Negation Forms in the Poetry of Philip Larkin

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an analysis of negation forms in Philip Larkin's poetry, specifically forms negated by suffixes and prefixes. Drawing on the literary stylistic analysis approach, as proposed by Geoffrey Leech, we progress from linguistic description to literary interpretation, with the assumption that linguistics and literature should complement one another. We discuss nine poems by Larkin, with the focus placed on patterns that deliver precise understanding of the text's unifying theme. The major argument is that the frequent use of negation forms by Larkin is not arbitrary; rather its use might illustrate an effort meant to make these forms resonate with the poem's atmosphere and social contexts. The results suggest that linguistic choices and poetic style have helped Larkin convey messages concerning three themes, namely, 1) uncertainty, 2) futility of life, and 3) agnosticism. By focusing on Larkin's poems and the ways in which the poems are read, different strands are plaited, and multilevel stylistics approaches help readers to focus on the gaps concerning social contexts that could illuminate other possibilities and meanings.

摘要

本文分析了菲利普·拉金诗歌中的否定形式，特别是后缀和前缀否定的形式。借鉴杰弗里·利奇提出的文学文体分析方法，我们从语言学层面的描述着手，进而对其进行文学阐释，并假设语言学和文学应该相辅相成。本文讨论了拉金的九首诗，重点放在精确理解文本统一主题的模式上，得出的主要论点是拉金频繁使用否定形式不是任意的; 相反，它的使用可能说明了一种导向，旨在使这些形式与诗歌的氛围和社会背景产生共鸣，即语言选择和诗歌风格帮助拉金传达了三个主题的信息，即1）不确定性，2）生命的徒劳，3）不可知论。通过关注拉金的诗歌和诗歌的阅读方式，不同的线索被编织起来，多层次的文体学方法帮助读者关注与社会背景有关的空白，而这些空白可以阐明其他可能性和意义。

1. Introduction

Linguistic approaches that deeply investigate social contexts are promising and essential in analyzing literature. In a context where language is often determined by social surroundings, writing style is central to constructing meanings. The power of stylistics

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lies in its ability to unearth elements that might be overlooked, enabling us to understand why a writer chooses certain structural techniques. Sociological approaches, on the other hand, study patterns of social order, change, culture and relationships, thus providing us with a valuable tool for reflecting on literary texts. An analysis that pairs social studies with stylistics can relate poetic structures to social constructs. Informed by social constructs, a stylistic analysis might illuminate how the marked structures correspond to and support underlying meanings.

The premise is that an uncertain social context, for example, might require a language that expresses certain forms of uncertainty, including those phrases and sentences that signify people's worries, fears, indecision, and skepticism. Taking a close look at Larkin's linguistic structure and morphological elements can reveal what he is trying to convey. Integral to such exploration is the presence of negative forms, frequent strategies that Larkin uses to express his disavowal of postwar England which was supposed to generate social change and mock those who still believe in hope and deliverance. As such, Larkin paints "a gloomy atmosphere" (Idrus and Mukahal 57) for a life constructed on deception and fraudulence. It could be the case that Philip Larkin's postwar oeuvre was informed by, or resonated with, conditions that made it legitimate to embrace a particular style in many of his poems, namely negation forms. A meticulous examination of several poems in his four collections of poetry (*The North Ship* in 1945, *The Less Deceived in* 1955, *The Whitsun Weddings* in 1964 and *High Windows* in 1974), as well as his late work "Aubade" (1977), all collected in *The Complete Poems* (2014), might reveal, in one way, the extent to which the poet assesses the social conundrums by using negation forms to deliver his views.

