OF (MIS)READING LITERARY FOREFATHERS
HAROLD BLOOM'S THEORY OF *'ANXIETY OF INFLUENCE'* –
A CRITICAL PERUSAL

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Abstract

Literary tradition is a myriad series of theses, syntheses and antitheses, both at the level of thought as well as of technique. Every writer has to unavoidably confront with the legacy bequeathed by his literary forerunners, particularly in the same language. Does this legacy provides him an impetus for his creative process and helps him in paving his own way in the tradition, or it comes as an impediment, has been long a moot point. Subscribing to the later view; the literary tradition as a handicap for new writers, American literary critic and theorist Harlod Bloom developed a highly influential, though controversial theory, which he named as 'anxiety of influence'. The paper intends to undertake a critical analysis of this theory. Taking a background look at Bloom's earlier career as a critic of Romantic poetry, it will highlight salient features of *the Anxiety of Influence* for which he is best and widely known. Besides that, the paper will discuss the critical atmosphere and contemporary critical approaches that shaped or provided impetus for Bloom's theoretical formations. Finally, the place of Bloom's theory in the the overall literary theory will be discussed.

Key words: *Misreading/Misprison, Personality, Belatedness, Romanticism, Tradition, Trope, Literary history, Kabbalah*

Bloom's Preoccupation with the Romantics:

Bloom's earlier reputation rests on his preoccupation with English Romantic poetry (Bloom 1959, 1961) but his enormous range of is illustrated by his many contributions, from 1985 onwards, to Chelesea House's Modern Critical Interpretation and Modern Critical Views series. These make him one of the very few twentieth-century critics to cover the whole field of English literature.

His early studies of Romanticism reacted against the New Criticism in two ways. On the one hand, Bloom deflects critical interest away from 'the line of wit' and metaphysical poetry (Brooks 1939) and towards Romanticism. On the other, he insists from the earliest stages of a long career that the poem is not an isolated verbal icon. (Wismatt 1954)

Bloom is also unusual in the sense that he writes for both an academic and popular audience; his panoramic survey and defence of the entire Western Canon (Bloom 1994) is a rare example of successful popularization. Like *The Western Canon* (Bloom 1994) Bloom's *Shakespeare* (Bloom 1999) is a work of popularization and argues that in such a strong poet that his work already contains all the interpretations that can be made of it; that, indeed, Shakespear, the key figure in rhe Bloomian canon, is such a strong poet that he created the modern sense of selfhood; that we cannot conceive of ourselves without making reference to Shakespeare's characters. To the extent that Bloom's reading of the plays concentrates on individual characters, it is stragely reminiscent of the much-derided character analysis of Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (Bradley 1904).

Poetics of Influence – Introductory Remarks:
Bloom is probably best known for his theory of *Anxiety of Influence* (Bloom 1973) and its themes recur through his career, despite his many changes of direction. He advances the idea that every poet (especially since Milton), in a sense, is, 'belated' and oppressed by anxiety because of 'precurser' poet - the great ones above all. For instance, a putative poet now is growing up as a poet in the shadow, so to speak, of the great poets of the past. This poet stands in the relationship of ‚son' to them, or the one of them in particular, and feels oppressed by that relationship.
For Bloom, there are no texts, but only realtions between texts, and meaning itself is a product of their interaction. Whilst his vision of the relationship between texts obviously anticipates the intertextuality of Kristeva…, it is also an early version of what Bloom will later call 'misreading' (Bloom A map of misreading 1975a and *Agon: Towards a Theory of Revisionism*.1982)

The literary tradition is revionist in that poets (and critic; Bloom sees no difference, in kind and degree, between the language of poetry and criticism) inevitably reinterpret, re-invision, re-evaluate and revise the works of their precursors in a bid to overcome the anxiety of influence and their sense of belatedness, or the nightmare sense of coming after the event, and of trying to occupy the ground where powerfull predecessors have stood. Strong poetry begins with with a wilful act of misreading that allows the *ephebe* (the Greek term for a young citicen, used by Bloom to describe the new citizen of the poetic realm) to absorb and overcome the influence of his percursors. One of the most obvious and fertile examples of misreading is the Romantic reading, to which Bloom himself subscribes, that sees Satan as the true hero of *Paradise Lost*.
In postulating his theory of the *Anxiety of Influence* Bloom draws mainly on the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex. Carrying through the Oedipal idea, Bloom suggests that such a ‚son' is rival to the father poet who is ‚castrating precursor'. The ‚son', powerfully influenced by a parent-poem or poems of the 'father', experiences ambivalent feelings, compounded not only of love and admiration but also of envy and fear - and perhaps even hatred. These twin feelings of fear and hatered are generated by the son's need to reject and rebel against the ‚father', in order to become autunomous and original and find his own 'voice'.

