

JIM HARRISON

Barking

The moon comes up.
The moon goes down.
This is to inform you
that I didn't die young.
Age swept past me
but I caught up.
Spring has begun here and each day
brings new birds up from Mexico.
Yesterday I got a call from the outside
world but I said no in thunder.
I was a dog on a short chain
and now there's no chain.

PHILIP LARKIN: THE RIGHT LINE

Edited by Jean Hartley & Jim Orwin

Introduction

Art is by so much the most exciting thing in the world.

— Philip Larkin, June 15, 1943

The whole point of drawing is choosing the right line.

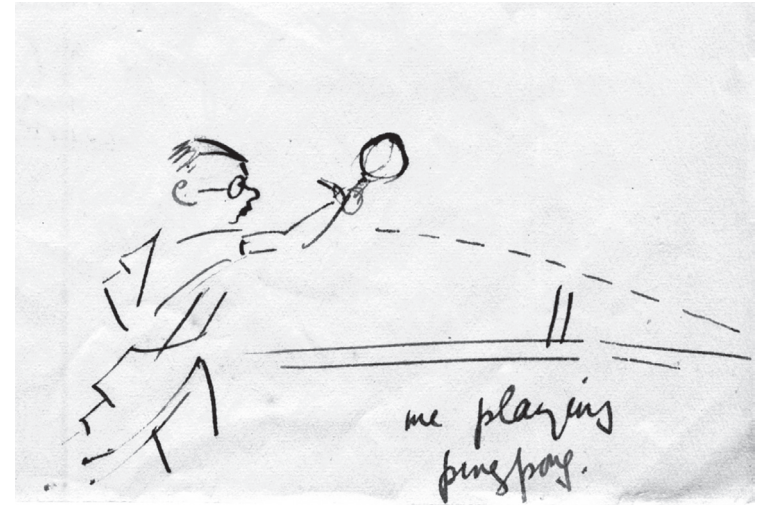
— Philip Larkin, July 12, 1965

After the publication of *The Whitsun Weddings* in 1964, and the subsequent universal acclaim accorded to both the collection and its author, the release to the world of a new poem by Philip Larkin was considered to be an exciting literary event. This respect was well placed. Larkin's struggle to produce the best poetry he possibly could is well documented in the workbooks, which provide a detailed record of the development of most of the poems. Moreover, poems seemingly finished in his workbooks would often be honed further as he set them down in typescript.

In contrast, the drawings and doodles that comprise this portfolio were (in the main) thrown off to entertain for a brief moment a particular individual, with complete disregard for any artistic merit they might contain. Illustrating letters and notes to friends or colleagues, decorating a gift yearbook for his mother, and scribbled in workbooks or on committee meeting papers, these drawings are a small sample of hundreds of such illustrations by Larkin.

The bulk of the drawings, and the most detailed, are to be found in his letters to Jim Sutton, a school friend to whom he began writing when he was seventeen. Jim was an art student at the Slade School and although the letters cover literature, jazz, film, and theater, there is also a continuous dialogue about art and artists. The correspondence lasted for over twenty-five years, and Larkin's letters are full of vivid and mobile drawings that chart his moods and activities. Throughout them Larkin refers to Jim as "The Artist" and himself as "The Writah."

To date, comparatively few of Larkin's drawings have been made available for publication. In selecting those to be included here, we have attempted to represent both the range of sources where drawings have been found and the variety of styles employed by Larkin in his drawing. There is no sense that he placed any importance or value on them, and yet they shed an interesting sidelight on this very private, many-faceted, multiply-gifted man. They continue to surprise and delight us: we hope they affect you similarly. — JH & JO



Editors' note: We are grateful to Betty Mackereth and Deborah Duffin for giving us access to material in their possession and for allowing us to use items from their personal collections in this portfolio. We would also like to thank Judy Burg and the staff of the Brynmor Jones Library; Judith Priestman, Curator of Modern Literary Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library; and Jeremy Crow of the Society of Authors on behalf of the Estate of Philip Larkin, whose assistance, patience, and expertise helped to make this portfolio possible. The drawings included in this portfolio are © 2008, The Estate of Philip Larkin. "Distressing sartorial affinities," "The vision of Piers Plowman," and "My dear, if that's the *Civil Service*," all appear courtesy of The Bodleian Library, University of Oxford: shelfmarks MS.Engc.2358 folio 7, MS.Eng.c.3898 folio 32, and MS.Eng.c.3898 folio 37.

