



# About Larkin

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**Address for all Society correspondence**

**The Philip Larkin Society**  
c/o Andrew Eastwood  
Southwood  
Southgate  
Hornsea  
HU18 1RE  
Email [andrew@theeastwoodbox.com](mailto:andrew@theeastwoodbox.com)

# Editorial

It is with deep sadness that we record the death of Ivor Maw who, with his wife Jean, had long been a stalwart of the Society. Ivor, together with Philip Pullen, began research in the Larkin family letters in the History Centre. He gave invaluable help to James Booth in the final stages of his biography. We feature an obituary by Phil Pullen and a piece which Ivor wrote, shortly before he died, about a visit to the high-windowed flat in Pearson Park. We also record the death of Matthew Evans, Chairman of Faber & Faber and one of our Vice-Presidents. His distinguished career has been celebrated in numerous obituaries, including this in the *Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/07/lord-evans-of-temple-guiting-obituary>

There has been another change on the Committee. Chris Cagney is stepping down as Merchandising Officer. We wish him the best of luck in his new post at Reading University. Lyn Lockwood and Rachael Galletly, recent newcomers to the Committee, have generously agreed to take over this role.

Photography is a recurrent theme in this issue. We publish Mark Haworth-Booth's fascinating AGM lecture in which he gave insights into Larkin's skill in the more technical aspects of photography. In the course of his piece Mark cites references in the family letters currently being edited by James Booth and due to be published by Faber & Faber as *Letters Home*, probably early in 2018. Other articles on photography in this issue are Philip Pullen's piece on a remarkable holiday 'snap' by Larkin and a second review, by James Booth, of Richard Bradford's book of Larkin photographs, *The Importance of Elsewhere*. This complements the review by the late Terry Kelly in *About Larkin* 40.

R. H. Winnick follows up his article in the last issue on overlooked allusions in Larkin's *Complete Poems* with one on allusions in the *Letters to Monica*. Timothy Vaughan offers his own perspective on the famous occasion in 1974 when Larkin gave a reading at St John's College Oxford, giving an entertaining glimpse of Larkin's bumptious friend John Wain. James Underwood reviews *Philip Larkin's Poetics: Theory and Practice of an English Post-war Poet* by Hungarian critic István D. Rácz, a book which demonstrates that Larkin had more theoretical awareness than he is usually credited with.

We also include in this issue poems by John Tatum, Andrew Thomas, Monica Cheale and John Mowat, on a wide range of subjects and in very different styles.

John White and Teresa O'Brien give an account of 'Larkin' About', a highly entertaining programme of readings compiled by Sue Wilson, given at Steyning Festival in June. The readers, Sunny Ormonde and John Telfer, are well known for their roles in *The Archers* (as Lilian Bellamy and the Rev. Alan Franks). Recent Society events have included James Booth's talk on 'Schoolgirls, Seaside, Churches and Death' at a joint meeting of the Larkin and Betjeman Societies in St. James the Less, Pimlico on 21 September. James also addressed the Eton College Literary Society on 28 September.

Preparations continue for the inauguration of the Poets' Corner memorial on 2 December (see page 4). Places have been allocated, and it has been possible to accommodate almost all those Society members who wish to attend.

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

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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.

## Poets' Corner: Westminster Abbey, 2 December 2016

Members of the Committee have met the Westminster Abbey authorities twice and have corresponded with them about the details of the installation, the ceremony and the formal invitations. The programme has now to be printed and the speeches written.



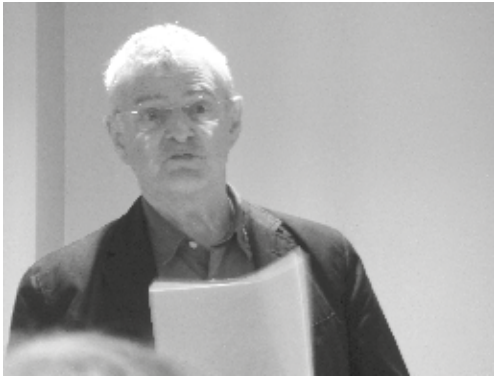
The Abbey has allocated a fixed number of places at the ceremony. Ideally, the Society would have liked to invite all members, but unfortunately this has not been possible. Invitations have therefore been sent to those who knew Larkin personally or have been supporters of the Society and have given their time, expertise or money to the many ventures we have initiated.

It was also decided to include an application form with the previous issue of *About Larkin*, allowing ordinary members the chance to attend this historic event, on a first-come first-served basis. Fortunately, it was possible to accommodate almost all those who wished to do so.

**The guest list is now full.** Formal invitations will be sent to everyone very shortly, but **please ignore the RSVP date.** If you have a place but find you are unable to attend, please let us know so that it can be offered to someone else. If you think that you have a place and do not receive an invitation in the next few weeks, please get in touch with me.

Carole Collinson!

## AGM: The Lawns Centre, 4 June 2016



*Mark Haworth-Booth*



*The obligatory 'slight delay for technical reasons'*



*Anthony Thwaite and Joseph Bailey*



*Graham Chesters and Eddie Dawes*

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# *Philip Larkin as Photographer*

*Mark Haworth-Booth*

*AGM Distinguished Guest Lecture, Lawns Centre, Cottingham, 4 June 2016*

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Philip Larkin is a hero of mine. I was very glad to be asked to contribute to the handsome book *The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs* which came out last autumn. The publisher won me over immediately, when he invited me to write the foreword, because I am, he said, 'both an expert on photography and a poet'. Naturally, I agreed with alacrity! However, it was not just because I felt flattered. I really wanted to help make this first book of Larkin's photographs worthy of the poet. As it happened, when I read Richard Bradford's text, I realised that his focus was very much on the biographical content and context of the photographs and much less on the technical, purely photographic aspects. I realised that this was part of the book I could try to address. This meant coming up to Hull last June and spending a very intense few days at the History Centre, where Larkin's photographs – around 5,000 prints and negatives – and his surviving cameras are preserved.



My first photograph most of you will know well, I'm sure. A cropped version was used on the book's cover picture. It shows Philip Larkin posing for a self-portrait with the handsome Rolleiflex camera he bought in London in 1957. This was a professional quality camera which he used on a tripod, as you can see, with a cable release – which you can also see – to trigger the shutter: he used it to avoid camera shake because the exposure, taken indoors, actually in his bathroom mirror, would have been longer than usual. He would have used the Weston light meter he owned (also professional quality kit) to gauge the appropriate combination of aperture and exposure time. However, I wonder if there is anything in the photograph that we don't quite see? More about that in due course.

We surely care about Larkin's photographs, essentially, because we care about the poems and the man behind them. I'd like to thank James Booth very warmly for his wonderful biography of Philip Larkin, which is not only a joy to read but, I feel, rescued the poet from the negativity which threatened to engulf him posthumously, along with all his marvellous writings. I've actually done quite a lot of biographical writing myself, about the lives of visual artists, so I really appreciated the tact and decency as well as the flair James brought to his task.

I hope you'll kindly indulge me if I spend a few moments talking about my connections with Hull, and then how I first came to Larkin's poetry, before turning to our main subject – his photographs. It is always a pleasure to return to Hull. My father's side of the family came from here. They were merchants, associated by marriage with another merchant and shipbuilding family, the Blaydes. Among the family's claims to fame are that Benjamin Blaydes built a cargo ship named the 'Bethia', which was launched here in Hull in 1782. It was later sold to the Royal Navy and renamed the 'Bounty', which became synonymous – of course – with a notorious mutiny. More happily, another forebear, James Blaydes, married Anne Marvell in Charterhouse Chapel in 1633. She was a sister of Andrew Marvell, the celebrated poet and MP for Hull. My great grandfather began a family tradition of adding Marvell to the given names of daughters, so my wife and I kept the tradition alive when we named our daughters Emily (Henrietta Marvell) and Alice (Sylvia Marvell) in the 1980s. For many years the family lived at Hullbank Hall, now known as Haworth Hall – a handsome pile

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built in the 1750s – which still stands on the banks of the River Hull not far from here.



It is fun walking around the city and noting memories of Andrew Marvell on the Charterhouse, of the Blaydes at Blaides Staithe and Blaydes House, now the university's Maritime Historic Studies Centre, and Haworth at Haworth House.



My favourite Hull ancestor is Adrian Hardy Haworth, who was educated at the Grammar School and went on to publish important works on botany and the British lepidoptera in the early 19th century. He spent quite a few years living here in Cottingham and this is where he began the study of natural history – much in the style of Gilbert White of Selborne – for which he is still known and admired today. He published a 112-page poem on Cottingham and played a leading role in setting up a botanical garden in 1812 in the well-named Linnaeus Street. (It was moved to another site in 1877 and closed in 1889.) His beautifully written *British Lepidoptera* served as a standard work for many years and his books on succulents were reprinted in the 1960s. The genus *Haworthia* is named after him, so we quite often see the family name in garden centres. At the time of his death from cholera in 1833, Adrian Haworth's home and garden in Chelsea were almost a museum, containing 40,000 insect specimens, a herbarium of 20,000 items, 1,600 books on natural history and 500 plants in the 30 x 30 yard garden. His forte was the very close observation and description of specimens, especially plants. Oddly enough, as a curator I was particularly involved with the very close observation of photographs. For example, I wrote a 120-page book on one 19th century French landscape photograph – 'River scene, France' by Camille Silvy. I'd like to say I wrote it without hesitation, deviation or repetition but as it took me 20 years I think I comprehensively failed on hesitation.

Thank you for allowing me that detour into my family background in Hull. Please indulge me in another, shorter, detour concerning my route to Larkin.

I wonder how many people remember the first Larkin poem they read or that turned them on to his work? Quite a few, I should think. I certainly do. In 1967 Ted Hughes published a book called *Poetry in the Making*, aimed at helping young people enjoy and write poetry. For me it was magical. Among the exemplary poems Hughes chose is Larkin's 'Mr Bleaney'. That poem has always seemed to me outstanding in the use of telling details in conjuring up a life and an environment – the lonely bachelor, the bleak boarding house and the closed horizons. I suppose Mr Bleaney was an updated, contemporary version of T. S. Eliot's Mr Prufrock, whom I'd met in my schooldays and feared becoming.

Thus, I moved on to *The Whitsun Weddings* and then the earlier books and joined Larkin's growing legion of admirers. I was full of anticipation when his magnificent final volume, *High Windows*, appeared in 1974. Of course, that slim volume proved to contain some of the best loved and most quoted poems in the language. I was astonished and appalled when a nasty, hostile, negative review by one Robert Nye appeared in *The Times*. No doubt encouraged by the robust use of expletives in *High Windows*, I sent Nye a letter c/o *The Times*. My letter, which aimed at brutal concision, read as follows:

Dear Robert Nye

Re your Larkin review: [one syllable expletive] off

Yours, etc.

I sent a carbon copy to Larkin at the Brynmor Jones Library and received a gratifying reply, dated 17 June 1974. This was published, through the good offices of James, in *About Larkin* in April 2015. It read:

Dear Mr Haworth-Booth

Many thanks for your inspiriting letter. I count myself lucky that there has been only one Nye so far, but of course others may follow.

With all good wishes, Yours sincerely, P.A. Larkin

Since receiving that letter, I've always found the word 'inspiriting' highly inspiriting and often enjoyed using the sign-off 'With all good wishes'.

It was great coming up to Hull last June to study Larkin's photographs in the History Centre. I felt that I had the chance to try to repay something at least of the huge debt I owe to the poet. I must say, Simon Wilson, University Archivist, and his colleagues at the Centre, were terrifically helpful. I was granted exceptional access to both the prints and the negatives.



It is important to mention that Simon has ambitious plans to catalogue the photographs in detail and this will surely provide valuable information about Larkin's methods and achievement. So my findings are very much interim. I wanted to try to work out which camera Larkin used when, plus whether Larkin did his own film processing and/or printing. I was fortunate in having the helpful work on Larkin's photographs by other students of the subject at my disposal, most notably Denis Low and Rachel Foss (her excellent article 'Larkin and Photography' in *About Larkin* no. 20, Autumn 2005). I

was also able to draw on the unrivalled expertise on cameras of my old friend Dr Michael Pritchard, director-general of the Royal Photographic Society. Since writing the foreword to the book, I have been given new information on Larkin and photography found by James during his patient trawl through the vast cache of letters the poet wrote to his parents.

As Richard Bradford has shown, Larkin grew up with photography. His father Sydney was a keen family snapper.



Here is Sydney, using a Kodak Baby Brownie camera, photographed by Philip. Photographs with simple cameras like this, with their lenses of modest quality, tend to make everything look smaller and further away. Perhaps it was through looking at Sydney's snaps that Larkin came up with the phrase 'All's kodak-distant' in the early poem 'Whatever happened?'

One of Larkin's many Oxford photographs, taken in the early 1940s, shows a group of friends, for whom Larkin was the self-appointed photographer, at St John's College in summer 1942. They were acting out roles, with Kingsley Amis, crouched at the centre, playing a 'Japanese Soldier'. Larkin used a camera he was given by his father. It had a marvellous name: Houghton-Butcher Ensign Carbine no. 5 (made from 1920 to 1930). The one Larkin owned is preserved in the History Centre. It was a

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good quality camera for amateurs – a folding, bellows model which yielded negatives measuring 6 x 9 cms.