M. H. Abrams analyses this predicament: "The belated poet unconciously safegaurds his own sense of autonomy and priority by by reading a parent-poem ‚defensively', in such a way as to distort it beyond his own conscious recognition. Nevertheless, he cannot avoid embodying the malformed parent-poem into his own doomed attempt to write an unprecedentedly original poem; the most that even the best belated poet can achieve is to write a poem so ‚strong' that it

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effects an illusion of ‚priority' – that is, an illusion both that it precedes the father-poem in time and that it exceeds it in greatness." (Abrams 1999)

Bloom proposes six distortive processes (described as ‚revisionary ratios') which function in the reading of a precurser poet, and he explains these on the model of Freud's defensive mechanism. He concludes that it is possible to know a ‚poem-in-itself' and that all interpretation is a ‚necessary misprison', that all reading is 'misprison' or 'misreading'.

Bloom followed *The Anxiety of Influence* with further detailed analytical inquiries on various poetic texts in *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975) and *Poetry and Repression* (1976).

The Question of Misreading:

With Bloom's approach to the reading of poetry, we are presented with two distictive and apparently contradictory conceptualizations of the critical text and its interpretative function: criticism as event or act and criticism as description, representation and systematic (inductive) totalization. Wih this apparent conceptual divergence, a question, naturally enough, arises: is Bloom attempting at having his cake and eat it too? How can a critic who styles all criticism as ‚prose poetry' and all poetry as misinterpretation of prior poetry write of the ‚pattern' that *truely* exists in all Romantic lyrics? This is illustrated in a number of articles and reviews dedicated to the work of Bloom that have focussed on the issue of critical map-making and its relation to the central trope of misreading. In this regard the comment by Robert Scholes is typical: 'if there is not "understanding" then can be no "misunderstanding" either. We cannot have "deliberate misinterpretation" without the possibility of correct interpretatio, from which this „deliberate misinterpretation" departs in some intelligible way'. (Scholes 1974: 267) Commentators such as Scholes would highlight comments like this one from "The necessity of misreading" to exhibit Bloom's ultimate reliance on the epistemological concept of reading: The strongest of poets are severely mis-read that generally accepted, broad interpretations of their works actually tend to be exact opposite of what the poems truly are' (Bloom 1975b) Here Bloom's insistence on the necessity of misreading "strong" poems appear to conflict with his suggestion that he in fact does possess the capacity to *know*, somehow through his reliance on the process of misreading, ‚what the poems truly are'. Gerald Graff sums up this response to this particular passage: 'Here Bloom seems to be disagreeing with himself by implying that we *can* know what a poem "truly" is. For that matter, the very concept of misreading seems to presuppose that there is such a thing as true reading and that we know how to reconize it'. (Graff 1977: 472) The objects of Scholes and Graff are typical in that they are presented as logical objections. Both critics highlight the manner in which epistemology returns in Bloom's apparently anti-epistemological practice of misreading. Yet such objections do not really engage with the true significance of the concept of misreading.

Paul de Man's Critique:

Paul de Man, in his review of *The Anxiety of Influence*, presents (de Man 1971: 267-76) Bloom's study as a radically unstable or volatile kind of text in which such staple terms as literature, poetry and criticism undergo what we might call a crisis of identity.

This representation of Anxiety allows de Man to submit the theory presented in that book to a radically requestioning and revision. De Man begins his review with such a revision in mind:

'Like most good books, Harold Bloom's last essay is by no means what it pretentds to be.'(Ibid.: 267) Having made this observation, de Man can then suggest what *Anxiety* 'really' is. In other words, de Man endeavours to spplement Anxiety with principles and insights it is thought already, in a negative way, to possess these principles or negative insights can be grouped under three interrelated subheadings. To begin with, we would do well to refer to de Man's treatment of the revisionary ratios. The principle which which de Man highlights within this central area of Bloom's theory is that of rhetorical substitution, the notion of poetic meaning as the product of poet's revision of pre-existent figurations and modes of linguistic signification. However, de Man asserts that 'from the moment we begin to deal with subtitutive systems, we are governed by linguistic rather than by natural or psychological models: one can always subsitute one word for another, but one cannot, by a mere act of will, substitute night for day or bliss for gloom'. (Ibid: 274) This point leads de Man into a major re-evaluation, stating that it is possible 'to transpose Bloom's six ratios back to paradigmatic rhetorical structures in which they are rooted'. (Ibid: 275) De Man associates ratios such as *tessera* with synecdoche and *apophrades* with metalepsis, in a manner which clearly forms one of the vital motivations behind Bloom's creation of his map of misreading.

