American Literature and Harold Bloom's Theory of Literary Influence

Tawfiq I. Yousef *

ABSTRACT

This paper tries to apply Harold Bloom's theory of influence to Anglo-American literary relations. To achieve this, it has first outlined and then applied Bloom's six ratios which characterize literary relationships to the dialectic between American literature and English literature, between American and English writers. These ratios include: "Clinamen", which suggests a process of "swerving' from the precursor; "tessera" which intimates a reversionary movement of "completion" of the precursor; "kenosis", which indicates an "emptying" of the self in relation to the precursor; "daemonization", which implies the extraction, countering, and celebration of an "alien", though present, element in the precursor; "askesis", which denotes an effort of "self-purgation" aimed at attaining a sacred solitude against the precursor; and, finally "apophrades", which depicts an uncanny "return" of the precursor, for now the mature latecomer seems, strangely enough, the true author of the precursor's characteristic works. The paper also shows that all American writers have been affected by the English and European traditions and by the American tradition as well. Though the general tendency is to deny any such influence, some poets are ready to acknowledge their indebtedness. Along the way, some poets may choose not to join in this battle against the literary precursors and instead, look backward to established European and English models. Ironically, such writers have not been able to achieve great fame for, according to Bloom, a "strong" poet should embrace the task of sinning against the precursor whereas the "weak" or minor poet skirts the issue of his literary belatedness by accepting the influence of prior canonical masters within the sanctioned literary tradition.

Keywords: American Literature, Harold Bloom’s Theory, Literary Influence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern American literature has its roots in the early Puritan literature which actually shaped many of the American values and traditions and it has continued to do so till now. Puritan writers such as William Bradford, Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, William Byrd and Jonathan Edwards wrote works on Biblical and devotional topics, about the spiritual truth they discovered in the natural world. As they were composing their works, these writers were conscious that they were imitating the well established literary traditions of Europe, particularly England. Nevertheless, they were also keen on producing works which bear the distinctive characteristics of their writers' creativity. For example, Bradford (1590-1657) says at the beginning of his narrative Of Plymouth Plantation that he will try to unfold his story in a "plain style" by which he probably meant he will not imitate the ornate "high style" that was the fashion in England at the time as evident in the works of the Metaphysical Poets, particularly their leader, John Donne.

The trend adopted by Bradford continued to persist in the 18th century or what is often called the Age of Reason. An outstanding writer who carried further this trend was Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790). In his great masterpiece of the Age of Reason, The Autobiography (1791), Franklin calls for an American literary independence to accompany the political independence. And in the "Declaration of Independence" both Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) urged for the rejection of British authority.

The nineteenth century marked a period of American nationalism and a steadily growing self confidence on the part of the major writers of the period. Like their predecessors, nineteenth-century American authors endeavored to develop distinct American characteristics out of American colonial past as well as local and foreign traditions. James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe,
Washington Irving, and others saw America as a country marked by its distinctness from England. Instead of writing on traditional themes, they became more interested in local themes and subject matter. Ralph Waldo Emerson, David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman and Emily Dickenson carried this trend even further and with greater degree of confidence and defiance.

In the late 19th century and the early 20th century, some American writers like Henry James and T.S. Eliot lived between the two sides of the Atlantic. Most of James's novels are about characters pulled between the cultures of the two worlds. The 1920s was the era of American expatriates such as Ezra Pound, Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, each of whom tried to make a major breakthrough in writing his distinctly American works. After the Second World War, American writers began to break away even further from the British/European influence and to move to a period of variety and experimentation as can be seen in the works of William Faulkner, e. e.Cummings, Wallace Stevens and a host of postmodernist writers.

The relationship between the American and English Literature has been studied, in one way or another, in comparative terms, that is, through the traditional theory of literary influence. The main aim was to reconstruct the sources for the given authors' ideas and techniques (Joust: 33) and usually pointing out the borrowings of American writers from their English counterparts. However, in the 1970s, Harold Bloom came up with a new theory of influence which focuses on individual writers and which can be used as well in order to explain the influence of English writers on American writers in a new way. My main aim in this paper is to explain the intra- and inter- literary relationships between American and English writers as well as among American writers themselves in terms of Bloom's theory of influence.

As this theory has a strong bearing on the discussion in this paper, it needs further elaboration. Unlike the traditional theory of influence which is mainly concerned with the ties and links between different works and the effect of one work on another, Bloom's method draws upon the psychological theory of Freud to explain literary influence. In his book The Anxiety of Influence (1973), Bloom outlines the relationship between the new poet and his predecessor/s as a kind of Oedipal rivalry; the new poet wants to get rid of his father/predecessor in order to transcend him and to create a place for himself in the literary canon. Bloom proposes six "ratios" or "strategies" which every "strong" poet should use (consciously and unconsciously) before he can claim any sense of originality. The strategies include: "distorting" (Clinamen), "antithetically completing" (tessera), "repeating" (Kenosis), "converting" (daemonization), "purging" (askesis), and finally gaining "priority" over (aprophrades) the poem written by the new poet's greatest precursor/s (14-16). Bloom stresses that these relationships or strategies function primarily at the psychological level and have nothing to do with the "transmission of ideas and images from earlier to later poets" which he relegates to "source-hunters and biographers" (Anxiety of Influence: 31).

