxford women's college, this is a sequel to the girls' school story *Trouble at Willow Gables* (Faber and Faber, 2002). James Booth suggests that

though light, comic, and more simply erotic, this literary context is perhaps as idealised, 'safe' and 'static' as the more poetic 'sweet' severed image of 'Thus through the unripe day'.

In a delightfully farcical episode, the neurotic belt-fetishist, Philippa Woolf, is depicted 'entertaining a small girl with an Eton crop to tea, a friend of Hilary Allen named Penelope' (187):

...Penelope had found she had overmuch time on her hands, and was able to cultivate a few social contacts. Among these was Philippa Woolf. They discovered a mutual interest in the film-acting of Gary Cooper.

It turns out that Marie, Philippa's younger sister, an irrepressible amateur Jungian, is attempting to shock her sister out of her belt-fixation by planting earthworms about her rooms (the belts are, of course, really, symbols). The hapless Penelope becomes the victim of this stratagem: 'In three egg-shell blue teacups three pink worms nosed restlessly about':

'My dear, how utterly ghastly.' Penelope clutched both hands to her unemphatic bosom: worms always had a curious effect on her. 'My dear, take them away or I shall do something awful, faint or something. Take them away this minute.'

Philippa throws the earthworms out of the window and 'Penelope lay back shuddering on the divan'. Then Philippa discovers more earthworms among her necklaces and Penelope goes for a lie down:

A piercing scream sounded from the bedroom, and there was a thud as a bedside table crashed to the ground. Penelope's face, as white as her shirt, appeared round the bedroom door.

'My dear, there is a worm on your pillow.'

A few sentences on, 'Penelope was in the sick-room, being sick.' Marie tries to persuade them all that Philippa's 37 belts are symbols of something much deeper: worms. Philippa tells her sister: 'You're the one who needs help. You have put worms in my china. You might have seriously unnerved me. And you've frightened the life out of poor little Penelope Scott-  
S t o k e s ' .

Penelope reappears later when Marie goes to visit the horsey Margaret Flannery, who has set up an illegal bookie's business in her college room. She finds Margaret

corner Penelope Scott-Stokes was busy typing': 'Another half-dozen on "Golden Vase", said Penelope, looking up. "Taken?"' The section ends: 'Penelope's typewriter rattled busily'.

More intriguing than these inventive but innocent hi-jinks, and very different, is the second poem which Larkin addressed to Penelope. This abandoned 11-line draft was unearthed in the Hull University archives by Don Lee, and is published here for the first time. Don describes it as 'quite the oddest thing I've uncovered' in the Larkin-Penelope material. Larkin is of course famous for his shock beginnings ('Annus Mirabilis'/'This be the Verse', which he published, and 'Love Again', which he didn't) but 'Penelope' beats everything by a good 20 years.

The extensively redrafted holograph reads:

Poem for Penelope abt. the Mechanical Turd

August again, and it is a year again  
Since I poured the hot toss into your arse.<sup>7</sup>

\*

Choking, I pull open a door. It is evening out there.  
But the house is building still behind my back  
Room over room, cells of a great mad brain,  
And all are threaded on my parents' voices  
Crossing like scissors in the stale air.

The [bright?] road crawls with placid faces.  
And I leave tomorrow eager to have done  
With the sandwiches they are cutting for me to take  
– For they love me – but I turn again in despair.<sup>8</sup>

Does 'August again' perhaps refer back to the original title of Poem XXX, 'Sonnet: Penelope, August 1942'?

James Booth comments:

Since it is clear that Philip's relationship with Penelope never went beyond the refused tea-invitation, the gratuitous opening lines must show the young poet venting his sexual frustration in a violent masturbatory fantasy. The emotion seems to be of shame and guilt rather than misogyny or aggression. The title sounds arbitrary and surreal; presumably the poet means to describe *himself* as a mechanical turd? Gauchely original though the clash of register is, too much should not perhaps be made of it. Nor does it seem that the dedication 'for Penelope' is of intrinsic importance. Once the sexual outburst is out of the way the poem continues, after an asterisk, as a subtle evocation of youthful energy thwarted by dull domesticity. The young poet unironically acknowledges his parents' love, but is vividly eager, 'to have done' with their

lovingly prepared sandwiches, and return from this vacation claustrophobia to the promise of Penelope's Oxford. (One recalls the sandwiches which the embarrassed John Kemp stuffs through the train window at the beginning of *Jill*.)

\* \* \*

As Booth comments, Penelope's tenuous and discontinuous contact with Larkin shows her both as muse and 'real girl'. Pen was herself also a poet. Before publishing *A Rebel in Love*, she had sought critiques of her poetry, and kept the responses – some of them harsh – in a folder together with drafts of various poems. Among the critics she contacted were George S. Fraser and Walter Stein. There is a thoughtful eight-page letter dated 2 November 1962 in a large looping hand from the British-born American poet Denise Levertov:

Leaving out the sonnet, which is a well done *exercise*, I like their clearcut use of real language, & the natural feeling you have for cadence, ie where to break (end) your line. They are not padded out, not frilled, not 'literary', ie not *contrived*... I feel you have possibilities, but I am not sure whether you are willing to be *used* by the art of poetry, or whether you want to *use* it to help yourself emotionally.

In her reply Pen wrote:

Things have happened to me – 3 children, divorce & a cycle of breakdowns (4) which I hope I'm getting away from... Children are all away & I work as a secretary. I'll be 40 amazingly soon, like a lot of my friends – we're all amazed I think... Somehow, I think I'm not elected to be *used* by poetry. No, words aren't an obsession, though I like them, sometimes fall under their spell.

One of the poems she sent to Levertov, but not included in *Rebel in Love*, concerns an unsatisfactory emotional encounter:

You take your coat –  
It's time, your look tells me, for you to leave.  
There is nothing, it seems, that I can keep you with.  
Whatever holds you, indolent my lover,  
It is not,  
Evidently it is not in my power to give  
That place you look for  
I must be blind to,  
It is something I do not see.  
I am left with the hollow of the pillow where your  
head lay,  
And the stain of seed in the bed –  
That is left to me.

24th Feb 1962

In her response to Levertov Pen wrote that the poem about 'the chap taking his coat':

was written on the edge of another illness – I think certainly it is a way of giving room to an explosive tension. There's a series about this particular bloke. But the important thing to me is: this is what happened, & this is what it felt like, this is what it was. It looks as if the alchemy didn't take place in those poems – they're raw...I might – & do – use these poems, some of them (I keep wanting to put 'poems') as a kind of incantation to myself - this doesn't mean anything about them as poems.

Briefly in the early 1940s Penelope had been Philip Larkin's muse. She was to meet Larkin once again, and she followed his career throughout her life. In the second part of this memoir, I shall describe their second encounter in 1967, so different from the first, and go on to discuss her verdict on the *furor* in the early 1990s following the appearance of the *Selected Letters* and the biography.

<sup>1</sup> See McDonagh Russell, *Sheep into Shoes*, Percy Lund, Humphries & Co (1962), published to mark Harry's retirement after 40 years with Morlands.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Douglas Smith was at this time the rebel Prime Minister of the white-ruled Rhodesia, which had made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain rather than submit to elections and black government.

<sup>3</sup> *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation*, Faber and Faber 1981; republished in *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews 1952-1985*.

<sup>4</sup> 'Poem XXX' does seem to be coming into favour. In March 2008 *The Guardian* published a series of seven booklets, 'Great Poets of the 20th Century', which purported to be the 'best poems of the best poets'. In the Philip Larkin booklet, with a foreword by Andrew Motion, Poem XXX was the first of the 10 poems chosen.

<sup>5</sup> Larkin inadvertently inserts a hyphen into the name.

<sup>6</sup> Mistakenly transcribed as 'greatly' in About Larkin 24, p.5.

<sup>7</sup> Larkin originally wrote 'into your mouth'.

<sup>8</sup> Everything after the asterisk is cancelled with crossed lines.

• DPL(2) 11/4/4

Poem for Penelope abt. the  
mechanical Turd.

August again, and it is a year again  
Since I poured the hot tons into your <sup>arse,</sup> ~~mouth~~

\*

~~Choking, I pull open a door. It is evening  
But the house is building some behind my back  
But I sit at my desk the furnace or the drifting dust  
Room <sup>over</sup> or room, like cells of a great mad  
And all are threaded on my parents' <sup>train</sup> ~~voices~~  
That <sup>Crossing</sup> ~~like~~ <sup>wind</sup> ~~sharp~~ <sup>in the stalling</sup> ~~stale~~ <sup>air</sup>~~

~~See the <sup>high</sup> <sup>road</sup> <sup>chawls</sup> ~~will~~  
At ~~the~~ <sup>leaving</sup> <sup>face</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>placid</sup> <sup>faces</sup>;  
And I am going <sup>leave</sup> <sup>tomorrow</sup> <sup>to</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>gaze</sup>,  
With the sandwiched they are calling for me to take  
- And they love me, but I ~~am~~ <sup>am</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>not</sup>  
~~turn~~ <sup>turn</sup> <sup>again</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>despair</sup>~~

Unpublished Larkin material © The Estate of Philip Larkin.

I am grateful to the Society of Authors on behalf of the Larkin Estate for permission to publish this material.