The important point for us here is the implicit critique such a translation contain, particularly with regard to psychopoetic theory of poetic influence Bloom' six revisionary ratios are meant to substantiate. This leads to the second major element in de Man's review.

In an earlier review of The Visionary Company, de Man had analysed Bloom's construction of an anti-natural or "antithetical" theory of Romanticism on a highly personal or idiocycratic reading of the poetry of William Blake. (de Man 1962: 618-23) In his review of Anxiety de Man takes up Bloom's description of Romanticism once again, showing how his antithetical portrayal of the poetic imagination relies on an apparently outmoded language of psychological naturalism and historical geneticism: the language of temporality, originality, priority, desire and the poetc 'subject'. What Bloom refuses to do, as far as de Man is concerned, is accept that his antithetical claims concerning Romantic poetry deconstruct not only the myth of Romantic imagination but also the Romantic 'subject' itself. Bloom has gone half way, according to this reading, and then stopped short, because to proceed any further would lead him into a priviledging language of 'psychological naturalism'. De Man wishes us to understand that, by relapsing into a 'subject'-centred language of psychoogical desire and anxiety, Bloom evades the true nature of belatedness, which is not, after all, temporal, historical or psychological phenomenon, but an aspect of the epistemological uncertainty which persists in every reading of literary text. This insistence on the primacy of lingistic substitution over 'psychological naturalism' reinstates the question of epitemology, of the truth or falsity of the literary text, as the cardinal issuein critical interpretation. (de Man 1971: 272) *A Map of Misreading* is dedicated to Paul de Ma. It is not unreasonable to as an answer to de Man's critique of Anxiety; an answer, moreover to the post-strucuturalist tendencies of though that critique encapsulates.

The chapter in which Bloom engages with de Man's brand of criticism most directly is entiltled 'The belatedness of strong poetry'. Bloom' answer to de Man here is to incorporate into this map de Man's insistence on rhetorical, longuistic structures, but then largely to reverse the implication of such a inclusion. Instead of de Man's assertion of the priority of language over the naturalistic criterion of the poetc 'subject', Bloom establishes the interdependence of trope and defence, an interdependence which reasserts the validity of the language of poetic psychology

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over the deconstructive criterion of language. Bloom rejects the de Manian argument in which 'the linguistic model usurps the psychological one becauselanguage is a subsitute system responsive to the will, but the psyche is not' *(Bloom 1975a:* 76). In opposition to this position, Bloom asserts that the criticism of strong poetry discovers that 'a trope is just as much a concealed mechanism of defence, as a defence is a concealed trope' (*Bloom 1975a:* 77). Such an assertion transforms de Man's focus on the 'epistemological moment' in literary text into what we might term as *category mistake*. 'The burden for reader', Bloom argues, 'remains that poetry, despiteall its protests, continue to be a discursive mode, whose structures evade the language that would confine them' (*Bloom 1975a:* 77). Poetry, accroding to Bloom, 'is a discursive and not linguistic mode.' (*Bloom 1975a:* 68)

Impossibility of Reading:

Poetry is, for Bloom, a discursive rather than linguistic mode because it tropological swerves are pittied not solely against literal meaning but defensively against past instances of poetic language. We can get a little nearer to an understanding of Bloom's reassessment of poetic meaning by returning to the difference between his own brand of interpretation and that of de Man and his denconstructive colleagues. Bloom writes: "Reading, despite all humanist traditions of education, is very nearly impossible, for every reader's relation to every poem is governed by a figuration of belatedness. Tropes or defenses (for here rhetoric and psychology are virtual identity) are the 'natural' language of the imagination. A poet attempting to make his language new necessarily begins by an *arbitary act of reading* that does not differ in kind from the act that *his* readers subsequently must perform upon him. In order to become a strong poet, the poet reader begins with a trope or defense that *is* a misreading, or perhaps we might speak of the trope-as-reading. A poet interpreting his precursor, or any strong subsequent interpreter reading either poet, must *falisfy* by reading. Through this falsification can be quite genuinely perverse or even ill-willed, it need not be, and usually is not. But it must be a falsification, because every strong reading insists that the meaning it finds is exclusive and accurate." (*Bloom 1975a:* 69)