There is some fogging by light inadvertently hitting the negative, probably when the roll of exposed film was removed from the camera before being taken to a local chemist to be processed and printed – the method Larkin used for all his photography. He never learned processing or printing.

Here is a camera from the Ensign Carbine series, an image I grabbed from eBay.

Exposures ranged from one second to one hundredth of a second. Contact prints from these were usually enough for most amateurs, to be placed in their albums or given to friends and family. That word 'Carbine', by the way, links with the idea of the 'snapshot', the shooting



term first applied to photography – as a prediction rather than a reality – by Sir John Herschel in 1860. Shooting metaphors suggest an aggressive role that doesn't apply to most photographers, including Larkin. More on that later.

In a letter home from Loughborough, dated 29 September 1946, Larkin shows his fascination with photography: 'Thank you ... for the photographs. I'm sorry they were not all I hoped for. The portrait of Ruth would have been passable if only I'd had a tripod or at least a steady base for my camera'. He goes on to lament the post-war shortage of film: 'Why aren't there any films to be had?' In another letter from this period, Larkin tells his parents that he has found a source for film in Belgium.

Throughout his life, Larkin took many hundreds of self-portraits. Here is one of the earliest. It isn't perfect technically, but it is fascinating as a self-image of a young writer in what looks like a college room in an attic or, in other words, a garret. Is it also a picture of psychological isolation? If so, it is one of many instances

in which Larkin's poems and photographs interweave and overlap.



Larkin's next camera, a sleek, modern-looking 'Purma Special', bought in October 1947 for the reckless sum of nearly £7 (a week's salary), was a step-up.



The one Larkin owned is also in the History Centre. It was a British camera, introduced in 1937, and its body was made of that exciting new material, Bakelite. It had an ingenious mechanism whereby, depending which way the camera was held, the operator could choose from



three different shutter speeds: Slow (1/25th of a second), Medium (1/150th) and Fast (1/450th). The negatives were 3.1 cms square. Larkin wrote to his painter friend Jim Sutton that, although the camera's forte was 'swift scenes in bright sun', 'I like poor light the best'. In this liking for 'poor light', by the way, Larkin wasn't being a miserabilist – most photographers prefer diffused light, which reduces high contrast and the tonal problems this can cause. He wrote in detail to his parents:

This week has been a crazy week, for I have bought a camera... It *won't* take time exposures, which is a great drawback. It takes 16 exposures on a roll, but I suppose the developing is more expensive as they have to be enlarged. Until I see what kind of results it produces, I can't make up my mind about it, but something tells me that I shall part with it when I have learned all I can learn off it. (26 October 1947)

It is interesting that Larkin saw it as a camera to learn from and then advance to a better one. I think he was probably prompted to buy the Purma by moving to Leicester. It gave him a good way of exploring his new habitat.



This photograph shows that fascinating phenomenon of a crowd assembling on foot, bike, etc., to watch a football match. Larkin not only carefully titled the print on the back, 'crowd going to football match: Waterloo St.', but also added technical information: the negative was Kodak Verichrome, the exposure 1/150th of a second, the time 2.15, the month October. Quite a few of Larkin's photographs from this time are annotated in this way and I confess I could not decipher all of the information he recorded. The annotations show that Larkin had become a serious amateur photographer.

However, I think it was not until he arrived in Hull that Larkin really applied himself to the medium. James drew

my attention to a splendid letter from Larkin to his mother, dated 1 September 1957, announcing the purchase in London of a much better camera:

My dear old Creature, [...] On Friday I went to the big camera shop that supplies the Duke of Edinburgh, & bought a new camera: at least, it isn't new itself, but it is a German camera, a Rolleiflex, & they are regarded as being very good indeed and above £120 each when new. I won't tell you how much I paid! But I insured it on the spot.

The 'big camera shop' to which Larkin refers, I feel rather pleased with myself for knowing, was Wallace Heaton in New Bond Street, still a classy place when I knew it in the 1970s. It was, for example, where David Hockney bought his photo albums each year – very large handsome albums they are too. In 1972 it was bought by Dixons.

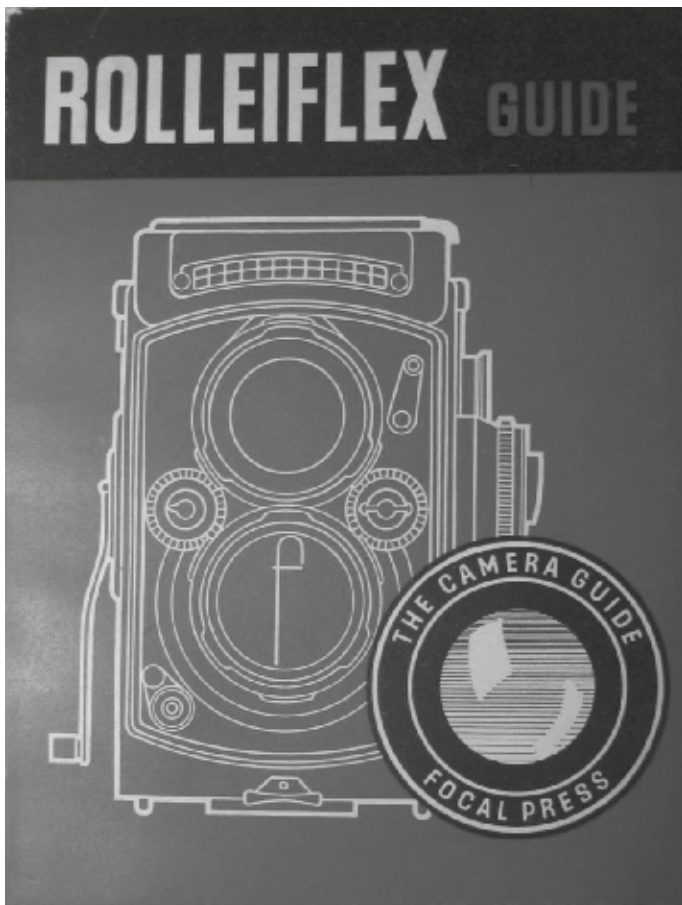
The Rolleiflex was a German camera introduced in the late 1920s. It was a twin lens reflex camera, meaning that it had one lens for viewing and focusing and a second one for actually taking the picture. The operator looked down on a ground glass which folded out at the top of the camera. The ground glass, or focusing screen, showed the subject laterally reversed, but was very clear and excellent for sharp focusing. The Rolleiflex, or Rollei for short, became very popular with reportage photographers – for example, Brassai recording Paris by night in the 1930s, Bill Brandt doing the same in London, as well as his classic book *The English at Home* (1936), and Lee Miller recording the events she witnessed as a photojournalist in World War II. It also became the preferred choice for many serious amateurs.

One reason photographers liked the camera was that it took a relatively large negative (6 x 6 cms), especially compared with the smaller, if beautifully engineered, 35mm Leica. The Rollei negative gave ample scope for cropping. Larkin showed why this was important in his self-portrait with the new camera with which we began. The uncropped photograph shows the shelf and its clutter in the bathroom where Larkin took the picture – which he knew, when he made the exposure, that he could remove by judicious cropping. I've known this photo for quite a long time now but I confess that I noticed for the first time, only the other day, the shapes at the right – some toiletry bottle (repeated in the mirror) that merges with the grey of Larkin's cardiganed arm. I think Larkin knew that we would be focusing our attention on his face and his camera, not those vague shapes at the side. Of course, once you've properly seen them, you can't edit them out!

I think that Larkin had a further reason for acquiring the Rollei. So far as I could tell from looking at his negatives, his first batch were of Glasgow University Library: part of his rationale in buying this expensive camera was that he needed a good one to make photographs as part of the planning of the Brynmor Jones library.

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That Larkin was serious about learning how to use his fine new camera is clear from a letter to his mother dated 20 October 1957, asking that his Christmas present should be a book on the Rollei camera. One imagines that he obtained what he wanted.



The Rolleiflex guide was published in 1957 by Focal Press, the leading technical publishers in Britain, and internationally. One of the attractions of the camera, pointed out in the text, is the ground glass or focusing screen:

The ground glass is the oldest and perhaps most efficient means of photographic education. Unlike any other view-finder it presents a two-dimensional full-size counterfeit of the photograph as it will look later. The man [*sic*] who cannot be taught to 'see' photographically by the ground glass of a camera will never learn to do so.

I myself acquired a cheaper knock-off of the Rolleiflex, a Zeiss Ikonflex, in the 1970s and I can vouch for the truth of these remarks – it was a real pleasure to look at a subject and to focus manually using a ground glass. As the author of the Rollei manual also noted, 'Contact prints made of these negatives are just large enough to be called, in a way, pictures.' Thus Larkin, always careful with money, could usually avoid the extra expense of ordering enlargements. This model of the Rolleiflex had no built-in light meter so Larkin acquired a professional quality Weston light meter. The manual includes a couple of pages on how to use such a meter.

I think there may have been another reason why Larkin was keen on this particular camera. Perhaps we can trace his awareness of the Rollei back to his Oxford days. Larkin spent a memorable evening in November 1941 in the company of Dylan Thomas, who performed at the Oxford English Club. He wrote to his friend Jim Sutton about it, adding: 'If you see this week's *Lilliput* you will find a very good photo of Dylan T...!'

Larkin was referring to the portrait of 'Dylan Thomas at the Salisbury' by Bill Brandt (easily accessible through any search engine). It is one of Brandt's very best and was published in a feature on eight 'Young Poets of Democracy' in *Lilliput* magazine for December 1941. Very funny himself, Larkin hugely enjoyed Thomas's wit. I think we can see some of that humour in the portrait: Dylan Thomas had prepared for his sitting with one of Britain's best photographers by making sure that his patterned tie, shirt and jacket all clashed as vigorously as possible! As Larkin thought the magazine might be a good home for one of his short stories, we can guess that he saw it regularly – and its many Rolleiflex photos by Brandt. It is worth mentioning here that Larkin acquired for the Brynmor Jones Library a complete run of *Picture Post* magazine (1938–57), which also often featured Brandt and other excellent British photographers of the time. Such magazines were, of course, very important before the rise of television.

In this Larkin portrait his friend Bruce Montgomery is shown reading an illustrated magazine which was probably *Picture Post*. Such magazines were, of course, very important before the rise of television.



On the subject of cropping, this is the best example I came across in the Larkin archive. It is an image of Pearson Park. You can see that Larkin has indicated the part he wanted enlarged by drawing in blue biro on the upper left quadrant of the contact print. My hypothesis is that Larkin planned this crop as he took the photograph.



Thus, he was able to photograph the scene from some distance, and without pointing his camera directly and intrusively at the people relaxing under the trees. He knew he could bring the scene he wanted closer by enlargement.



The enlargement captures a wonderful spring or early summer scene with the trees in full leaf, dappling the sunlit grass and the people. There is actually a small discrepancy between the crop Larkin indicated and the enlargement made by the photo-finisher, probably at the local chemist in Hull he regularly used. If we look at the bottom right corner, Larkin's indication would have included a sizeable chunk of the fence running diagonally into the scene. I think the finisher used his discretion and reduced this dark area: it could, perhaps, have spoiled the enlargement if more of the fence had been included. Of course, the full-leaved trees in the Pearson Park scene bring to mind Larkin's marvellous spring poem, 'The

Trees'. I believe photography played a part in helping Larkin to focus on subject-matter for his poems, bringing him closer to the common life and to lives very different from his own. He aimed, as he wrote to Robert Conquest in 1956, for that 'fuller and more sensitive response to life as it appears from day to day'.

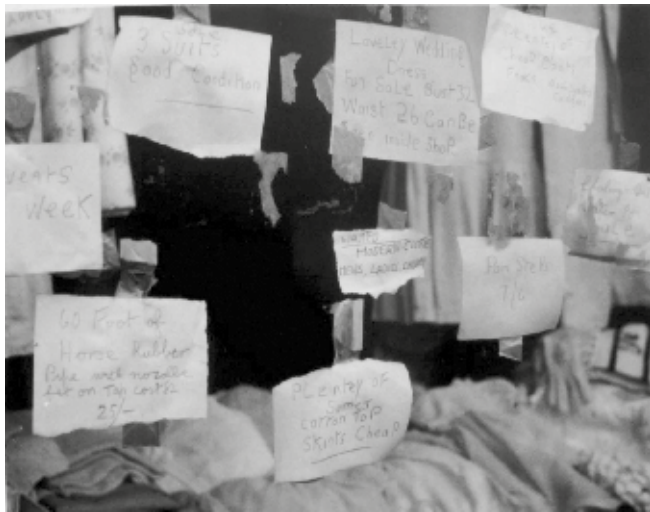


I think we see this in the group portrait Larkin took in Dublin, in which the people were probably distracted by a passing funeral cortège, allowing him to capture – unobtrusively – all these vivid faces. As I mentioned a moment ago, I photographed quite seriously in the early 1970s and I believe photographers do photograph people – strangers in street scenes, I mean – with a particular affectionate interest. Perhaps you might even call it a special sense of solidarity. I wonder if anyone here feels the same? I think it also applies to the lives implied by, for example, the signs of the many fishery trades we see in this image taken in Scarborough (incorrectly identified in *The Importance of Elsewhere* as taken in Hull).