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*Warwick*  
*A Larkin Sunday Morning Trail*  
*7 October 2007*

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*Don Lee*

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As part of the Warwick Literary and Arts Festival in Autumn 2007, the Philip Larkin Society was again invited by its Director, Richard Phillips, to organise the Warwick Larkin Sunday Morning Trail. Our Cornwall member, Cherry Pyke, was on hand to take the photographs. The highlight of the walk was the visit to the one-time Larkin family home at Coten End, where morning refreshments were kindly provided by Roger and Sarah Beckett, the current owners of no. 73.



*Michael Wyndham Thomas reads.*



*Wendy Cole*  
*Photographs © Cherry Pyke*



*The back garden of 73 Coten End. The top left window is Philip's room, where he wrote the early poems, the 'Brunette' works, Jill and A Girl in Winter. To the right was a wartime army drill hall. Philip constantly complains in his letters about noisy soldiers.*

The fully subscribed party, which I led and Gloria Gaffney back-marked, enjoyed a fine, crisp Autumn morning stroll through Larkin-land. Accompanying us was Midland poet, Michael Wyndham Thomas, who chose some relevant readings; and as an unexpected bonus the Society's Media Officer, Wendy Cole, delivered her St Trinians rendering of some Brunette Coleman material, which will not be forgotten in a hurry.

As usually happens on these walks, I was able to glean some fresh facts and insights that will add to the value of a Larkin/Warwick trail, when it is eventually published.

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# 'New Brooms'

*Philip Larkin*

*Betty Mackereth*

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The fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Hull's University Library fell on 6 March 1979. For the occasion Philip Larkin wrote the delicate poem 'New eyes each year'. The Deputy Librarian, Brenda Moon, had the poem printed in a limited edition on the recently purchased 1833 Albion Press, still to be seen on display in the Library today.

On the inside cover of Brenda Moon's copy, Philip wrote also 'The daily things we do', addressed to her personally.

Both these poems are to be found in *Collected Poems* 1988 (pp. 212-13).

Unpublished until now is the poem he wrote on the inside cover of my copy. I had been his secretary since May 1957.

© 2008 *The Estate of Philip Larkin. We are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate, for permission to publish this poem.*

'New Brooms'

New brooms sweep clean,  
They say, and mean  
Change and decay,  
Things brushed away;  
But for old rooms  
Where life has been  
And love seen,  
Keep the old brooms.

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# *Larkin Re-covered by a New Generation*

*A Larkin Study Day  
held in the Lyndsey Suite, University of Hull  
13 March 2008*

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The latest in the Larkin Society's series of annual Study Days for A-Level students was ably coordinated by Belinda Hakes, Head of English at Wyke College and former editor of *About Larkin*. It was a bustling event attended by 170 students from five colleges in Hull, Newcastle, Sheffield, Rotherham and Grimsby.

James Booth talked about 'Living Rooms and Dying Rooms in the Work of Philip Larkin', and Charles Mundy from the Scarborough Campus gave a vivid lecture on 'Larkin, Memory and History', illustrated with images of

Coventry and the Great War. Belinda Hakes led workshops on 'The Essential Larkin'.

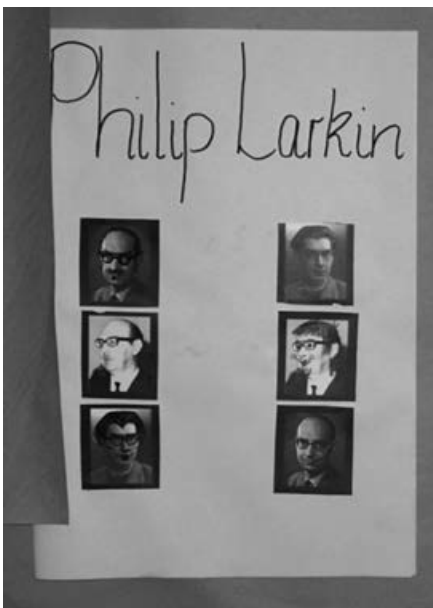
After lunch the students gave their own presentations. Set the task of creating a cover for a selected edition of Larkin's poetry, they came up with some imaginative images. Then came a first-hand personal account, 'Larkin's Love of Life', by Larkin's erstwhile publisher, Jean Hartley, and the proceedings ended with a highly animated question and answer session involving all the speakers.



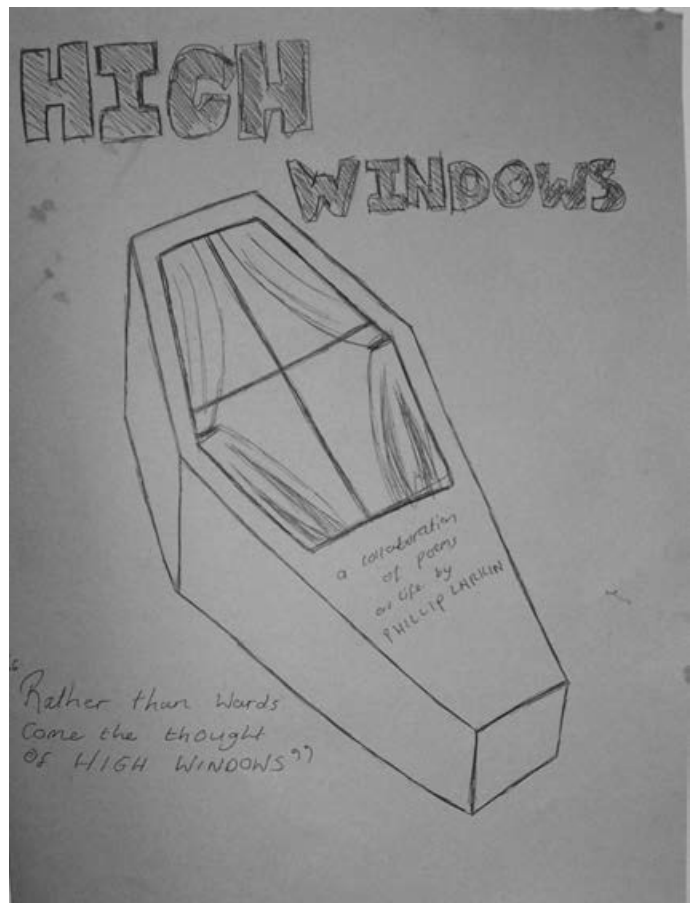
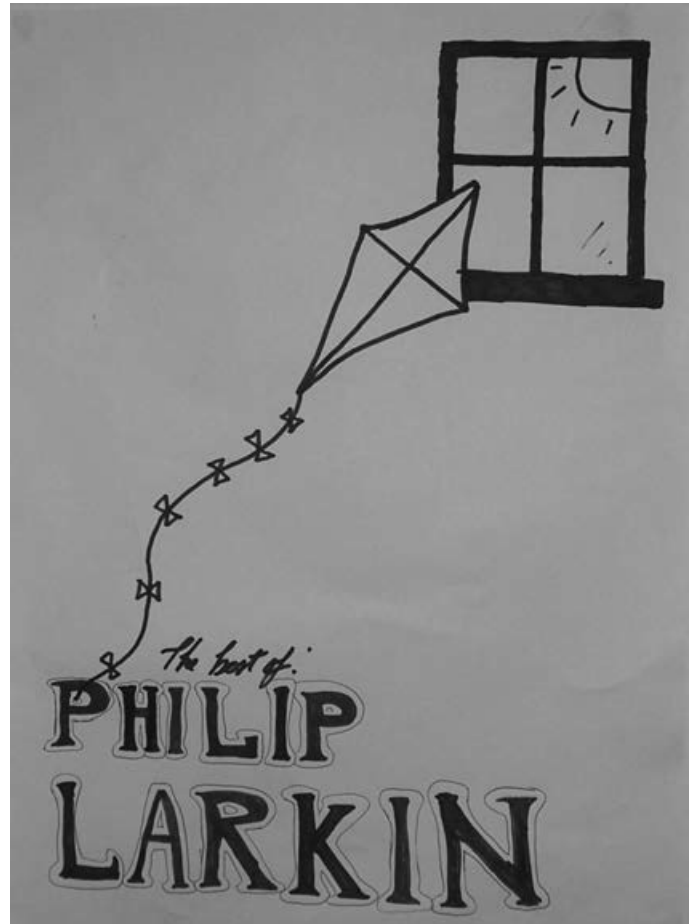
*Belinda Hakes and Jean Hartley*



*Charles Mundy*



Photographs © James Booth



Further pictures at [www.philiplarkin.com](http://www.philiplarkin.com)

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# 'Dear Pop and Mop'

## The Larkin Family Letters arrive in Hull

James Booth

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Wednesday. On Sunday I attended my first and (I trust) last Chapel. Nowood divelled in a cultured manner. On Sunday I attended my first lecture - Edmund Blunden talking about biography. Very strange. B. was a nervous man with a shock of hair, a nose like a wedge, and a twitching mouth. He delivered his lecture in staccato phrases, semi-ironically, only half concealing his genuine enthusiasm for his subject. After that I heard Nichol Smith talking about Dryden, and yesterday Prof. Wyle on the History of English. The latter was very interesting but hard to follow.

Yesterday, too, we were Matriculated.

This entailed dressing up in all the full apparel - I didn't look half bad at all - and shambling down to Trinity School to receive the Statutes of the University and being blessed in Latin by the Vice Chancellor. This was only a very hasty affair - cut down to a mere nothing - and conducted to the accompaniment of bombers overhead. God, there are hundreds! My Latin name, by the way, is Philippus Arturus Larkin.

From a twelve-page letter beginning 'Dear Fambly', dated 15 October 1940.



