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Syntax and Stylistics: A Bibliographical Essay

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Of the four book-length bibliographies of stylistics, James R. Bennett’s A Bibliography of Stylistics and Related Criticism, 1967-1983 (New York, 1986) is probably the most useful for specialized study of syntax and stylistics. Four of its six parts include sections on syntax, and it includes an appendix classifying critics by theory and method of stylistic analysis. Stylistics before 1967 is covered in Richard W. Bailey and Sister Dolores M. Burton’s English Stylistics: A Bibliography (Cambridge, MA, 1968). In addition to devoting a large section to stylistics in the twentieth century (when most relevant consideration of syntax begins), Bailey and Burton provide helpful perspective by surveying, in an introduction, stylistic activity in the mid-twentieth century. A third book-length bibliography, Louis T. Milic’s Style and Stylistics: An Analytical Bibliography (New York, 1967), offers three invaluable indexes: Authors as Contributors, Authors as Subjects, and Subjects and Topics. Less useful for the study of syntax and style in English literature, but well worth looking at, is Helmut Hatzfeld’s A Critical Bibliography of the New Stylistics Applied to Romance Literature, 1900-1952 (Chapel Hill, 1953). All of these published bibliographies are updated yearly by Richard W. Bailey in the journal Style.

For an excellent introduction to the study of syntax and style, see Nils Erik Enkvist’s Linguistic Stylistics (The Hague, 1973), especially chapter five on grammatical models in the description of style, and chapter six on deviant syntax. Donald Davie’s Articulate Energy: An Inquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry (London, 1955), while less rigorous methodologically than the work of many linguists, offers worthwhile insights into the aesthetic functions of poetic syntax.
William E. Baker’s *Syntax in English Poetry, 1870-1930* (Berkeley, 1967) systematically delineates the origins, range, and effects of modern poetic syntax and provides sound characterizations of modern poets’ use of syntax in the context of the poetic tradition. For a recent review of four introductory texts on stylistics, see Christian Mair’s “The ‘New Stylistics’: A Success Story or the Story of Successful Self-Deception?” (*Style* 19, 1985).

There are several important anthologies of articles on stylistics. In *Essays on the Language of Literature* (Boston, 1967), Seymour Chatman and Samuel R. Levin reprint thirty-one of the most influential articles on a broad range of topics in stylistics, of which at least half are relevant to the study of syntax and style. Donald C. Freeman has edited two anthologies of previously published articles: *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York, 1970) and *Essays in Modern Stylistics* (London, 1981). Both include excellent introductions and provide brief summaries and comments at the head of each article. Many of the most distinguished names in stylistics are represented in each anthology.

Seymour Chatman’s *Literary Style: A Symposium* (New York, 1971) reproduces papers delivered at a 1969 symposium on style. After each paper in the collection, Chatman summarizes the discussions which followed the reading of each paper at the conference, supplying interesting commentary and conveying a feel for the excitement generated by research in the field.

Three very influential articles on stylistic theory as it relates to syntax include Jan Mukařovský’s “Standard Language and Poetic Language” in *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure and Style* (Washington, 1964; rpt. in Chatman and Levin), in which the concepts of foregrounding and deviance are introduced, and Michael Riffaterre’s “Criteria for Style Analysis” (*Word* 15, 1959; rpt. in Chatman and Levin) and “Stylistic Context” (*Word* 16, 1960; rpt. in Chatman and Levin), which develop the concept of stylistic context. Richard Ohmann’s “Generative
Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style” (Word 20, 1964; rpt. in Freeman, Linguistics) effectively argues for transformational grammar as the most promising linguistic theory for stylistic study. For an influential critique of Ohmann and other researchers, see Stanley E. Fish’s “What is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?” in Approaches to Poetics, ed. Seymour Chatman (New York, 1975; rpt. in Freeman, Modern Stylistics). Louis T. Milic’s “Rhetorical Choice and Stylistic Options: The Conscious and Unconscious Poles” in Chatman’s Literary Style: A Symposium (New York, 1971) makes an important distinction between unconscious stylistic options and conscious rhetorical choices available to writers during composition. The idea of constructing a grammar of a text receives critical discussion in J. P. Thorne’s “Generative Grammar and Syntactic Analysis” in New Horizons in Linguistics, ed. John Lyons (London, 1970). A most illuminating article on the relation of syntax and style is Paul Kiparsky’s “The Role of Linguistics in a Theory of Poetry” (Daedalus 102, 1973; rpt. in Freeman, Modern Stylistics), in which Kiparsky identifies syntactic patterns as among the most important variables constituting poetic form.

For illustrations of how stylisticians have applied linguistic theories of syntax to analysis of literary texts, the articles discussed below should be of interest. Richard Ohmann, in “Literature as Sentences” (College English 27, 1966; rpt. in Chatman and Levin), demonstrates the critical usefulness of his theory by identifying syntactic transformations in analyses of sentences from prose works. E. L. Epstein’s “The Self-Reflective Artefact: The Function of Mimesis in an Approach to a Theory of Value in Literature” in Style and Structure in Literature, ed. Roger Fowler (Ithaca, 1975; rpt. in Freeman, Modern Stylistics) establishes a criterion of value for literature by identifying ways in which syntax, among other linguistic elements, mimes content. Also in Fowler’s Style and
Structure in Literature is Donald C. Freeman’s “The Strategy of Fusion: Dylan Thomas’s Syntax,” in which Freeman shows how Thomas’s deployment of syntactic transformations reflects the poetic designs of poems. Another article by Freeman, “Keats’s To Autumn’: Poetry as Process and Pattern” (Language and Style 11, 1978; rpt. in Freeman, Modern Stylistics), explains the reader’s experience of poetic form as a process of perceiving and decoding syntactic patterns. W. Nelson Francis, in “Syntax and Literary Interpretation” in Readings in Applied English Linguistics, ed. Harold B. Allen (New York, 1964; rpt. in Chatman and Devin), analyzes syntactic ambiguities in poems by Keats and Thomas as a method of initiating or assisting other modes of critical interpretation.

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