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I think we find it even more poignantly in a photograph of a Hull shop window from 1956.



I find this photograph so touching, with its illiterate signs and bargain prices, that I would love to include it in a kind of blind-tasting of documentary photographs of the period in which experts on the subject would be asked to assess photographs without knowing who took them. I think it would hold its own very well. One label in the centre foreground reads, with shoddy, threadbare spelling: PLENTEY OF / SUMER / COTTON TOP / SKIRTS CHEAP. These photographs are replete with evidence of a bygone era, when the fishing industry was very different and before the arrival of plentiful cheap fashions.

Larkin once wrote of his aim as a poet as 'to construct a verbal device that would preserve an experience indefinitely by reproducing it in whoever read the poem'. As a librarian, Larkin dealt chiefly with printed books and printing has been eloquently described as 'an art preservative of all the arts'. As a photographer, Larkin managed the same act of preservation of family, friends, places, moments and the shared social landscape.

I think of the new book of Larkin's photographs as similar in kind to a volume by another poet who has, like Larkin, very large numbers of ardent admirers. *The Importance of Elsewhere* is equivalent, I believe, to *Exchanging Hats*, a selection of paintings by Elizabeth Bishop published by Carcanet in 1997. Elizabeth Bishop exhibited only two paintings in her lifetime. However, delightful paintings by Bishop appeared on the jackets of the handsome editions of her poetry, prose and letters published after her death in 1979. Her paintings have become part of Bishop's deeply attractive 'image'. It was said of Bishop by the art critic Meyer Schapiro that 'She writes with a painter's eye'. Could we say that Larkin wrote with a photographer's eye? Surely, both media depend for their best effects on convincing realism and telling detail. Bishop said of her paintings: 'They are Not Art – NOT AT ALL' but William Benton (editor of *Exchanging Hats*) answers: 'They are though. They are just not to be confused with a process whose order and

intensity penetrates the matrix of a life. Her paintings were done differently [from her poems]; her life entered them.'

## E X C H A N G I N G   H A T S



## E L I Z A B E T H   B I S H O P P A I N T I N G S

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND AFTERWORD BY WILLIAM BENTON

We can surely imagine Larkin insisting that his photographs are not art – but we should certainly not think of them as artless, and that phrase, 'life certainly entered them', certainly applies to Larkin's photographs. Just as Bishop took paintings as the starting point for some of her best-known poems, so Larkin used his chosen visual medium for the poem 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album'. Here Larkin acknowledges that, as a medium tied to reality, photography is often simultaneously 'Faithful and disappointing'. However, the glory of photography is that same realism, providing an image which (quotes) 'overwhelmingly persuades / That this is a real girl in a real place'. Better still, the photograph preserves a loved one as perfectly as a poem might. The snapshot of Winifred Arnott in a swimsuit in the album crystallises:

... a past that no one now can share,  
No matter whose your future; calm and dry,  
It holds you like a heaven, and you lie  
Unvariably lovely there,  
Smaller and clearer as the years go by.

Larkin is characteristically sane in identifying photographs as reflections of the living. By contrast, the French theorist Roland Barthes, in his book *Camera Lucida* (1980), wrote: 'In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: She is going to die: I shudder... over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.' That seems to me completely contrarian and wrong. I believe Larkin's poem is a much better guide to how most people experience photographs than the views of Barthes, which are so uncritically quoted by academic theorists. Larkin's poem

shows us, beautifully, how photographs capture moments in the flow of time. He packed so much into that line 'Smaller and clearer as the years go by.'



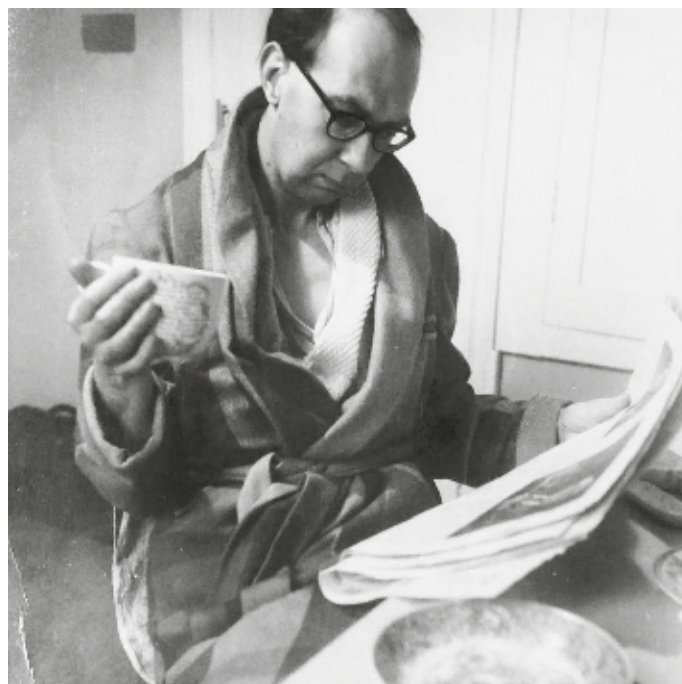
One of the clearest convergences of photographs and writing in Larkin occurred at the Bellingham Show, held every year near Monica Jones's cottage at Haydon Bridge in Northumberland. This photograph focuses on wrestlers at the Show. Larkin noted in a letter 'the odd ritualistic garb and stance of the wrestlers, and the rural crowd in a circle. What a lovely day it was! It will stay in my mind forever, it was lovely'. Well, as we know, Larkin also turned that day into his splendid poem 'Show Saturday':

The wrestling starts, late; a wide ring of people; then  
cars;  
Then trees; then pale sky. Two young men in acrobats'  
tights  
And embroidered trunks hug each other; rock over the  
grass,  
Stiff-legged, in a two-man scrum. One falls: they  
shake hands.  
Two more start, one grey-haired: he wins, though.  
They're not so much fights  
As long immobile strainings that end in unbalance  
With one on his back, unharmed, while the other  
stands  
Smoothing his hair.

The event was preserved in photographs, a letter and a poem. I find the last two lines almost cinematic: 'one on his back, unharmed, while the other stands / Smoothing his hair.'

Among the things that stand out in Larkin's photographs are the many self-portraits he made and their high quality. What other writer made photographs of himself in the act of poetic composition, as I think Larkin did here? One can imagine a fascinating exhibition entirely of Larkin self-portraits. Such an exhibition would have to

include this one, in which Larkin portrays himself at a leisurely breakfast, with a large tea cup and the Sunday paper: this is the man who (as James's biography reminds us) 'loved everything about the everyday.'

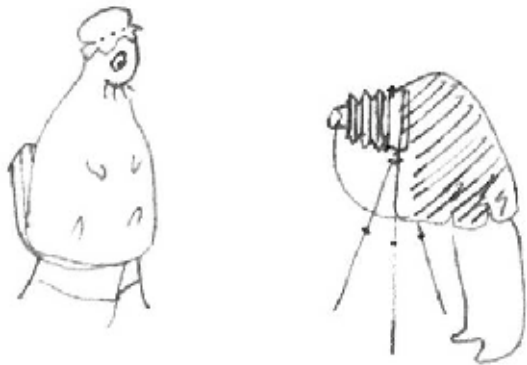


He photographed friends and family with the same care, most notably his mother. These were not casual portraits. I feel sure he prompted his mother to adopt the pose in this delightful portrait, the upward gaze signifying a mind on noble, higher things.



He writes to her on 21 January 1958 that 'one day' he must take another photograph of her, and inserts a cartoon of the sitting taking place – himself under an old-style photographer's dark cloth.

## About Larkin



Larkin often photographed Kingsley Amis and I find this one particularly interesting – I'm sorry it is not in the book.



Amis is shown apparently looking into a well-appointed drawing room – which is, of course, only a blown-up photograph of one in a bookshop. In the foreground is a book with a photographic portrait on the cover. Who is it? Théophile Gautier, the poet who helped to invent the idea of an artistic 'Bohemia' and was so much admired by Baudelaire, taken in Paris by Nadar in 1856. Was Larkin portraying his friend as positioned somehow between the lure of upscale social life and that of art for art's sake? He was himself, of course, keenly aware of the attraction of the outlaw world as opposed to the tamed, domesticated one. One can easily over-interpret these things, but it is certainly a fascinating and unusual portrait.

Now, as my talk moves towards its conclusion, I'd like to share some photographs and some words by Philip Larkin that embody the delightful wit we so much enjoy. Here is a photograph taken on a holiday with Monica Jones, looking down from a hotel window as two men set off purposefully, with all the comedy of people unconsciously in lock-step. It has the unmalicious pleasure of a silent movie gag.



Then there is this photograph, one of many of rural villages within cycling distance or easy motoring distance from Hull. Larkin's attention was caught by this lovely sign popping up like a concrete poem with its simple, joyful message LETTUCE.



A letter written to his mother shows Larkin commenting with characteristic self-deprecating wit on that all-important subject: how we look when other people take our photograph. On 10 February 1957, he refers to a sitting with the portrait photographers Elliot & Fry: 'I tried to look grave, kindly yet humorous withal, but shall no doubt emerge as the popeyed, small mouthed version of Heinrich Himmler we all know so well.' I've always been fond of this photograph in which Larkin stands ruefully and with exaggerated stolidity beside a bronze bust of the impossibly handsome T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia.



And here is a neat example of Larkin cropping a portrait taken by Monica Jones, perhaps at his request. It is the well-known photograph of Larkin seated beside a sign emblazoned ENGLAND, with the red cross of St George. It is a genial, light-hearted but also quite serious portrait.



I shall finish with a poem I wrote last year, after my visit to Hull. It is about getting up early in the morning, either to write poetry or read it or both. I've been doing this since I started writing poetry in a regular, committed, formal way in 1986 – thirty years ago now. Like so many others, I found that the example of Philip Larkin made learning to write verse seem worthwhile. The form is terza rima. It is – appropriately, I think – an aubade and is called 'Everyday':

Walking through the garden in the dark  
my forehead breaks a sticky spider thread.  
A crescent moon describes a white-cold arc  
between the pair of phone lines overhead.  
The last owl hoots, a lorry in the lane,  
the apple trees. I open up the shed,

take off boots wet from the overnight rain,  
snap on the light and lift the laptop lid  
as the first blackbird begins his refrain.

And now leaves and branches are silhouetted  
against the early morning sky. Blue-grey.  
Unscrew the thermos, pour the tea – a blessed  
moment – and now the grass is on its way  
to green and I recall that Philip Larkin  
'loved everything about the everyday'.

*We are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate, for permission to publish photographs and extracts from Larkin's letters to his mother.*  
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### Perspectives

Strangers walk by a river;  
lives contained a moment  
by a juddering window frame.

Someone throws a stick  
for a dog; a woman  
whirls in laughter.

They move beyond knowing  
as fields fan out and hedges  
run into woodland;

yet, with a flight of fancy,  
their presence looms  
into familiar names –

home to a brown tea pot,  
rows of geraniums;  
scent of death and love.

My distant ghost waves  
as the speeding train  
disturbs the afternoon.

*John Wyndham Tatum*

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# *My Friend Ivor Maw*

1936 – 2016

*Philip Pullen*

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*Ivor and Jean Maw*  
*Photograph © Philip Pullen*

Ivor Maw died on 16 July aged 80. Ivor and his wife Jean were long-standing members of the Philip Larkin Society and attended most of our events and conferences. Ivor also contributed articles to this journal and a Poem of the Month on the Society's website.

Born in 1936, at Pode Hole, near Spalding in Lincolnshire, Ivor came to Hull University eighteen years later (one year before Philip Larkin) and, like so many Hull graduates, remained in the city for the rest of his life. He became a school teacher and taught English at Eastmount Secondary Modern and then at Malet Lambert School, where he became head of sixth form.

I first met Ivor in 2012, just after I had begun research into the life of Eva Larkin. The more I delved into her letters in the Hull History Centre the more I began to wonder where the other half of the epistolary conversation might be found, namely Philip's letters to his mother. When I eventually enquired, the staff at the History Centre told me that these letters were yet to be catalogued and that one of their volunteers, Ivor Maw, was working his way through them, making a brief summary of the content of each letter, a valuable exercise for any future researcher. It wasn't long before we met up in the History Centre search room. We struck up an instant friendship and I quickly began to appreciate Ivor's kindness and conviviality. He was delighted to find someone with the same interest and enthusiasm for 'all things Larkin'. Soon we began working together in the task of pre-cataloguing the letters, as I typed out Ivor's written notes alongside my

own on Eva's correspondence. We were able to complete the task in 2014, covering altogether nearly 5000 individual items. It often felt as if we were completing a huge jigsaw, and it was both fun and exciting.

I think it would be true to say that working on the letters was a very satisfying part of Ivor's life. He would come in on a Thursday afternoon and I looked forward to him being there and to catching up on the Larkin 'gossip'. We would always have something to share: some new snippet of information which we were itching to reveal to each other; some element of content that had us laughing (many of Philip's letters are very amusing) or wishing to discover the other side to ('What did Philip mean when he told his mother...'; 'What is Eva referring to?'). Often we would find ourselves disturbing the hush of the search room with our hard-to-suppress laughter and eagerness to highlight the latest revelation. After we had completed the task, Ivor was keen to continue with some Larkin-related work in the archive but, sadly, his health took a turn for the worse, though we carried on our conversations at his home from time to time. We also made several visits together to Betty Mackereth in her nursing home in Hessle. Ivor would greet the nurse with a twinkle, asking her to tell Betty that 'her two young men had come to see her'.

