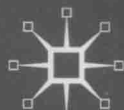
A black and white portrait of John Osborne, a middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. His hands are visible at the bottom of the frame, resting on a surface.

Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence

A Case of Wrongful Conviction

John Osborne



Larkin, Ideology and Critical Violence

A Case of Wrongful Conviction

John Osborne



palgrave
macmillan



© John Osborne 2008

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4LP.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published 2008 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010

Companies and representatives throughout the world

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4039-3706-3 hardback

ISBN-10: 1-4039-3706-0 hardback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources. Logging, pulping and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for a Research Leave Award that made the writing of this book possible.

I would also like to thank Professors Robert Crawford and Barbara Everett for supporting my application for the AHRC grant; Judy Burg and the staff of the Brynmor Jones Library for guidance in the consultation of Larkin manuscripts; the Philip Larkin Society for providing a laboratory in which to road-test my ideas; Sylvia Tynan, Smitha Manoj and the staff of Macmillan India Ltd for invaluable assistance in preparing the typescript; the Society of Authors as the Literary Representative of the Estate of Philip Larkin; Jane Thomas for personal and scholarly support; and Rhiannon, Aeronwy and Carys for their forbearance.

Although this book was written in an isolating spirit of contestation, there are two intellectual debts I would like to specify: first, to Larkin's friend Ted Tarling, who died before he had the chance to comment on my ideas but who shaped them anyway, in an act of unaccountable generosity, by bequeathing me his library; and, second, to Jim Orwin, the world authority on musical settings of Larkin's poems, who has repeatedly given me the benefit of his researches.

I dedicate this book to my mother: whatever virtues it displays, I learned from her; the vices are all my own.

The author and publishers acknowledge the following permissions to reprint copyright material: Faber and Faber Ltd and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC, for quotations from *Collected Poems* (1988) by Philip Larkin; excerpts from *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940–1985*; and excerpts from *Required Writing* by Philip Larkin. Faber and Faber Ltd for excerpts from *Jill, A Girl in Winter, All What Jazz, Further Requirements, Larkin's Jazz* and *Early Poems and Juvenilia* by Philip Larkin. The foregoing are all copyright the Estate of Philip Larkin. Marvell Press, England and Australia, for quotations from 'Whatever Happened', 'Born Yesterday', 'Poetry of Departures', 'Wants', 'Arrivals, Departures', 'At Grass', 'Skin', 'Dry-Point', 'Next, Please', 'Latest Face', 'Maiden Name', 'Church Going', 'Places, Loved Ones', 'If, My Darling', 'Lines on a Young Lady's

Photograph Album', 'Reasons for Attendance' and 'Toads', reprinted from *The Less Deceived*. Faber and Faber Ltd and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC, for excerpts from Collected Poems by Thom Gunn. Faber and Faber Ltd and Harcourt, Inc., for quotations from Collected Poems by T.S. Eliot. Peterloo Poets for an excerpt from *Love is a Four-Letter World* by Maurice Rutherford. Excerpts from Siegfried Sassoon's *Collected Poems, 1908–1956*, copyright Siegfried Sassoon, by kind permission of the Estate of George Sassoon. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked, the author and publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

Abbreviations

All references to the works of Philip Larkin are incorporated in the text using the following abbreviations:

<i>AWJ</i>	<i>All What Jazz</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Poems</i> (1988)
<i>EPJ</i>	<i>Early Poems and Juvenilia</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>Further Requirements</i>
<i>GW</i>	<i>A Girl in Winter</i>
<i>J</i>	<i>Jill</i>
<i>LJ</i>	<i>Larkin's Jazz</i>
<i>RW</i>	<i>Required Writing</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>Selected Letters</i>
<i>TWG</i>	<i>Trouble at Willow Gables and other fictions</i>

All other citations may be found in the notes.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction: Radical Larkin and the Late Millennial Bowdler	1
1 Larkin and Modernism: Jazz	27
2 Larkin and Modernism: Poetry	50
3 Larkin and Philosophy: Existentialism	82
4 Larkin and Philosophy: Poststructuralism	100
5 Larkin and Englishness	132
6 Larkin and Gender	159
7 Larkin and Politics	187
8 Larkin and Identity	216
Conclusion: Larkin and Postmodernism	257
<i>Notes</i>	261
<i>Bibliography</i>	284
<i>Index</i>	293