The primary argument in this article is that Larkin's frequent use of negation forms is not arbitrary; rather, it was meant to make these forms resonate with the poem's atmosphere, the subject matter, and the social context of the time. The starting point is an assumption that in Larkin's poetry, negative statements are pragmatically more informative, more expressive, and more relevant than positive choices. In a sense, they better serve the poetic purpose: to fit in and align with the atmosphere created by Larkin to support his subject matter and their underlying themes. What poems might have meant and how they convey that meaning (to invite readers to engage in the subject matter and preclude definitive speculations about meaning) are generally expressed in negation forms. The analysis progresses from linguistic description to literary interpretation with the assumption that linguistics and literature provide rich contexts if they are "married" to one another. In the following pages, the analysis will consider nine poems specifically: "Sad Steps," "The Whitsun Weddings," "Talking in Bed," "Send No Money," "High Windows," "Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album," "Come Then to Prayers," "Church Going," and "Ignorance." We are drawing on the literary stylistic analysis approach, as proposed by Geoffrey (Leech, "*Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding*"), to analyze the linguistic forms negated by suffixes and prefixes. The article attempts to answer this question in particular: Why do Larkin's poems frequently use negation forms, specifically those forms that involve suffixes and prefixes? The paper will seek to identify and explain how these linguistic choices and poetic style have helped Larkin convey messages about the world and the broader social settings contextualizing the publication of the poems.

2. Stylistic approaches to Larkin's poetry

In his book on narratives, Ronald Barthes argues that "in the current state of research, it seems reasonable to elect linguistics itself as a basic model for the structural analysis of narrative" (239). These structuralist models of analysis, which saw persuasiveness in the linguistic-based methods, was introduced to investigate the form, style, and structure of poetic language and how these elements were connected to the broader poetic themes. It is this awareness that informed early linguistic critical responses to Larkin's poetry. In his analysis of Larkin's poem, "Mr. Bleaney," David Lodge finds that a feeling in poems can be captured by syntax, particularly line endings, which signal a shift in the persona's attitude (127). Another analysis of "Mr. Bleaney" is offered by Henry Widdowson, who argues that a poem's linguistic structure lends insight into an appreciation of ideas and an invitation to two different meanings: one achieved by the thread of the final lines and the other by the entire structure of poems (24).

Nevertheless, Widdowson does not provide a literary analysis, the kind that offers an interpretation of the possible meanings, nor does he provide an account of the poetic or aesthetic poetic elements. John Sinclair falls into the same trap of linguistic abstraction. In his analysis of Larkin's poem "First Sight," John Sinclair uses a stylistic approach based on categories of linguistic description. He starts from larger structures to smaller ones, from stanzas and lines to sentences, clauses, and words. Like quantitative research in mathematics, Sinclair catalogs his analytical elements in a table, leaving the task of interpretation to the reader. This pure linguistic description falls short of interpreting a poetic text.

Guido Latre made a step forward in his monograph on Larkin's poetry. In this work, Latre talks about two modes, which can only be understood in conjunction with a third mode, a symbolic mode that lies in the implied structure of poems. This specific structure, Latre observes, establishes a pattern through which one can interpret poems. In "At Grass," for example, Latre finds a pattern for the "horses:" there is an initial stage that starts as a movement, develops into a climax, and later collapses into a standstill, a resting place or the final stage in animal or human life (437). Latre finds Larkin moving in his poetry: 1) from realism to symbolism and 2) from the real to the ideal; they reflect a transition that can only be captured through analyzing linguistic choices. Latre's analysis is based on surface structure description, but he has managed to take his reading beyond traditional grammatical rigidity. However, an engaging reading is still needed to establish a link between style and meaning.

3. Marked structure in Larkin's poetry

In her anthology on Larkin's works, Lesley Jeffries writes, "[P]oetry in the twentieth century has been freed from rigid constraints on poetic structure. The assumption is that poets have to compensate for the loss of traditional poetic form by using the resources of the language to the fullest. One result is that grammatical structure has been exploited more extensively than in previous eras' (96). Geoffrey Leech believes that a linguistic approach can only be applied to literary analysis if it considers the phenomenon of a marked structure, a structure typically defined as an unfamiliar part of poems which contribute to meaning construction. In the simplest form, a marked structure entails

using a peculiar grammatical form that can render a linguistic phenomenon particularly noticeable with a unique effect in terms of signification. James Booth points out in his monograph on Larkin that one salient feature of Larkin's language "is his fondness for the negative prefix 'un-'" (J. Booth 8), adding that there are '157 such words in his work after 1945, of which no fewer than 105 appear only on a single occasion. They create a tone of unassertiveness or irony" (8).

