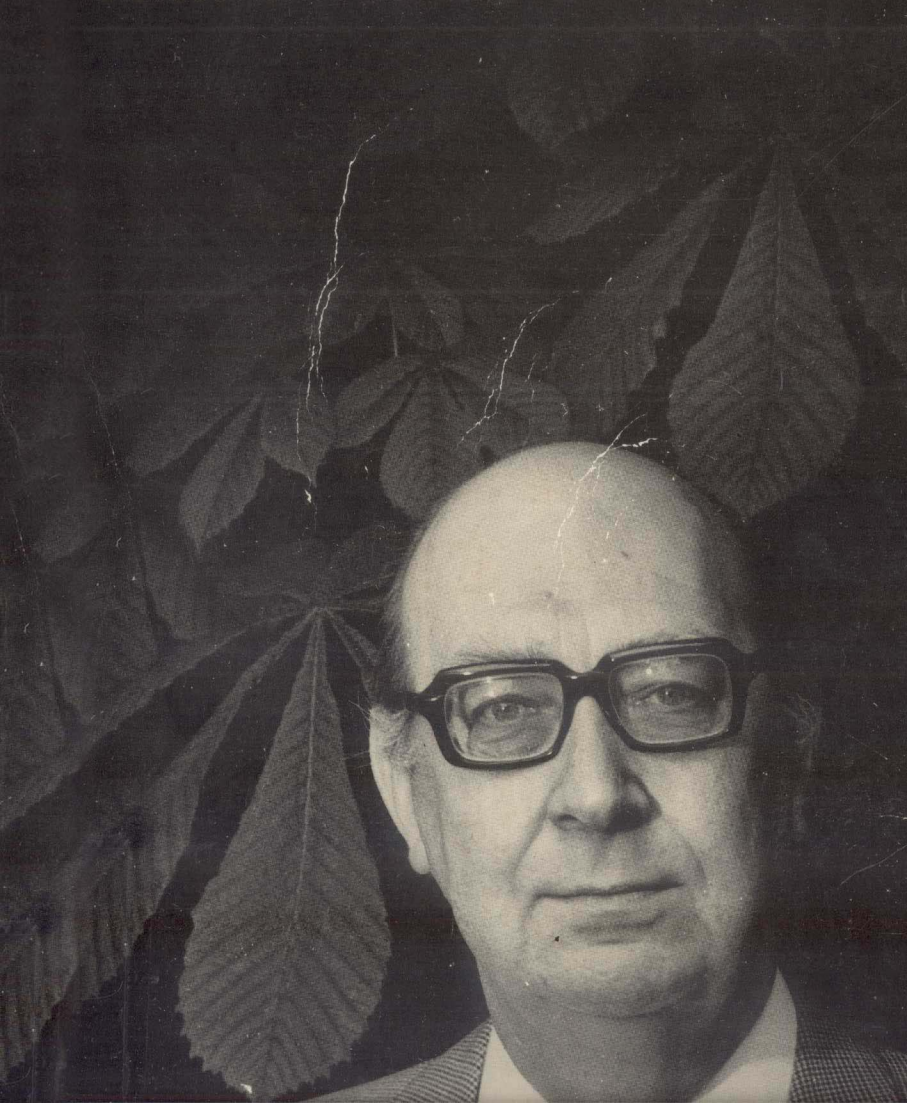


ff

PHILIP LARKIN

REQUIRED WRITING

Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982



Required Writing

Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982

PHILIP LARKIN



faber and faber

LONDON · BOSTON

Required Writing

by the same author

poetry

THE NORTH SHIP

THE LESS DECEIVED (Marvell Press)

THE WHITSUN WEDDINGS

HIGH WINDOWS

fiction

JILL

A GIRL IN WINTER

non-fiction

ALL WHAT JAZZ

First published 1983
by Faber and Faber Limited
3 Queen Square London WC1N 3AU
Reprinted in 1983 and twice in 1984
Filmset by Wilmaset, Birkenhead, Merseyside
Printed in Great Britain by
Whitstable Litho Ltd, Whitstable, Kent.
All rights reserved

© Philip Larkin, 1983

CONDITIONS OF SALE

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Larkin, Philip
Required writing.

I. Title

828'.91408

PR6023.A66

ISBN 0-571-13120-4

Library of Congress Data has been applied for

To
Anthony Thwaite

Contents

Foreword	page 11
Acknowledgements	13
RECOLLECTIONS	15
Introduction to <i>Jill</i>	17
Introduction to <i>The North Ship</i>	27
Single-handed and Untrained	31
Early Days at Leicester	36
Vernon Watkins: an Encounter and a Re-encounter	40
INTERVIEWS	45
An Interview with the <i>Observer</i>	47
An Interview with <i>Paris Review</i>	57
WRITING IN GENERAL	77
Statement	79
The Pleasure Principle	80
Writing Poems	83
Books	85
Subsidizing Poetry	87
The Booker Prize 1977	93
A Neglected Responsibility	98
WRITING IN PARTICULAR	109
The Savage Seventh	111
Carnival in Venice	117
Hounded	120
What's Become of Wystan?	123
The Blending of Betjeman	129
Missing Chairs	134

Masters' Voices	page 136
Mrs Hardy's Memories	142
The Poetry of William Barnes	149
Frivolous and Vulnerable	153
The War Poet	159
Freshly Scrubbed Potato	164
Wanted: Good Hardy Critic	168
The Poetry of Hardy	175
The Apollo Bit	177
The Most Victorian Laureate	182
Grub Village	188
Big Victims	191
Palgrave's Last Anthology	198
It Could Only Happen In England	204
Mr Powell's Mural	219
Supreme Sophisticate	225
The Real Wilfred	228
The World of Barbara Pym	240
The Changing Face of Andrew Marvell	245
Dull Beyond Description	254
The Girls	260
All Right When You Knew Him	263
The Batman from Blades	266
The Great Gladys	271
The Traffic in the Distance	274
Horror Poet	278
 ALL WHAT JAZZ	 283
Introduction to <i>All What Jazz</i>	285
Just a Little While	299
Coverage	302
Blues Bash	303
Law	305
Basie	306
Moment of Truth	307
Wells or Gibbon?	309
Minority Interest	312
Vocals	313
What Armstrong Did	314