Bloom's insistence on critical reading as misreading appear to bring him into line with his deconstructive colleagues; yet, his map of misreading equally appears to reinscribe the criterion of empirical verifiablity, the objective, anterior perspective of the critic who founds his interpretative machine or model on an inductive, empirically based, survey of literary texts as *in themselves they really are*. The first thing to say about the appearances is that at best they are starting points and at worst they are considerably wide of the mark. We must remind ourselves that de Man and Bloom are, in effent, interpreting very different things. De Man interprets the epistemological status of a text's statement. Bloom, however, does not interpret text at all. For Bloom there are no texts, but only relations between texts. He explains his use of word 'influence' as representing 'the whole range of relationships between one poem and the other', going on to explain that such a conceptulization makes of influence 'a highly conscious trope, indeed a complex sixfold trope that intends to subsume six major tropes: irony, synecdoche, metonymy, hyberbole, mataphor, and metalesis, and in just that ordering' (*Bloom 1975a:* 70).

Map of Reading or Six ways of Misreading:

The map is Bloom's personal hypostatisation of his trope of influence, which functions as Bloom's personal chart of the possible roads through which meaning can be said 'wander'

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between texts and presents a personal chart which makes use of a number of discursive structures, including the tradition of Kabbalistic interpretation. Bloom describes his method as converting the 'Lurianic dialectics of creation' into a map of misprison, a charting of how meaning is produced in post-Enlighenment strong poetry by the substitutive interplay of figures and images, by the language strong poets use in defense against, and response to, the language of prior strong poets' (*Bloom 1975a:* 87). The most significant aspect of the Lurianic triad comes once it has been converted into the analogical form of limitation, substitution and representation. Such a triadic system allows Bloom to relate three of his leading tropes (and their corresponding defense mechanism, ratios and images) to the principle of limitation and the other three to the principle of representation; thus adding two 'higher' tropes (hyperbole and metalesis) to Kenneth Brook's 'four master tropes'.15. In this way, Bloom can postulate a dialectical shuttle in poetic rhetoric and defence between the limitation of meaning and the representation of meaning; dialectic grounded on the cardinal principle of rhetorical substituion. 'Stong' poem, on this model, are mini-apocalypses, which brew gradually to a pervasive but temporary minor victory over past time, past Words. The Romantic ideal of an apocalypse of personal vision is reenacted by each 'strong' poem's re-rehersal of the map of misprison.

But if the interpretation of poetic text is a defensive act – the 'interpretation of [a] poem's interpretation of other poem' (*Bloom 1975a:* 75) – it is also because of the undecidability of the nature of poetic meaning, where *meaning* is conceived as the product of relationships between as poem and past poetry. The map represents 'six tropes' which are 'six interpretations of influence' and 'six ways of reading/misreading intra-poetic relationships . . . which means six ways of reading a poem'. These six tropes combine into 'a single scheme of complete interpretation, at once rhetorical, psychological, imagist, and historical, though this is a historicism bur deliberately reduces to the interplay of personalities' (*Bloom 1975a:* 71).

The map of misreading is one critic's multifaceted *interpretation* of influence as an element in poetic texts and poetic meaning. Indeed, in that recognition of an element deliberate reductionism, Bloom alerts us to the foundation of his brand of critical misreading. This foundation lies, not in the totalising tendency itself, though for some this will continue to ba a problem, but in the positive recnstruction of intra-poetic relationships. Given that the uncertainties of meaning lie *in-between* texts rather than in a single text, the moment of reductionism, which is equally a moment of in which the critic reverts to the language of empricial verifiability and mimetic validity, will occur for Bloom in the reconstrction of the presumed misinterpretation or revionary misprison which is involved in any text's apparent meaning. In 'The necessity of misreading' Bllom explains: 'Every act of reading is an exercise in belatedness, yet every such act is also defensive, and as a defense it makes of interpretation a necessory misprion . . . A *strong* reading can be defined as one that itself produces other readings – as Paul de Man says, to be productive it must insist upon its own exclusiveness and completemess, and it must deny its patialness and its necessary falsification. 'Error about life is necessrary for life'; error about a poem is necessary if there is to be yet another stong poem. (Bloom 1975b: 97)

When we remember that, for Bloom, a poem contunually strives to negate or revise its dependence on prior poems, so that no explicit surface echo or allusion to a specific past poem need be discernable when reading the poetic text, then we recognise that the presentation of

Bloom's reconstructions of the revisionary relations *between poems* is accurately described by Bloom himself as an 'exercise in belatedness'.