No one who met Ivor could fail to be struck by his warmth and willingness to help others. I remember on one occasion a Canadian academic and her partner turning up at the History Centre. After introducing himself, Ivor arranged to drive them around Hull to show them various parts of the Larkin Trail.

It has been a great privilege to have known Ivor, if only for a few years. There are very few people that could cope with my unending desire for a deep and unrelenting conversation about Philip Larkin but Ivor was one of them. He was a kind and generous person with a wonderful sense of humour and a great zest for life. I will remember him for so many reasons but not least for one special experience we shared together in June 2015 and which forms the basis for Ivor's article in this journal. There can be few people who have gained access to Larkin's top floor flat at 32 Pearson Park. But thanks entirely to Ivor's charm and enterprise, we became two of them. I can still picture him, on that very sunny summer morning, silhouetted in front of 'the sun-comprehending glass' of those famous windows.

Our deepest sympathies go to Jean, Andrew and Louise.



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# 32 Pearson Park

*Ivor Maw*

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'Rather than words comes the thought of high windows'

Every Thursday I take my wife to Princes Avenue in Hull for her hair appointment. Just round the corner is Pearson Park and only a few yards into the park is number 32, Larkin's old address. I do a weekly walk round the park and glance up at the high windows of his flat, where so much of his writing was done. Consequently, I see the park in all its moods: stark and empty in winter, the lake frozen over, the trees bare; busy in summer with children in the play area, the café open, the trees a mass of green.

Pearson Park has changed very little in the past fifty years. Larkin would still recognise its features, the lake with people feeding the ducks, children enjoying the play area, lobelias in the flower beds. But one thing has changed – the park's inhabitants. To the east lies Beverley Road and it is here that many of Hull's asylum seekers reside and enjoy the park's open spaces, evidenced by empty Polish beer cans and the mosque just along from number 32. On the western edge of the Park lie the Avenues, much as they always were, home to many of the university staff, well-kept, rather fine houses, one-time home of Amy Johnson, Jacob Bronowski, Richard Hoggart, Alan Plater; and the small hospital where Larkin died (and I go for my periodic Warfarin check.)

One May morning as I was passing number 32, I noticed a lady unloading a car and passing through the gate. I asked her if she was the owner of the house and she said she was. She knew it had been Larkin's home and informed me that she was setting up the top flat for her son. I expressed my interest in Larkin and asked if I

might make a visit. She kindly agreed and we arranged a date when I and friend Philip Pullen would go.

The day of our visit arrived. It was a beautiful sunny morning as we climbed the stairs to the top flat. This was where Larkin had made his way so often, passing the doors of his neighbours who had annoyed him with their noise on occasion but not always – 'I can hear the children in the flat below, playing at railway engines. They don't annoy me nearly as much as a radio would.' (to his mother Eva, November 1956.)

And then we were there, the top flat, with its high windows! From what I had read in letters to Eva, I somehow felt a familiarity with the room. Today it was neatly set out: carpets, arm chair. Owner Nicola Mills informed us that for years it had been a junk room but was now tidied up. The thing that made most impression was the expanse of glass in the three sets of windows and the vista of trees and blue sky. Larkin had written: 'You would like to see my view as I sit – a wide vista of treetops nearly bare and nothing else. I shall feel like a bird.' (October 1956) 'The trees in the park are in full leaf now and make up one impenetrable shifting green wall seen from my window.' (May 1966) But to me the words at the end of 'Here' seem most appropriate: 'Here is unfenced existence: facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.' In so many respects, this was an ideal spot for Philip Larkin: just trees and, beyond them, blue sky.

We took photographs and recollected the history of this flat: visits by Monica Jones, photographed here in this exact spot looking out of the window; by John Betjeman and Patsy Strang ('we drank a lot'). This visit made me more aware of Larkin's reluctance to leave. He would never have admitted it, but Pearson Park was a good place for a writer and worth putting up with the inconveniences – noise from neighbours, icy rooms in winter. Larkin wrote to Eva: 'Pearson Park exercises a fascination over me and I always enjoy an hour in it.' (August 1958)

We felt at the end of our visit that we had increased our understanding of Philip Larkin and the reason for his extended stay here. Things literary were never the same at Newland Park, his next home.

*We are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate, for permission to publish extracts from Larkin's letters to his mother. © 2016 The Estate of Philip Larkin.*

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# Larkin – and Wain – at St John's, 1974

Timothy Vaughan

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Recently, on coming across the account of Larkin's reading in the SCR at St John's College in 1974 in James Booth's *Philip Larkin: Life, Art and Love*, I was reminded that I myself was fortunate to have been there. I was reaching the end of my first term at Wadham. My father, the late Paul Vaughan, had been interviewing John Carey for the radio programme he presented, *Kaleidoscope*, that day, and Carey had asked him if he wanted to come along. My father had other business that evening but put my name forward, and Carey kindly acquiesced, meeting me at the lodge. We proceeded to the SCR, which was roomy and comfortably appointed. There were about twenty people there, not many more, but we filled the room.

Larkin himself, in a dark three-piece pinstripe suit, thick pebble glasses and deaf aid (a proper 'death-suited visitant') wasn't hard to spot; as he was introduced, his 'minder' (I cannot now remember who this was) gave us all to understand the need to obey certain protocols – that Mr. Larkin had agreed only very reluctantly to do this, that any questions we might have after the reading were to be directed to Larkin through him, the 'chair', &c. We weren't in any doubt anyway that this was a rare treat indeed, but that fact was heavily emphasised. At the time, it occurred to me that he was talking about Larkin as though he were a thoroughbred racehorse that might easily be spooked.

The other most prominent character in the room was notable for his eccentric dress sense: badly matched discordant colours, flamboyant neckerchief, loud socks, wild hair, &c. Less a man in a 'parody of fashion' than someone whose sole purpose was to draw attention to himself. As the room settled down, I asked John Carey who he was. 'John Wain,' he said, with wry foreboding. It was quite evident Carey didn't like him.

I can't recall all the poems Larkin read that evening. I do remember he began with 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' and that 'Vers de Société', 'Sympathy in White Major', 'A Study of Reading Habits' and 'Posterity' were in there. 'Annus Mirabilis', 'This Be The Verse' and others in like vein were absent. It seemed to me that this was Larkin in more playful, self-mocking, self-deprecating mood, or the lyrical Larkin of 'To The Sea' and 'The Trees'.

Throughout the proceedings, John Wain was sitting in the middle of the SCR, head back, spectacles propped above his brow, one trouser leg half way up to his knee to expose his shin, eyes shut, uttering low, at first, but increasingly audible moans of appreciation, rubbing his

hands all over his face. Larkin, I assume because of his deafness, was at first oblivious to this but in time grew aware of an air of slight embarrassment and discomfort around the room. But, undeterred, he announced that he next intended to read 'The Whitsun Weddings', apologising in advance for its length. John Wain led the murmurs of appreciation with 'Great, Phil: Great!', pulling out his handkerchief to attend to his nose. The room settled as Larkin's next reading began, and he must have got as far as 'I was late getting away; not till about' – when Wain sneezed loudly and said, 'Sorry, Phil. So sorry, so sorry. Start again.' Somewhat discombobulated, Larkin did so, to be interrupted by another crashing sneeze over 'all sense of being in a hurry gone'. Larkin stopped, flustered. Wain got up and, muttering 'keep going, keep going!', left the room with much shuffling of seats. Larkin continued to read the poem to the sound of further explosions from the cavernous echo-chamber of the anteroom downstairs.

By the time Wain came back, most of the pleasure had been dissipated and had turned to a general feeling of disconsolation. The reading was coming to a close, anyway, and at the end of it, Wain, now back in his chair, got up to give the address of thanks, which was possibly the most patronising series of put-downs I've ever witnessed. He spoke of himself and Kingsley Amis and the times they'd shared together at St. John's, then went on to describe their various achievements, Amis's string of novels and his fellowship at Peterhouse, his own *Hurry On Down* and the position of Professor of Poetry, before talking about Larkin's 'four slim volumes' and his life up in Hull at the library, making some jibe or other about Larkin having 'hidden himself away' or some such. It was a deliberate slight, or appeared so, and there were mutterings of protest, although Larkin seemed to take it all without any show of discomfort.

I'd gone there clutching my copy of *All What Jazz*. I had hoped that he might sign it, and would have told him that I'd spent the previous summer with Mezzrow, Bechet and a soprano saxophone in Italy... that we might have shared a moment to talk about Bix Beiderbecke, Satchmo, Miff Mole or Fats Waller, among the jazz musicians I was weaned on. In retrospect, I sometimes wonder if we might even have corresponded about jazz as I lived through my troubled student years. But in the event, I was too confused by what had happened to do anything more than fumble my thanks and admiration as I shook his hand. He said 'Freshman?' I said 'Yes.' He smiled at me and said, 'Hard luck'.

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# A Holiday 'Snap'

Philip Pullen

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I first came across this photograph stuck on the wall above the desk of a slightly eccentric English teacher and Larkin fanatic at a college I once worked at and it has always remained one of my favourite images of Philip Larkin. The more one delves into his complex character the more this image seems to encapsulate so much of the contradictory elements in his psyche. Just look at the sandals (impressively sockless), the fulsome scarf and the striking femininity of the pose. The patterned fabric he is sitting on almost gives the impression of a discarded skirt or dress. Only the head, and the slightly serious, slightly uncomfortable expression on the face remind one of the rather more sombre be-suited Larkin who would stalk the library floor, albeit wearing brightly coloured socks. He was, of course, on holiday, with one of the most important women in his life. But which one?

The photograph first appeared in 1997 in Andrew Motion's biography and the accompanying caption suggested that it was taken by Monica Jones in Sark in 1955. This, of course, was an understandable assumption, given the pattern of their annual shared holidays, and Philip and Monica did indeed holiday in Sark in 1955. But, in fact, in terms of this photograph, the place and the photographer are both different. A

scrutiny of the Larkin archives at Hull History Centre reveals that the photograph was actually taken by his mother, Eva, on the beach in Weymouth in July 1953, immediately after Philip had spent a week holidaying with Monica in Scotland. In a letter to Eva, post-marked 16th August 1953, Philip enclosed a print of the beach photograph and rather despairingly commented:

Yes, your picture of me certainly came out & I enclose it, but why am I twisting about so coyly? I don't think I look very he-manish, rather the reverse in fact, but it has provided much innocent amusement for the people I've shown it to. Annoyingly enough it's the best photograph of the lot!

The people Philip had shown it to included Monica Jones. In a letter he wrote to her on 7th August 1953, Philip refers to having got his photographs back from the Weymouth holiday, including:

a fantastic one of me on Weymouth [*sic*] looking disturbingly effeminate, comically as well as disturbingly! I don't know why I don't photograph just badly: why it always has to be absurdly as well. Is it nerves that compels me to these coy hand lockings, these whimsical head-cockings, these sickly grins that resemble a choirmaster complimented on the way he has with 'the lads'. Don't bother to answer. Wait till you see it.

*We are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate, for permission to publish this photograph and the extracts from Larkin's letters. © 2016 The Estate of Philip Larkin.*

## **The Fence**

Through gaps in a blur of trees  
I glimpsed the path where once we'd walked.  
My hand on the seat beside me,  
I pressed my face against the glass,  
as if to see us walking there; but the train  
roared and plunged into a tunnel.

Now, under the trees, I follow  
the path once more, while the track gleams  
beyond the fence. I am alone  
where you had walked beside me.  
Half-deafened, I look for our ghosts  
as the train blurs past.

**John Wyndham Tatum**

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# *Larks at the Steyning Festival*

*'Larkin' About' by Sue Wilson: Steyning Festival, 3 June 2016*

*Reviewed by John White and Teresa O'Brien*

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This delightful confection, concocted by Sue Wilson, was a high spot of the Steyning Festival. It featured two actors best known for their roles in *The Archers* – Sunny Ormonde (Lilian Bellamy) and John Telfer (Rev. Alan Franks), the latter in character as an often grumpy but always funny Larkin in heavy spectacles, pink sweater and yellow socks. Talented musicians Matt Platt (keyboard and cello) and Ilone Antonious-Jones (flute and keyboard) complemented the principals in a well-crafted celebration of Larkin's life as revealed in his verse, prose and musical tastes.

The thread binding these elements together is Larkin's ambivalent relationships with women, particularly Ruth Bowman, Patsy Strang, Monica Jones, Maeve Brennan and last (but not least) Betty Mackereth. Sunny Ormonde gave splendid and affecting voice(s) to these significant others in Larkin's life, while John Telfer's readings from 'Annus Mirabilis', 'This Be The Verse', 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', 'Wild Oats', 'Reference Back' and 'For Sidney Bechet' were nonpareil. In particular, his rendering of the line 'Like an enormous yes' combined authentic jazz inflection with Larkinian solemnity. Some lesser-known poems were included such as 'Dear Jake' and 'Ignorance'. Ormonde and Telfer acted and interacted with consummate (but seemingly effortless) skill, while Platt and Antonious-Jones gave rousing renditions of such Larkin jazz favourites as 'Dallas Blues', 'It Don't Mean a Thing (If It Ain't Got That Swing)' and 'Down in the Dumps', as well as 'Baby it's Cold Outside' and 'Stormy Weather'.

