

Philip Larkin by Andrew Motion - Synopsis

SHORT

Andrew Motion, a close friend of Philip Larkin, explores the great poet's life and work and his relationship to the city he called home: Hull.

MEDIUM

Andrew Motion, a close friend of Philip Larkin, explores the great poet's life and work and his relationship to the city he called home: Hull. Combined with Sir Andrew's personal and candid story are performances of some of his best-known work, as everyday people from the city of Hull give recitals in a variety of locations, from pubs to supermarkets to car parks

LONG

For a poet who could hone beauty and truth from despair and ordinariness, for a librarian who rationally indexed things for a living, Philip Larkin, one of Britain's greatest poets, was a categorical mess of contradictions.

In 1976, 23 year old Oxford graduate Andrew Motion took a teaching post at Hull University where he could breathe the same air as his poetic idol Larkin, then the University's Head Librarian. Andrew had low expectations of meeting him; his hero had a fearsome and aloof reputation on campus. Yet the pair bonded in the Staff Bar when the younger poet attempted to save the literary monument from choking on a pint of beer - the beginning of a close friendship that would last until Larkin's death in 1985. As executor of the poet's unpublished estate Andrew's fond memories of Philip – funny, deep, loyal and a poetic genius - were challenged to the core when reading those private papers revealed a Larkin who could be cruelly, casually, racist and sexist. Larkin's posthumous reputation in some quarters was severely compromised when Andrew, as Philip's biographer, was obliged to publish what he found.

Three decades after Larkin's death Andrew, now himself considered one of the nation's best loved poets, still hails Larkin's genius and mourns his great friend while hating the sentiments he discovered in those boxes. Can we, he asks as he returns to Hull, separate the man from the artist and celebrate the man who wrote the words that raised us up, rather than those that let us down?