Introduction: Radical Larkin and the Late Millennial Bowdler

I The original Bowdler

For three centuries after his death, Shakespeare was regarded as a major poet so wanting in taste that even his greatest works were marred by regrettable moral and linguistic lapses. On hearing Shakespeare's boast that he never blotted out a line, Ben Jonson rejoined: 'Would he had blotted out a thousand'. Dr Johnson concurred: 'Shakespeare never has six lines together without a fault'. John Dryden claimed that Shakespeare 'is the very Janus of poets; he wears almost everywhere two faces; and you have scarce begun to admire the one ere you despise the other'. While Voltaire loftily declared that 'Shakespeare is a drunken savage ... whose plays can please only in London and Canada'.¹

One solution to the problem of Shakespeare's unevenness was to improve his plays by rewriting them. 'Tate rewrote *King Lear* to give it a happy ending; the Honorable James Howard, Dryden's brother-in-law, rewrote *Romeo and Juliet*' marrying the young lovers; and Poet Laureate 'Sir William Davenant did a jolly production of *Macbeth*, complete with singing and dancing'.² In all such instances, not only were offending passages excised from Shakespeare's original but new material was added by the subsequent, more judicious author.

In 1807, the approach changed, Hannah Bowdler published *The Family Shakespeare*, which in an unsigned preface pledged to remove 'everything that can raise a blush on the cheek of modesty'. (In a nice case of the Bowdler bowdlerized, Hannah wielded her scalpel anonymously 'to avoid the odium of admitting that she, an unmarried gentlewoman of fifty, understood Shakespeare's obscenity' well enough to expertly remove it!)³ Hannah's volume was far from comprehensive, some plays being omitted in their entirety; however, eleven years later

her brother Dr Thomas Bowdler published the revised and enlarged edition that, in ten volumes, became the best-selling Shakespeare of the nineteenth century. Dr Bowdler surgically removed from Shakespeare's text 'whatever is unfit to be read by a gentleman in a company of ladies' or 'which may not with propriety be read aloud in a family'.⁴ In practice, this meant suppressing all overt sexual allusions and many religious ones. This in turn entailed greatly diminished roles for the likes of Hamlet, Macbeth, Falstaff and the Nurse, and the total elimination of reprehensible characters like Doll Tearsheet. 'True to his medical training', the good doctor 'neatly stitched the loose ends across' the cut to 'avoid scars. He substituted very few words of his own', and he neither paraphrased 'nor (with rare exceptions) added commentary'.⁵

Such was the success of *The Family Shakespeare* that Bowdler went on to expurgate Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. He also set a trend for what as early as 1836 became known as 'bowdlerizing'; distinguished text-cutters who followed in his footsteps including the great dictionnarian Noah Webster, William Cullen Bryant, W.M. Rossetti, the novelist Charlotte Yonge, Palgrave of *The Golden Treasury* (though not in that volume), Bulfinch of the *Mythology*, Lewis Carroll, Justice Brewer of the Supreme Court, Quiller-Couch of Oxford and the Poet Laureate John Masefield.⁶ Thanks to the sterling efforts of these guardians of taste, three or four generations of anglophone readers grew up with an inaccurate idea of their own literary inheritance. With the First World War, the assumptions underpinning bowdlerism seemed to lose their legitimacy. The cultural tide turned in the direction of ever-greater deregulation and the artistic licence to challenge rather than endorse polite taste. When bowdlerism re-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, it took a very different form and Larkin was a principal victim.

II The late millennial Bowdler and the biographical fallacy

Dr Bowdler was very clear that in expurgating the indecent and blasphemous passages 'he was conferring a benefit not only on the reader but on Shakespeare as well'. Whenever you erase improper material from the plays, he observed, you do so 'not only without injury, but with manifest advantage ... to the sense of the passage and to the spirit of the author'.⁷ With the late millennial Bowdler, by contrast, expurgation moves from the *textual* to the *interpretative* plane; and the effect is often, though not necessarily, such as to diminish rather than enhance the reputation of the chosen author.