An appreciative audience responded to these performances with laughter, applause and even some tears. Extracts from Larkin's letters to Jim Sutton, Monica Jones, Patsy Strang and Maeve Brennan were used to good effect in compiling a narrative of his views on life, marriage, sex, the blues and Handel. (Unfortunately, Andrew Motion's somewhat jaundiced biography was the only other source for the "life".) Not surprisingly, the biggest laugh of the evening occurred when Sunny Ormonde produced her "Lilian Bellamy" ribald cackle just before a reading of Larkin's letter to Monica suggesting various risqué "improvements" to the *Archers'* script:

Wish I could have the writing of it for a week. Carol Grey would seduce Christine, who would turn into a prostitute in an effort to atone for the lapse. Jack Archer would be run in for watering the beer, Walter Gabriel would be gored to death by a bull, Tom Forrest would be caught in one of his traps all night, Dr Cavendish would appear in the *News of the World* as running a high-class brothel-cum-abortion clinic...

Asked by one interviewer – after a performance at Stratford-upon-Avon – if Larkin would approve of the current *Archers'* storylines, Ormonde said: "He would love it now – it's become what he always hoped it would be. I think he would have adored Lilian, especially after her illicit affair!"

This is certainly one of the most enjoyable dramatic interpretations of Larkin's private life and literary legacy.



*Sunny Ormonde*

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# Some unrecorded allusions and echoes in Larkin's Letters to Monica

R. H. Winnick

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Like his *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin 1940–1985* (1992; rev. ed. 1993), Anthony Thwaite's *Letters to Monica* (2010) is a well-edited and invaluable resource for those wishing to know more about the man behind the poems and, in turn, about the poems themselves. As in the earlier collection, however, many notable allusions and echoes go unremarked, some perhaps because they could not be traced, others perhaps because they were simply missed. While documenting every allusion and echo, no matter how minor or obvious, would be pedantic and pointless, the following items, keyed to the pages of Thwaite's edition, may be thought to shed further light on Larkin's range of reading, powers of recall, and allusive richness, all of which are also reflected in many of his poems:

3. 'Probably Miss B. quailed at the thought of buying anything for "a gentleman" – "so difficult, my dear.'" Dickens, *Bleak House*, ch. 30: "'Why is it so difficult, my dear?" [Mrs. Woodcourt] returned.'

6. 'I wanted to shriek at him what Llewelyn & John Cowper Powys shrieked at Baron Corvo in Venice: "We're engaged! All the time! Right up to the bloody hilt!"' Echoing ch. 9 ("Europe") of John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (1934): 'Blinded by the spell I was under and furious at this contact with fashionable society, I lifted my voice, the moment I heard [the Baron] begin enquiring whether we were engaged for the rest of that week, and in a shriek more worthy of Lancelot Gobbo than of Signior Antonio I screamed ferociously: "Up to the hilt! Up to the hilt! Up to the hilt!"'

7. 'you wd like me less [...] if you had more opportunity of learning my general behaviour-patterns. Not *le divin Marquis*, nor Captain Hugh, but [...]' Denoting, respectively, the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) and Captain Hugh 'Bulldog' Drummond, the gentleman-adventurer created by H. C. McNeile (pen-name Sapper), beginning with the novel *Bulldog Drummond* (1920).

15. Speaking of D. H. Lawrence: 'Then again his moral judgments seem to me so devastatingly accurate – you remember when Kate has run away from the bullfight, the young American who has stuck it out for the sake of the

'experience' comes boasting about it afterwards – "He looked wan, peaked, but like a bird that had successfully pecked a bellyful of garbage.'" From ch. 2 of *The Plumed Serpent* (1926).

16. Lawrence again: 'As – finally – for ambition, he was ambitious in a conventional way when a young man: ("I s'll make a thousand a year!") & also snobbish ("My wife's father was a Baron")'. In D. H. Lawrence: *A Personal Record* (1935), Jessie Chambers (writing as "E. T.") recalled Lawrence proclaiming, on their first (1909) visit to London, 'I'll make two thousand a year!' In a note of c. April 1914, on letterhead, to Ivy Low, Lawrence wrote: 'Don't let the crest upset you – my wife's father was a baron, and we're just using up old note paper.'

17. 'Only then everyone'd expect a free copy, which would be most retrograde to my desire.' In *Hamlet* I.ii.114, Claudius calls Hamlet's contemplated return to school in Wittenburg 'most retrograde to our desire'.

20. 'Monday. Awake, my soul, and without the sun &c.' Echoing Thomas Ken's hymn 'Awake, My Soul, and With the Sun' (1674).

30. 'Pack, clouds, away!' The opening phrase of Thomas Heywood's lyric 'Love's Good-Morrow' (1608).

31. 'I feel a bit flat. Can it be a frustration of my societal instinct, as Lawrence wd say?' In a letter of 3 August 1927 to Dr Trigant Burrow, Lawrence wrote: 'What ails me is the absolute frustration of my primeval societal instinct.'

39. 'And now I live, & now my life is done!' From the elegy, beginning 'My prime of youth is but a frost of cares', composed by Chidioc Tichborne (c. 1562–1586) while awaiting execution for his role in the Babington plot to murder Queen Elizabeth.

53. On Dickens: 'But I should like to say something about this "irrepressible vitality", this "throwing a fresh handful of characters on the fire when it burns low"[...]' Dickens's 'irrepressible vitality' was a critical commonplace. In a piece on David Copperfield published

## About Larkin

in vol. 1 of her *Collected Essays* (1925), Virginia Woolf wrote: 'With such a power at his command Dickens made his books blaze up, not by tightening the plot or sharpening the wit, but by throwing another handful of people upon the fire.'

54. On Handel: 'What other artist has caused a king to leap to his feet?' King George II is said (perhaps apocryphally) to have done so during the 'Hallelujah' chorus when, in 1743, *The Messiah* was first performed in London.

61. 'And lookee here, do you really like Kipling? All Kipling? "The makin's of a bloomin' soul"?' Line 20 of Kipling's poem 'The Return'.

68. On doing housework: 'you can imagine me scuffling round or hauling the Abhorrence ("Nature abhors a vacuum") after me (not an original joke, but I'll leave you to find where it comes from).' From ch. 6 of *Miss Pym Disposes* (1946), a novel by Elizabeth Mackintosh writing as Josephine Tey.

79 'The idea of explaining the vividness of a child's sensations by the fact that it was "fresh from God" would have seemed unnecessary to him [Llewelyn Powys]: it is simply part of being a child.' From ch. 1 of Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840): 'I love these little people; and it is not a slight thing when they, who are so fresh from God, love us.'

81. On his need for solitude: 'I dislike saying so, because it sounds like a "line" – "Man can live 3 days without bread, but not one without poetry" [...]' Oscar Wilde's note on 'French Cookery for Ladies' begins: 'The most perfect and the most poisonous of all modern French poets once remarked that a man can live for three days without bread, but that no one can live for three days without poetry.' Baudelaire's actual words, in 'Aux Bourgeois' (1846), were: 'Vous pouvez vivre trois jours sans pain; – sans poésie, jamais.'

87. 'I have returned a set of coupons to Vernon's, so when I win we'll go sailing over the sea with a £5 note etc.' Echoing the opening lines of Edward Lear's 'The Owl and the Pussy-Cat'.

93. 'Carpe diem. Nox est una perpetua dormienda. Etc.' The first phrase ('seize the day') from Horace, Odes 1.11; the second, slightly misquoted, from Catullus, Carmen 5: 'nox est perpetua una dormienda' ('there's a perpetual night to be slept').

99. 'As I lay preparing for sleep I heard a bird beginning to sing in the garden below – o! how that does ravish me,

I think I cd listen to it for a small eternity (who said that, of what?)'. Katherine Mansfield, in a letter dated 7 April 1920 to John Middleton Murry, wrote – of the Clown's song 'Come away, come away, death' in *Twelfth Night* II.iv.51–66 – 'Oh how that does all ravish me. I think I could listen to that for a small eternity.'

104. On his indifference to politics: 'Like Ambrose, I don't know the index figure for a family of four.' In ch. 1 ("Autumn") of Evelyn Waugh's *Put Out More Flags* (1942), when asked 'D'you know the index figure for a family of four?', the apolitical aesthete Ambrose Silk replies 'wistfully' that he does not know nor wishes to be told.

117. 'But who could be rabbity enough [...] Hardy, I suppose, in a funny grotesque way ("blest champaign").' Hardy's 'The Milestone by the Rabbit Burrow' ends 'Some blest champaign / Where no gins are?'

118. 'Still, "I am content with what I have, Little be it or much . . ."' From a poem beginning 'He that is down needs fear no fall' in Part II of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1684); later published separately as 'The Shepherd Boy sings in the Valley of Humiliation'.

121. 'Silence, patience & exile.' Echoing a passage in ch. 5 of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: 'I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely [and] wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use—silence, exile, and cunning.'

125. 'This is of first importance: no "stupid life at its bungling work", as in H.J.' Misquoting, perhaps deliberately, Henry James's 'clumsy Life again at her stupid work' in the Preface to vol. 10 of the New York edition (1908).

127. 'Hastily I tried to collect my thoughts, looked at my poppy, thought of Sassoon at the hydro in Scotland, and They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old [...]'. During the First World War, Siegfried Sassoon was sent to Craiglockhart Hydropathic, in Edinburgh, then in use as an army psychiatric hospital, after issuing his anti-war statement 'Finished with the War: A Soldier's Declaration' (1917). The italicised words comprise line 16 of Laurence Binyon's wartime elegy 'For the Fallen' (1914).

136. After first seeing only the words Brewer's Dictionary while unwrapping Monica's Christmas gift of *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*: 'then I got it all out & could see that your reason hadn't dismounted from its throne'. Echoing stanza III.1–3 of 'Melancholy. Pindarick Ode.' by Charles Cotton (1630–1687): 'Alas!

my Reason's overcast, / That Sovereign Guide is quite displac't, / Clearly dismounted from his Throne'.

142. 'have just spent half an hour hootlessly fronting through Butler's *Notebooks* for the passage saying "If people must believe in something, let them believe in the music of Handel".' It occurs not in Samuel Butler's *Notebooks* but in ch. 2 of his *Life and Habit* (1848): 'If he must believe in anything, let him believe in the music of Handel, the painting of Giovanni Bellini, and in the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.'

169. 'I am frightend, sweetheart, that's the long & short of it . . . – do you know who wrote that?' Answer: Gerald Gould, in poem XXX of his *The Journey: Odes and Sonnets* (1920).

189. 'Ah never shall bun that morrow see!' Playfully substituting L's pet name for Monica for 'sun' in *Macbeth* I.v.60–61.

198. 'Some bright lad (E.M.F.?) said the opposite of love wasn't hate but individuality'. Not Forster but Lawrence: 'Hate is not the opposite of love. The real opposite of love is individuality.' From '. . . Love Was Once a Little Boy' in Lawrence's *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* (1925).

205. 'The children were there quite a lot: Philip & Martin [Amis] quite nice little boys by now, Sally ingeniously loathsome.' The italicised phrase from William Watson's 1888 essay 'Some Literary Idolatries', where it refers to the murderous Bosola in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

205. 'you'd say it was just my subject, I expect, but it won't cohere & jump (Viola).' From *Twelfth Night* V.i.249–53: 'If nothing lets to make us happy both / But this my masculine usurp'd attire, / Do not embrace me till each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump / That I am Viola'.

206. 'I've spent the evening doing my Merwin/Nott review – tripe about tripe – and a vague melancholy clouds me.' The last from ch. 32 of Elizabeth Sara Sheppard's *Charles Auchester* (1853): 'I was quite solitary in my intentions, and rather troubled with a vague melancholy, the sun being under a cloud'.

211. Describing a residence-hall dance the previous night: '[...] BJ, flinging himself about like a warhorse ("Ha! Ha! among the strumpets")'. David Marno's poem 'Ha, ha, among the strumpets' appeared in the Christmas 1950 issue of *The Gryphon* (published by the University of Leeds), its title a play on Job 39:25: 'He saith among

the trumpets, Ha, ha: and he smelleth the battle afar off—and perhaps also echoing, as Janet Brennan suggests, an exchange in V.ii of Thomas Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605): 'Lucre: Ha, ha, ha. Hoard: A common strumpet!'

228. 'I have a few moments ago identified my feelings on Sunday regarding your U.S. offer: 'Toad ceased his frivolous antics at once. He became grave and depressed [...]''. From ch. 8 of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1915).

235. After privately recording some Hardy poems: 'Unhappy summer you, one I like, is very soggy in the middle. One that went unexpectedly well was a sad one that I can't find now – about a lonely woman moving to a town & dying there.' The first of the two is 'This Summer and Last'; the second, 'Lonely Days'.