Foreword

The pieces collected here were, with one exception, produced on request—mostly, of course, as reviews, for it is an unexpected consequence of becoming known as a writer that you are assumed to be competent to assess other writers. But for every request complied with, several others were declined, for which either the time or the interest or the capability was lacking. It was, of course, flattering to be asked, but only up to a point: newspapers and magazines have to be filled, and if you won't do it someone else will. It is only the very prolific or the very needy who can afford to say yes to everything.

There is little coherence, therefore, in what is here reprinted. I have never proposed to an editor that I should write this article or review that book, so that what I produced was someone else's idea rather than my own. This is not to say that such tasks were undertaken lightly. A good reviewer combines the knowledge of the scholar with the judgement and cogency of the critic and the readability of the journalist, and knowing how far I fell short of this ideal made me all the more laboriously anxious to do the best I could. I have heard it said that anyone who has spent three years writing a weekly essay for his tutor finds literary journalism easy: I didn't. I found reading the books hard, thinking of something to say about them hard, and saying it hardest of all. That I persisted was due to the encouragement of friendly literary editors, in particular Bill Webb of the *Guardian*, Karl Miller of the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman* and the *Listener* (and now, of course, the *London Review of Books*), and Anthony Thwaite of the *Listener*, the *New Statesman* and *Encounter*, and I should like to record my gratitude to them, reluctant though my response may have been at the time.

The piece written on my own initiative was the introduction to *All What Jazz* (1970), the collection of jazz record reviews I had written for the *Daily Telegraph* between 1960 and 1968. I had originally intended to publish that book privately, which is why it was printed by the now defunct firm Hull Printers; my publishers took it over only when I wrote asking if they would be prepared to distribute it. This may also

account for the light-heartedly aggressive tone of what I wrote, and the enjoyment with which I wrote it. In fact I went on reviewing records until the end of 1971, and a few pieces from these last three years have been included along with the introduction.

Although I rarely accepted a literary assignment without a sinking of the heart, nor finished it without an inordinate sense of relief, to undertake such commissions no doubt exercised part of my mind that would otherwise have remained dormant, and to this extent they probably did me no harm. They are now reprinted because some of them have begun to be quoted out of context, and I should like to reiterate the latter, especially their dates. They will, I hope, also carry the rest, whose exhumation would otherwise hardly be justified.

Apart from minor verbal amendments, the pieces are reprinted as they first appeared. The order is chronological by date of publication except for the section 'Recollections', where the order is chronological by subject-matter.

P.L.
February 1982

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Betty Mackereth for her help in converting a wilderness of press cuttings into something resembling an ordered text, to Catherine Carver for patiently freeing that text from inconsistencies, inaccuracies and inelegances, and to Monica Jones for giving the proofs a second, much-needed reading.

For permission to reprint reviews and articles the publishers acknowledge the following with gratitude:

Antiquarian Booksellers' Association, 'Books'; *The Cornhill*, 'It Could Only Happen in England'; *Critical Quarterly*, 'Mrs Hardy's Memories', 'Wanted: Good Hardy Critic'; the *Daily Telegraph*, 'Just a Little While', 'Coverage', 'Blues Bash', 'Law', 'Basie', 'Moment of Truth', 'Wells or Gibbon?', 'Minority Interest', 'Vocals', 'What Armstrong Did'; *Encounter*, 'A Neglected Responsibility', 'The Real Wilfred', 'Dull Beyond Description'; *English Literary Renaissance*, 'The Changing Face of Andrew Marvell'; Faber and Faber, 'Introduction to *Jill*', 'Introduction to *The North Ship*', 'Vernon Watkins', 'Introduction to *All What Jazz*'; FVS Foundation, Hamburg, 'Subsidizing Poetry'; the *Guardian*, 'Freshly Scrubbed Potato', 'Grub Village', 'All Right When You Knew Him'; Kenyusha, Japan, 'Statement'; *Library Association Record*, 'Single-handed and Untrained'; the *Listener*, 'The Poetry of William Barnes', 'The War Poet', 'The Poetry of Hardy'; the Marvell Press, 'The Pleasure Principle' from *Listen II*; *New Fiction*, 'The Booker Prize 1977'; the *New Statesman*, 'Masters' Voices', 'Missing Chairs', 'Frivolous and Vulnerable', 'The Apollo Bit', 'The Most Victorian Laureate', 'Big Victims', 'Mr Powell's Mural'; the *Observer*, 'The Great Gladys', 'Interview with the *Observer*', 'The Girls'; Oxford University Press, 'Palgrave's Last Anthology: A.E. Housman's Copy', from the *Review of English Studies*, vol XXII; *Paris Review*, 'An Interview with *Paris Review*', © *Paris Review*, 1982; *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 'Writing Poems'; *Poetry Review*, 'Horror Poet'; *Punch*, 'Supreme Sophisticate';

the *Spectator*, 'The Savage Seventh', 'Carnival in Venice', 'Hounded', 'What's Become of Wystan?', 'The Blending of Betjeman,' 'The Traffic in the Distance'; the *Times Literary Supplement*, 'The World of Barbara Pym', 'The Batman from Blades'; *University of Leicester Convocation Review*, 'Early Days at Leicester'.

RECOLLECTIONS