The deposit in the Brynmor Jones Library Archive by Larkin's niece, Rosemary Parry, of about 2,000 family letters written by the poet to his mother, father and sister, over a period of nearly four decades, gives us access to a largely unfamiliar Larkin: a thoughtful, caring son and brother.

The sequence begins in 1939 with cards written on a school trip in Brussels to 'Pop and Mop' as he called his parents. The letters written in wartime Oxford, under the drone of aeroplanes, are full of period charm: 'I heard that old Brett-Smith (lecturing on mediaeval romance), paused in his discourse, peered over his spectacles, and inquired "Do I hear an unacademic sound?...". Everyone roared with laughter and the lecture continued.'

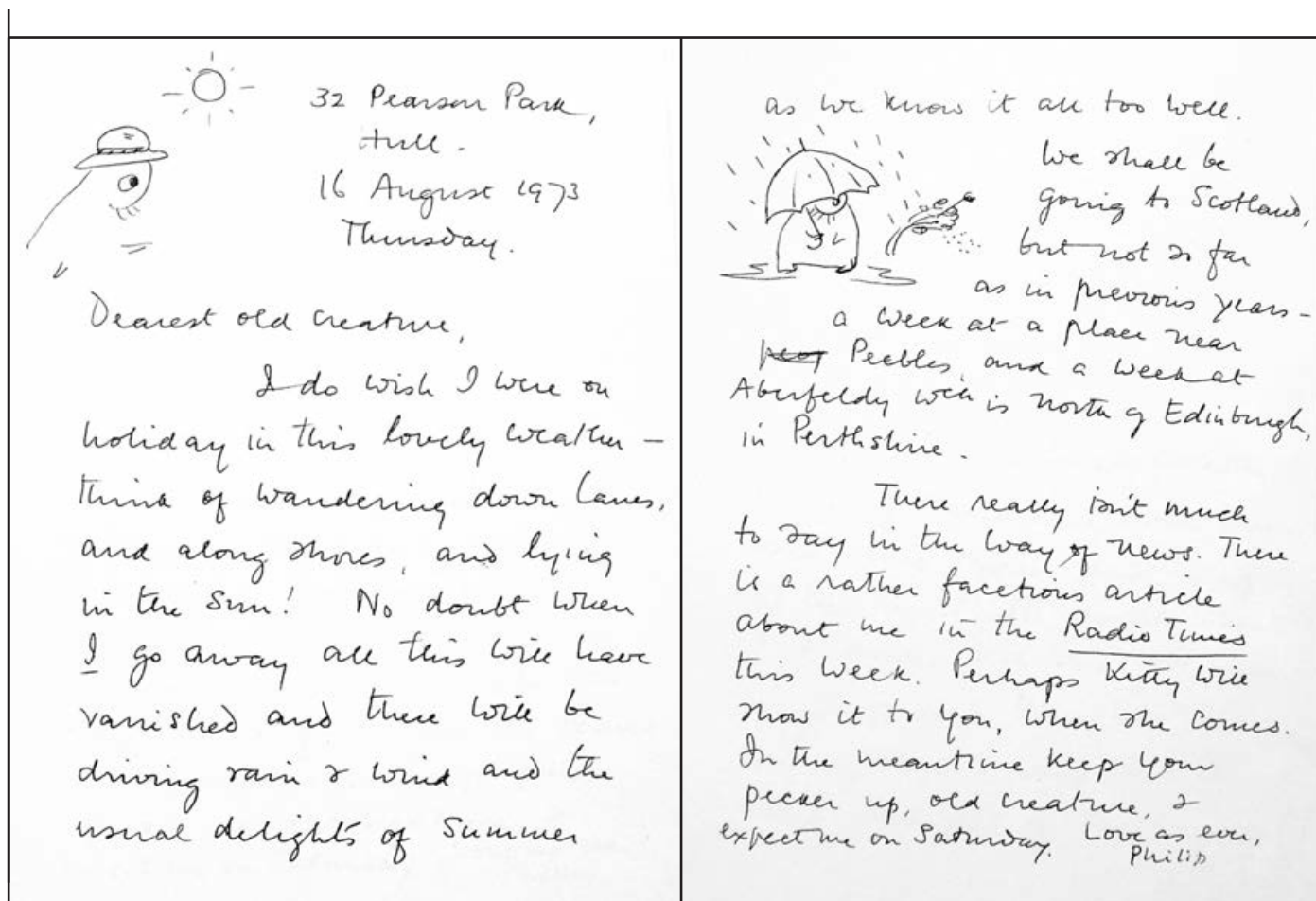
Later Larkin wrote in alarm at news of the Coventry Blitz: 'I was tremendously relieved to know that you were safe... While you have had the bombings, fires, rescue parties and all the rest of the grim trappings of air raids, we up here merely had the unpleasant rumours, the horrific newspaper, and the lack of news.'

Larkin's father died early in 1948, and perhaps the most remarkable sequence among this vast assemblage is that written over the next three decades to 'Mop', his exasperating, timid mother, whom he loved so dearly. Year after year he wrote, once a week, or even more frequently, to his 'dear old creature', telling her to keep warm, hoping she enjoyed his sister Kitty's cake, sharing gossip, gently correcting her habit of misplacing apostrophes.

And as those who know Larkin's manuscripts will anticipate, the letters are liberally scattered with Larkin's delightful and immediately recognisable little sketches and caricatures. Graham Chesters of the Larkin Society has a long but pleasurable task ahead of him to catalogue this hoard.

**Unpublished letters © 2008 The Estate of Philip Larkin.**

*We are grateful to The Society of Authors on behalf of the Larkin Estate for permission to publish these extracts, and to Judy Burg and the staff of the Brynmor Jones Library for their assistance.*



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# *Larkin Revisited*

*Terry Kelly interviews Archie Burnett  
who is currently editing Larkin's Complete Poems*

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Born in Scotland in 1950, Archie Burnett studied at the University of Edinburgh and later completed a DPhil at Oxford University in 1977, with a thesis on Milton's language. There followed spells as Junior Research Fellow at St John's College, Oxford, 1974-78, then as a lecturer and eventually Professor of English at Oxford Brookes University, 1979-2000.

Currently Co-director of the Editorial Institute and Professor of English at Boston University, USA, Archie Burnett's publications include *The Poems of A.E. Housman* (1997) and the two-volume *Letters of A.E. Housman* (2007). He is currently editing *The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin* for Faber and Faber.

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*Where and when did you first encounter Larkin's work? And was it an instant or gradual 'conversion' to the poetry?*

I encountered Larkin's poetry as an undergraduate, and liked it immediately; but I investigated it much more substantially as a graduate student at Oxford (and liked it even more). My enthusiasm was fired up after being present when (to everyone's surprise) the poet came along to St John's in November 1974 to give a reading of some of his poems. I also met him, albeit briefly and somewhat casually, when he attended a college dinner, and I found him gentle, unassuming, and candid.

*In literary or academic circles, you're perhaps best known as the editor of Housman's letters and poetry. Larkin admired Housman's poetry (once referring to its 'unique and plangent enchantment of generations of readers' in a review of a critical biography of the poet by Norman Page in The Observer in January 1984). Do you see affinities in the work of Housman and Larkin?*

Very much so. John Bayley wrote on such affinities in *Essays in Criticism*, 41. 2 (April 1991), 147-59. In my edition I document specific echoes of Housman in

Larkin's poetry (most of them previously unremarked). *When and why were you approached by Faber to work on The Complete Poems of Philip Larkin?*

I was originally approached in 2002, but was committed to the completion of the edition of Housman's letters at the time; and in any case, Faber issued a contract only at the end of 2007. I was approached, I think, because of the work I had done on Housman's poems.

*The 2003 edition of Larkin's Collected Poems caused some consternation among his admirers, given that so many cherished poems from the original 1988 edition were jettisoned in favour of restoring the admittedly beautiful structures of the original collections. Will the Complete Larkin replace or supplement either or both of those collected volumes, or will it represent a stand-alone one or two-volume variorum edition?*

I believe strongly in respecting the contents of the volumes as published and then supplementing them with other poems published during the poet's lifetime and with poems not published during the poet's lifetime. My edition aims to print everything, even uncompleted poems from the workbooks.

*In a private email last summer, you told me that you have started preliminary work on the Larkin manuscripts, following visits to the archives at the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull, the British Library and the Bodleian Library, Oxford. I understand you also have a sabbatical semester set aside this autumn to work on the book. What stage are you currently at with the Complete Larkin and when is the earliest we might see the book published?*

I don't believe discussing such matters is profitable to anyone. I have begun work on the text and commentary; I do have a sabbatical lined up, but for a little later; and I have no idea when the work will be finished.

*Could you say anything briefly about the scope of the commentary that will accompany the poems?*

*The published Larkin oeuvre has expanded considerably since his death, with two Collected Poems, the Selected Letters, the Early Poems and Juvenilia and the prose collection Trouble at Willow Gables. Ian Hamilton, reviewing the original Collected Poems in The London Review of Books (October 13, 1988), wrote: 'It's as if this most bachelor of poets had suddenly acquired a slightly messy family life.' In Larkinesque terms, does all this adding mean increase, or is there a danger of blurring his overall achievement?*

I am confident that the poems Larkin published will stand in all their eminence, no matter what, and that there is no danger of blurring his achievement. The increase in the corpus of his verse beyond what he published is something quite distinct (as he himself must have seen it, rejecting so much for publication). A scholarly edition like mine is designed to preserve a complete and accurate record for study.