242. Defending J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951): 'but it seems to me moderately lifelike, I mean more lifelike than say *Lord of the flies* ("nay, if you are to bring in gabble[") –'. The parenthetical comment from ch. 66 of Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson*: 'Nay, if you are to bring in gabble, I'll talk no more.'

248. Calling a key scene in *The Boy Friend* 'a great moment in drama': 'I thought it ranked with "Kill Claudio" and "I'm a seagull" and Molly Bloom's last soliloquy.' Referring, respectively, to Beatrice's line in *Much Ado About Nothing*, IV.i.289; Nina's in Act 4 of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1896); and the interior monologue with which Joyce's *Ulysses* ends.

250. 'Contact with my fellow men does me what Isherwood called "medically demonstrable good."' From ch. 3 of Christopher Isherwood's *Lions and Shadows* (1938): 'It [poetry] did you medically demonstrable good, like a dose of strychnine or salts.'

266. 'ay, mark that, Cesario.' Echoing *Twelfth Night* II.iv.42–3: 'O, fellow, come, the song we had last night. / Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain.'

268. 'I dreamt I dwelt in marbled halls.' Also known as 'The Gipsy Girl's Dream', a well-known and often-recorded aria from the ballad opera *The Bohemian Girl*, composed by Michael William Balfe with a libretto by Alfred Bunn, first performed in London in 1843.

309. 'This reminds me of Angus Wilson, who as I said was nice [...] but a colossal fool, as Baudelaire put it ("Not only a colossal fool, but demoniacally possessed" – he was speaking of George Sand) [...]''. From Baudelaire's posthumously published *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu* (1897):

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'Voyez George Sand. Elle est surtout, et plus que tout autre chose[s], une grosse bête; mais elle est possédée.' Several English translations followed, all under the title *My Heart Laid Bare*.

309. 'I'm sure Miss Richardson retires like ye moon when ye Sunne doth appear.' Echoing a passage in meditation 13 of Andrew Welwood's *A Glimpse of Glory* (1763): 'What is the moon when the sun doth appear?'

320. 'So much for my craft and sullen art.' Pointing to Dylan Thomas's poem 'In my Craft or Sullen Art'.

338. Commenting on Lady Elizabeth Cavendish: 'I don't think there's much of the repose that stamps the cast etc. left today, do you?' Lines 39–40 of Tennyson's 'Lady Clara Vere de Vere' read 'Her manners had not that repose / Which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.'

342. As verse: 'I would I were where Russell plays / Through a foul tobacco haze / I would I were where Russell plays / And Condon calls the key'. A parody of the refrain of the traditional ballad 'Helen of Kirkconnell': 'I would I were where Helen lies; / Night and day on me she cries; / O that I were where Helen lies, / On fair Kirkconnell lea!'

342. 'There ain't a lady living in the land That I'd swop for my dear old Dutch'. From 'My Old Dutch' (1892), a Cockney music-hall song written and performed by Albert Chevalier.

363. After reading, and writing, about Thomas Hardy: 'Almost like DHL, really! "One sloughs one's sicknesses in books." i.e. one retells real events to one's own advantage'. In a letter of 26 October 1913 to A. D. McLeod, Lawrence wrote: 'One sheds one's sicknesses in books – repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be the master of them.'

371. 'CQ [*Critical Quarterly*] are having a 10th anniversary no. ("ah me, the years, O!"). Echoing lines 6 and 20 of Hardy's 'During Wind and Rain': 'Ah, no; the years O!'

379. 'Apparently one can be in [*Who's Who in America*] under either of two headings – "Titular" or "Achievemental". I'm achievemental. Yare, yare. It couldn't be called ungentle.' Robert Frost's poem 'Departmental' ends 'It couldn't be called ungentle. / But how thoroughly departmental.'

379. After rereading some old diaries: 'I really ought to burn them: there's very little good in them ("I'm full of the cheese of human kindness – milk of h.k. gone sour")

[...]' Perhaps echoing line 70 of Samuel Beckett's poem 'Casket of Pralinen for the Daughter of a Dissipated Mandarin' (1931), which contains 'the gorgonzola cheese of human kindness' – based, in turn, on Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in *Macbeth* I.v.16–18: 'Yet do I fear thy nature; / It is too full o' the milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way.'

389. 'As Baudelaire said,"—ing is the poetry of the people" (since he wrote in French, I don't know what kind of word he used, but it's very true.)' Various translations, what Baudelaire wrote in *Mon Coeur Mis à Nu* was 'La fouterie est le lyrisme du peuple.'

394. 'my rug stands up like quills upon the fretful porpentine'. Echoing *Hamlet* I.v.19–20.

396. 'Yeats always said Wilde was a man of action.' In *Autobiographies* (1927), Yeats wrote: '[Wilde] could not endure the sedentary toil of creative art and so remained a man of action.'

402. 'Sicut bucketus erat, if I can quote Joyce.' 'Sicut bucketus est' occurs in section XX of Joyce's fragmentary *Stephen Hero*, posthumously published in 1944.

416. Referring with customary hostility to George Hartley: 'O cursed spite! that ever I was bound to such a shite!' Echoing *Hamlet* I.v.188–9: 'The time is out of joint; O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!'

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### Roadside Flowers

The trees along my route are wrapped  
in flowers, quickly passed each day  
but only noticed by a few.

Their colours burst then slip from view  
as each is lost, submerged in grey,  
their brightness all too quickly sapped.

Should death come on a carriageway  
to leave me by some roadside oak,  
do not leave flowers at the scene  
to highlight loss, what could have been.  
A further sacrifice, they soak  
in rain, abandoned to decay.

No, focus on this life and not  
the flowers left, ignored, to rot.

Paul Wooldridge



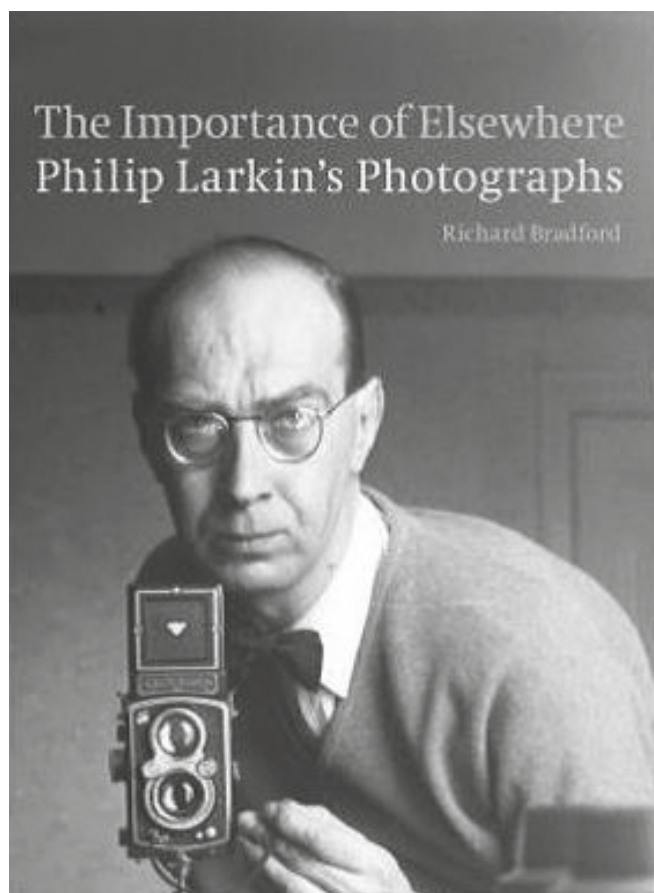
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# 'O, Photography': Larkin behind the Camera

James Booth

*The Importance of Elsewhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs*, Richard Bradford  
Frances Lincoln, 2015, 256pp, £25 (hardback)

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'photographic' realism, it is also a 'composition' in words. The phrase 'a terminate and fishy-smelling / Pastoral' is not 'plain description'.

Mark Haworth-Booth, former curator of photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum, writes in the Foreword to this engrossing collection that Larkin was a 'serious amateur' photographer. His earliest photographs were taken with a 'Houghton-Butcher Ensign Carbine No. 5', given to him by his father. The £7 camera, bought in 1947, was the more advanced 'Purma Special', which boasted three shutter speeds. But his serious ambition in the medium is revealed most clearly in the choice of his third camera which, as he told his mother, he bought in London in 1957 from 'the big camera shop that supplies the Duke of Edinburgh... it isn't new itself, but it is a German camera, a Rolleiflex, & they are regarded as being very good indeed & above £120 each when new. I won't tell you how much I paid! But I insured it on the spot.' As Haworth-Booth tells us, this camera was also used by Brassai, Brandt and Lee Miller. Larkin would adjust exposures using his light meter; he would resort to a tripod to avoid vibration. He took 'selfies' with a delayed-action shutter-release, and showed much skill in marking up contact prints for enlargement.

The variety and inventiveness of his photographs are remarkable. He shot his human subjects in different lights and from carefully judged angles. Patsy Strang is photographed in deep shadow with melodramatic chiaroscuro. Diana Gollancz reclines on a bed in reflective, inwardly absorbed close-up. Maeve Brennan is glimpsed mysteriously half-obscured by reeds, or ingenuously catches the photographer's eye with an instantaneous smile. In one remarkable photograph (p101 top), Larkin takes advantage of the fact that Colin Strang and his second wife Barbara are looking to the camera, waiting for the delayed shutter release. Behind their backs he mimes extravagant boredom. The personnel of Hull University's Library are photographed from the window of Larkin's first-floor office, informally scattered across a paved area, looking upward. Larkin's atmospheric light-studies of graveyards and of lonely village-scapes along the Humber are intensely evocative. Some photographs can be related to particular poems. A view of a crowd outside a shop in Dublin may have played a part in the inspiration for 'Dublinesque'; the wrestlers in choreographed action at

In 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album', Larkin declares: 'But o, photography, as no art is, / Faithful and disappointing!' Too objective to be an art, photography presents us, unmediated, with 'a real girl in a real place'. But he then contradicts himself, celebrating how the photograph transfigures its subject: 'what grace / Your candour thus confers upon her face!' The young lady, 'empirically true', her blemishes uncensored, becomes, through photography, as enchanting as the traditional ideal muse. Larkin is well aware that photography is, indeed, an art.

In an early letter to his friend Jim Sutton, Larkin relishes the new possibilities opened up by his newly-bought £7 camera: 'There are dozens of worthy compositions knocking around: it's a question of realising what is good even in black and white.' The artistic instincts seen in his poetry are also evident in his photography. In a letter to Robert Conquest, Larkin claims that the evocation of Hull in 'Here' is 'plain description'. But though it has

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Bellingham Fair feature in 'Show Saturday'. These photographs provide a record of the historical period through which Larkin lived, while also telling his personal biographical story. Many of them are visually arresting or beautiful.

Richard Bradford has earned our gratitude for assembling this photographic gallery, as have the members of the Brynmor Jones Library staff at the Hull History Centre for their impressive digitisation of the images. Regrettably, however, Bradford's casual approach results in a number of incorrect captions to the photographs. Some mistakes are trivial but irritatingly gratuitous. The room shown on p72 is clearly a kitchen, not Monica's office; the road shown on p86 is not Dixon Drive; Warwick Common (p71) is not, as Bradford tells us, 'now built over'; and the furniture in the photograph on p203 is that of Larkin's Pearson Park flat, not Monica's flat in Leicester.

Most serious, however, are the errors in identifying people and occasions. The girl in the top photograph on p23 is not Larkin's sister Kitty; they never visited Germany together. We can trust Larkin's indication on the back of the photograph reproduced on p60, which shows Diana Gollancz, not Ruth Bowman. Neither of the different women shown on pp98 and 99 is Patsy Strang; nor is the woman in the top photograph on p101. The photograph was taken in Newcastle in 1958, three years after the Strangs' divorce and the woman is Colin Strang's second wife, Barbara, who, as Larkin told his mother, was 'as unlike [Patsy] as could be'. The 'still unidentified' woman on p103 is Molly Sellar, who subsequently married Larkin's Belfast colleague, Arthur Terry. The slender man in soft focus seen from a low angle on p160 is not Robert Conquest (apparently never photographed by Larkin) but Alec Dalgarno, a colleague of Larkin in Queen's University, Belfast. Bradford captions the photograph on p179 'Maeve taking breakfast in a hotel in Hornsea, where she had spent the night with Larkin, 1963'. Maeve published this photograph in *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (2002) with the caption 'Afternoon tea at the Floral Hall, Hornsea'. The table setting, her immaculate hair-do and the bright sunlight show that her identification is the correct one. Had she spent a night of 'pre-marital' sex with Larkin in 1963, she would have been haggard with religious guilt by breakfast. In all his writing on Larkin, Bradford has consistently misinterpreted Larkin's relationship with Maeve.

It is a pity that the captions in such an important book are so often misleading. It is, however, still worth buying for its fascinating photographs. And there are plenty more where these came from.

### from *Pembrokeshire Sonnets*

#### *North and South*

The postcard came just before my exams:  
'Thanks for the fags – gone like chaff in the wind!  
you'd scrawled in a spidery ill hand,  
adding 'Only a bit of a cold, mind.'  
The exams now over the phone call  
came and southwards I rode through mountains to coast  
to find relatives anxious in the hall,  
unusually quiet, hopelessly lost.  
Out in his Hillman sat my cousin Dave,  
*Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* playing,  
a magical mystery tour rave;  
and others upstairs hopefully praying.  
And I in the north had been thinking and writing;  
and you in the south were controlling your dying.