Unlike Dr Bowdler and his sister, who were fully cognizant of what they were doing and declared their objectives to the reader, their late millennial counterparts appear to work without a conscious methodology. Nonetheless, their procedure is systematic and can therefore be explicated. The first vital step is to discuss literary texts as though they were spoken, not written; listened to, not read; received by ear, not by eye. The language employed by the text may be described as a 'tongue', the narrative referred to in terms of 'speech', the narrator described as an authorial 'mouthpiece', the author's career made to pivot on the discovery of a 'voice' of his or her own. This might be defended as an innocent use of metaphor, not intended to be taken seriously. In practice, the act of writing – with all its implications of inscriptedness or redrafting, its potential for variable rereading, its scribal sensitivity to the texture of text, to the way words can flow, granulate, chafe or caress – is evaporated in favour of the supposed immediacy of oral exchange.

This first move facilitates an exegetical simplification in which authors are perceived as 'speaking' more or less direct to the audience. In the case of poetry, for example, the narrators of all the individual poems in a collection will be conflated with the actual author. This conflation not only involves vanquishing the individualized narrators – the expurgation process is by now well under way – but also suppressing intertextual references of the sort that draw attention to the textuality of the text and the constructedness of its narration. In old-fashioned parlance, for the critic to admit the presence in the poem of 'voices' other than the author's own risks acknowledging that the narrator's 'speech' differs from that of the author by being compounded with non-authorial elements.

These deletions are hidden from the reader (usually from the bowdlerizer too) by wadding the resultant interpretative *lacunae* with biographical information. Typically, the critic will identify locations in poems that are non-site specific, gender the narrators and addressees in poems that are non-gender specific, and date events in poems that are temporally unhoused. A favourite tactic in accomplishing this feat is to refer the text back to the biographical incident that the critic believes prompted it. The hermeneutical quest for textual meaning is replaced by a biographical quest for the moment of origination.

Finally, it is worth remarking the frequency with which our contemporary bowdlers compensate for any shortage of biographical fact by essentializing the author's life in relation to the categories of nationality, race, class, sex and gender. In this schema, a poet like Larkin might be described as quintessentially English (i.e., xenophobic, repressed,

middle-class), Dylan Thomas or Brendan Behan as typical Celts (intemperate, romantic, *drunk*), Sylvia Plath as archetypically female (emotional, possessive, hysterical), Ted Hughes as Yorkshire personified (wind-swept, taciturn, brutal) or Allen Ginsberg as flamboyantly gay (oedipal, promiscuous, attention-seeking). The precipitate of ideologies so familiar as to pass notice, these types and their defining traits receive neither justification nor analysis; they have been 'naturalized', and are appealed to as obvious truths. Their role is not to aid differentiated thinking but to thwart it.

This, then, is the sequence of displacements that constitutes the methodology, no less systematic for being unconscious (it is when ideology is unawares that it is most pervasively at work), of the late millennial Bowdler: text is equated with speech; all narrators are collapsed into one and conflated with the author; the life of the author is used as the key to the work, so that literature is displaced onto biography; the author's life is displaced onto the template of a group identity of which he or she is perceived as representative; and that group identity is defined in relation to a few symbolic traits so stereotypical as to seem self-evident, so self-evident as to deter interrogation. This reductive hermeneutics became hegemonic in the literary journalism of the second half of the twentieth century and spread from there to certain sectors of academic criticism. Nowhere were its effects more ubiquitous or oblitative than in the domain of poetry.

III Bowdlerizing the Beats

Two literary movements of the 1950s and 1960s fell victim to his biographical essentialism, though both might be accused of having brought down that fate upon their own heads. The first group, the Beats, might be so accused in relation to subject matter. For example, Jack Kerouac's novels are heavily fictionalized chronicles of the antics of him and his pals – Allen Ginsberg becoming the Alvah Goldbook of *The Dharma Bums*, Lawrence Ferlinghetti becoming the Lorenzo Monsanto of *Big Sur*, William Burroughs being pseudonymized as Old Bull Lee in *On the Road* and Gregory Corso appearing as Raphael Urso in *Desolation Angels* – thereby creating the misleading impression that the reader might pierce the text in order to grasp an originary autobiographical 'truth'.