Drawing on a cognitive stylistic approach, Lisa Nahajec analyzes three poems by writers, including Larkin. She finds linguistic negation forms creating unrealized worlds essential to constructing meanings (125). Negation in Larkin, she observes, is a form of instruction concerning the intended meaning which can be inferred based on the assumption that a negation form excludes its opposite, positive alternative. Nahajec argues that to capture the significance of negation, the reader might better visualize the positive proposition that the poet does not explicitly present. In her analysis of Larkin's poem "Talking in Bed," Lesley Jeffries points out that the poet uses double negatives (e.g., "incomplete unrest") to convey a different meaning from the positive idea of "complete rest." Jeffries argues that Larkin presents negative words as gradable opposites, with many shades and truths in between. However, readers may still have questions about what these shades and truth are and how negation relates to the title of the poem or its subject matter.

4. Stylistics and social context

There is a large body of stylistic literature describing Larkin's texts linguistically without providing literary interpretation. On the one hand, Larkin's poetry, and by extension other poems by other writers, might contain meanings that stretch beyond the mere abstract syntactical or morphological structures; the main task of a critic, therefore, is to illuminate insights into such meanings by bringing literature and linguistics together. On the other hand, some criticism produced practical analyses, but they have yet to establish a pattern across a wide range of Larkin's poems. While some critics have explored the linguistic style of Larkin, a systematic study of the negation forms (the ones formed by prefixes and suffixes) that demonstrates adequate regard to the social context in which Larkin's poetry is written does not exist.

Like any other literary work, poetry functions within and is conditioned by the sociocultural system prevailing at the time of writing. Thus, understanding poetry requires considering not only the text but also the context and the poet's philosophical views (Bruke 295). Where style and sociology meet, poems by Larkin bear witness to various matters, particularly concerning language use in post-WWII England. In his seminal monograph, *Philip Larkin*, Stephen Regan argues that an accurate reading of Larkin might better consider "the crucial importance of the changing social and cultural context in which the poetry was written" (10). In his analysis of poems, Regan focuses on a language of tensions and conflicts of postwar English politics. In the *North Ship* poems, for example, Regan maintains that the claim of immaturity is distorted, as the volume is a product of "social and political constraints imposed upon creative expression by the conditions of war" (67). However, before the war, Larkin's poetry was "often surprisingly outspoken, shrewdly observant and wittily ironic" (67). The collapse into a conservative language during and after the war might have inspired linguistic choices that echoed the

social structure of the time. As Regan argues, "through its rhetorical ploys and tonal shifts, the poetry maintains a skeptical and vigilant response to the changing social order" (100).

In Larkin's poetry, the starting point for grasping negation forms is that they typically present something contrary to people's expectations. For example, Larkin uses litotes (double negatives) to make understatements that create a thought that is neither positive nor negative to render an ironic effect. Using "not" with the privative "un-" might generate a nuanced meaning or a subtle difference that the positive forms otherwise cannot capture. In "Move your Works to the Unspoiled Dales" ("Going, Going" 194–195), for example, the use of "unspoiled" instead of "clean" may prompt one to consider if the typical item is actually spoiled. This semantic reasoning about negation might have been meant to invite the reader to look at alternatives. For example, the reader of this poem needs to evoke a natural landscape that is spoiled and then think of the opposite, thus allowing for the construction of what the case is and what the case is not. In addition, the tension between "spoiled" and "unspoiled" might register the speaker's worries of a soon vanishing countryside, equally providing a rationale for such worries, including the call to businessmen to move their business to the untouched areas. These are demonstrated in the title of the poem, "Move your Works to the Unspoiled Dales" and the sixth stanza, "it is not going to last."

5. Patterns established by negation forms

In this section, we analyze Larkin's negation forms and try to establish a pattern of themes in nine of his poems. It is our contention that these forms were meant to relate to the times in which they were created (especially postwar England) with potential links to the themes of "uncertainty," "futility of life," and "agnosticism," as we will see below.