#### *Old Fisherman*

Too old now I sit in the evening sun  
and watch the slow tide flooding in and out.  
I mend the high draped nets when I can  
though my joints won't stoop down to the lobster pots.  
My son Billy takes all the boats out now;  
I've told him where the fattest flatfish lie  
and where the mackerel are and where to row.  
He'll soon be home on the late evening tide.  
The girls they work the rocks some miles away,  
stripping the strewn black laver-weed,  
a way of life that nowadays doesn't pay;  
but I like it for supper, oatmealed, fried.  
It's chilly here. When will the children come?  
Ah, Billy's home: I hear his outboard's hum.

#### *The Lonely Farmer Speaks*

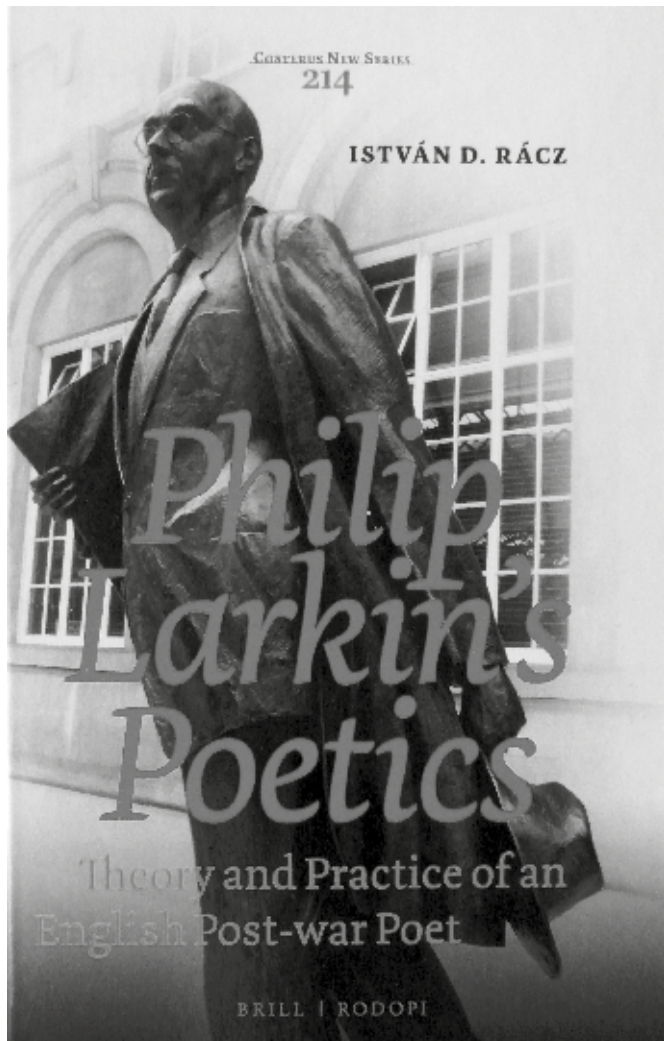
I rock back on my heels and have a piss:  
the muffled music assumes a quieter tone:  
a smoochy number with a plaintive moan  
slips through the un-shut door like a soft kiss.  
My tipsy mates inside won't want to miss  
the dance's warm, soft-slow seductive charms;  
around some young girl's slender waist their arms;  
they're hoping for a rampant night of bliss!  
I wish I didn't skulk in here like this;  
they look at me in terror and alarm;  
no, they don't want a life on Bryngwyn farm:  
they want something more, the modern miss.  
A girl to hold in these work roughened hands...  
as hard to find as working on the land.

*Andrew Thomas*

# Poetry and Principles

James Underwood

István D. Rác, *Philip Larkin's Poetics: Theory and Practice of an English Post-war Poet* (Leiden: Brill / Rodopi, 2015), 235pp. €76. ISBN 978-90-04-31106-0.



Asked about literary criticism, Larkin said: 'I may flatter myself, but I think in one sense I'm like Evelyn Waugh or John Betjeman, in that there's not much to say about my work. When you've read a poem, that's it, it's all quite clear what it means'. Asked how he arrived at the central image of 'Toads' and 'Toads Revisited', he kept it brief: 'Sheer genius'. Asked about his reading, Larkin replied: 'almost everything except philosophy, theology, economics, sociology, science, or anything to do with the wonders of nature, anything to do with technology – have I said politics? [...] I read almost no poetry' – which apparently only left Gladys Mitchell, Michael Innes, and Dick Francis. Asked to comment on *The Whitsun Weddings*, Larkin wrote: 'once I have said that the poems were written in or near Hull, Yorkshire,

with a succession of Royal Sovereign 2B pencils during the years 1955 to 1963, there seems little to add'. Got it.

More scholarly-minded readers might disagree, but then Larkin's academics are not flattering creations: there is Jake Balokowsky with his unfortunate surname, the cynical narrator of 'Naturally the Foundation will Bear Your Expenses', 'that ass' and his 'fool research' in 'Vers de Société', and the 'Ph.D. with a beard / And nympho wife' of 'Laboratory Monkeys' (though to be fair, he is a scientist). 'I remember saying once', Larkin told an interviewer, 'I can't understand these chaps who go round American universities explaining how they write poems: it's like going round explaining how you sleep with your wife'. But in Larkin's case there was no wife to speak of, and those interested in Royal Sovereign 2Bs constitute a small self-selecting group, so it seems only fair that we should get to hear more about the writing instead. That, however, requires dogged determination; more chance of Larkin adopting an orphanage than generously expatiating on his poetics.

Having said that, the pieces gathered together in *Required Writing* and *Further Requirements* represent roughly 700 pages of criticism, and it would not be ridiculous to wonder whether there might be lurking within this mass something amounting to a coherent poetics. Granted, these are pithy contributions: mostly book reviews, with a handful of interviews, introductions, and some brief commentaries such as the notorious 'Statement'. But it is a lot of critical writing for someone so opposed to the enterprise – and then there are the letters, the jazz criticism, the *Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, remarks in the workbooks, and so on. Surely amongst all this a relatively consistent approach to the writing of poetry might be located?

István D. Rác believes so, and has done a commendable job of tracing it in his book on Larkin's theory and practice. With no *Defence of Poetry* or 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' to work with, Rác instead explores 'a kind of poetics that does not reflect upon itself as poetics, yet makes it possible for the poet to base his poetry on it and for the reader to interpret it as poetics'. His basic argument is that a series of 'firm principles' pull together in order to constitute Larkin's life work as a 'cohesive whole'. The book is divided into

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two parts, the first of which, 'Larkin's Principles of Writing Poetry', sets out the main ideas underpinning the creative work. The second, 'Writing about Time', explains how Larkin put these into practice in his many poems about temporality.

Each one of the nine chapters contains plenty to chew on. The first discusses Larkin's relation to 'the English Line', the phrase cautiously packaged in inverted commas, because while the debt to particular English poets (like Hardy) is apparent, Larkin never truly rejected dialogue with other traditions. Rácz immediately identifies 'experience' as a key word in Larkin's poetics, and a way of negotiating with poetic ancestors: his belief in poetry as both pleasure and preservation for the 'ordinary' reader is a version of Wordsworth's 'man speaking to men'; similarly, the meeting of the traditional and the contemporary in his work is a central idea in Eliot's poetics, which Larkin so noisily attacked. As Rácz writes, there are certain passages by Eliot in which Larkin 'could not have found anything unacceptable'; at the same time, Larkin's commitment to experience prevented him from being as *overtly* intertextual and 'literary'.

Chapter 2 develops this by exploring Larkin's ideas about beauty and truth, pointing to a Keatsian dimension, although Rácz suggests that in using 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' as an intertext to be rejected in 'An Arundel Tomb', Larkin wilfully ignored its ambiguities. This in turn introduces another principle behind the poetics: Larkin's role-playing (in this case 'a man of letters who is not interested in literature as literature, only as a medium of experience'). Rácz's wariness here is judicious; not only was Larkin sufficiently interested in other poets and artists to incorporate them into his work (as 'An Arundel Tomb' shows), he also effectively dedicated his life to the art of poetry.

Role-playing is explored further in Chapter 4, where Rácz restates his thinking about Larkin's use of 'Character, Mask and Monologue'. Rácz is careful to explain his understanding of the mask, which is not used 'to simply [cover] something that was already there', but rather to construct a character within a poem in which awareness of that character's fictitiousness is key to its interpretation. This is perhaps easy to recognise in a poem like 'Wedding-Wind', whose narrator is a newly-married woman, and Rácz lists 'Mr Bleaney', 'Dockery and Son', 'Self's the Man', and 'Vers de Société' as other poems in which 'the speaker is explicitly a performer', although I would add that such performances have not been sufficiently explicit for some critics. However, he describes a 'third type of poem' in Larkin's oeuvre which is 'just as important', namely the dramatic lyric: first-person poems describing a particular experience, mood, or emotion. The terminology is a little confusing: the kind of poem to which Rácz refers (Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale',

Hardy's 'The Darkling Thrush') is more commonly referred to as 'the lyric'; *Dramatic Lyrics* was the title of Robert Browning's 1842 collection containing poems like 'My Last Duchess', and therefore connotes the 'dramatic monologue', a separate genre which Rácz treats elsewhere in the book.

Nonetheless, his analysis of Larkin's lyric poetry is very useful. Poems such as 'Church Going' and 'Reasons for Attendance' are shown to have two 'agents' at work within them, one 'perceptive' and the other 'cognitive': the first perceives an emotion or experience, and the second attempts to understand it. In 'Coming', for example, the narrator is moved by the birdsong in a serene landscape, and feels 'like a child / Who comes on a scene / Of adult reconciling, / [...] And starts to be happy'. This is the 'perceptive' agent of the poem; but because happiness is expressed as a simile, the 'cognitive' agent understands that the emotion is more nuanced – the older, wiser narrator experiences something *like* happiness, not the unqualified happiness of the child. Other critics have theorised the arrangement of a typical Larkin poem: John Osborne, for example, points to the recurring 'four-act structure', while John Carey describes the interaction of 'masculine' and 'feminine' voices. Rácz's conceptualisation of dual agency provides another valuable means of understanding the tonal complexities of Larkin's poetry, often misguidedly read as pure self-expression.

The chapter on Larkin's characters and masks is sandwiched between chapters on the 'Audenesque Larkin' (poetry as non-literary and bound to experience) and 'Hardyesque Larkin' (poetry that understands pain and suffering as necessary to spiritual development). The final chapter of the book's first section then explores questions of 'Language, Death and Transcendence'. In the second part, Rácz shows how the principles which Larkin held firm contributed to his poems about time. A good example is Larkin's attitude to experience, emphasised from Chapter 1: if the poet is accountable to experience, then he is accountable to life; but since life is defined by death, the poet cannot ignore this – but nor can he truly represent the experience of death, which is unknowable. Consequently, Larkin knows that language is a problematic medium – evidence of his postmodern credentials (though Rácz sensibly does not go as far as to call Larkin a postmodernist). He must find his own provisional ways of representing time and human existence. One common strategy is to imagine time as spatial ('Days are where we live'). But the inevitable fact of aging challenges this – while also contributing to the coherence of Larkin's life work. According to Rácz, Larkin's three mature collections each contain one central and comparatively long philosophical poem: 'Church Going', 'The Whitsun Weddings', and 'The

Building'. Collectively, these poems form a 'tripartite vision of past, future and present'. But that vision is confronted by 'Aubade', the 'central text of a fragmentary and never published last volume', which shows the 'absurdity' of time relations in the face of death. While at first it seems strange to dedicate one-half of a study of Larkin's poetics to the theme of time, it becomes clear that this theme is an effective means of showing how Larkin's principles developed and worked together to construct a cohesive poetics. Reading the poems about time reveals 'one possible' way of seeing Larkin's life work as a coherent whole.

Any book which sets out to present the 'theory and practice' of a major artist inevitably runs the risk of being critiqued for what it leaves out or suppresses. I think that would be a senseless enterprise, partly because it could go on and on, but also because there is no doubt in my mind that Rácz does more than enough to prove that Larkin *did* consciously produce a coherent and interactive poetics. There is perhaps one important missed opportunity, which is to demonstrate the poetry's *diversity* once and for all. This is not to say that Rácz has not presented a complex, intelligent, and self-aware poetics – he has, and it is one of the major achievements of the book. Indeed, it is refreshing to find Rácz's scholarship supported by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, and Paul de Man – their very presence shows that Larkin's poetry is by no means naively anti-intellectual. At the same time, however, the roll call of Larkins presented by this study is quite familiar: the Hardy-esque Larkin, the Audenesque Larkin, Larkin the Movement poet, Larkin the agnostic, the Larkin interested in suffering, terror, and yearning, the Larkin obsessed with death, aging, and the passing of time. These all deserve their place in a comprehensive study by virtue of their existence within the poetry, but Larkin is also more various than that. What about the Larkin inspired by, say, Walt Whitman, or schoolgirl fiction? What about the Larkin who writes exquisitely of in-the-moment *jouissance* (in 'For Sidney Bechet', for example), or with borderline spirituality ('The Explosion')? Is it necessarily true that Larkin's 'most frequent mask is that of the middle-class, middle-aged man'? Is he not just as interested in inhabiting the Otherness of women, or animals, or even trees? It would be interesting to see how these aspects fit with the poetics mapped by Rácz, and I suspect they do. In fact multiplicity might even be one of Larkin's principles. Then again, the fact that this study affords rather than denies space for other Larkins shows both the expansiveness of the poetry *and* of Rácz's scholarship. For a poet so determined to expose different forms of deception, Larkin is a slippery and unreliable guide. By sceptically and insightfully reconstructing Larkin's poetics, Rácz's book represents a valuable addition to a body of criticism which has too often taken Larkin at his word.

