



Current Comments®

EUGENE GARFIELD

INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION®
3501 MARKET ST. PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104

**A Different Sort of Great-Books List:
The 50 Twentieth-Century Works
Most Cited in the Arts & Humanities
Citation Index, 1976-1983**

Number 16

April 20, 1987

A few months ago we reviewed a list of the 250 most-cited authors in the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index™ (A&HCI™)*, 1976-1983, emphasizing those who published works during the twentieth century.¹ In this essay, it is the most-cited *items* that occupy our attention and, once again, we concentrate on those published in this century. By collecting most-cited and presumably significant works, the Bibliography in this essay takes on something of the character of a great-books list. In fact, all but 2 of the 50 items turned out to be books.

The term "great books," when used to modify a curriculum or a collection, implies a selection of best or essential works as defined by various criteria. For example, St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, is known in the United States chiefly for the great-books curriculum it offers to undergraduates. The college has structured its program around the essential literature of Western civilization—those works that its administrators believe every college graduate should know.² Such an approach to education has placed St. John's outside the mainstream, since most universities have long emphasized the importance of acquiring specialized rather than general knowledge.

Besides its use to define a curriculum of study, the term "great books" also attaches itself to the related intellectual exercise—undertaken since antiquity—of drawing up a list of books that by virtue of their outstanding quality serve to define civilization. Perhaps the best-known great-books list is that compiled by Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler in 1952. It included 443 works by 74 authors (none, however, of the

twentieth century). The list became *Great Books of the Western World*, a 54-volume set published by Encyclopaedia Britannica.³ In 1977 Adler drew up a second list, this one including only works of the twentieth century.⁴

Other, more recent great-books lists are not as didactic in intent nor as systematic, but seem rather to have been fashioned to stimulate discussion or merely to entertain. As a result, they can appear highly idiosyncratic, which only illustrates the wide range of criteria that is used to define great books.

Take, for instance, the English novelist Anthony Burgess's *99 Novels: The Best in English Since 1939*.⁵ His selections—limited to fiction, as the title states—range from Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*⁶ to Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*⁷ and Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*.⁸ Or consider the lists drawn up by Frederic Raphael and Kenneth McLeish in their *List of Books*: "Books of the Decade, 1970-80," "Getting to Grips with the Twentieth Century," and "Editors' Choice," the last being a tally of the books the authors chose as those to "pack for a desert island holiday."⁹

Nonetheless, it would appear that most great-books lists have been compiled with a view toward education and intellectual betterment. And, apart from the Burgess list, they typically contain both fiction and non-fiction, with fictional literature more often defined as "great" than works of scholarship or secondary works of criticism.

Our list of 50 publications of the twentieth century most cited during 1976 to 1983 (see the Bibliography) differs in a few im-

**Bibliography of A&HCI™ Twentieth-Century
Items Most Cited During 1976-1983**

**Number of
1976-1983
A&HCI Cites**

- 235 Auerbach E. *Mimesis: Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendlandischen Literatur* (Mimesis: the representation of reality in Western literature). Bern, Switzerland: Francke, 1946. 503 p.
- 378 Austin J L. *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962. 166 p.
- 244 Bakhtin M M. *Tvorchestvo fransua Rable* (Rabelais and his world). Moscow: Khudozhestvennia Literatura, 1965. 525 p.
- 454 Barthes R. *S/Z*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970. 278 p.
- 290 Benveniste E. *Problemes de linguistique generale* (Problems in general linguistics). Paris: Gallimard, 1966. 356 p.
- 244 Berger P L & Luckmann T. *The social construction of reality: a treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966. 203 p.
- 336 Booth W C. *The rhetoric of fiction*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961. 455 p.
- 640 Chomsky N. *Aspects of the theory of syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965. 251 p.
- 399 Chomsky N & Halle M. *The sound pattern of English*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968. 470 p.
- 272 Chomsky N. *Syntactic structures*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton, 1957. 116 p.
- 411 Culler J. *Structuralist poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975. 301 p.
- 434 Curtius E R. *Europaische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* (European literature and the Latin Middle Ages). Bern, Switzerland: Francke, 1948. 601 p.
- 475 Derrida J. *De la grammatologie* (Of grammatology). Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1967. 445 p.
- 272 Derrida J. *L'écriture et la différence* (Writing and difference). Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1967. 436 p.
- 235 Eco U. *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1976. 354 p.
- 378 Eliot T S. *The waste land*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922. 64 p.
- 488 Foucault M. *Les mots et les choses* (The order of things). Paris: Gallimard, 1966. 400 p.
- 331 Freud S. *Die Traumdeutung* (The interpretation of dreams). Leipzig, Germany: Franz Deuticke, (1900) 1909. 389 p.
- 699 Frye N. *Anatomy of criticism: four essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957. 383 p.
- 426 Gadamer H-G. *Wahrheit und Methode* (Truth and method). Tubingen, FRG: J.C.B. Mohr, Paul Siebeck, 1960. 486 p.
- 400 Genette G. *Figures*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966. 3 vols.
- 234 Gombrich E H. *Art and illusion: a study in the psychology of pictorial representation*. New York: Pantheon, 1960. 466 p.