This drawing comes from a letter dated August 12, 1939, to Jim Sutton in which the seventeen-year-old Larkin describes playing ping-pong, while on holiday in Jersey, with a "silly little baldheaded fool." He writes, "I take great pleasure in whooping him."



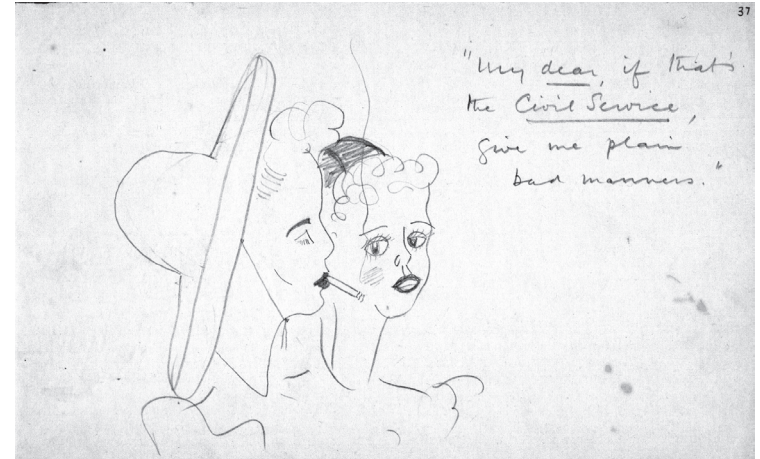
Here is another example of the kind of drawing Larkin would include in his letters to Sutton. Larkin has been reading some of Edward Thomas's verse, which brings about a realization in him that "to write is the one thing I really want to do." In this letter, dated May 7, 1941, Larkin tells Sutton that he has written an "obscene remark" in the Junior Common Room book, and later mentions: "Last night I wrote a sonnet."



In the early forties, Larkin's friend Bruce Montgomery had sent him "The Poet, the Bear, and the Phairy Phantasy: A Moral Tale in Umpteen Pictures." Larkin's response was "Life with Phairy Phantasy: A Morality in Pictures Drawn by Mr. P.A.L.," a series of eleven drawings, of which this is one.



Again from the early forties, this comes from a series of ten drawings — based mainly on the Old English texts Larkin studied for his finals at Oxford — sent to Montgomery. Other subjects in the series include *Lazamon's "Brut," Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Beowulf*.



Number eight in the Old English series sent to Montgomery, this drawing is linked to Larkin's attempts to find gainful employment with the British Civil Service. In one letter to Sutton, dated June 15, 1943, Larkin wrote: "As a matter of fact, I have put my name down for the Civil Service, as a Temporary Assistant Principal. I don't know what it entails and I don't much care. I don't want to 'do' anything." Larkin's interviewers were left in no doubt as to his lack of interest in a career with the Civil Service: "They asked me what I really wanted to do, and I said 'Be a novelist'" [Larkin to Sutton, August 10, 1943].



It was customary at the start of a new year for Larkin to present his mother, Eva, with a yearbook. This detailed domestic setting of "Old Creature," Larkin's affectionate name for Eva, is dated December 1949 and was drawn in her yearbook for 1950. Particularly effective, we think, is the shadow of the toast with toasting fork.

Needler Hall
31 March 1961

Dear Deborah,
I loved having your
kind letter when I was
in hospital.



This is me having my
temperature taken, and
not liking it. With love from
Philip Larkin

On March 6, 1961, Larkin collapsed at a Brynmor Jones Library Committee meeting at Hull University. He was temporarily cared for at Needler Hall, one of the student halls of residence. This is Larkin's reply to a get well letter from Deborah Duffin, the young daughter of the family who lived in the flat beneath Larkin's at 32 Pearson Park.



The annual Christmas parties of the Brynmor Jones Library staff were enjoyed with almost childlike excitement, and were filled with games, dancing, drink (provided by Larkin), good food (provided by the staff), and much jollity. In preparation for their 1963 Christmas party, all those attending were asked to draw self-portraits, to be revealed at the event. This is Larkin's effort.