Kabbalistic Paradigm:

It is this rejection of traditional, positivistic source-study, in fact, which explains the importance of Bloom's Kabbalistic paradigm in the estalishment of the map of misprison. If 'stong' poetic texts do not exhibit the intertextual agonism on which they depend for their production of meaning, then the only way in which such intertextual modes of affiliation and revision can be recuperated is if the anthithetical reader can find a 'pattern in the dance' of trope, defence and image. Bloom affirms that there is such a pattern (Bloom 1976:270) and it finds its best manifestation in Kabbalah. The tradition of Kabbalah thus grounds Bloom's interpretaive paradigm; a paradigm through which he can map the pattern or dance of tropes, defences and images in all post-Enlighenment poems and by so mapping them locate the *places* at which 'strong' poetic texts wrestle agonistically with their prime precursors. (Bloom 1975b: 86-92)

Question of Literary History/Historicism:

Generally speaking, deconstruction represented a texualized unravelling of most of the concepts on which not only the New Criticism but equaly any positive form of historiography up to that point had been based. To those concerned with history, deconstruction in America seemed to be a kind of nightmare extention of the New Critical project.

It would be, of course, wrong to portray the recent history of criticism in the Anglo-American world as a simple fight between historicist and deconstructive or post-structuralist movements. Much post-structuralist is deeply engaged with the history and the question of literary historiography; deconstruction, if it has been used to deny history, is not in itself necessarily anti-historical. Commentators on Bloom's work have characterized it a move 'beyond formalism' towards a new form of historicism. Said writes that, along with the work of Raymond Schwab, Michael Foucault and Walter Jackson Bate, Bloom's approach should be read as ,exemplifying a possible trend for criticism to be taken seriously only if literature is going to be studied in a more situated, circumstantial, but no less theoretically self-conscious way'. (Said 1984: 151-52)

The general drive to pass 'beyond formalism', which can be said to have greatly assisted in the acceptance of post-structuralist theory into the Anglo-American critical scence around the begining of the 1970s, led in a number of distinct, if frequently interrelated, direction. Of course, each diferent ,post-formalist' movement has defined what it takes to be the pricipla limitations of New Criticism/formalism in terms that open a space into which it can position itself. The rise of what is commonly styled as a ,new historicism' exhibits one route. Edward Said exemplifies this movement: "My opinion is that texts are wordly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted." (Said 1984: 4)

A different set of criteria can be said to have fed into the deconstructive approach to the 'going beyond' question. A concern with the unbridgeable gulf between signified and signifier, the consequent problematization of epistemoloy and interpretative accuracy, the emphasis on

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textuality over standard, ‚humanistic'value-terms such as ‚history', the writing and reading ‚subject', the ‚literal'/'figural', ‚form'/'content', ‚presence'/'absence', ‚speech'/'writing', oppositions: all these concerns combined in the emergence of a deconstructive movement in certain key institutions within the Americam academy in the mid- 1970s.

Influence and Romantic Tradition of Poetry:

Bloom's critical interpretation is founded on two conceptions. The first is situated within literary history. Bloom writes that the ‚remedy for literary history' lies in a conversion of its concepts ‚from the category of being into the category of happening'. He adds: ‚To see the history of poetry as an endless, defensive civil war, indeed a family war, is to see that every idea of history relevant to the history of poetry must be concept of happening' (Bloom 1975b: 63). The other feature of Bloom's approach to misreading emerges when we attend to the outline he provides in his 'The map of misprison' of the formal characteristics of 'what has been the central tradition of greater modern lyric' is indebted to the work of his former teacher M.H. Abrams. (Abrams 1984: 76-108) Indeed, Bloom's map combines Abrams's description of the typical Romantic crisis-lyric with the revion of Northrope Frye's analysis of the quest-romance mode. Romantic and post-Romantic poems, in Bloom's approach, become internalised quest-romances founded on various systemisable moments of ‚break through'. This tradition, which stretches from Spencer to the poetry of John Ashbery, is predicted by Bloom on the discovery of a recuurent riadic pattern within such poems (*Bloom 1975a*: 96)

Bloom's Place in Contempoary Theory:

His seminal role in the re-evaluation of Romanticism and in the attempt to find alternatives to a temporarily dominent deconstructve movement guaranteed him a large audience.

