

their own empires in the jungle. Moreover, many of the GIs who dance, sing, and tan their way through the film are easily recognizable in the book, as are the commanding officers who put on war shows for visitors they wish to impress. If we are going to explore the contribution of literature to the film, let us give Herr his due, even if he is not so famously “literary” as Conrad.

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Preunderstanding *To Autumn*

To the Editor:

To the extent that it does not use my “Keats’s ‘To Autumn’: Poetry as Pattern and Process” (*Language and Style*, 11 [1978], 3–17) as a punching bag, Annabel Patterson’s “‘How to load and . . . bend’: Syntax and Interpretation in Keats’s *To Autumn*” (*PMLA*, 94 [1979], 449–58) is a sprightly, if forced, reinterpretation of the poem. I disagree with her reading; but it is plausible, given her evidence, and I have no wish to attack it.

I part company with Patterson, however, on one major methodological issue and several concrete aspects of her syntactic analysis. The most ringing sentence of her assault on the syntactic analysis of poetry is: “Syntactic procedures cannot be mimetic of semantic constructs unless those constructs are already and otherwise understood; therefore we can have no surety that the grammatical analysis was not predetermined by that understanding” (p. 451), a point borrowed admiringly from Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s jeremiad on that subject (“Surfacing from the Deep,” *Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 2 [1977], 151–82).

I have two main comments about this plaint. First, its view of syntactic analysis as some kind of intellectual Silly Putty to be twisted any way one wants makes the entire discipline of linguistics a fraud. No linguistic analysis of a particular construction would be independently replicable (since “grammatical analysis [can be] predetermined by . . . understanding”), and therefore the whole enterprise would be vain.

Thus, to use linguistics in the study of poetry, just find a passage, “preunderstand” it, and subject it to an entirely ad hoc, unverifiable, unfalsifiable syntactic analysis predetermined by that preunderstanding; then triumphantly offer that analysis as constitutive of that understanding, an understanding impossible to achieve without that analysis.

My second point is that if my “grammatical analysis [is] predetermined by [my] understanding” of the poem, it would follow (1) that the causatives, inchoatives, resultatives, instrumentals, and transitiveizations I find in the poem are my inventions and exist nowhere else in English grammar and (2) that they are not significant to what I consider the poem’s meaning.

The first of these implications does not merit serious refutation. Independent motivation for particular grammatical analyses is one of the best-developed aspects of the philosophy of linguistic science, as any introductory textbook in that subject points out. Grammatical analysis cannot be predetermined by “meaning.” The constructions I postulate in *To Autumn* are either there or not there. They are all well attested in the linguistic literature, and Patterson explains none of them away.

The second implication is more subtle. Since neither Patterson nor I dealt with *all* the syntax of *To Autumn*, we did not, as she implies, invalidate syntactic analysis as a critical tool by drawing opposite conclusions from the same evidence. Rather, we *both* selected syntactic elements on the basis of that curious “preunderstanding” she condemns. But what critical procedure does *not* use “preunderstanding”? If transformational analysis “cannot be a method of semantic discovery” because it “requires preunderstanding” (p. 451), must *every* sort of critical evidence—biographical, psychological, mythological, textual, all of which require “preunderstanding” if they are to be used intelligently for “semantic discovery”—be similarly discredited? I think not.

In short, facts about a poem cannot be related to its meaning without a “preunderstanding,” or a *hypothesis*, about that meaning. Criticism is not the random assembling of facts. Every literary critic proceeds by constructing a hypothesis about a work and then searching for facts that confirm, or *disconfirm*, that “preunderstanding.” Patterson supports this generalization by adopting it herself. “Given,” she concludes, “a negative hypothesis, the syntax of the poem [a very different syntax from mine] displays negative constructions. What I looked for I found” (p. 457).

Patterson and I chose to analyze different syntactic properties because our “preunderstandings” differed, but our differing hypotheses do not affect the existence of the syntactic properties themselves. It is therefore difficult to see how my grammatical analysis could be “predetermined by that [semantic] understanding.” Again, whatever my hypothesis, what I see in the syntax of *To Autumn* is either there or not there.

A basis *does* exist, however, for choosing between Patterson's and my analyses: their relative range and depth. Patterson's analysis involves only a curious "aggregation" (by which I assume she means conjunction); "extreme inversion," which, as I shall show, is neither extreme nor unnecessary; the interplay of syntax and meter, an area in which Patterson is not on the surest footing; and a curious discussion of participles (one of which, "oozings," is, uncooperatively, a gerund). I find an intricate interplay of inchoativeness, causation, resultatives, instrumentality, and transitivity through eight verb phrases and three stanzas, an iconic syntax that embraces the entire poem. I take it as axiomatic that of two analyses, the broader and deeper should prevail.

In her own "wrest[ing]" of the poem's syntax into conformity with the desired result, Patterson perceives an "extreme inversion" leading to "an effect of strain" (p. 453) in the line "and bless / With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eyes run." In fact, Keats "inverted," that is, intraposed, "With fruit" to avoid ambiguity about whether "With fruit" modifies "bless" or "run." Had he intraposed "With fruit" without shifting "run" to the end of the line, he would have had an unmetrical line:

With frúit the vínes that rún round the thátch-eyes
 W S W S W S W S W S

Uninverted, the line would violate the proscription against stress maxima—linguistically assigned stress contrasts—in weak, or odd, metrical positions. The "extreme inversion" thus is not only not extreme (inversion of verb and complement is common in English poetry) but required by both syntax and meter; the "effect of strain" therefore must arise from elsewhere (from "preunderstanding," perhaps? But here the syntax disconfirms the hypothesis).

Because Patterson has not falsified any of my analyses and I have falsified at least one of hers, and because I believe my syntactic analyses are both broader and deeper than hers, I claim that I have better supported my "preunderstanding," and hence my interpretation, of Keats's *To Autumn*.

Can there still be an unpredictable reading of *To Autumn*? I devoutly hope so. Linguists and critics need to work with, not against, each other on questions of this sort.

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