31.10.1980

RESTRICTED
R/S 7/3

The University,
Hull.

29th October, 1980

Meeting of Senate

Meeting of Senate will be held in the Council Room on Wednesday, 5th November, 1980, at 2.00 pm.

FF MATTISON
Registrar

AGENDA

GROUP I

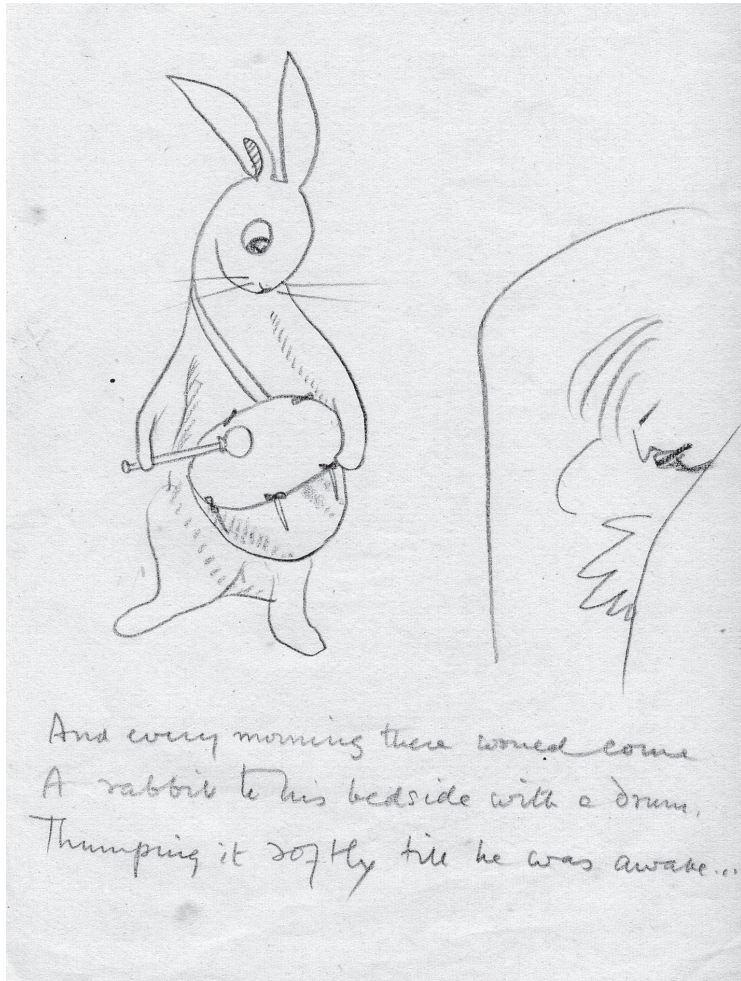
1. Minutes of meeting held on 8th October, 1980 (circulated 22.10.80)
Correction: Min 15 - Refusal to admit or re-admit students. Delete the words "be confirmed" in the final line of the Resolution.
2. Matters arising:
 - (a) Min 12 Student numbers ¹²¹ 5441 ^{inc.} (565 p3) ^{then in target} ^{Committee in Ed.}
 - (b) Min 14 University owned houses
3. Reports and References from Council (to ~~follow~~)
4. Vice-Chancellor's Business
5. Reports of meetings of the Faculty Boards:

(a) Arts	- 22nd October, 1980	(to follow)
(b) Science	- 15th October, 1980	(to follow)
(c) Social Sciences	- 29th October, 1980	(to follow)
(d) Law	- 15th October, 1980	(to follow)
(e) Items common to all Faculties		(copy attached)
6. Minutes and Reports of Committees:

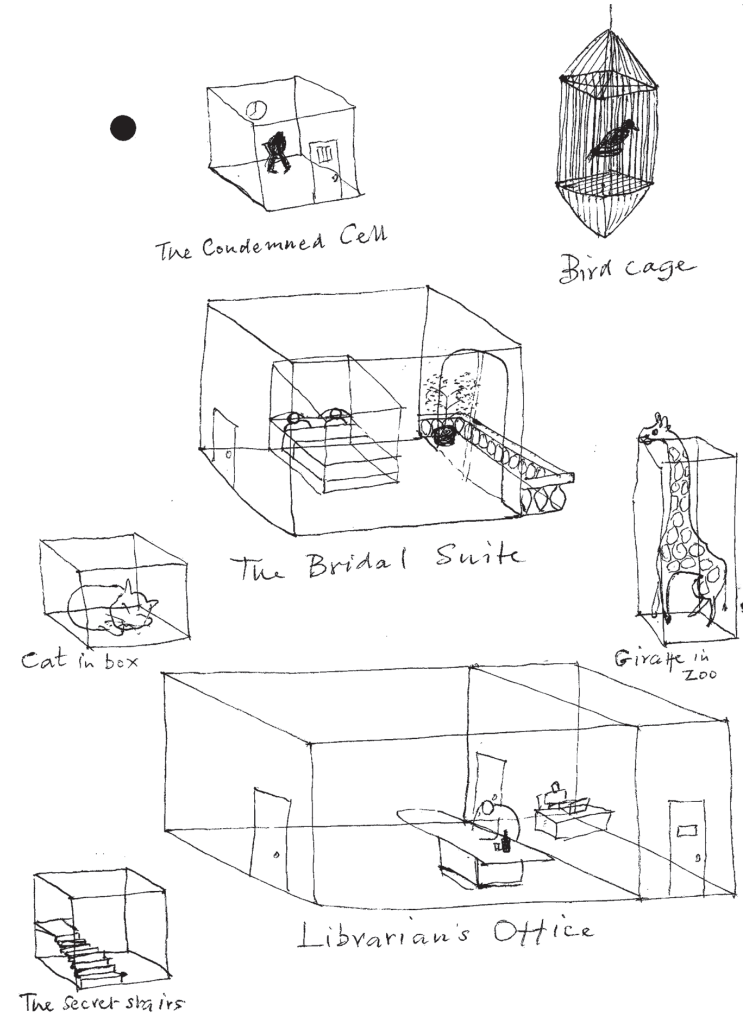
(a) Staffing	- October, 1980	(copy attached)
(b) Lecturing Staff	- 7th October, 1980	(copy attached)
(c) Development	- 13th October, 1980	(copy attached)
(d) Honorary Degrees	- 22nd October, 1980	(to follow)

Verbal report

Larkin is reputed to have been an inveterate doodler on working copies of committee meeting papers, though few examples seem to survive. This intricate Arabian scene, including camel and scimitar, is dated October 29, 1980. The image of the radiant sun echoes the poem "Solar": "Your petalled head of flames/Continuously exploding."

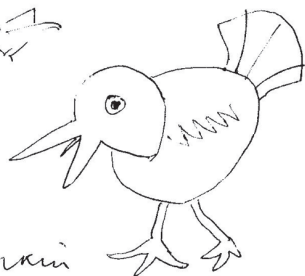
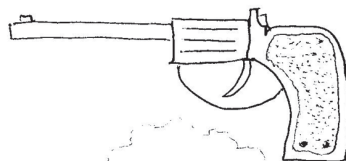


Larkin's secretary, Betty Mackereth, provided this delightful drawing by him of a rabbit with a drum, which unfortunately we cannot date. The text reads: "And every morning there would come / A rabbit to his bedside with a drum. / Thumping it softly till he was awake ..."

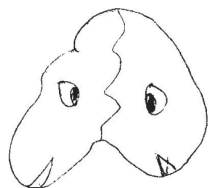


Larkin's poems often reveal a deep sympathy with animals and a loathing of how humans can ill-treat them. On his desk at work he kept a framed photograph of a caged gorilla named Guy, with whom — according to his secretary, Mackereth — he felt a kinship. The symbols of confinement shown here align Larkin's own predicament, and the human condition generally, with that of all caged creatures.

3) 10'8.30
36.10



Philip Larkin PL
Philip Larkin PL
Philip Larkin PL
Philip Larkin PL
Philip Larkin PL
Philip Larkin PL



COMMENT

This page of doodles originally came from the personal collection of Margaret Elliott, who took over as Larkin's secretary when Betty Mackereth retired in June 1984. Interestingly, the focus of the page lies in Larkin's rehearsed signatures; a universal preoccupation normally associated with the young, but one we feel is consistent with the protean nature of Larkin's character generally.