*Will the Complete Larkin incorporate posthumously published poems and how will you approach the question of unpublished poems of which there are no final or definitive versions?*

I shall do what I did in the case of Housman's poems that were incomplete: provide a reading version, and record all variants and signs of incompleteness in an apparatus. The copy-text and apparatus thus go together.

*Although there's a critical consensus that Larkin's output began a rapid decline from the 1970s, Larkin still attempted such ambitious but unfinished works as 'Letters to my Mind,' as late as 1979. Based on your initial research in the Larkin archives, can you say anything specific about this poem, or if there are many variants of 'Aubade,' arguably his last major poem, published in late 1977? In general terms, do the manuscripts confirm what Anthony Thwaite called 'the dryness of his last years.'?*

I have not yet investigated the composition process in respect of particular late poems, but the barrenness of his late years is much lamented, as it was by the poet himself. I would therefore be surprised to find that he was in fact prolific in these years.

*A.T. Tolley's Larkin At Work (University of Hull Press, 1997) is the only book exploring the poet's compositional methods. Has Tolley's work or that of any other Larkin scholar proved particularly useful?*

Tolley's work is useful, but I always work independently with the primary sources.

*Larkin's poetry has sadly been overshadowed by his life in recent years, following the controversy sparked firstly by the Selected Letters and then Andrew Motion's A Writer's Life. In a previous email, you expressed the following*

*wish for The Complete Poems: 'I hope that the edition will bring people back to the poems who were diverted towards the seamier side of the biography.' Could you expand on this and do you feel Larkin's literary or public 'rehabilitation' will be a long-term one?*

I very much hope that the poems will once more take up their position at the centre of readers' attention, as they have already done for Clive James, Alan Bennett, and Martin Amis, for instance. And some rehabilitation of the biography has taken place with Maeve Brennan's book (2002) and with the kind of testimony in the letter from Brian Cox published in the *TLS*, 30 August 2002, p.15. The poems are the thing, however.

*Archie Burnett, many thanks for your time and patience.*

### Wartime picnic

(Sonnets for my mother I)

The gap in the hedge is thorny, but we're through,  
sitting together in long rough grass, a bright  
blessing of sunshine everywhere, and you  
lying back, laughing, making it all feel right,  
forgetting the bombs, your flags across the map,  
our house half-full of strangers, and our man  
somewhere unknown in Europe. You unwrap  
tomatoes, bread – doing the best you can  
with home-grown, queued-for, scarce; for me it's  
bliss

unbounded, the perfect day. Later I see  
how brave you were that morning, and why this  
is almost my only unstained memory  
of you, of us. How soon it came about  
that you stopped laughing, and the sun went out.

Alison Mace

### 'You collapsed your glasses'

You collapsed your glasses  
into your breast pocket.  
Perhaps wrapped a scarf  
against un-dated snow.  
Then, walking through the winter dusk and  
Finding a house of low stained windows  
Stood at the back of evensong,  
Listening for the weight of prayer.

Jane Moth

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# *Serious Earth*

## *Philip Larkin's American Tape*

### *(The Watershed recording)*

*James Orwin*

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On 12 February 2006, *The Telegraph* carried a short piece by Chris Hastings entitled 'Unknown Larkin tapes found in attic'. The article mistakenly suggested that John Weeks, the sound engineer who made the recordings, was one of Larkin's closest friends. The article also stated: 'It had been thought that [Larkin] ... never recorded any of the works from [*The North Ship*].' A few lines further into the article, a clue was given about where this assumption originated, when Hastings quoted Andrew Motion: 'I didn't realise he had made any recordings from *The North Ship*...' Later that evening, a message was posted on the Larkin Society website Forum pointing out that, as listed in Bloomfield, Larkin had recorded two poems (XXX and XIII) from *The North Ship* for inclusion on an LP record – *On Record* – issued in 1974 by the Yorkshire Arts Association.

Two days later, 14 February, *The Guardian* reported the same story. Martin Wainwright's piece was a tad more theatrically titled: 'From a garage studio in Yorkshire, Larkin speaks again'. Wainwright bumped up the number of poems included on the tape from the 25 reported by *The Telegraph*, to 'nearly 30 poems'. Wainwright a little more accurately reported the relationship between poet and recording engineer: '...a colleague, John Weeks... managed the sound department at Hull University when the poet was the chief librarian there. The two occasionally had a drink in the staff bar...'

However, Wainwright confused the publishing history of *The North Ship* with that of *XX Poems* when he quoted the Larkin Society's Wendy Cole: 'But the most interesting are three poems from *The North Ship*, which he published himself in 1945 – only about 100 copies altogether.' Of course, Larkin did not self-publish *The North Ship*; it was published in 1945 by The Fortune Press. Larkin self-published *XX Poems*, in an edition of approximately 100, in 1951.

Throughout the day (14 February), BSKYB News repeatedly broadcast a 16-minute video report of the story, in which was shown interviews with Molly Weeks (widow of John Weeks) and her son Peter. Peter Weeks, filmed speaking in his father's old studio, explained that

his mother had told the family 'the story of Larkin coming here to make the tapes', which inspired them to see if they could locate the recordings.

Also interviewed in the BSKYB report were the Larkin Society's James Booth and Eddie Dawes. Booth was quick to point out that Larkin had often publicly deprecated *The North Ship*, but suggested – nevertheless – that Larkin's inclusion in this recording of three poems from *The North Ship* might indicate that the Weeks recording was 'Larkin's own anthology... of what he means to be his distilled *oeuvre*'.

Meanwhile, Andrew Motion and Peter Weeks were being interviewed on BBC Radio 4. By this time, Motion had realised that earlier recordings of Larkin reading poems from *The North Ship* did exist. In the interview Motion commented that Poem XXX (from *The North Ship*) 'is in fact one that [Larkin] did record before, in a rather obscure and little known way. It was recorded for the Yorkshire Arts and put out on a record in 1974'. Peter Weeks admitted – to Motion's relief – that he was not, as reported in the *Yorkshire Post*, considering offering the recording for sale on eBay, the internet auction site.

Two years later, on 24 February 2008 (28 years to the day after the recordings were made), *The Sunday Times* reported that BBC Radio 4's 'The Archive Hour' would [at last!] broadcast the readings. 'The Larkin Tapes' was to be broadcast on 1 March 2008. Presented by poet Paul Farley, an admirer of Larkin's work, the programme would include interviews with, among others, Andrew Motion, John Banville, James Booth and Jean Hartley.

In the years since it came to light, the recording of Larkin made by John Weeks has generated a great deal of interest, and much has been speculated, assumed, inferred, supposed, misquoted, misremembered and reported about it. However, Philip Larkin – unsurprisingly – kept his own record of the affair: the 'Watershed Foundation' file, now held in the Larkin Archive at the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull (DPL2/3/91). What follows is a summary of some of the information contained in that file.

Though the Weeks recording was made in early 1980, its troubled history begins on 13 February 1979, when Stephen Waldhorn, Director of Library Relations at the Poets' Audio Center, Washington, wrote to Larkin suggesting that the Center produce a Watershed Tape of Larkin reading his own poetry. Waldhorn, as he mentioned in his letter to Larkin, was the son of Arthur Waldhorn (an American professor who had spent a year at Hull University, and with whom Larkin had become friendly).

Larkin's letter of response, dated 13 March, states that he has no objections 'in principle' to this suggestion, but points out that he has in fact made records of all his collections apart from *The North Ship*; and though these are copyright, he would, he thought, be able to record fresh readings.

Having made contact with and solicited a favourable response from Larkin, Waldhorn then handed over the responsibility for negotiations to Anne Becker, Associate Director of the Watershed Foundation. Becker's first letter to Larkin, dated 22 March, included a copy of the Foundation's 'usual agreement'. In the letter, Becker also offers to reimburse Larkin for the cost of making the tape, which Larkin had indicated might be recorded using the facilities at the University of Hull.

It was 17 July before Larkin sent Becker his considered response to the Watershed Foundation's form of agreement, having requested guidance and advice from the Society of Authors. The agreement consisted of 21 clauses: in his letter Larkin challenges 12 of those. To give one example, Larkin's response to clause 1 was: 'Suggest delete everything after "non-exclusive". Either the agreement is non-exclusive or it isn't.' After some compromise on each side, agreement was seemingly reached (between Larkin and Becker) by 28 August.

Apart from the formal agreement, it is worth mentioning two further constraints that Larkin had to consider. Becker had stated that any tape produced by Larkin should cover the range of his work; and it would also have to conform to the Foundation's standard length tapes – 45 minutes (22 1/2 minutes each side) or 60 minutes (30 minutes each side). Both constraints would necessarily have some impact on the choice and ordering of poems to be included. In addition, Becker made a point of requesting that Larkin send the Watershed Foundation the first generation master of the recording, in order to maximize the quality of duplication.

Larkin's handwritten list of poems under consideration for inclusion comprises 32 poems. His notes show candidate poems from each collection, with timings for each poem. Curiously, between each poem's title and its duration in minutes and seconds, are a series of numbers. These

appear to be unrelated to the number of stanzas, lines or syllables in the poem concerned, or to the duration of the poem. And while there seems to be a clue as to what these numbers mean at the top of the page, where Larkin has written 'ow-ow-ow', I have been unable to decipher the markings (See Fig. 1).

ow-ow-ow

Poem Title	Numbers	Duration
<i>North Ship</i>		
Within the dream	2-29	1-22
I put my mouth	30-10	1-26
The bottle is drunk	36-24	1-48
S. Harcourt Street	39-25	1-53
<i>Less Deceived</i>		
Participate often	28-22-31-12	2-41
Wedding-song	17-17-24	1-17
Comedy	23-19	1-40
Next, please	26-26-45	1-29
toasts	54-28	2-24
Chance Song	35-25-25-25-25-22	1-08
Toasts	47-47-25	1-28
Skin	22-14	1-21
At Grass	19-19-51	1-26
<i>Whitsun Weddings</i>		
the saloon	10-10-56	1-46
Whitsun in the rain	2-54	1-52

Fig. 1 Some of Larkin's timings for candidate poems.