(continued)

portant ways from any other great-books list. For one, the selection of these titles is rooted in quantitative analysis (number of citations), rather than in personal, subjective criteria. (I soften that distinction by reminding readers that citations reflect the subjective choices of those citing a work; the point is that the mechanism of our selection was objective.) To my knowledge, quantitative analysis played little part in the compilation of previous lists. Furthermore, the data for this analysis derive from academic journals and thus reflect the distinctive dialogue of a specific intellectual community and one that took place during a limited period.

Finally, the typical great-books list is restrictive: only the books selected—and implicitly not others—are judged to be great. Otherwise, Hutchins and Adler would have added a 444th title, a 445th, and so on. A list based on citations, however, cannot make such a claim. While citations are indicators of influence and utility, their absence for this or that publication should not be interpreted as proof that a work is not influential, useful, or “great.” For example, certain works become so well known that explicit citation is deemed unnecessary, a phenomenon known as “obliteration by incorporation.”¹⁰ With these understandings, we may now turn to the Bibliography.

- 226 **Habermas J.** *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Knowledge and human interests). Frankfurt, FRG: Suhrkamp, 1968. 366 p.
- 450 **Heidegger M.** *Sein und Zeit* (Being and time). Tubingen, FRG: Max Niemeyer, 1927. 438 p.
- 255 **Hirsch E D.** *Validity in interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967. 287 p.
- 236 **Iser W.** *Der Akt des Lesens* (The act of reading). Munich, FRG: Wilhelm Fink, 1976. 358 p.
- 262 **Jakobson R.** Closing statement: linguistics and poetics. (Sebeok T A, ed.) *Style in language*. Boston, MA: Technology Press of MIT, 1960. p. 350-77.
- 416 **Joyce J.** *Finnegans wake*. New York: Viking Press, 1939. 628 p.
- 345 **Joyce J.** *A portrait of the artist as a young man*. New York: Huebsch, 1916. 299 p.
- 710 **Joyce J.** *Ulysses*. Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922. 732 p.
- 292 **Kripke S A.** Naming and necessity. (Davidson D & Harman G, eds.) *Semantics of natural language*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Reidel, 1972. p. 253-355; 763-9.
- 855 **Kuhn T S.** *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, (1962) 1964. 172 p.
- 280 **Lacan J.** *Ecrits*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966. 924 p.
- 335 **Levi-Strauss C.** *Anthropologie structurale* (Structural anthropology). Paris: Plon, 1958. 2 vols.
- 253 **Levi-Strauss C.** *La pensee sauvage* (The savage mind). Paris: Plon, 1962. 395 p.
- 236 **Merleau-Ponty M.** *Phenomenologie de la perception* (Phenomenology of perception). Paris: Gallimard, 1945. 531 p.
- 286 **Popper K R.** *Conjectures and refutations: the growth of scientific knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963. 412 p.
- 225 **Popper K R.** *Logik der Forschung* (The logic of scientific discovery). Vienna, Austria: Springer, 1935. 248 p.
- 235 **Popper K R.** *Objective knowledge: an evolutionary approach*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1972. 380 p.
- 245 **Pound E.** *The cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, (1925) 1970. 802 p.
- 319 **Propp V Y.** *Morfologiya skazki* (Morphology of the folktale). Moscow: Academia, 1928. 151 p.
- 366 **Proust M.** *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Remembrance of things past). Paris: Bernard Grasset (Vol. I); Nouvelle Revue Francaise (Vols. II-VIII), 1914. 8 vols.
- 370 **Quine W V O.** *Word and object*. Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of MIT, 1960. 294 p.
- 418 **Rawls J.** *A theory of justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971. 607 p.
- 293 **Sartre J-P.** *L'etre et le neant* (Being and nothingness). Paris: Gallimard, (1943) 1976. 692 p.
- 297 **Saussure F D.** *Cours de linguistique generale* (Course in general linguistics). (Bally C & Sechehaye A, eds.) Paris: Payot, (1915) 1968. 331 p.
- 415 **Searle J R.** *Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969. 203 p.
- 228 **Thompson E P.** *The making of the English working class*. New York: Pantheon, 1964. 848 p.
- 668 **Wittgenstein L.** *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical investigations*. New York: Macmillan, 1953. 232 p.
- 346 **Wittgenstein L.** *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1922. 207 p.