5.1. Uncertainty

In many of Larkin's poems, the speaker is uncertain about reactions to things presented before them. This is connected to the notion that language shapes and reshapes reality, characteristic of postmodern literature, but in a general, rather than a specific, way. Larkin was a postmodern poet in the way he used poetic elements, which, as John Osborne reasons, "are eviscerated by ellipsis, paronomasia, citationality, negative qualifiers, and the four-act structure with closing reversal" (259). The theme of uncertainty is intricately woven into some of Larkin's poems, and it is accentuated through linguistic elements characterized by a series of negative forms that convey an ambivalent tone. The enigmatic nature of Larkin's personas, as observed by Gillian Steinberg in her reading of "The Whitsun Weddings" (*The Complete Poems* 154–156), leaves readers with a sense of intrigue. Steinberg notes that the poem offers a multitude of options and possibilities, but none of them is fully realized in the poem (43). The poem involves at once disdain (or "condescension," to use Steinberg's term) and appreciation as well as "separateness" and a touch of "borderline envy for the same characters who are mocked earlier in the poem" (43). The reasoning of the poem is sculpted as a choice, to stay or to leave, with the uncertainty created by a situation where the persona is caught between these two choices (43).

This uncertainty, we argue, is also created by linguistic choices. The speaker (or observer) in poems seems skeptical about whether such weddings express happiness, hence his "As if" and the frequent use of "like" all exist to generate doubts. The conventional use of language devices that do not capture the reader's or listener's attention is known as "automatization" (the opposite of foregrounding). This is linked to the typical patterns in language use that language users resort to in any situation. Conversely, when language devices are foregrounded, they generally attract the decipher-er's attention, leading to unexpected formulations concerning a specific context (e.g., using formulaic, archaic, or formal expressions in casual conversations). This departure from the usual norms and standards is what we generally refer to as foregrounding. Different communication needs determine the use of both foregrounded and automa-tized language. For instance, the specialized terms in pure sciences are automatized, while foregrounding devices are employed in persuasive and stimulating speeches (Leech, "*Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding*"). Leech (1969: 42ff) has identified various levels at which foregrounding, a powerful stylistic device, is employed in lan-guage. In Larkin's poetry, the deliberate use of lexical foregrounding stands out as a defining feature, adding depth and richness to his work.

In Larkin's poem "Wants," Ameen (2018) observes parallelism via repetition as fore-grounding technique to highlight the key parts in the poem to stimulate literary insights. In "Wants," lines 2–4 are paralleled to show similarity superficially, though they refer to two variant aspects of life that Larkin contrasts with the wish to be alone. However, negation and contrast are approached differently in Larkin's poems, as they are used as foregrounding style. For example, in "Sad Steps," the final line, "But is for others undiminished somewhere," reminds readers that youth still exist somewhere. Larkin may have lost his youth, but his heartfelt reevaluation of the power of survival serves as a source of comfort in this moment. Larkin's use of the prefix -un supported the notion of possibility compared to the disparity between achieving and even lasting youth. The skepticism lingering in the poem between lost and kept youth was resolved by affirming the "undiminished" youth found "somewhere." The negation in the line deconstructed the pessimistic atmosphere of the poem; a formidable situation would have resulted otherwise. The final adjective in the poem, "undiminished," captures the essence of Larkin's style by simultaneously making a promise and subverting it. In a split second, one realizes that the "un" acts as a grammatical barrier against diminishment, yet it also serves as a simple negation, almost implying diminishment. Larkin uses the prefix "un" to enhance specific emotion through the creation of "a dialogue between aspiring, elevated cadences on one hand, and all the niggling army of modifiers and qualifiers" (Motion 24).

The poet deploys the following multiple negation prefixes in the second stanza in "The Whitsun Weddings":

A slow and stopping curve southwards we kept.

Wide farms went by, short-shadowed cattle, and

Canals with floatings of industrial froth;

A hothouse flashed uniquely: hedges dipped

And rose: and now and then a smell of grass

Displaced the reek of buttoned carriage-cloth

Until the next town, new and nondescript,

Approached with acres of dismantled cars. (152)

The poem criticizes the industrialization process in England at that time, which distorts the beauty of the English countryside. To foreground his viewpoint, Larkin uses negation prefixes to contrast the countryside's natural beauty with the ugliness of the new industrial advancements. The use of the prefix "dis" in "displaced" indicates a force given to nature to defeat the artificial and the intense aromas of the roses and grass which exceed the smells of the filthy cloth. It also forces the latter to vanish due to the lack of beauty of a rural village, leaving it "nondescript" as it is surrounded with "dismantled" cars and urging readers to draw attention to the devastating fate of these industrious manifestations. These prefixes forefronted the tension between nature and industry, natural and artificial, and confidence and skepticism that raced in Larkin's mind.