In ordering the poems, Larkin reduced the number to 29, excluding from the initial 32 'The bottle is drunk out by one', 'Solar' and 'Nothing To Be Said'. The poems listed as candidate poems but not included in the final recording are: poem XVI ('The bottle is drunk out by one') from *The North Ship*, 'Wedding-Wind' and 'Skin' from *The Less Deceived*, 'Nothing To Be Said' from *The Whitsun Weddings* and 'Solar' and 'Annus Mirabilis' from *High Windows*.

The readings were recorded on 24 February 1980, but it is not clear if Larkin recorded 32, 29 or 26 poems. What is clear is that the first-generation copy contains 26 poems: 14 poems chosen and ordered for side 1 of the proposed Watershed Tape, and 12 poems for side 2. A full list of the poems selected for each side of the tape is shown in Table 1.

In a letter to Becker dated 3 March 1980, Larkin points out that 'side 1 of the tape is 28 seconds longer than you stipulated', but suggests that if that length is unacceptable 'A Study of Reading Habits' should be deleted. The letter's next paragraph contains a list of the publishers of the four collections with 'a statement of the address to which your request for permissions should be addressed'.

Two days later Larkin wrote another letter to Becker, informing her that he had posted the tape 'air mail', at a cost of £11.04, and that he 'should like to add this to the expenses of making the tape.'

In the same letter, Larkin states: 'The recording was made on 24 February 1980 in my room in the Brynmor Jones Library, the University of Hull, England.' Between these two pieces of information, in a separate paragraph, Larkin casually mentions 'American publishers who presumably should be placated.'

Side 1	Side 2
Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album	The Whitsun Weddings
MCMXIV	Cut Grass
Toads	Vers de Société
The Explosion	'I put my mouth'
A Study of Reading Habits	At Grass
Home is so Sad	Mr Bleaney
'Within the dream you said'	Coming
Afternoons	Toads Revisited
The Old Fools	The Building
For Sidney Bechet	Days
'So through that unripe day you bore your head'	Wires
Next, Please	An Arundel Tomb
The Trees	
Church Going	

**Table 1. The final selection and ordering of poems for Larkin's American tape.**

The mention of 'publishers' and 'permissions' at this stage came as a surprise to Becker, who had somehow convinced herself, based on her understanding of previous correspondence, that no publishers would need to be consulted. However, in her reply, Becker says she will send all Larkin's publishers 'standard waiver forms'. She also takes the opportunity to broach the issue of a title for Larkin's recording, she herself suggesting two: *Serious Earth and Bone Riddles*.

Larkin's response includes an apology to Becker ('if you feel I have misled you') over the position regarding publishers' claims to his work, but he makes the pertinent point that 'Publishers' agreements relating to collections of poems always in my experience include a clause claiming subsidiary rights including recordings, and I assumed this would be known to you.' At the same time, Larkin expresses his approval of one of Becker's suggested titles: 'I think *Serious Earth* is an excellent title and should be happy for you to use it.'

On March 31, Becker wrote letters (the same letter) to both

Faber & Faber and George Hartley of the Marvell Press, enclosing a 'publisher's release form'. By the beginning of May, there had been no reply from either, so (on 12 May) Becker again wrote to Hartley saying – at Larkin's suggestion – that if she did not hear from him within 45 days, she would assume his agreement to the inclusion of the poems in the tape. Hartley replied to Becker on 24 May, but at that time clearly had not received her letter of 12 May. By 1 June, Hartley had received the letter. He responded speedily and made his position perfectly clear: he would not be willing to give permission for the Watershed Foundation to use 'in any way' any of the poems from *The Less Deceived*; and stated his determination to take any action necessary to prevent infringement of copyright.

The wranglings and discussions were to continue for another nine months, mainly at Larkin's insistence as he persuaded Becker, Hartley and Faber & Faber on several occasions to resume negotiations with each other. However, by 20 January 1981, Larkin could foresee what the final outcome was likely to be, and, in a letter to Faber & Faber, asked if there was any likelihood of them being able to 'unload the tape on some other American company that would pay fees you consider reasonable'. This particular letter is perhaps more interesting for what Larkin relates in its penultimate sentence: 'The tape was made with America in mind (that is, no four-letter words or peculiarly English subjects)' – further (self-imposed) constraints that may have forced the exclusion of some poems that otherwise would have been included in an ultimate personal selection by Larkin ('Dockery and Son', 'To The Sea', 'Show Saturday' 'High Windows', 'Going, Going' etc.).

On 9 April 1981, Becker, angered and annoyed, finally gave up on the project and offered to return Larkin's tape – once she had received \$10 from him for postage. Larkin's response was characteristically courteous: sorry that she had had so much trouble – and for nothing. However, he writes precisely what Becker does not want to hear: 'It is my fault for being so co-operative in the first place'. He asked Becker if she would mind keeping the tape a little longer: 'I have always thought of it as my American tape, and should really like it to remain in America somehow'. He went on to say he would 'write to one or two American libraries' about the tape. But Becker was having none of this, replying that as far as she was concerned it was she who had been co-operative and not Larkin, who she thought had 'not been cooperative at all.' She concluded by saying that if she did not receive the sum of \$13.25 in American currency within 30 days, she would consider he no longer wanted the tape and would erase it 'to protect your copyright.'

It would be easy after reading the negotiations between Becker, Hartley and Faber & Faber to lay the blame for the collapse of negotiations with Hartley. His manner was combative and stubborn and, at times, founded on a

misunderstanding of which rights to Larkin's work he actually controlled. However, in one of their last letters to Larkin on the matter, Faber & Faber admit that their revised terms 'do not differ a great deal from those suggested by George Hartley'. It seems clear that Hartley could see the wider consequences of agreeing to the Foundation's terms, including (of course), but not by any means limited to, the competition his own recordings of Larkin (should he ever decide to make them available in the US) would face from a recorded Selected Larkin. As Larkin pointed out to Faber & Faber (20 January 1981): 'Hartley takes the view that...no other [American] record company is likely to consider publishing another reading if Watershed are still selling theirs.'

Now resigned to the fact that the original master tape would inevitably be erased, Larkin was keen to recoup his expenses for the production of the tape and recover postage costs incurred in sending the tape to the Watershed Foundation. John Weeks' original invoice for his services in recording Larkin shows that the readings were recorded over 3 hours @ £5.00 per hour; mastering, editing and materials brought the total cost to Larkin up to £31.75. (A contemporary technical note provided by Weeks states that the recording was made on a 'half track Revox A77' reel-to-reel tape recorder (Figure. 2), a high-quality, but also very portable machine, weighing approximately 33 pounds, that can be carried comfortably with one hand, using its foldaway carrying handle.)



**Figure 2. ReVox A77 reel-to-reel tape recorder.**

By 28 April 1981, Larkin had written to Stratis Haviaras, Curator at Harvard University's Poetry Room, offering him the tape for £50.00 plus postage. In his letter, Larkin informs Haviaras that 'in February 1980 I made a studio recording... of my poems', clearly contradicting the statement he made in his letter of 5 March 1980 to Anne Becker: 'The recording was made on 24 February 1980 in my room in the Brynmor Jones Library...' However, writing to Haviaras on 22 June, Larkin backtracks somewhat, saying simply that the recording 'was made

under studio conditions', removing little of the confusion about where the recordings were made.

Understandably, Haviaras is delighted at the prospect of acquiring for the Harvard Poetry Room the tape of Larkin reading his poetry, and he gladly accepts Larkin's terms. Acknowledging receipt of the tape, Haviaras – giving further credence to George Hartley's resistance to the project – comments that he is disappointed with the letter Larkin had received from the Watershed Foundation (which Larkin had included with the tape he sent to Haviaras) and that he has had similar experiences with them.

On 24 August 1981, Larkin wrote to his bibliographer, BC Bloomfield :

For your bibliographic notes: a tape of poems I made for Watershed Foundation has ultimately been sold to Harvard Poetry Library. Watershed are supposed to have destroyed the master. Harvard has the ONLY first-generation copy; I have the ONLY copy from that. It's a long, sad story w<sub>ch</sub> I'll tell you some time.

He continues: 'I've also recorded endless poems for the South Bank Show – for this 1982 programme. God help me.' (Brynmor Jones Library DX/213)

After two years of protracted and often bitter negotiations, Larkin is at last content, the tape having found a home in the Harvard Poetry Room; his American tape is now residing in America. He concludes his correspondence with Haviaras by saying: 'I hope one day I shall be commercially recorded in America.'

For almost 27 years, visitors to the Harvard Poetry Room have had the opportunity and the privilege – though they may not have known it – to listen to a set of Larkin readings (Hollis Catalog No. 002348249) unavailable to the rest of the world. Larkin's *American* tape has been exclusively available to a very small section of Americans. The discovery of the Weeks recordings will change that situation.

