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Stylistic Analysis of Poetry

The Tricon program has been adapted as an aid to the
analysis of syntax in poetry with the hope of identifying
the dominant patterns that characterize a poet's style.
The Tricon program (described in Concordances from Com-
puters, S.M.Lamb and L.Gould, University of California,
Berkeley,1964)has three active lines which this research-
er has used for text, syntactic analysis (following a
phrase-structure grammar) and a deviance indicator. The
analysis for the three lines is charted and then trans-
fered to punched cards. Abbreviated alphabetical symbols
are used for the syntactic analysis (AP=adjective phrase)
because of the program's 24unit search limitation.

The program provides the usual textual concordances
for vocabulary, punctuation, etc., and a concordance of
syntactic patterns and deviances. Syntactic and deviance
lines may be concorded for identical units (wholes: S-NP-
PP-P) or for partials (all tokens for S or P). The pro-
gram has a wide range of subsort possibilities including
multi-dimensional crossconcordance: subsorts are possible
by left or right context on all three lines. It also has
the advantage of a neat multi-line centered print-out,
so that the searched token appears with left and right
context; this is especially helpful in the analysis of
poetry. The concordances provide totals of the number of
tokens for each type as well as totals of the number of
types and tokens searched.

An extensive analysis of a poet's poems with the aid
of a program like Tricon could provide the basis for a
formulaic expression of the poet's syntactic habits, as
a set of patterns and deviances. This kind of analysis
might aid in the comparison of styles by identifying
differences in their dominant and minor syntactic
patterns and deviations (qualitative distinctions) and
the variations in their frequencies of occurrence (quan-
titative distinctions). Such a formal treatment, of
course, looks far into the future, and a program like Tri-
con must be regarded as at best a breaking of ground.
This researcher is exploring Tricon's possibilities in
the analysis of e.e. cummings poetry. A substantial
analysis of his poems using Tricon would help determine
what syntactic patterns create the "cummings style" and
to what extent and in what manner they are deviant from
the standard grammar of English.