The next analysis considers the following lines:

All posed irresolutely, watching us go,

. . .

Marked off the girls unreally from the rest. (152-153).

In these lines, "irresolutely" suggests that Larkin observes the uncertainty that he seems to share with the wedding guests regarding the immensity of what weddings entail. Larkin and the guests feel contempt or fear of weddings and marriage. The "ir" added to "resolutely" copes with his choice of "girls" to describe female guests, who are soon to cross the threshold of hesitation to the harsh reality of marriage. Larkin's choice of "irresolutely" foreshadows the ignorance of some women concerning the post-wedding phase. However, the latter use of "unreally" infuses a sense of feigned something about female guests, as if these women fabricate their innocence and ignorance. Once more, it seems that Larkin's use of "un" strikes to foreground a negative meaning, one that presents alternative to the negation. The usage of the negative prefix emphasizes the speaker's already apparent wavering tone. In the last verse, he struggles to find the perfect words as he realizes his relationship is no longer working (Verdonk).

The feeling of uncertainty is also recorded in "Talking in Bed" (*The Complete Poems* 163). The poem is a poetic venture into the gap between hope and reality, between expectations and the unavailing, unrewarding existence. The optimistic tone in the first stanza lapses into an entangled feeling in the ensuing lines. Larkin's skill is manifested in his effective treatment of human relationships and through his use of specific linguistic aspects and the way they work in a poem. It is suggested that the speaker uses negative forms; the "behavior" of the wind in "Outside, the wind's incomplete unrest/Builds and disperses clouds in the sky" corresponds with what the speaker currently portrays regarding a relationship between a couple, that the "incomplete unrest" is necessary for the creation and development of things, as well as for their differentiation in the process of development. While complete rest will never result in building a relationship, a complete unrest will destroy such a relationship, perhaps resulting in immature "clouds" or relationships. The negative "incomplete unrest" is possibly meant to bring

an equilibrium, the kind typically found in nature that humans cannot find. At the same time, while the positive forms, "true" and "kind," characterize what humans might hope for, the double negatives "not untrue and not unkind" evoke the ambiguities of unfulfilled desires in humans. Untrue does not necessarily imply wrongdoing. The prefix modifying the word "true" suggests the existence of some degree of truth, denoting that true words have "been lost in the void of time" and they were replaced by kindness (Rácz 12).

Also, the use of the prefixes "in" and "un" repeatedly in the aforementioned poem foregrounds the emotions and the thoughts the speaker conveys, in this case, marital silence or the difficulty of initiating a conversation between married couples. This condition is artistically contrasted to the wind sounds outside that is in "incomplete unrest." Litotes is one of the salient features of modern English, or, to use Henry Fowler's expression, a "congenial of English temperament" (383). The use of the double negatives, "incomplete unrest" is probably meant to contradict expectations and meanings. Contrary to what people expect, the words might not be valid or kind, but this does not mean that all couples communicate using genuine or kind words. "Not untrue/not unkind" might describe a situation in which the unsaid words are not proper/kind, which is not quite the same as describing them as completely inaccurate/not kind. The atmosphere where the married couple cannot say something that is either proper/kind or not untrue/unkind evokes a state that a majority of people have experienced. However, it has yet to produce true/kind words that almost everyone has necessarily experienced. This true/kind vs. untrue/unkind tension creates an area of human relationships that falls somewhere between the downright positive and negative senses, a gray area (an uncertainty) that characterizes much of human relationships. Larkin frequently uses this tension as an indirect way of telling the reader that the impression created by a situation is untrue/unkind, but this "untrue/unkind" thing is less harsh than the one created by the absolute "not."

5.2. Futility of life

The theme of the futility of life is a recurring motif in Larkin's work. Specifically, Larkin seems to be aware of the post-WWII anguish, and a close reading of his poetry reveals a heightened awareness of life's meaninglessness. His poems often raise questions about life and the meaning of existence, yet they also demonstrate a sense of confusion about the true meaning of life. In "Send No Money" (*The Complete Poems* 177), the speaker engages in a dialogue with time, the ultimate revealer of life's truth. The insights acquired over time lead the speaker to a profound realization of the futility of life. The poem effectively captures the frivolity of life through the use of the negative "untransferable," suggesting that the truth cannot be passed on. The only way to grasp the truth is to wait, but as we wait, we inevitably succumb to the ravages of old age and, ultimately, death.