In fact, the 1 March broadcast of 'The Larkin Tapes' on BBC Radio 4 was a disappointment. The programme seemed poorly researched and carelessly written (repeating at least three times that the poems from *The North Ship* that feature on the tape had never been recorded before, and giving Larkin's age at the time the tapes were recorded as 58: he would not have been 58 until 9 August 1980); it gave the wrong date for when the tapes were discovered (I was invited to a meeting that took place in London in November 2004 to discuss the tapes); aired only a third of the poems on the tape in their entirety; and focused more on Larkin's supposed dislike of recording his own voice (despite the number of

recordings he made, both in studios and at home for his own pleasure), and his preference not to give public readings of his work, than on the readings of the poems the tapes contained, which were purported to be the subject of the programme. It was easy at times to forget that the programme was called 'The Larkin Tapes'.

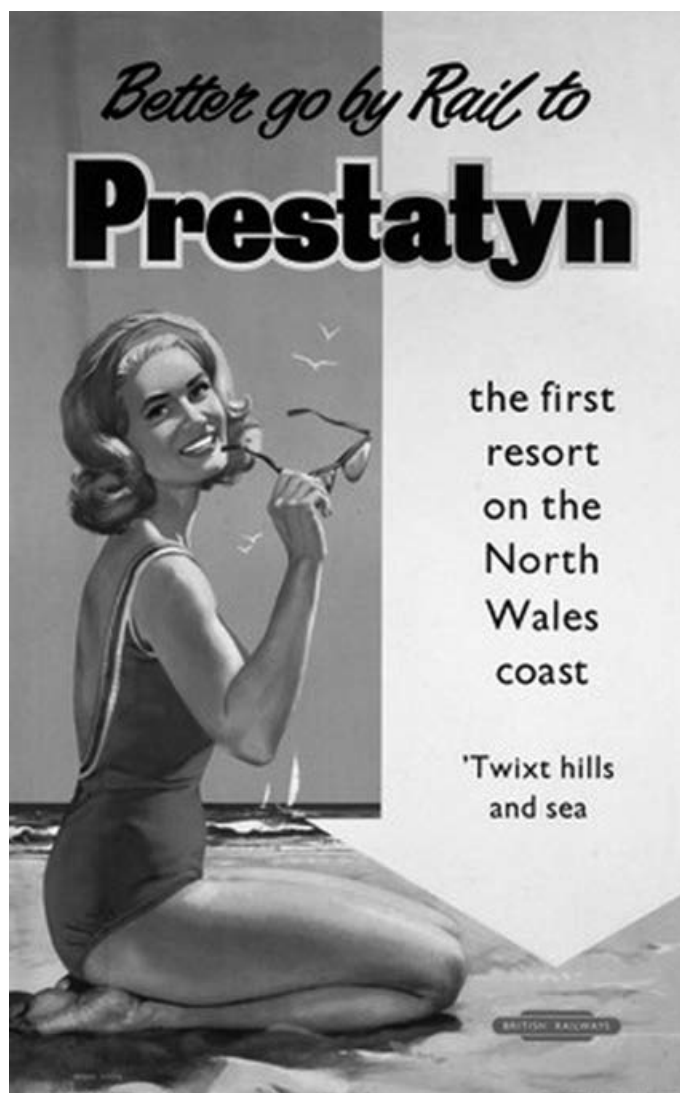
However, the quality of both the readings and the recordings was evident for all to hear. Moreover, the information reported by *The Sunday Times* of 24 February, that Faber & Faber intend at some point to release the recordings on CD, was restated at the end of the programme. I await that event with great anticipation. I wonder if Faber & Faber will take into consideration Larkin's own view that '... *Serious Earth* is an excellent title...' when they name the recording.

Since the discovery of the Larkin tapes by Peter Weeks in his father's archives, Larkin's own copy of the recording has been found (somewhat predictably) in the Larkin archive at Hull, along with the substantial file Larkin kept on the affair, which made this article possible. Clearly the recordings are a testament to the technical skills of the sound engineer who recorded the tapes, John Weeks. But the discovery of the recordings leaves us with many questions still unanswered:

- ❖ How many poems did Larkin *actually* record on 24 February 1980, before editing took place? 26? 29? 32? More?
- ❖ Did Larkin record any introductions to those poems that, because of time constraints, did not make the final edit? And, if so, do poems or introductions still exist somewhere among the hundreds of tapes in John Weeks' archive yet to be listened to?
- ❖ Where was the recording made on 24 February 2008? In John Weeks' studio at Hornsea, East Yorkshire? Or in Larkin's room at the Brynmor Jones Library (which might best account for Larkin's apparent lack of discomfort with the recording process), and then edited at the Hornsea studio (perhaps the following weekend)?
- ❖ Who do the tapes (which are the standby master recording) discovered in John Weeks' archive actually belong to? The Weeks family? Or the Larkin Estate, since Larkin settled John Weeks' invoice for 'Dubbing of a standby master...' on 12 March 1980?
- ❖ Is it wise to make *any* assumptions about Larkin's selection of poems that made the final edit, bearing in mind the constraints imposed on him by the Watershed Foundation and those self-imposed constraints designed to make the tape *American*?

❖ Given Faber & Faber's cavalier attitude to the bibliographic integrity of Larkin's *Collected Poems*, their own previously criticised and questionable editorial integrity, and Andrew Motion's comment about the list of poems featured on the tapes: 'To have what looks like a contents page is extremely valuable' – will they have the audacity to use Larkin's selection of poems for this recording as the basis and justification for a textual (or otherwise) Larkin *Selected Poems*? And would Larkin's literary executors support such an idea?

**Stop Press:** Amazon is now taking advance orders for 'The Sunday Sessions', an audiobook of these readings to be published by Faber and Faber later this year.



*British Railways (LMR) poster. Artwork by Derek Lucas. Available as an art print (framed or unframed) from [www.vintage.artehouse.com](http://www.vintage.artehouse.com) Larkin's 'Sunny Prestatyn' seems to have no actual poster as its subject. This is the closest Don Lee's researches have come.*



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# *Larkin in the Dock*

*John Gilroy*

*Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence: A Case of Wrongful Conviction,*  
*John Osborne (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 260 pp.*

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*Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence* is so much more than exceptional literary criticism. It is effectively a survey of twentieth century social history, a political statement and an act of faith in a writer who, its author believes, has been seriously misrepresented, even by many of the critics who profess their admiration for his work. The book, in addition to being an ideal starting point from which to commence Larkin studies at the beginning of the new century, would do well to act as a warning to those who find themselves on university courses concerned with methodology. As John Osborne himself remarks, the manner he adopts is applicable to 'innumerable other authors'. His fair mindedness here, within a necessarily combative approach (a spirit of 'contestation', as he describes it), highlights the bigotry with which entrenched critical ideologies can skew facts to their own agendas, often victimising authors which in Philip Larkin's case, it is argued, has amounted to nothing short of a scandal.

A substantial portion of twentieth century criticism of Larkin has become the territory of what the book calls late millennial Bowdlers, critics who have conditioned a whole generation into making assumptions, often gleaned from biographical readings, and which are unable to withstand the simplest and most obvious of critical investigations. Such uncritical judgments tend to perpetuate themselves creating stereotypes of their subjects, and this imposition of ways of reading, as Osborne argues, has established a hegemony over studies of Larkin, even though his predicament is not a singular instance of misrepresentation. Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Dylan Thomas, Brendan Behan, Allen Ginsberg and the Beats, to name but a few, have all been judged and placed according to what is 'known' about their life experiences and personalities. But whereas Hannah and Thomas Bowdler in their stitchings up of a nineteenth century Shakespeare were motivated by a sense of moral rectitude and an 'improving' purpose, no such high-mindedness in Osborne's view has driven some of the literary industry surrounding Philip Larkin. The so-called evidence employed against him has created his now popular reputation in some quarters as a fascist, racist, sexist, provincial and socially marginalised figure, excluding

him from politically correct university programmes and many school syllabuses and disqualifying him from any association with the fashionable 'isms' of critical practice.

It is a fact that assumptions often based on cumulative 'fictions' surrounding their highly disputable reputations have damagingly affected great writers of the past. One thinks of Shelley as one example whose eloquence, the moralist F. R. Leavis thought, handed poetry over to a sensibility 'which has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help'. A poet, of course, whom Wordsworth, himself a meticulous reworker of his own poetry, called one of the greatest craftsmen of all 'in workmanship of style'. Even a cursory glance at Shelley's skilled combination of the terza rima and Shakespearean sonnet form in each stanza of 'Ode to the West Wind' might have caused Leavis, one would have imagined, to reconsider his opinion. One thinks, too, of how Byron's adoption of masks and his careful construction of narrative voices have frequently been set aside by readings which displace the work onto the now well nigh exhausted biography of a man 'mad, bad and dangerous to know', and often against Byron's own disclaimers that he is to be taken as the 'hero' of some of his own poems.

In his book Osborne time and again persuasively demonstrates how reductive and spurious biographical approaches to Larkin have usurped his texts, imposing limitations on the poems and effectively shutting them off from a multiplicity of interpretative possibilities. 'An April Sunday' and 'Reference Back', for example, have been more or less established as Larkin's 'Dad' and 'Mum' poems respectively, when they are demonstrably non gender specific. In fact, critics who accuse Larkin of sexism and racism can sometimes themselves be the more guilty as their assessments must first supply gender and race to poems often determinedly unspecific about such issues. Among the many examples discussed here one might single out 'For Sidney Bechet' as a poem in which, using his admirable knowledge of jazz history, Osborne points out how the author's own voice is not privileged and the poem deliberately constructed to be uncertain of reference. The pitfalls of reading biographically

can lead to hilarious results as in the title poem of the collection, *High Windows*, where a simple attention to chronology would dictate that Larkin must have made a mature decision about his religious beliefs at the age of four!