This misleading impression is entrenched at the aesthetic level, the Beats adopting an expressivist poetics in which it is proposed that art should aim for the heart rather than the head, the best way of affecting the reader's emotions being to speak directly from one's own ('I am the

substance of my poetry', Corso claimed). With regard to the act of composition, this entailed a privileging of the spontaneous, the inspirational, the epiphanous, over the considered and premeditated: see Ginsberg's poem 'On Improvised Poetics', whose axiom 'First thought best thought' might be translated as 'First draft, best draft' and might, as Dennis O'Driscoll has pointed out, 'evoke a "First reading, last reading" reproach from his readership'.⁸ It is with unabashed pride that Kerouac claimed to have written *The Subterraneans* in three nights and Ginsberg boasted of having composed 'Sunflower Sutra' in twenty minutes and the long first section of 'Howl' in an afternoon.

The reality is very different. The major works in the Beat canon are almost invariably those which benefited from arduous crafting while the genuinely impromptu pieces are usually the most disposable. This is not to say that the masterpieces exude laboriousness, but that their spontaneity has been hard won. Ginsberg's 'Howl' is the poem that is usually thought to epitomize Beat aesthetics. When a facsimile edition was published in 1986 it reprinted five drafts of Part I, eighteen of Part II, five of Part III and seven of Part IV – though it makes no mention of a fifth part which Ferlinghetti persuaded Ginsberg to drop entire.⁹ Other versions, now lost, are alluded to in the commentary. The variants that are included demonstrate the dramatic revisions the poem underwent before assuming its final form. In Part I, for instance, what is now the seventh strophe began as the fiftieth; similarly, the present twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-seventh and thirtieth strophes all moved fifty or more places in the sequence, often undergoing extensive rewording in the process. Moreover, the facsimile edition concentrates on the period 1955–6, whereas Ginsberg actually met the poem's dedicatee Carl Solomon in 1949, jotting down at the time many of the latter's anecdotes and aphorisms which subsequently found their way into the poem. So 'Howl' was composed over a seven-year period, some parts of it undergoing at least twenty rehearsals before arriving at a persuasively 'improvised' discourse. To put it another way, it took protracted effort to get this text to masquerade as speech.

Also contrary to the authors' propaganda regarding spontaneity and improvisation is the dense palimpsestic multi-layering of quotes and allusions that mediates any autobiographical disclosures in the Beat text. James Campbell has remarked the extraordinary literary pedigree of Kerouac's title *On the Road*, citing as evidence works of the same name by Douglas Goldring (1910), Gwen John (1920), Langston Hughes (1935) and Cyril Campion (1954).¹⁰ As for Ginsberg, many of his best poems are written over the top of previous works by earlier authors: 'Malest Cornifici Tuo

Catullo' translates and adapts a poem by Catullus; 'A Supermarket in California' rewrites Lorca's 'Ode to Walt Whitman'; 'Sunflower Sutra' is modelled on Blake's 'Ah, Sunflower!'; while 'Kaddish' leans heavily on Edward Marshall's 'Leave the Word Alone'. In 'Howl' the layers multiply: for instance, Ginsberg took Christ's agonized cry 'eli eli lamma lamma sabachthani' – 'My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?' – not from its New Testament source in Matthew 27.46, but via Tristan Corbière's 'Cris d'Aveugle', so that both anterior texts are in play in the pertinent passage towards the end of Part I. Whatever such works do provide, they clearly do not offer unmediated authorial speech.

