

Editor's Column

LAST YEAR a member of our Editorial Board proposed that we accept an essay on the basis of its boldly unconventional approach: "It does not," he pointed out, "contain a single reference to Northrop Frye!" The comment, of course, was made in jest, but the suggestion that our contributors tend regularly to pay obeisance to the author of *The Anatomy of Criticism* was not at all frivolous. Nor is this homage a recent development. Three years ago William Schaefer wrote in this column, "At times . . . it seems that authors feel their articles would not be given serious consideration without a quotation from Frye, preferably in the opening paragraph."

While many of the essays we receive continue to take archetypal bows in the direction of Toronto, I have lately noticed that our authors increasingly seem to find their inspiration in France and in New Haven, the Paris of America. It is remarkable (though not surprising to anyone au courant with theoretical trends) how often the same names and titles show up in scholarly essays. In order to determine whether some patterns I have been seeing are real and not just figments of an imagination bombarded by too many footnotes, I looked closely at the citations in a representative group of submissions, the essays discussed by the Board at our June 1979 meeting. These thirty-five papers come from all over the country and address a wide range of topics.

Knowing that citation counts, unless one is a sociologist, are more entertaining than enlightening and that such statistics fluctuate dramatically as critical fashions change, I nevertheless pass on the results of my small survey, or "popularity poll," and invite your utter suspension of disbelief. I discovered, first of all, what you probably have already guessed—the writers most often mentioned in these essays are our continental cousins, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, the former cited in ten papers, the latter in seven, one of which was devoted wholly to his work. Numerous books and essays by both authors were mentioned, with *Of Grammatology* (Derrida) and *The Pleasure of the Text* (Barthes) appearing most frequently. In addition to these obviously a la mode writers, other European critics referred to in more than one essay are Jacques Lacan, Ferdinand de Saussure, Georges Poulet, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and, on the other side of the Channel, Frank Kermode, quoted in four papers.

Moving across the Atlantic, I found that the Connecticut theorists whose influence is obviously powerful right now are J. Hillis Miller (quoted in six essays), Paul de Man (five), Harold Bloom (four), and Geoffrey Hartman (four). Although de Man's *Blindness and Insight* is mentioned several times, a critic's single most visible work is not always the one that attracts the attention of our authors, but rather a congeries of books and essays, especially essays published in *Critical Inquiry*, the *Georgia Review*, and *Glyph*. Miller, for example, is represented by no fewer than seven separate entries—two books (*Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* and *Poets of Reality*), an introduction (to the Penguin *Bleak House*), and four essays.