What seems equally essential is to develop a fundamental critique of Bloom; that his poetic version of literary history, his defiant repetition of the Romantic ideology and his pschopoetic theory of intertextual modes of misreading leave out of an account of poetic meaning its social and historical dimensions. Given Harold Bloom's antognism to rival or alternative movements in contemporary literary theory, and given the complex nature of the history of that field since the early 1970s, it is difficult to locate Bloom's place within the Anglo-American critical scene. Bloom's fiercely individual stance, his constant effort to distance himself from all movements, from what he sees as the weak rhetoric of consensus, militates against the drawing of neat lines of associations between his ‚antithetical criticism' and other more popularly understood and inclusive approaches.

An Idioncycratic Theorist:

Moreover Bloom is highly idiosyncratic and his idiosyncrasies and inconsistencies are many. Once closely associated with the so-called Yale School of Deconstruction (1979), he latter dismissed deconstruction as the the ‚death-throes of German romantic philosophy' (Bloom 1982). His borrowings from the tradition of rhetoric, psychoanalysis and Gnostic or his Kabbalistic interpretation (Bloom 1975b) are exemplary instances of misprison. He is waspish towards his many rivals, dismissing 'source hunters' as 'the carrion-eaters of scholarship' (Bloom 1975a) and generally describing Foucauldians, New Historicists and the Feminists as the

School of Resentment, the object of their resentment being the authority and influence of the canon (Bloom 1994). His pronouncements of Feminism are deliberately provocative; if the ‚burgeoning religion of the Liberated Woman' comes to dominate the West, the last link with the tradition of Homer will be broken and the canon will be destroyed (Bloom 1975a) Despite this anti-feminist stance, Bloom also argues in his bestselling *The Book of J* (David & Bloom 1991) that the first books of the Bible were written by a woman at the court of Solomon, even though there is little or no evidence to support that claim. Exponent of feminist criticism such as Showalter claim (1991) that Bloom's theory applies only to male line of descent; others, like Gilbert and Gubar (1979a), have used it with profit, whilst Paglia is a self-confessed disciple.

Bloom's choice of terminology can be idiocycratic as to appear eccentric or even quite arbitrary. One of the strategies of misreading is dubbed *clinamen*, described as swerving away from a strong influence; this is the term used by Lucretius in Book roman 2 of *The Nature of the Universe* to describe how atoms swerve from their straight course and collide to form matter. Bloom's justification for such eccentries is that every word in a critic's vocabulary should ‚swerve from inherited words'. A better way to understand Bloom's relationship to contemporary theory is to begin with those rare moments in which he associates his own work with contemporary movements. In *The Anxiety of Influence* he asserts: 'In the contemporary criticism that clarifies for me my own evasions, in book like *Allegory* by Agnus Fletcher, *Beyond Formalism* by Geoffrey Hartman, and *Blindness and Insight* by Paul de Man, I am made aware of the mind's efforts to overcome the impasse of Formalist criticism, the barren moralizing that Archetypical criticism has come to be, and the anti-humanistic plain deariness of all those developments in European criticism that have yet to demonstrate that they can add in reading any one poem by any poet whatsoever.' (Bloom 1973: 12-13)

This is, with hindsight, an interessting assessment of theoretical affiliation. The ascription to Paul de Man of an attempt to provide a defence against the anti-humanism of an insurgent, Continental philosophical movement says far more about Bloom's own resistance to post-structuralism that it does about de Man. The more precise assessment concerns the description of these books as constituting a generally discernable movement within America in the late 1960s and early 1970s to ‚go beyond'. Both Harman's and de Man's texts contain a number of essays which call for and/or exhibit such a movement. It is clear also that in its stated promise of a 'more antithetical practical criticism than any we now have' (Bloom 73: 13), its rejection of the concept of the literary text as an aesthetic monad in favour of a conception of each text as a dyad, its emphasis on the revionary nature of both poetry and criticism, and other issues.

The *Anxiety of Influence* was consciously by Bloom as his own version of such a movement.

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