In the phrase "Send no Money," the prefix "un" which appears in the adjectives "unfair" and "untransferable," creates a double negative meaning that ultimately affirms the right to want. However, the truth is that there is a transferable cost, which a person pays with their lives. As Thwaite argues, these prefixes define the limits and nuances of the world, and they coldly confront our fragile illusions (4).

With "Send No Money," the word "untransferable" links to advertisers' actions that entice buyers to pay overtime rather than instantly for a product. Furthermore, while buyers are tricked by companies whose advertisements usually start with the expression 'Send No Money," it is a fact that they pay without being aware that they are doing so. Therefore, they have been sold illusion, not truth, because the truth cannot be transferred ("untransferable"). The knowledge the poet's narrator was supposed to gain for free instead came at a high price; time passed, and the young speaker arrived at middle age while still waiting for an answer. That is, when people grow old, their appreciation of beauty starts to taper off.

In "Sad Steps" (*The Complete Poems* 205), which Larkin wrote in his late 40s, the persona rejects celebrating symbols of beauty, which is always tentative. For some people, the moon symbolizes beauty, romantic imagination, and youth. For the persona, the moon's cleanliness reminds him of his fading life. For young people, however, the moon's beauty is "undiminished." The prefix "un-" portrays the opposite positive form but with a negative meaning (diminished), as though the speaker is telling those with high hopes about life not to drift away and be fooled by what ostensibly appears to be lasting. The "undiminished" would not mean anything without pairing it with its opposite, the default meaning and the one that persists as the accurate characterization of futile life. What they think of the moon, and thus their youth being undiminished, evokes the long-held "laughable" tradition of describing the moon as "preposterous" (line 10). The unawareness hinted at in "Sad Steps" makes people live by acts of deception (deceiving someone or/and being deceived).

"Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album" (*The Complete Poems* 106–107), colors readers' perception of a beautiful lady who is no longer young. It suggests that the access to the world of that beautiful woman is impossible because the access is part of the past. The poet uses "disquieting" to highlight the discrepancy between the woman in the photo album and her previous lovers or acquaintances, which he considers anxious and unsuitable for a girl like herself. The "dis" prefix enhances the feeling of uneasiness and discomfort, thus supporting the attitude that although life is futile, choices should be made carefully because their memories and consequences will last beyond these moments. The lady must have grown older, probably with wrinkles on the face and flabby skin, but what remains beautiful and unblemished is the picture (the art), the unreal, the deceptive, the "invariably lovely" (106) portrayal that will survive for so long as compared to the naturally changeable (variable) real character in the photo. The negative form "invariably" is in tune with Larkin's view of photography as an art: one that "records/Dull days as dull;" it preserves everything, but what it produces will never be accurate because invariability is only a deception.

5.3. Agnosticism

In his book *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, Andrew Motion quotes Larkin as responding to people who asked about his faith: "I am an agnostic, but an Anglican agnostic, of course" (625). The distress of WWII and its aftermath may have influenced Larkin's poetry to reflect a sense of religious disbelief or agnosticism. Throughout his *Collected Poems*, there are recurring religious references where the speakers grapple with the idea that faith cannot provide them with solace or deliverance. In "Church Going" (*The Complete*

Poems 121–122), there are numerous religious allusions, but the language "is stripped of its usual connotations" (Regan 74). The act of kneeling in "Come then to prayers" (*The Complete Poems* 523–526) is connected with humility rather than obedience:

And kneel upon the stone,

For we have tried

All courages on these despairs,

And are required lastly to give up pride (524)

Such kneeling evokes sheep that kneel out of an "instinct rather than a gesture of prayer and thankfulness" (Regan 74), as it aims to make one give up his or her pride. While kneeling for prayer is a kind of obedience, kneeling that takes our pride away invokes an image of the subjugated in front of a tyrant.