Paradoxically, even the most urgently personal aspects of this body of literature serve to demonstrate the fictiveness of the Beat text and the absurdity of trying to take its measure in biographical terms. Allen Ginsberg met Carl Solomon in the Columbia Presbyterian Psychiatric Institute in 1949 when Ginsberg became a voluntary patient in order to escape imprisonment for possession of stolen goods. Ginsberg regarded Solomon as 'an intuitive Bronx Dadaist and prose-poet', noted down his more memorable anecdotes and turns of phrase, picked up from him Artaud's concept of the artist as a mad (i.e., sane) person in a sane (i.e., mad) world, and six years later brought all these elements together in a poem whose full title is 'Howl for Carl Solomon'.¹¹ The piece famously begins

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking
for an angry fix¹²

and Solomon is presented as the prime example, a lunatic saint cruelly incarcerated by an uncomprehending society. The pivotal moment of the long first section of the poem begins with a passage particularly reliant on Solomon's stories –

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and
subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of
the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of
suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy
and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin,
Metrazol electricity
hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong
& amnesia¹³

– and culminates in the direct address: ‘ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe’. The third part of ‘Howl’ opens with a variant of the address – ‘Carl Solomon I’m with you in Rockland’ – the last five words of this line thereafter being repeated eighteen times as a refrain (Rockland was the hospital in which Solomon was held after a mental breakdown in 1955). In short, Solomon is the poem’s dedicatee, addressee, inspiration and hero-victim. He is to ‘Howl’ as Neal Cassady is to *On the Road*, the real person whose life the work celebrates.

Once again, however, the case is not what it seems. Not only does Ginsberg’s poem meld Solomon incarcerations from two different geographical locations and two different decades, but as the latter admitted the wild escapades he had earlier recounted to the poet, and which provide ‘Howl’ with much of its vivacity, were largely bogus:

I gave Allen an apocryphal history of my adventures and pseudo-intellectual deeds of daring, He meticulously took note of everything I said. ... [H]e published all of the data, compounded partly of truth, but for the most [part] raving self-justification, crypto-bohemian boasting à la Rimbaud, effeminate prancing, and esoteric aphorisms plagiarized from Kierkegaard and others – in the form of *Howl*. Thus he enshrined falsehood as truth and raving as common sense for future generations to ponder and be misled.¹⁴

In making this disclosure, Solomon gleefully supposes that he has exposed the poem as worthless whereas what he has actually proven is that the autobiographical ‘truth’ of Beat literature is most plausible when the product of fictive means. Ginsberg probably thought he was ‘telling it like it is’, complete with Solomon’s eye-witness testimony; but by persuading the poet of the truth of his fabricated life, Solomon released him from the treadmill of the biographical into a larger realm of linguistic and imaginative play. And this, in turn, made the fiction real in the only place that matters, not at the level of the life lived but at the level of the words on the page. To put it another way, the success of Beat literature stems from the fact that even when the authors were trying to be autobiographical they signally failed in the endeavour.

Alas, the forgoing complexities have largely eluded the movement’s commentators: in *The Penguin Book of the Beats*, their leading light Ann Charters repeatedly asserts that ‘Beat literature is predominantly autobiographical’ and that ‘the Beats insisted on writing directly about events in their own lives’, while her biography of Kerouac preposterously recycles episodes from his novels as though they were transcripts

of actual events.¹⁵ As a result of this late millennial obsession with the biographical, the individual Beat writers enjoy celebrity status while the critical discussion of their work is more rudimentary and misguided than anything stemming from Bowdler's deletions.

IV Bowdlerizing the Confessional poets

Much the same holds true with those authors commonly identified with M.L. Rosenthal's term 'the Confessional Poets': Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton – what Larkin jokingly called 'the-look-at-me-I'm-round-the-bend school'. Once again it could be claimed that the writers were complicitous with biographical criticism, the very fact that their verse was characterized by the public 'confession' of transgressions which would formerly have been admitted only in private to a priest or analyst seeming to necessitate author-centred interpretation. Typical Confessional themes include fraught relations with parents, personal accounts of infidelity and divorce, nervous breakdown, incarceration in mental institutions and suicidalism (an infatuation consummated in the cases of Berryman, Plath and Sexton). As with the Beats, the best books on the subject tend to be biographies, the literary critics bowdlerizing the poetry of interpretative complexities that do not reflect the tabloid sensationalism of the author's lives.