Hat distinguishes this method from the traditional models of "influence" is that here the influence can be traced back to a particular source or, at least a fairly limited number of sources. On the other hand, in influence studies the sources may be many. A traditional theory of influence would give priority to the first text over the later text, the original over the imitation. For it, what comes first is superior to what comes next; it would not consider later texts as possible positive advances over the literature of the past, especially if the present texts are seen as imitation of older texts. As Thais Morgan observes:

The metaphor of influence says that literary history is like the natural flow of water and that there is a unidirectional 'current' or relationship between an anterior text and a posterior text.... Besides placing the burden debt entirely on the more recent text, this model also valorizes A more highly because it is the ur-text or 'source' of certain features in text B....This naturalistic model for literary art tends to judge an imitation or 'derivation' to be inferior by definition (240).

Bloom's concept of the "anxiety of influence" is closely linked to the theory of intertextuality. Broadly defined, the notion of intertextuality refers to the way in which one text echoes or is linked to other texts by direct quotation, allusion, or simply by being a text. Intertextuality has also been defined as "the structural relations among two or more texts" (Morgan: 246). These texts can be interrelated in an unforeseeable number of ways and with a virtually unlimited number of other texts. In literary criticism, intertextuality has replaced the traditional influence theory as it provides a broader alternative to the linear schema of influence and source studies, to the notion of closed works of New Criticism and to the independent systems of structuralism. The idea of intertextuality has been treated by a wide variety of critics and theorists extending from Bakhtin's concept of
"polyphony" and "dialogism" to Barthes' redefinition of the text as both multidisciplinary and multisubjective, and his idea of the open text (writerly), to Derrida's free play of the sign to Kristeva's intertextual transformations and to Riffaterre's and Genette's theories of intertextual readers.

The main argument of these theorists is the inevitable intertextuality of all discourse, for every utterance is an interweaving or a textile of signifiers whose signifieds are by definition intertextually determined by other discourses even though this illimitable and unstable number of transformations sometimes undermines the whole notion of intertextuality turning it into an abyss of infinite signification as it happens in the deconstructionist theories of Derrida and Bloom.

Bloom's method is different from the theory of intertextuality which, more or less, superseded the older theory of influence. In intertextuality, there is a shift of critical attention from the author/work of New Criticism to discourse/text. Instead of concentrating on tracing literary origins and on the dialectic of imitation versus originality that characterize influence study, intertextuality emphasizes the free play of one text with other texts. Unlike Bloom's theory which is concerned with tracing the limited number of authorial interrelationships, intertextuality sees literary texts as a tissue of quotations, an echo of various voices, not just the words or the voice of the individual author. Introduced in the late 1960s, intertextuality has demonstrated that the relationship among literary works is more than the influence of writers on one another, for every text is informed by other texts. Like intertextuality, Bloom's theory, calls attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of works/texts as conceived by the New Critics is a misleading notion, for any text has its meaning because of its relation with previously written texts. For Bloom, meaning is produced in an unstable play of substitutions, cross-crossings, misinterpretations or misprisons. In this way, Bloom employs a limited theory of textuality. However, for all semiotic theorists, intertextuality is directed against the closure of the signifier in all representational discourses, thus allowing for a pluralizing interpretation of interrelationships through an almost endless series of intertextual signifiers. Apparently, this view of interrelations among literary texts contrasts with the traditional model of influence as well as with Bloom's notion of anxiety of influence whereby Text A affects Text B in a linear relation that does not account for the multidirectionality of intertextual relationships. Undoubtedly, intertextuality marks a further advancement on traditional influence study which focused on the diachronic relations among literary texts. In the words of Morgan, a semiotics-based intertextuality "proposes a specialization of textual relations that subordinates diachronic developments to synchronic structuration of the field: (346)".