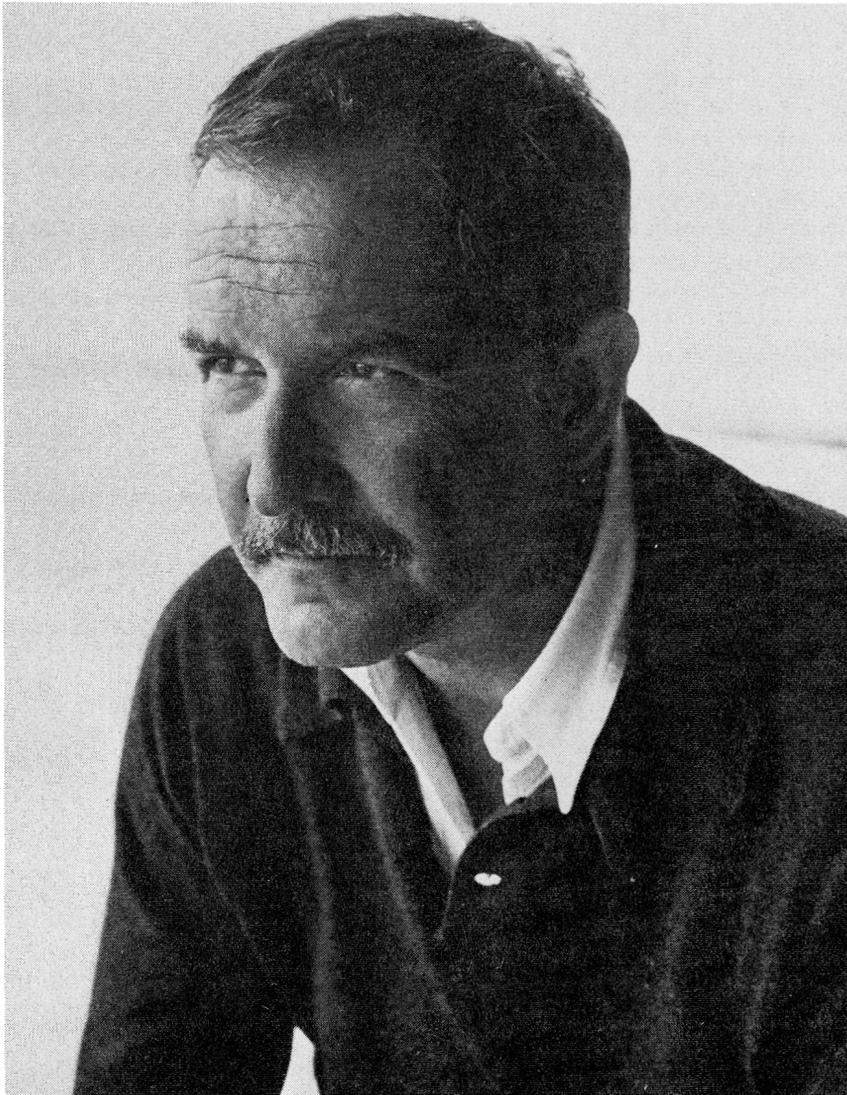
Other Americans whose work is cited two or more times include M. H. Abrams, Edward Said, Barbara Herrnstein Smith, Jonathan Culler, Stanley Fish, Wayne Booth, and E. D. Hirsch. From an earlier generation, the names of Lionel Trilling and Rosemond Tuve are much in evidence. Usually writers are identified with specific books, and obviously anyone just starting on a voyage through contemporary theoretical waters would do well to examine not only *The Anatomy of Criticism* and the other titles I've mentioned but the following as well: *Natural Supernaturalism* (Abrams), *Structuralist Poetics* (Culler), *Beyond Formalism* (Hartman), *Poetic Closure* and *On the Margins of Discourse* (Smith), *The Structuralist Controversy* (ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato), *A Map of Misreading* and *The Anxiety of Influence* (Bloom), *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Angus Fletcher), *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Booth), *Self-Consuming Artifacts* (Fish), *Validity in Interpretation* (Hirsch), and *Beginnings* (Said).

Other basic texts are *S/Z* (Barthes), "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line" (Miller, *Critical Inquiry*, 1976), *Speech and Phenomena* (Derrida), and *Ecrits* (Lacan). An

acquaintance with Lévi-Strauss is also de rigueur. If seasickness threatens during this strenuous excursion, I prescribe, as a sedative, Barthes's *A Lover's Discourse*, a wise book that will evoke smiles of recognition from anyone who has been in love—and from anyone who has not.

In the interest of accuracy I should point out that one of the essays used in this survey has ninety-seven footnotes, of which none refers to any of the texts mentioned in this column. I want to add, too, that the essays in this issue of *PMLA*, which were not part of the survey, yield yet other names to be added to my much too selective list: Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Kenneth Burke, Edmund Husserl, Mircea Eliade, Michel Foucault. Additional names (and titles) will be suggested by those of you who will write to excoriate me for having left out a favorite source or a well-thumbed text, to ask why there is no mention of Bachelard or Ricoeur, no Lukács or Eco or Bakhtin. I welcome your letters: after all, editors, like theorists, are never happier than when someone is actually moved to respond.

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Carlos Fuentes

Photo by Jerry Bauer