Larkin's own well-documented statements on the representational objectivity of his poetry, its lucidity, accessibility and resistance to critical scrutiny, together with his own adoption of a disarmingly self-effacing ordinariness, have led squadrons of critics up the garden path. Larkin was in fact a master at setting traps, deploying ambushes and laying false trails. In some respects one of his great predecessors here is Swift, a centrally embedded and, as Osborne remarks, frequently overlooked presence in 'Letter to a Friend about Girls'. Far from situating himself at the centre of his poems Larkin adopts a detachment such as that implicit in his comments on 'An Arundel Tomb': 'I was delighted when a friend asked me if I knew a poem ending "What will survive of us is love". It suggests the poem was making its way in the world without me. I like them to do that'. Here one is reminded of Auden in 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats':

Now he is scattered among a hundred cities  
And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,  
To find his happiness in another kind of wood  
And be punished under a foreign code of conscience.  
The words of a dead man  
Are modified in the guts of the living.

No writer, and Osborne would surely concur, has been more 'punished' or unfairly 'modified' than Larkin. The Auden generation in fact represents the period of Larkin's young manhood. Politically, from the thirties to the fifties, this was a time in which writers no less than others, as he says, were being subjected to an ideological pressure to take sides -- Spanish Republicanism or Fascism, the free world or Communism, for example. Osborne presents Larkin as a writer alive to the role of oppositions (e.g. 'Coming'/'Going'; 'Here'/'The Importance of Elsewhere'; 'The Dance'/'Sad Steps') but as one whose search is for 'subject positions outside [a] constrictive binary'. Where critics such as Germaine Greer and Alan Bennett have sometimes claimed to hear a bullying voice in the poems, Larkin's true register is unassertive. He is a writer who invites antiphonal responses, silently summoning, for example, Arnold's wife's reply to Arnold ('Self's the Man') or Dockery's point of view ('Dockery and Son'); a writer who resists 'either/or' and with great subtlety gives expression to the 'excluded middle'. In such vein Osborne systematically, convincingly and with *brio* reveals how, as well as pre-figuring many other critical positions besides, Larkin was a poststructuralist before Poststructuralism, a post-modernist before Postmodernism, a post-colonialist

before Post-Colonialism and essentially, although it is well known that he set his face against it, a modernist before Modernism. In the case of the latter, Larkin is shown to be constantly attracted to what he rejected. His critique of Charlie Parker, along with Pound and Picasso does not, Osborne argues, reflect his true stance in relation to Modernism, the movement he is known for stating to have been responsible for separating art from its audience. Jazz music, as Larkin knew, was Modernist from its outset, influencing a whole spectrum of creative figures in the worlds of literature, as well as of classical music and musical arrangement. Not least of Modernism's literary giants was T. S. Eliot whose 'The Waste Land', Kingsley Amis is on record as having said, represented on its publication a kind of club from which he felt he'd been excluded, with notes referring him to books he'd never read by writers he'd never heard of and so on. Like Eliot, Larkin is himself densely allusive. His extraordinary palimpsestic range and citationality is 'only explicable in relation to Modernist aesthetics' where echoes of Eliot alone, writes Osborne, can be detected in almost forty of Larkin's poems. Larkin himself, however, avoids a hierarchy of values in his allusive techniques. Shakespeare, Gray, Milton, Virgil are not, for example, to be privileged over railway holiday advertisements ('Sunny Prestatyn') or slogans for Polo mints ('The Life with a Hole in it'). His is a democratising poetry presenting life and the human condition truthfully and without discrimination.

However, Larkin's detractors have been quick to point out his tendency to dubious racist sentiments in critical judgments made on the basis of recorded remarks in letters or in private conversations. Osborne is very sensible in refusing to sweep these issues under the carpet while at the same time pointing out that, in his uncreative and somewhat miserable latter years, Larkin's opinions were reflected in many aspects of contemporary establishment culture, just as his inhabiting the pornographic demi-monde is now cast into a shadow by material freely available and seemingly acceptable on television, in cinema and on the internet. In point of fact, Osborne's book goes to some lengths to demonstrate Larkin's compassion extending to the animal world as well as to the human and that, far from being a poet of exclusively Anglo-Saxon attitudes, whatever they might be, he gives expression to racial and gender equality in a poetry which is multicultural and inclusive. Thus within 'The Explosion', often taken to be representative of an Anglocentricism in Larkin, we find a veritable Chinese box sequence of multi-layered, multi-national source materials which he has ingeniously assembled to sabotage the conventional pieties sometimes detected by critics of this poem. Elsewhere, what has endlessly been described as Larkin's negativism is simply dispelled by Osborne's explanation of how the nuance and range of negative qualifiers in the poetry can indicate a

positivism, just as the 'nothing' or 'non-being' at the heart of Taoism, the system of religion which interested Larkin (and another example of his multicultural awareness), amounts in his hands to optimism and creativity.

There is nothing in this entire book that could be construed as special pleading. Its case is underpinned with incontrovertible evidence and a wealth of detailed analysis. It is illuminating, for example, to be told about the political significance of the Comet aircraft in 'Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses', or the importance of a word such as 'stock' in 'Dockery and Son', or to have pointed out how the transference from heavy industry to consumer culture can be traced systematically through Larkin's work. In this sense he occupies a place within poetry diverging fundamentally from that English tradition to which he has often been misguidedly assigned. Osborne remarks that the same poems in fact which led some critics in the fifties to assume he was rootedly Irish were later enlisted as proof that he was rootedly English (*Private Eye's* 'Just Fancy That' comes to mind). As he points out, Edward Thomas, the poet of that iconic vision of England seen from a railway carriage, 'Adlestrop', remains halted at the station, still and listening, whereas Larkin's poems with their goings, comings, arrivals, departures are essentially concerned with deracination. In a brilliant and witty reading of 'I Remember, I Remember', Osborne describes how Larkin's rerouted rail journey taking him *through*

Coventry where he has his 'roots', happens to be a journey through the very city which, as home of the Rootes Group motor car manufacturing industry, gave birth to England's social mobility. Even Thom Gunn in his paean to the bikers of 'On the Move', a classic of the 'new poetry', presents a static observer whereas it is Larkin, conversely, who can here truly be called a 'movement' poet in the real sense of the word.

This is an important study. Its erudition and its purposive approach presenting a Larkin freed from the prejudice of ideology and highlighting past mistakes gives to his poetry the kind of enhanced stature its sophistication demands. Yet, although serious in intention, this is by no means a po-faced monograph. Not the least of its strengths is the humour with which Osborne displays his sheer bewilderment at the misreadings and wrong-headedness which have bedevilled, with often farcical consequences, some of the criticism of supporters and detractors alike. It cannot, he writes, be 'a tolerable critical incompetence that plays into the hands of the zealots who show-trialed Larkin's works for moral misdemeanours of which they are entirely innocent'. If there is now, as seems to be the case from the concluding chapter, a lively resurgence of interest in Larkin as witnessed in his recent influence on a range of different art forms, John Osborne's book will consolidate it. He is to be congratulated for it and for playing a timely Horatio's part to the wounded name of Philip Larkin.

### ***Passions and Prejudices: Philip Larkin's Jazz***

***'I asked for water and they gave me gasoline'*  
Professor James Connelly  
Tranby Room, University of Hull  
5 December 2007**

The Society's Jazz Consultant, John White, presided at this most enjoyable evening of combined passionate polemic and spontaneous musical performance.

Illustrating his points with impromptus on the clarinet and guitar, James Connelly made a most persuasive case. Despite the fascination of Larkin's writings on jazz, and despite the reliable pungency and accuracy of many of his judgements, Larkin, he felt, mischaracterised the jazz tradition, and so prevented himself from appreciating developments from the advent of Bop onwards. Psychologically this misunderstanding was rooted in Larkin's need to maintain American jazz, and blues, from



*Photograph © Suzanne Uniacke*

the 1920s as his personal escape back into the world of his youth. Musicologically, Professor Connelly contended, Larkin misconceived the nature of jazz as a tradition of composition, improvisation and performance, while philosophically he confused 'tradition' with the idea of the 'traditional' and produced an over-narrow definition of the very word 'jazz'.

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## *Thoughts Afterwards*

*Jane Thomas: 'Larkin's Hardy', 17 January 2008,  
The Tranby Room, Staff House, University of Hull*

*Margaret Young*

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*Jane Thomas*  
*Photograph © James Orwin*

In my memory Hull evenings are preferably grey, rain washed and lit by street lamps. I like Hull that way. A wet January evening has not only been a fitting backdrop for a return to my hometown for a talk on Larkin's choice of Hardy's poetry but strangely reminiscent of the last time I visited the University for a talk on Hardy.

On that occasion the subject was 'The Lyrical Poetry of Thomas Hardy'. The speaker had been Dr C Day-Lewis. He was introduced by Philip Larkin, whose choices for the *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* were yet to be made. Publication would be five years later and this was Tuesday 19 November 1968. My love of both Hardy's and Larkin's poetry was just beginning at that time. The small pink entrance ticket has been tucked into

my six-shilling *Selected Shorter Poems of Thomas Hardy* ever since; the book 'mended, when a tidy fit had seized' me! The ticket and its evocations have, amongst my treasures, a rightful place with Larkin's 'Love songs in Age' and, speaking from the pages of my 1973 birthday present of *Twentieth-Century English Verse*, Hardy's 'Old Furniture' and 'The Sunshade'.