Examining Bloom's theory vis-à-vis its relation to New Criticism, we find that he makes the refutation of the argument of New Criticism as one of his two main objectives which are: first, "to deidealize our accepted accounts of how one poet helps to form another" and second, "to try to provide a poetics that will foster a more adequate practical criticism" (Anxiety:5). In another context Bloom assets that he is offering his notion of the anxiety of influence against what he calls "the impasse of Formalist criticism" (12). Bloom affirms that he is not proposing another poetics but "a wholly different practical criticism "(43). Even more, Bloom urges for relinquishing New Criticism altogether: "Let us give up the failed enterprise of seeking to 'understand' any single poem as an entity in itself." Instead of the close reading, the organic unity, the ambiguity, the irony, the paradox and other formal and literary devices typical of New Criticism, Bloom calls for "a more positive use of the study of misprision, an antithetical practical criticism as opposed to all the primary criticisms in vogue" (69). Unlike the New Critics, Bloom does not view literary texts as complete, self-sufficient objects or artfully constructed verbal icons or well-wrought urns that can cannot be paraphrased or tampered with. For him, poems should be conceived as interrelated works that confront one another in an ever-going process of misprision and creative reproduction; poems rise in response to other poems. Indeed, Bloom sees criticism and poetry as one, not two, distinct identities: "There are no interpretations but only misinterpretations and criticism is prose poetry". (Anxiety: 93). As Eagleton observes: "For Bloom criticism is another form of poetry as poems are implicit literary criticism of other poems" (Eagleton: 60). Apparently, the implication here is that poetry precedes literary criticism.

Bloom's theory has been a conscious reaction to New Criticism as well as to the historical approaches. Like the New Critics, Bloom upholds the value of individual poetic voice and independent genius in an apparent attempt to reinstate the author and the power of imagination to counter the argument of intertextuality and deconstructionist theories. We may also wonder whether or not Bloom has reached the final stage of "priority" over the strong "fathers" of such theories as historicism and formalism. Although Bloom disagrees with the arguments of his strong and well-
established predecessors, he seems to have chosen them simply to clear a space for himself. In effect, Bloom is practicing what he is preaching, but only after condemning all preceding approaches, calling them as "failed enterprise" or "source-hunters" (Anxiety: 43, 71). Instead, Bloom affirms that his method is based on Freud's view of "Oedipal confrontation" (Anxiety: 8), thus using the psychoanalytic terminology to distinguish his method from previous approaches. Nevertheless, Bloom's indebtedness to both literary historicism and the formalistic approach of New Criticism cannot be excluded. Though his method is different from the linear approach of historicism and from the notion of closed-off discrete works of New Criticism or even the free play of intertextuality, Bloom's theory remains grounded in the diachronic approach of traditional influence studies and even in the close analysis of individual works of New Criticism. As Morgan observes: "In the long run, Bloom's theory of intra-poetic relations does not decisively break with the teleology implicit in literary historicism, for tracing the evolution of a poet's psyche presupposes a temporal determinism" (Morgan: 245).

Actually, Bloom's theory may be looked at from a closer perspective: Bloom's relation to Walter Jackson Bate. As a matter of fact, Bloom refers to Bate as his main precursor in examining influence. However, and in line with his own theory of the denial of influence, Bloom asserts that his mentor in the theory of influence is not Bate but Nietzsche whom he adds to Freud as the prime influences upon the theory of influence presented in his book. Bloom writes: "I find my own understanding of the anxiety of influence owes more to Nietzsche and Emerson ... than to Johnson, Coleridge, and their admirable scholar, Bate" (Anxiety: 50). Bloom limits the origins of poetic influence to the same period as Bate does: the eighteenth century. According to Bate, only in the eighteenth century does the poet begin to suffer the burden of the past primarily because he experiences a "loss of self-confidence as he compares what he feels able to do with the rich heritage of past art and literature" (qtd. in Renza: 187). However, Bloom departs from Bate in affirming that this anxiety affects the construction of poems as well as novels and literary criticism, a notion that runs contrary to Bate's view that "the Enlightenment novel lacks a 'rich heritage' and criticism devolves on the historical accumulation of knowledge" (Renza: 187). Moreover, Bloom rejects Bate's idea that the writers of this period began to experience poetic anxiety primarily because of their literary-historical situation and secondarily because of the newly changed societal circumstances. Instead, Bloom attributes this sudden development to a psychological imperative that leads them to sin against literary continuity.

Having made this brief survey of a few potential interrelationships among Bloom and his precursors, we now move on to a discussion of the applicability of Bloom's theory to the Anglo-American literary interrelationship across the Atlantic. According to Bloom, "Clinamen" implies revising, distorting, undermining the previous poem. It is also a swerving or a change of direction. Clinamen constitutes the new poet's "reaction-formation" against and misprision of the precursor text. The new writer swerves from and attempts to avoid the earlier text's "intolerable" presence by exposing its limitations. And so a "strong" writer, such as Bradford, is trying to swerve from the classic influence of English writers by finding fault with them, calling their style "flowery", "inappropriate," "aristocratic," etc., in an obvious strategy to clear a new ground for himself. From a Bloomian perspective, Bradford is entering into the English poems and trying to remodel them in such a way that suits his purpose of finding a space for himself and perhaps for other American poets. He is swerving away from his precursors, implying that the English poets went accurately up to a certain point but failed to move in the right direction, which he is now doing. Bradford argues that he is not imitating the English poets. Despite this, the total locus of his work is the dynamic relation to the earlier English poems he is trying to repress. In doing this, he is misreading and revising them to pave the way for his own method of writing, a plain style that is strong, simple and logical. Thus, when early American writers were expressing a strong desire to use a different style of writing from that of their British counterparts, they were actually experiencing what Bloom calls "Clinamen" or misprision, misinterpretation. In Bloom's words,

Poetic influence—when it involves two strong, authentic poets—always proceeds by misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation of the history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist (Anxiety: 30).