Of the 50 works listed, 25 were written in English, 13 in French, 10 in German, and 2 in Russian. The Russian-language books are Mikhail M. Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* and Vladimir Y. Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. All foreign-language items are available in English translation; the translation provided in the Bibliography is the standard English rendering of the original title.

Twenty-three of the items were published during the 1960s, and seven during the 1970s. Each of the first six decades of this century saw the publication of six or fewer items in the list.

Noam Chomsky, James Joyce, and Karl

R. Popper each wrote three of the items in the list; Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Ludwig Wittgenstein each wrote two. The only Nobel laureates in the Bibliography are T.S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre, who refused the prize. This group illustrates the diverse nature of most-cited works in the *A&HCI*: criticism, philosophy, scholarly treatises, and fiction.

The 10 most-cited books, in descending order, are Thomas S. Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (855), Joyce's *Ulysses* (710), Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (699), Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (668), Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (640), Michel Foucault's

Order of Things (488), Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (475), Roland Barthes's *S/Z* (454), Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* (450), and Ernst R. Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (434).

The earliest item in the Bibliography is Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900.

The most recently published are Umberto Eco's *Theory of Semiotics* and Wolfgang Iser's *Act of Reading*, both in 1976. Citations to these two derive to a significant degree from book reviews indexed in the *A&HCI*. Our indexers create a citation to a book under review so that users of the *Citation Index* can locate it by looking under the author and title of a book. Subtracting the book-review citations to the books by Eco and Iser (34 and 30 respectively) would lead to their dropping out of the Bibliography. Discounting such citations may be warranted, since they are not usually indicators of influence or utility.

Dropping the Eco and Iser books would add a book chapter by Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programmes" (1970),¹¹ with 219 citations and a second book by Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), with 217 citations.¹² The Eco and Iser books are the only ones that would be displaced from the Bibliography by eliminating book-review citations.

A second practice of our indexers—the creation of implicit citations—also has affected some of the counts. Our arts and humanities indexers are not only expert translators but also subject specialists, which usually enables them to recognize allusions to a well-known or classic work that is not explicitly cited in the text, a footnote, or the bibliography. For example, 114 of the 416 citations to Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* are implicit; they were in effect created by our indexers who recognized an author's allusion to this book. Unlike most book-review citations, implicit citations do carry weight as indicators of utility.

Conspicuously absent from the Bibliography is any work by Vladimir I. Lenin, who was the most-cited twentieth-century author in the *A&HCI*, 1976-1983, with over

8,900 citations.¹ When an author cites Lenin, a reference is generally given to *Polnoe Sobranie Sochineny* (*Complete Collected Works*), published in 55 volumes between 1958 and 1965.¹³ No attempt was made to identify individual items among the vast number of citations to these volumes; this might well be the subject of a separate study. As noted in our earlier study, citations to the works of Lenin reflect, of course, political ideology and mores, as well as scholarly notice.

