

U DX277

Article on Philip Larkin

[2000]

Historical Background:

Brunette Coleman was the pseudonym used by Philip Larkin in the early 1940s when he was an undergraduate at St John's College, Oxford. He wrote several works of fiction, verse and critical commentary under this name including *Trouble at Willow Gables*, set in a girls' boarding school and an incomplete sequel, *Michaelmas Term at St Brides*, set in a women's college at Oxford. Their existence was revealed to the public when Larkin's *Selected Letters* and Andrew Motion's biography were published in 1992 and 1993 respectively. The Coleman works themselves were finally published in 2002, with other Larkin drafts and oddments, in *Trouble at Willow Gables and Other Fictions* edited by James Booth.

The style was a parody of popular writers of contemporary girls' school fiction, but the extent of the stories' erotic content suggests they were written primarily for an adult audience. It is believed the adoption of a female persona released him from his creative inhibitions and was followed by the publication of two novels and his first poetry collection in his own name.

Stephen Cooper in his book *Philip Larkin: Subversive Writer*, published in 2004, argues that "The interplay of signs and motifs in the early work orchestrates a subversion of conventional attitudes towards class, gender, authority and sexual relations". Cooper identifies Larkin as a progressive writer, and perceives a "plea for alternative constructs of masculinity, femininity and social and political organisation". Cooper draws on the entire canon of Larkin's works, as well as on unpublished correspondence, to counter the image of Larkin as merely a racist, misogynist reactionary and instead he identifies what he calls a "subversive imagination". He highlights in particular "Larkin's objections to the hypocrisies of conventional sexual politics that hamper the lives of both sexes in equal measure".

Custodial history: Donated by Steve Cooper, Sevenoaks, February 2000

Description:

Article by Steve Cooper on Philip Larkin's subversive pseudonym 'Brunette Coleman'.

Extent: 1 item

Related material:

Pamphlet, 'What are we writing for?', Philip Larkin (as Brunette Coleman) [U DPL2/1/1/13]

There is a large volume of Larkin related material in the archives including:

Correspondence between Philip Larkin and Andrew Motion, 1978-1985 [U DP207]

Letters from Philip Arthur Larkin To James Ballard Sutton, c.1938-1952 [U DP174]

Papers of Andrew Motion, 1976 [U DP165]

Papers of Antony Simon Thwaite, 1960s-1990s [U DP155]

Papers of the Larkin family, c.1890-1983 [U DLN]

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U DX277/1 'Philip Larkin's subversive pseudonym: a study of Trouble at Willow Gables by 'Brunette Coleman'
Typescript. Article by Steve Cooper.
1 item [Feb 2000]