The atmosphere of the confessional created by the speaker is one in which church-goers cannot have contact with the world outside the church, and part of that confessional is keeping those who go for prayers detached from light: "Draw down the window-frame/That we may be unparted from the darkness" (514). The rationality of going to church for prayers is comforting to the soul. This is supposed to be brought about by some contact with a transcendental power, which equally suggests light, illumination, and godsend. It is assumed, then, that in such an aura, we are fully detached from darkness, but "unparted from the darkness" brings a bleak image of those who seek refuge in that place, a place that they are likely to go astray and lose their pride at once.

In "Church Going," the speaker juxtaposes the church as a gallery or museum with its traditional role as a place of prayer. As Bruce Martin rightly points out, "We see a man sensitive to the possibility of religion get conditioned by at least a couple of generations of widespread scorn blending into influence toward Christianity" (55). The speaker, in his contemplation, commends the church not as a holy place, but rather as a building that reminds us that life is short. The church, once a vibrant place of spiritual solace, is now both physically and spiritually falling, a stark contrast to its former glory.

The agnostic character of the speaker is evident in his understanding of churches, places where people can gather and practice rituals (birth, marriage, and death) that they believe would bring luck to them. This is a version where the spiritual aspect is missing; for a believer, a church is a place to worship and spiritually contact God rather than a forum for social gatherings. After all, religion is not about luck. So even when churches are full of vim and vigor, they do not seem to involve true religious practice, a perspective that underscores the speaker's detachment and skepticism.

The speaker's use of "unlucky places" establishes a belief that these places have never been beacons for religious teaching (probably because the speaker is himself a disbeliever), and at best, they are considered as venues for superstitions, and now they suffer bad luck, declining into deserted spaces. The phrase, "unlucky places," is also ironic. When there is no faith (when religion is no longer there), churches generally decline into places for "dubious women" who come to make their children touchstones. This ambiance of agnosticism is somehow linked to societal permissiveness following what Nicholas Marsh notes in the 1960s: "a permissive society" which "made its capital in

London" (3). It is important to note that social openness and rapid moral breakdown were characteristic of post-WWII England, a restless period in the country's history.

In "Church Going," the first narrator seems to know nothing about what the churches are for and instead considers only the physical structure of the place. The negation form, "uninformed," in the sixth stanza by the second speaker is highly ambivalent, even paradoxical, that he is informed about his lack of knowledge, resonating well and giving credence to "Wondering what to look for" in the third stanza (line 20), an illustration of the poet's characterization of the disintegration of the societal ideas and values. "Uninformed" forms a unifying semantic structure together with the following four structures: 1) "awkward reverence" in the first stanza, line 9) "Someone would know: I do not" in the second stanza, line 12) "Wondering what to look for" and "And always end much at a loss" in the third stanza, lines 20) the thread of "Or" questions in the fourth stanza, line 28.

Larkin's views on religion and agnosticism are expressed through his consistent use of prefixes in "Church Going," highlighting the unignorable silence. Larkin seems bothered by the silence; he anticipates hearing from God in some way while in church, but this does not happen. The use of negative prefixes emphasizes his contempt for this silence, indicating his preference for seeking the truth of God and religion in different ways. This negation reinforces his attitudes and beliefs in agnosticism as the noticeable prevailing silence compels the poet to contemplate truths around him. Larkin extends his negation further to depict churches as "unlucky," giving them human-like qualities. This negative portrayal aligns with his pessimistic view of the future of religion. Churches might lose their standing in the community, potentially being viewed as bad omens that some people will avoid.

Larkin also equates belief with disbelief raising the following central question:

But superstition, like belief, must die,

And what remains when disbelief has gone? (lines 34-35)

The use of parallelism by the poet serves to underscore his contrasting beliefs, compelling the reader to engage with the struggle between beliefs and atheism. Identifying the deliberate use of parallelism by the poet illuminates how he captivates the reader's attention and evokes powerful effects (Rifqi). In "High Windows" (*The Complete Poems* 190), Larkin depicts traditional conservative customs as an obsolete combine harvester. The speaker seems to wonder if he envies couples who can freely make love. The speaker poses a hypothetical question in the third and fourth stanzas, but it remains unanswered as he is interrupted by thoughts of "High Windows" and the expansive "deep blue air." The reference to "endless" can be interpreted in different ways. If we assume that Larkin used poetry to criticize societal permissiveness, it could be inferred that people of the time were either indulging in sexual relationships or longing to do so. However, for some, it was too late.