In terms of subjects represented, the present list has much in common with our previous study of most-cited authors.¹ In both, the predominance of literary criticism, linguistics, and philosophy is apparent. While such a strong showing may be due in some measure to the large number of journals in these three areas covered in the *A&HCI*, I do not doubt that, even taking such coverage into account, criticism, linguistics, and philosophy would top our list.

Of particular note are many works in the tradition of French structural linguistics and semiotics, structuralism, and post-structuralism. It is clear that during the years 1976 to 1983 the paradigms of these schools shaped much discourse in the academic community of the humanities. However, it remains to be seen whether many of the items representing those concerns will appear in future lists.

Finally, I wish to note the perhaps surprising place that works in the philosophy of science have taken in recent writings in the humanities. As I've said, Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* turned out to be the most-cited work in our study. Three books by Popper, on the growth and logic of scientific discovery, also received much attention. The history and philosophy of science are well covered in the *A&HCI*, but the number of specialty journals in these fields cannot alone account for the impressive number of citations to these books.

It is encouraging to note this strong interest on the part of humanities researchers in science, if only in the history and philosophy of science, for I agree with physicist and Nobel laureate Sheldon Glashow, Har-

vard University, that "most [scientists] are well-read and can hold [their] own with historians, literary critics and whatever. Humanists, on the other hand, are often (though not always) scientifically and mathematically inept and proudly so. Our conversations must turn on matters of their concern, not ours. We are disadvantaged because we are compelled by their ignorance to match wits on their territory."¹⁴

Earlier on, I mentioned the distinct character of our great-books list, especially when compared with other lists of great books of the twentieth century, such as the second list compiled by Adler.⁴ Of the 131 works selected by him, only 9 also appear in our list of 50. Why? What has received most attention in a specific community during a delimited period (our list) obviously does not coincide—nor should we expect it to coincide—with Adler's standard of timelessness. Those books shared by both are certainly

worth notice: Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*; Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*; Lévi-Strauss's *Savage Mind*; Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*; Heidegger's *Being and Time*; and Popper's *Conjectures and Refutations* and *Logic of Scientific Discovery*.

Should we repeat this exercise 5 or 10 years from now, some of the 50 most-cited items would undoubtedly change. Those that continue to turn up perhaps come closest to great books as traditionally defined: enduring, in fact, timeless works. A quantitative contribution to the definition of great books should prove an interesting complement to the work of Adler and others.

* * * * *

My thanks to David A. Pendlebury and Patricia Taylor for their help in the preparation of this essay.

© 1987 ISI

REFERENCES

1. Garfield E. The 250 most-cited authors in the *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, 1976-1983. *Current Contents* (48):3-10, 1 December 1986.
2. St. John's College. Personal communication. 16 December 1986.
3. Hutchins R M & Adler M J, eds.: *Great books of the Western world*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952. 54 vols.
4. The great books (contd.). *Time* 109(10):65-6, 1977.
5. Burgess A. *99 novels: the best in English since 1939*. New York: Summit, 1984. 160 p.
6. Hemingway E. *For whom the bell tolls*. New York: Scribner's, 1940. 471 p.
7. Heller J. *Catch-22*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955. 443 p.
8. Maller N. *Ancient evenings*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1983. 709 p.
9. Raphael F & McLeish K. *The list of books*. New York: Harmony, 1981. p. 6-8.
10. Merton R K. *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968. p. 27-9; 35-8.
11. Lakatos I. Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programmes. (Lakatos I & Musgrave A, eds.) *Criticism and the growth of knowledge*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1970. p. 91-195.
12. Barthes R. *Mythologies*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957. 268 p.
13. Lenin V I. *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* (Complete collected works). Moscow: Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 1958-65. 55 vols.
14. Devine C M, Dissel C M & Parrish K D, eds. *The Harvard guide to influential books*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986. p. 92 (cited in Byrne G. The 'two cultures' have endured. *The Scientist* 9 March 1987. p. 13).