

dactic power—Eliot successfully affirmed more aesthetically elevated but generically circumscribed definitions of both literature and culture. The resulting idea of the literary is used to domesticate Pound in the Faber collection of his essays. The triumph of Eliot's vision and its continuing influence in academia helps to redefine Pound's difference as eccentricity or failure. In later chapters Coyle explores, in readings of specific sections of the *Cantos*, the implications of his view that we are still bound by discursive norms and expectations that place Pound's work "out of bounds" and thus often out of view. Coyle's reading of Pound as a poet who resists "a thin-blooded aloofness from events and a false circumscription of the poetic sphere" (115) contributes to the larger scholarly effort of loosening modernism's tenacious bonds upon our own thinking and reading, in a literary and political world that is less and less possible to read, or to write, in modernist terms.

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Andrew Swarbrick. *Out of Reach: The Poetry of Philip Larkin*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995. Pp. xii, 202. \$39.95.

Andrew Swarbrick's study of Philip Larkin shifts our attention in the direction of the poetry itself, after the negative effects on Larkin's reputation caused by Anthony Thwaite's edition of *Selected Letters of Philip Larkin, 1940-1985* (1992) and Andrew Motion's biography, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life* (1993). Along with *Philip Larkin: A Concordance to the Poetry of Philip Larkin* (1995) by R. J. C. Watt and the recently launched newsletter of the Philip Larkin Society, *About Larkin*, Swarbrick's book represents the beginning of a post-biographical stage of response to Larkin's achievement.

*Out of Reach* is not centrally concerned with Larkin as the conservative, racist, and sexist figure highlighted in the letters and biography, and Swarbrick is aware of the impossibility of casting Larkin as a consistently generous writer, given what we now know of the more wretched details of his life. Yet, Swarbrick does attempt to retrieve the reputation somewhat, and to "rebut both the old charges of genteel parochialism and the new charges of ideological incorrectness" (ix). He is well informed about Larkin's failures, but he clearly appreciates the poetry and his writing is enlivened by his reading of it. This perspective gives a tonal evenness to his critical style, one which differentiates it from many of the more impatient commentaries on Larkin which have appeared over the past few years.

*Out of Reach* is now the most up-to-date general book available on Larkin. It engages in a study of Larkin's poetry volume by volume, and it often says precisely the right things about his development of craft, themes, and vision. It is an accomplished work of scholarship and criti-

cism: its "Select Bibliography" is representative, and it is also interesting (and trustworthy) in its inclusion of reference to some of the archival material made available at the Brynmor Jones Library Archives at the University of Hull after Motion had completed the biography. The poems commented on are smartly understood (see especially Swarbrick's commentaries on "Deceptions," 57-59; "Mr Bleaney," 95-97; and "Here," 103-05), and there is a good range in the selection of poems chosen for analysis. It is informative in an introductory way about Larkin's Movement context and makes extensive, if uneven, reference to other critics of Larkin's works. It does manage to soften some of the negative ideological readings of Larkin, but it accumulates into less hefty a defence of him than its Preface would have us think. Its biggest limitation is that its broadest controlling views on Larkin are not particularly original or strong ones.

Swarbrick views Larkin as essentially a negative mystic, a poet who seeks a kind of oblivion that leads him "out of reach" of the world of personal and public division. Larkin wishes to "escape from himself," and in this "lies the ultimate romantic yearning in Larkin that is perceptible throughout his career: a desire not so much for transcendence as a sublime self-forgetting" (40). I do not tend to agree with this view of Larkin, primarily because it trashes the explorative vitality in his religious poems. The claim that for Larkin "vacancy is all" (42) sounds good, but it greatly simplifies his pursuit of solitude, beauty, and transcendence—as though all of his imaginative and existential energy were traceable to a sort of semi-psychiatric disorder. As well, to offer that Larkin's poetry "is constantly striving for what is always 'out of reach': the ultimate expression of an absolute selfhood" (158) is to offer very little that is fresh as a response to Larkin in the first place. Put another way, the central thesis of *Out of Reach* looks back to a refutable formula that has already been recycled over and over again in Larkin criticism.

Thus, while Swarbrick returns us to close readings of the poems after we have been through a period of rough biographical response to Larkin, there is nothing crisp in the idea that "the ultimate desire in Larkin's poems is for desirelessness" (55). It overstates a dimension of Larkin's solitude, and it is tiredly close to the view presented just over two decades ago in Lollette Kuby's almost never credited book, *An Uncommon Poet For the Common Man* (1974) and in Calvin Bedient's *Eight Contemporary Poets* (1974). It is also visible in articles by John Bayley and M. W. Rowe—which Swarbrick cites (see 166)—and in the concluding framework of James Booth's study, *Philip Larkin, Writer* (1992). Swarbrick's angle on Larkin's mysticism of the void goes back particularly to Kuby's seminal reading of one of Larkin's reputedly most negative of mystic poems, "Absences." Booth reads that poem very much the way Kuby does, and Swarbrick agrees with Booth's view of the poem (see 68), apparently without knowing that they simul-

taneously also agree with Kuby. A shared understanding of this poem, therefore, lies at the thematic base of both Booth's and Swarbrick's books, without either of these books giving to Kuby the courtesy of even a passing reference to her contribution to the idea. This kind of thing gives an exclusive air to some of the scholarship in *Out of Reach*.

Swarbrick also develops received terms like "aesthete" and "philistine" as expressive of the two central impulses in Larkin's life and his poetry: "His whole career can be read as the often unresolved conflict between a romantic, aspiring Larkin and the empirical, ironic Larkin, between the aesthete and the philistine" (19). There is a very interesting shifting of familiar terms here, and Swarbrick manipulates "aesthete and philistine" so frequently (see also 2-3, 9-14, 27-34, 49-50, 79-91, 122-27, 126, 131-32, 137, 140-42, 151, 158, 164, and 172) that they emerge as more apposite candidates for the title of his book than the phrase, "out of reach," which is written on the book's cover. "Aesthete" and "philistine" are terms used by at least two other critics (Barbara Everett and Booth) who have squeezed the explicatory daylight out of them in earlier analyses of Larkin, just as the more flexible notion that Larkin is both an ironic and a romantic poet has also been around for an even longer period of time.

"Aesthete" and "philistine" are terms too unaccommodating for Larkin's complexity, in the first place—one of them suggesting a more rarefied view of the artist than Larkin ascribed to, and the other suggesting an insensitivity too crass to reflect anything like the full intricacy of his highly creative, uniquely sarcastic temperament. Swarbrick as well claims that Larkin develops as a writer when he takes failure as his subject matter, that he is both a performative writer and a dialogic one. All three of these notions are as well very common prior insights in Larkin criticism, and there are many other examples of derivative locutions like these interlaced throughout this book.

Issues of theme and derivation notwithstanding, *Out of Reach* is a good and useful general study of Larkin. Its knowledge of Larkin archival materials, its poise of tone, and the sharpness of its readings of a number of Larkin's poems guarantee that it will be referred to regularly in future Larkin studies.

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