### ***Millie getting Married***

My Millie, elfin, Audrey Hepburn-like,  
A sprite, a sylph, an Ariel in the dawn  
In gardens that Monet, in limpid light,  
Finding himself in Eden, might have drawn:  
That's how her parents see her, barely real,  
Yet such a creature needs her stalwart knight  
And cannot, must not, linger as ideal,  
As cast in gold and set upon a height  
To sing to courtiers of Byzantium  
And Audrey's Hollywood is tawdry town.  
I know there is a happy medium  
Between what's gold and what is earthy brown.  
Time floats her from what seems to what is other,  
The sprite a bride and, sometime soon, a mother.

***John Mowat***

### ***Peter – The Reclamation Specialist***

Peter, whose business in high places  
takes him amongst the starlings and the tiles,  
sees sky against cold chimney stacks,  
the fishdocks and the miles  
of houses crammed with peoples' lives,  
with husbands, kids and dogs – and wives.

With fiery hair and blue, Rabbinic eyes,  
in jeans and T shirt, Revolution's kit,  
his life's akimbo at the flies  
but close on fifty, though he won't admit  
each year begins to ache a bit.

Meanwhile, upon a roof, he's on the scent  
of something that he'd like dearly to resent,  
a something that is hardly 'God',  
an out-at-elbows, unpredictable, bad sod,  
a force to do with death. He found a bird  
That beat its wings unheard  
Inside an attic. It could not regain  
Cold sky beyond the broken pane.

### ***Peter, on the outside***

Peter, on the outside, looking in,  
self deprecating, wistful, thinks how sin's  
Attractive, with tight jeans and thighs, –  
busy in the kitchen, but she's gone,  
distracted by the bawling of her son.  
Maybe the years have dimmed his flame,  
so he only kneads the putty,  
sets the window in the frame.

***Monica Cheale***

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# Notes on Contributors

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**Monica Cheale** lives in Newcastle upon Tyne with her husband, David Gregory, and a cat. Both human members of the household are keen members of the Larkin Society and very much look forward to its meetings.

**Mark Haworth-Booth** read English at Cambridge and art history at Edinburgh. He worked at the V&A, 1970–2004, chiefly as curator of photographs. He read in New Voices at the Voice Box, South Bank Centre, in 1992 and published *Wild Track: poems with pictures by friends* in 2005.

**Teresa O'Brien** lives in Seaford, Sussex with John White and enjoys writing with him from time to time. She received her PhD from the University of Manchester where she taught Applied Linguistics from 1979 to 2003. She was involved in the education of teachers of English as a Foreign Language in various countries including Poland, Indonesia, Brazil and Macedonia. Her publications include *Collaborative Research in Second Language Education* edited with Mike Beaumont (Trentham Books 2002). Like Philip Larkin, she is a devoted Archers follower.

**Philip Pullen** was born and brought up in Coventry and is familiar with most of the haunts of the young Philip Larkin. He now lives in Beverley. He has spent most of his working life teaching in further and higher education and from 2001 until his retirement in 2011 was an HMI with Ofsted. Although his academic background is in the social sciences, he has had a lifelong passion for English literature. He is currently researching the relationship between Philip and Eva Larkin as revealed in their extensive correspondence.

**John Wyndham Tatum** was born in Edinburgh in 1933 and educated at Shebbear College in Devon. *A View of the Town* was published by Outposts in 1960 and Tatum attended sessions of The Group at Edward Lucie Smith's house in the 1960s. His *Poems to Sundry Notes of Jazz* was broadcast on BBC Radio Three in 1983; he also played the trumpet on this. Over the years, he has published poems in 'a variety of little magazines' and in 'This England'. He won third prize in the Petra Kenney competition in 2001 and third prize in the Philip Larkin competition in 2015. His hobby is painting watercolours of the English landscape.

**Andrew Thomas**, who was educated at schools in South Pembrokeshire and at Bangor (BA) and Cardiff (MA), taught English in secondary schools for 35 years. He has written articles for *The New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *English in Wales*, *Pembrokeshire Life* and *A Different Angle*. For some 10 years he was the editor of *Staple*, a publication of Bangor's School of English. He writes poems and short stories. A collection of the latter is to be published shortly under the title of *Once Upon A Place*.

**James Underwood** is Research Fellow in Modern & Contemporary Literature at the University of Huddersfield, where he works on the newly established Ted Hughes Network. He holds a PhD on Philip Larkin from the University of Hull. An essay on Larkin's letters to Monica Jones was published in English earlier this year, and he is currently preparing a monograph on early Larkin.

**Timothy Vaughan** read English at Wadham from 1974–1978 and, after graduating, was set up to start a B. Litt and pursue an academic career, but decided instead to go into broadcasting. He has spent nearly forty years making television drama, as a writer, producer and script editor, and is a partner in an independent television production company. But he still devotes as much of his spare time as possible to poetry.

**John White**, the Society's Jazz Consultant, is Emeritus Reader in American History at the University of Hull, where he taught from 1965 until 2002. With Trevor Tolley he produced the four-CD set, 'Larkin's Jazz' (2010). He is co-editor (with Richard Palmer) of *Larkin: Jazz Writings, 1940–1984* (Continuum, 2004) and contributed to Dale Salwak's *Philip Larkin: The Man and his Work* (Macmillan, 1989). His talk, 'Philip Larkin: Funny Man', delivered to the Larkin Society in 2010 (*AL* 29 and 30), is available on CD. He is a Chief Contributor to *Jazz Journal*, which has published his articles on Larkin's estimates of Duke Ellington and Sidney Bechet.

**R. H. Winnick** lives in Princeton New Jersey. He co-authored (with Lawrance Thompson) *Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938–1963* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1977) and edited *Letters of Archibald MacLeish, 1907 to 1982* (Houghton Mifflin, 1983). His other publications include article-length studies on Chaucer's 'Shipman's Tale' (in *The Chaucer Review*); Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (in *Notes and Queries*); Shakespeare's Sonnets (in *Literary Imagination and Notes and Queries*); Melville's *Moby-Dick* (in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*); and Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (in the *Thomas Hardy Review*). An independent scholar, Winnick received his Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Princeton University in 1976.

**Paul Wooldridge** is a father of two young daughters and a Careers Manager at a sixth-form college in Stourbridge. Larkin inspired him to write poetry, which he has been doing for the last three years. He has had his work published in *The New Humanist*, *The Good Funeral Guide*, *Cannon's Mouth* and *Graffiti Magazine*. He is currently finalising his first pamphlet and reads his formalist verse at poetry evenings in Stourbridge and the local area.

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# The Philip Larkin Society

## Publications and Merchandise

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### Submissions to *About Larkin*

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* 43 is 28 February 2017.

### Publications

All prices include postage and packing. For prices in US dollars and euros, please contact the Merchandising Officer at the address below. Please make cheques for all Society publications payable to 'The Philip Larkin Society' and send to:

Philip Larkin Society Publications  
c/o 25 Hawkehurst Road  
Sheffield  
S6 2WF

**About Larkin: Journal back issues:** £8.00 each.

Issues containing important Larkin works are: Letter to Eva (2); 'The Library I came to' (3); 1943 Letter to his parents (4); 'Story 1' (10 – out of print); 'Peter' (11); 'An Incident in the English Camp' (12); Schoolboy writings (13); 'We met at the end of the party'; prose and poetry from 1940\* (14); 'Apples on a Christmas Tree' (20); 'Biographical Details: Oxford 1' (23); 'Biographical Details: Oxford 2' (24); 'New Brooms'; 'Poem for Penelope'; early letters\* (25); Dream Diary (1942–3) Part 1 (27); Dream Diary (1942–3) Part 2 (28). Those asterisked contain a large quantity of significant material.

### Books

Maeve Brennan, *The Philip Larkin I Knew* (Manchester University Press: Philip Larkin Society Monograph 3) £15.50

A unique memoir of the poet, deeply personal and revealing.

A.T. Tolley, *Larkin at Work: A Study of Larkin's mode of composition as seen in his workbooks* (Larkin Society Monograph 1) £8.00

Jean Hartley, *Philip Larkin, The Marvell Press and me* £10.50

'Jean Hartley's story is a vital piece of evidence for anyone curious about Larkin's life.' Andrew Motion, *The Observer*.

Jean Hartley, *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire* £7.50

The second edition of this popular topographical and walking guide to the area, home to Larkin for 30 years.

Graham Chesters (ed.), *The Making of Larkin's Statue* £10.00

Dedicated to the memory of Dr Jean Hartley, this book tells the inside story of the statue, from commissioning to installation.

Geoffrey Waters, *The Larkin Trail* (Kingston Press) £13.50

Crammed with art work and accompanying narrative, this makes an excellent companion to *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire*.

Andrew McKeown and Charles Holdefer (eds.), *Philip Larkin and the Poetics of Resistance* (Paris: l'Harmattan) £8.25

The proceedings of the 2004 conference held in Poitiers, France.

*Old City, New Rumours*, an anthology edited by Ian Gregson and Carol Rumens (Five Leaves Press/ The Philip Larkin Society) £6.99.

Contributors include: Douglas Dunn, Roger McGough, Andrew Motion, Sean O'Brien and Maurice Rutherford.

### Poetry by Maurice Rutherford

*Love is a Four Letter World* (Peterloo Poets, 1994) £8.25

Observations about childhood, wartime service, and retirement.

Hull and its poets, including Philip Larkin, are major presences.

*This Day Dawning* (Peterloo Poets, 1989) £4.50

An original and funny offering from the renowned Hull-born poet.

**Larkin Society Audiotapes:** £4.00 each

Winifred Dawson: *Love and Larkin* (2001)

Zachary Leader: *Editing Kingsley Amis's Letters* (2001)

Alan Plater: *By the tide of Humber I fell among poets* (1998)

Dale Salwak: *Philip Larkin: An American View* (1997)

### CDs

*An Evening with Maureen Lipman CBE:* £8.00

Maureen Lipman was the distinguished guest at a dinner and auction which raised £9,000 towards the Larkin statue. Recorded on 2 September 2010, the CD captures the wit and humour of this successful event.

**John White:** Philip Larkin: *Funny Man:* £8.50

John White's marvellously observed and informed presentation at the University Staff House on 23 January 2010 takes us as close as we can to spending an hour in Larkin's company.

**Anne Fine:** Philip Larkin: *A Personal View* £10.00

Anne Fine's challenging, witty and personal presentation to the Annual General Meeting, June 2004.

**All Night North** £11.50

12 contemporary folk, pop and rock songs featuring the poems of Philip Larkin

### DVDs

**Jean Hartley A Tribute:** £10.00

A recording of Jean Hartley: An Appreciation of the Writer, Artist, Friend and Publisher of Philip Larkin's *The Less Deceived* – James Booth's Lecture at the Society's 2012 AGM.

**The Unveiling of the Philip Larkin Statue:** £10.00

This DVD captures the atmosphere of the unveiling of the Philip Larkin statue on 2 December 2010.

**Required Performance.** Professor Edwin Dawes, our Chairman, works his magic at the Annual General Meeting 2006: £10.00

### Philip Larkin Poster (A2)

From a 1964 photograph during the filming of the Monitor television programme (© 1964 Anne James): £8.00

### Stationery

Notelets (pack of 5): £3.20; Postcards (set of 4): £2.00.

Bookmarks (5): £2.00

### Monitor stationery

Pack of two notelets (and envelopes): £1.50

Set of four postcards: £2.00

*These items feature images of both Philip Larkin and John Betjeman from the 1964 BBC Monitor documentary programme 'Down Cemetery Road'.* (Photographs © 1964 Anne James)

### Larkin in 25 objects exhibition

Set of 6 beautiful images of Larkin's belongings by Larkin25 photographer Dennis Low, the objects providing an insight into Larkin's life, and throwing new light on familiar poems: £3.80

### Fridge magnets

Three different black and white photographs of Larkin £2.40 each; set of three £5.50

**Wotlarx Enterprises:** David Pattison, *This Was Mr Bleaney's Bike* £6.99 '... a good and ingenious plot...' Alan Plater

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**Cover illustration:**

*Postcard of the Martyrs' Memorial, Broad Street, Oxford, with climbing 'Creature'  
sent by Philip Larkin to his mother Eva Larkin on 28 March 1951.*

*We are grateful to The Society of Authors, on behalf of the Larkin Estate,  
for permission to publish Larkin's drawing. © 2016 The Estate of Philip Larkin.*