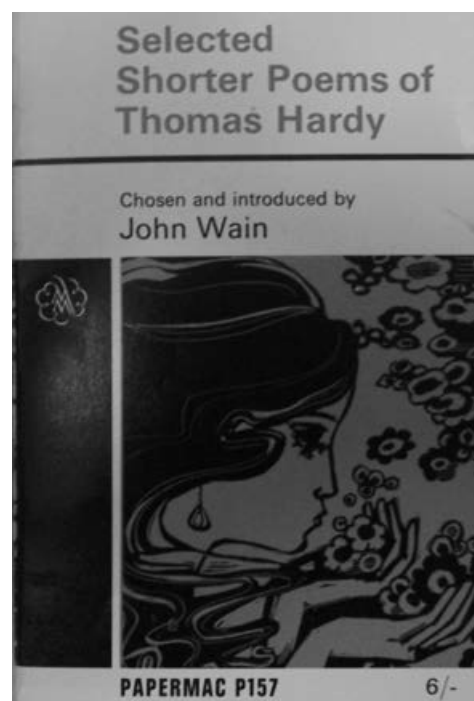
The ticket only just revives a visual memory of that evening in 1968. I am therefore indebted to Jean Hartley for telling me that Larkin held a dinner afterwards at which she was present and at which she was placed next to Dr Day-Lewis. My recollection of Larkin's presence at the lecture was beginning to wear thin and she has reassured me that he was indeed part of my memory!



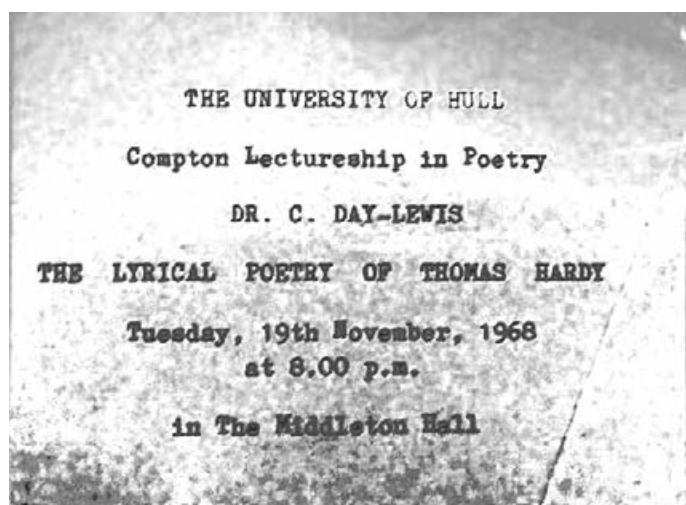
*Ivor and Jean Maw; Margaret and Edward Young  
Photograph © James Booth*

I have even less visual recollection of Dr. Day-Lewis but what has remained with me through forty years is his reading of 'Afterwards'. I recall that the room became utterly still and we were held spellbound as he read. In memory the poem lasted so much longer than its five stanzas could possibly have done. Even now I feel the hard lump deep inside and the tears which, refusing to hold back, slipped embarrassingly down my face that night. It was not only Hardy's contemplation of his mortality but also its reader which caused me sorrow. He seemed to me old and the words unbearably poignant. For me was 'the unfailing sense of being young'. He must have been just 64, four years older than I am now and four years away from his untimely death.

That night Larkin, others and I, from our different perspectives, saw Hardy's hedgehog travel 'furtively over the lawn' and perhaps not only for me was it no longer Hardy but Dr Day-Lewis who 'noticed such things'.



Though 'Afterwards' was not included in the choices Larkin made for the *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse* that Jane Thomas explored with us that night, I do not doubt its resonance for him. As for me, 40 years on, Larkin's 'we should be careful / Of each other, we should be kind / While there is still time' has a resonance that a 20 year old 'pink ticket' holder could not have fully appreciated in 1968.



What a pleasure it has been to come to the University of Hull again and share in a love of poetry. I am very appreciative of a most stimulating evening and the warmth of welcome. For obvious reasons I shall not be leaving it

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## Notes on Contributors

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**James Booth** has taught at the University of Hull since 1968, and is now Head of the English Department. His publications include *Philip Larkin: Writer* and *New Larkins for Old: Critical Essays*. He edited Larkin's *Trouble at Willow Gables and Other Fictions* (Faber, 2002) and helped Maeve Brennan with her memoir *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (Manchester UP, 2002). His latest book, *Philip Larkin: The Poet's Plight* (Palgrave) was published in 2005.

**John Gilroy** was Senior Lecturer in the English Department at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, 1974-2005. He has published on Wordsworth and Hopkins and has contributed to various literary publications. He has lectured widely at home and abroad for organisations such as the Netherlands-England Society and the English-Speaking Union and is currently a course director for the University of Cambridge Institute of Continuing Education's residential and international programmes.

**Terry Kelly** works as a journalist in South Tyneside. He has previously contributed a review of Larkin's *Collected Poems* (2003) to *About Larkin* 15, a review of *Early Poems and Juvenilia* (2005) to *About Larkin* 19, and an interview with Larkin biographer Richard Bradford and a review of his *First Boredom Then Fear – The Life of Philip Larkin* (2005) to *About Larkin* 20. Another passion is Bob Dylan and he is a regular contributor to the UK fanzine *The Bridge* ([www.two-riders.co.uk](http://www.two-riders.co.uk))

**Alison Mace** used to be a teacher of English, an occupation which absorbed much of her creativity until she gave it up. Since then her poetic output has increased, and in 2006 she completed a Writing MA at Sheffield Hallam University, submitting a final poetry collection. She has published in *About Larkin* before, in 1999, and gave a paper at the 2007 Conference, 'Larkin's Elsewheres'. She has an earlier MA from the University of York, with a dissertation on 'The Good Counsellor in Shakespeare'.

**Betty Mackereth** was Philip Larkin's secretary from 1957 until his death in 1985. Her role in the poet's life has been well documented in Andrew Motion's *A Writer's Life*, and elsewhere.

**Jane Moth** was introduced to Larkin's work at the age of 14 with 'This Be the Verse'. She is a lifelong admirer of the poet and his work. She started her working life in Manchester's Central Library but is now a civil servant and an active member of the Church of England.

**James Orwin** was born in 1957 in Rosyth, Scotland, but has lived in Hull since 1961, where he works as a self-employed painter and decorator. He writes songs and poetry. An anonymous contributor to the Larkin Society website once described him as a 'mediocre poet of the self-publishing variety' which he thinks is fair, if incomplete.

**Susannah Tarbush** has a BPhil from Oxford University in Modern Middle Eastern Studies and works as a freelance journalist, editor and consultant specialising in the Arab world. She is a consulting editor of the London-based magazine of modern Arab literature *Banipal*, two of whose regular contributors have Larkin connections: Iraqi journalist and critic Fadhil Sultan has translated and published Larkin poems in Arabic, and Egyptian author and journalist Youssef Rakha won a Philip Larkin prize for essays on Bataille and Aelfric in 1998 while reading English and Philosophy at Hull University.

**Margaret Young**, born in Hull in 1948, spent nearly 30 years teaching in Guildford, Surrey, before retiring in 2006 (half way home) to South Lincolnshire. Two life-long passions have been art and literature. The former began with trips to the 'Ferens' tacked on like 'coffee in Lyons' to family shopping expeditions in the 1950s, especially if it were raining. The latter has engendered her private pantheon of 'greats' where Larkin has resided for 40 years.

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# The Philip Larkin Society

## *Publications and Merchandise*

**For fuller information visit our new improved website:**  
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We welcome contributions to the journal from Society members. Copy should be sent by email attachment to [j.booth@hull.ac.uk](mailto:j.booth@hull.ac.uk) or in hard copy to The Editors, *About Larkin*, 8 Alpha Terrace, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5PT.

The copy deadline for *About Larkin* 6 is 31 August 2008.

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A.T. Tolley

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Professor Tolley analyses transcriptions from Larkin's poetic workbooks, giving insight into the drafting of such poems as 'Church Going', 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Dockery and Son'. In several cases, the complete drafting process is reproduced.

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Jean Hartley

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Andrew McKeown and Charles Holdefer (eds.)

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## Forthcoming Events

- From Willow Gables to 'Aubade':  
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(7 October 2007) Don Lee
- 'New Brooms'  
Philip Larkin  
intr. Betty Mackereth
- Larkin Re-covered by a New Generation.  
The annual sixth-form Larkin Study Day in Hull  
(13 March 2008)
- 'Dear Pop and Mop': The Larkin Family Letters  
arrive in Hull James Booth
- Larkin Revisited: An Interview with Archie Burnett  
who is editing Larkin's *Complete Poems* Terry Kelly
- Poems:* Wartime picnic  
'You collapsed your glasses' Alison Mace  
Jane Moth
- Serious Earth: Philip Larkin's American Tape  
(The Watershed Recording) James Orwin
- British Railways (LMR) Poster:  
'Better go by Rail to Prestatyn'
- Larkin in the Dock: Review of *Larkin, Ideology  
and Critical Violence: A Case of Wrongful  
Conviction* by John Osborne John Gilroy
- Passions and Prejudices: Philip Larkin's Jazz:  
James Connelly (5 December 2007)
- Thoughts Afterwards: Jane Thomas, 'Larkin's  
Hardy' (17 January 2008) Margaret Young

## Notes on Contributors

## Publications and Merchandise

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