OUT OF REACH

THE POETRY OF PHILIP LARKIN

Also by Andrew Swarbrick

THE ART OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH (*editor*)

PHILIP LARKIN: *The Whitsun Weddings* and
The Less Deceived

T. S. ELIOT: Selected Poems

Out of Reach

**The Poetry of
Philip Larkin**

ANDREW SWARBRICK

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For Anne, Tom, Jo and William

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Preface

This book has been written in the conviction that Philip Larkin's poetry is important to us. It aims to present Larkin as more adventurous and challenging than we are used to recognising, and to rebut both the old charges of genteel parochialism and the new charges of ideological incorrectness. Although it takes account of recent biographical material, it is not simply an interpretation of the poems by way of the life. Indeed, as this study shows, the relationship between the two is in Larkin's case especially problematic. The focus of this study is on the poems and the rhetorical strategies which make them, in John Bayley's words, 'both wholly accessible and completely mysterious' (in the *London Review of Books*, 5–18 May 1983).

The book is organised around Larkin's separately published collections for the benefit of readers unfamiliar with the *Collected Poems*. Nevertheless, since this is a study of the whole poetic *oeuvre* (with some attention given to his two novels, *Jill* and *A Girl in Winter*), wide reference is made to poems not collected by Larkin in his four volumes. In these cases, references are given to Anthony Thwaite's edition of the *Collected Poems*. I have also been able to include previously unpublished material from Larkin's manuscript notebooks.

My earlier guide to Larkin in the Master Guide series published by Macmillan offered an explicatory account of some of his poems, and students in search of a basic introduction are directed there; I have taken the liberty, in the interim, of changing my mind on some points of interpretation. My hope is that this present book will prove of interest to the general reader and to the specialist alike.

I am grateful to the literary executors and Trustees of the Philip Larkin Estate for permission to consult and publish material lodged in the Philip Larkin Archive at the University of Hull Brynmor Jones Library, and to publish an extract from Larkin's correspondence with Barbara Pym. I owe particular debts to the Hull University Archivist, Brian Dyson; to Andrew Motion and Anthony Thwaite for commenting on a draft version of this book; to Stephen Regan who, as an anonymous reader, made many valuable suggestions during its preparation; to the staff of the Bodleian Library, Oxford,

especially in the Department of Western Manuscripts; to the staff of Oxford Central Library; and to Susan Ward for bibliographical assistance. All errors remain my own.

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ANDREW SWARBRICK

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