6. Conclusions

On the surface, linguistic-based approaches might seem impractical, due to claims that linguistics often falls short of providing the depth of literary analysis, usually collapsing

into abstraction and linguistic rigidity. However, if we pull back "the curtain" slightly, we will find in them potentials. The validity and versatility of such approaches can be realized by pairing them with approaches from other fields such as sociology, psychology, and politics. Roger Fowler argues that "it is a mistake to regard literary texts as autonomous patterns of linguistic form cut off from social forces" (7). A stylistic reading, incorporated with a sociological analysis, might better provide adequate answers and incorporate linguistics and literature together. In one way or another, poetry might better be read as a literary form that problematizes a particular social construct. Because the structure of poems might reflect attitudes toward the social surroundings, the task of a critic is to examine the formal style and evaluate how the views of the world are constructed across poems. By investigating the forms and stylistic choices across Larkin's poems, normal ways of monolithic interpretations are challenged, and social uniformities are destabilized.

On a broader level, Larkin raises our consciousness as to what and whose "voice" is being articulated. Untrained readers may assume that the poet's voice could be taken at face value. However, it might be pertinent to note that the poems as expressed above employed several kinds of forms to reveal certain social conditions of a particular society. Considering how the poems are used to convey indirect social motives and values through indirect means, readers may have an obligation to deconstruct whether (hidden) meanings are intended or if the speaker is simply "talking," including what Marcella Bertuccelli Papi argues as "the 'unsaids'" (Papi 2). As opposed to direct linguistic forms, indirect linguistic forms may show ambivalence because the poems do not report exactly what is being represented and who is fictionalizing what. As such, Larkin invites the readers to consider these implied constructions because the constructions generate some ways for readers to attend to other possibilities and alternatives hidden in the poems. The stylistics chosen by Larkin is particularly invigorating because the plurality of articulations which designate the poems permit us to attend to explorations and norms for the apparent one-way closedness. For poems to color readers' perceptions concerning certain contexts, the poems might better be presented in such a way that are in conflict with the forms that it attempts to discern and exclude. As Patrick O'Neill explains, " . . . no series of events in the real world, no matter how interesting, constitutes" anything, "unless it is made to do so by a double process involving both coding and decoding" (14). O'Neill suggests that because poems may employ various strategies to direct attention to readers concerning a specific point of view, choice of forms and stylistics generally construct the relationship between the poets and the readers. That is, when poets compose poems, they usually want the readers to be able to respond to these forms. As such, the words used in poems might better be permeated with the expectation from readers' inferences and responses. In this regard, Wayne Booth argues that speakers, including poets, are normally "constituted in polyphony," as the "collection of languages are words laden with values" (W. Booth 51). O'Neill says, poets "as co-producer, co-writer of a text whose final meaning resides not in a once-and-for-all interpretive product but rather in a continuing, ludic process of interactive structuration" (125), encourage the commingling between poets and the poems' multilayered meanings. Thus, the stylistics employed by Larkin alerts us to the multiple facets of meanings embedded in various kinds of poems.

Therefore, there is an organic association between style and social context. Larkin's poetry appears to be shaped by certain social contexts, and his poetics bears a resemblance with the postwar life in England. The syntax echoed the uncertainty, the ambivalence of post-WWII England, a chronicle of an era when nothing seemed to be undisputed. One of the many ways for Larkin to reflect on that chaotic state was in his use of negative statements, especially those formed by suffixes and prefixes. Thus, Michael Holquist draws our attention to the suffixes and prefixes that are to be closely examined, another illustration of the "consciousness of otherness" to which Holquist refers (18). By focusing on Larkin's poems and the ways in which the poems are stylistically understood, different strands are plaited, and multilevel approaches help readers to focus on the gaps concerning social contexts that could illuminate other possibilities and meanings. Consequently, the analysis of the nine poems suggests that Larkin is able to convey messages about three social issues through the use of linguistic choices and poetic styles in these poems, namely: 1) uncertainty, 2) futility of life, and 3) agnosticism. These themes are all morally and socially negative: 1) "uncertainty" colors readers' perceptions about doubt, indecisiveness, and procrastination, 2) "futility of life" is associated with pointlessness, and 3) "agnosticism" evokes renunciation.

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