Sylvia Plath is a case in point, her most famous poems containing strong enough hints of the autobiographical to lure her critics into the shallows. All remark the similarities between Plath and her narrators; fewer remark the dissimilarities (for instance, that Plath did not have the Nazi father or the Jewish-Gypsy mother of the protagonist of 'Daddy', nor did she attempt suicide at the age of ten like the narrator of 'Lady Lazarus'). None remark the dense interweave of allusions that constitutes what they like to call the narrative 'voice', attributing directly to Plath lines quoted from other authors. In one particularly vexed case, Anglo-Jewish and American-Jewish critics have divided over the legitimacy of Plath's use of Holocaust imagery. Irving Howe, Marjorie Perloff and Leon Wieseltier argue that she was a gentile who did not earn the right to address the catastrophe, while George Steiner and Jacqueline Rose defend her against the charge. At the centre of the controversy is the use of the first person singular in such lines as the following from 'Daddy' –

I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew ...
I may be a bit of a Jew.¹⁶

– a personalization that hostile commentators view as an unwarranted appropriation of other people's suffering. What neither side pauses long enough to notice is that Plath's lines are a reworking of passages such as the following from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*: 'I too would become a Jew. ... I already speak like a Jew. And I am as ugly as a Jew.'¹⁷

This denial of the literarity, the constructedness, of Plath's narration extends to her other masterpieces. No one seems to have noticed that the magnificent ending of 'Lady Lazarus' –

Herr God, Herr Lucifer

Beware

Beware

Out of the ash

I rise with my red hair

And I eat men like air.¹⁸

– comes from the end of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' –

And all who heard should see them there,

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!¹⁹

– possibly by way of Longfellow's 'Beware':

I know a maiden fair to see,

Take care!

She can both false and friendly be,

Beware! Beware!²⁰

What Plath gains by this perpetual if unremarked paralleling of male-authored texts might be broached by a glance at these lines from 'The Applicant':

Now your head, excuse is empty.

I have the ticket for that.

Come here, sweetie, out of the closet.

Well, what do you think of *that*?

Naked as paper to start.

But in twenty-five years she'll be silver,

In fifty, gold.

A living doll, everywhere you look.
 It can sew, it can cook,
 It can talk, talk, talk.²¹

The poem explicitly uses an interview in a marriage bureau to critique the way in which mid-century marital values demean women. However, not a single commentator appears to have noticed that it simultaneously mocks the institutionalized sexism of several decades of popular music. The immediate target is Cliff Richard's international hit record of 1959, 'Living Doll', which is mimicked throughout the poem and directly invoked in the second stanza quoted above. That song was itself a rewrite of the Johnny Black standard, 'Paper Doll' (1915), which had enjoyed particular success in a Mills Brothers recording of 1943. 'Paper Doll' subsequently resurfaced in the 1955 play *A View from the Bridge* by Arthur Miller, a favourite Plath dramatist. In the wake of both numbers come all those pop lyrics whose diction of doll, baby and child systematically infantilizes the woman addressed. (On the *With the Beatles* album released in the year of Plath's premature death, even Lennon and McCartney succumbed to the near paedophilia of 'Little child, little child, / Little child won't you dance with me, / I'm so sad and lonely / Baby take a chance with me ...'.) In effect, the poem is positing that men bring to the marriage contract the sorts of expectation they have been trained to by the popular culture of their teenage years.

Robert Lowell characterized Plath's work as 'womanish'; David Holbrook approached it as clinical evidence of her schizophrenia; and many of her feminist champions viewed her as a victim of patriarchy whose special significance lay in the vehemence with which she vomited anguished feeling direct upon the page (not so much the word made flesh as the flesh made word). In their various ways, all these commentators so personalize Plath's narratology that they are blinded to her skills at pastiche, intertextual reference, collage, narrative transvestism and genre subversion. The truth is that Plath's gift for rewriting male-dominated literary genres so as to render them woman-centred has given permission to several generations of feminist Postmodernists to do likewise. *The Wild Girl* and *The Book of Mrs Noah* by Michèle Roberts, Jeanette Winterson's *Boating for Beginners*, and such Carol Ann Duffy poems as 'Pilate's Wife', 'Queen Herod' and 'Mrs Lazarus' all follow the example of 'Lady Lazarus' in re-gendering parts of the *Bible*. Angela Carter's *Fireworks* rewrites Gothic after the manner of the closing verses of 'Daddy', which rework Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. 'Elvis's Twin Sister' by Carol Ann Duffy joins