Actually, American Puritan writers were faced with a
strong English literary tradition. They started by comparing themselves with that rich tradition as they wanted to produce their distinct American style, let alone their own individual style of writing. In Bloomian terms, they had to sin against the continuity of the past or the traditional notions of influence. (78). Instead of praising English models, they condemned them. Had they idealized them, they would not have produced their own masterpieces. As Bloom argues, "Weak talents idealize; figures of capable imagination appropriate for themselves" (Anxiety: 5). For them to become strong poets, they had to grapple with the rich past, to be retrospective rather than prospective. It is this feeling of anxiety that enabled them to become "strong" writers and to achieve their self-realization. As Bloom writes:

A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a clinamen in relation to it. This appears a corrective movement in his own poem which implies that the precursor poem went accurately up to a certain point, but then should have swerved, precisely in the direction that the new poem moves (Anxiety of Influence: 14).

As Bradford rejected what he called the adornments of English writers and urged for plain style, Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) wanted to establish herself as a new-born muse. Publishing her first collection of poems in 1647 under the title The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America By a Gentlewoman of Those Parts, an obscure housewife was thus placed, in one stroke, among the nine Muses of art and literature sacred not only to the Greeks but to the English and American writers as well. The title was embarrassing enough, especially for a woman to be placed among the company of established male poets. Bradstreet herself was aware of her vulnerable position: "If what I do prove well," she wrote, "it won't advance; / 'They'll say it's stolen, or else it was by chance." (qtd. in Robert Anderson et al.: 43). Stolen or inspired, premeditated or by chance, her book fared well among the critics and won her a permanent place in the literary establishment.

Benjamin Franklin, a man who had close ties with Europe, characterized the mother country as having a bad influence on American society and morals. Ironically, it was while he was staying in England that Franklin first noted his growing sense of alienation from England and the impossibility of compromise with the mother country. On the eve of the Revolution, and in the "Declaration of Independence", Franklin and Jefferson, among other drafters of the Constitution, affirmed that a further union with Britain was no longer desirable. In the words of these two writers/politicians, there is a strong impulse to create an American literature to accompany the growing impulse toward political independence. Franklin's optimism and his plain speaking are considered by many critics to be the keynotes of American literature. The "Declaration of Independence", perhaps the most significant literary as well as political work of the period, forms the core of American identity and a new form of literary expression. In one sense, the conditions of the colonial period and the rising sentiment for national independence demanded a new form of writing, a new pragmatic literature. Furthermore, the Revolution intensified the need for practical political writing and provided the potential for national literature. The question of political and literary identity had become the motivating force among American writers of the period.

Looking through Bloom's eyes, the attempts of early American authors, including those of Bradford, Bradstreet, Franklin and Jefferson, can be seen as a kind of displacing the precursor power/poet. In this period, many Americans wanted a cultural break with Europe. European culture, society and literature were attacked as being "aristocratic" and "decadent; therefore, a threat to the ideal of democracy. In a Bloomian sense, this was a matter of psychic anxiety; poets living in the shadow of other poets who came before them, as sons are oppressed by their fathers. Their poems /works can be read as a systematic remolding of previous poems, attempts to fend off their overwhelming influence so that the new poets can clear a space for their imaginative originality. In other words, it is a "clinamen" a process of "swerving", an ephebe poet's repressed anxiety over a dominant power or a menacing literary/political tradition which he wants to get rid of in order to displace the authority figure, the literary/political precursor, as it were, whose demise would facilitate the ephebe's quest to recover the authority/Muse that this "pseudo-legitimate" precursor has claimed for himself.

The nineteenth century marked a period of American nationalism and a steadily growing self-confidence on the part of the major writers of the period such as Washington Irving (1783-1859), James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862). It also marked the appearance of such great writers as Walt Whitman (1819-1892) Herman Melville (1819-1891) Mark Twain (1835-1910) and such home grown figures as Emily...
Dickenson (1830-1886). In the works of these authors, we notice that a clear and distinctively American literature had been established even though European influences were still persisting. In their works, the American character was still a dominant factor even though there was a clear trace of English models. Like their predecessors of the Puritan period and the Age of Enlightenment, American Romantic authors also endeavored to develop distinct American characteristics out of the American colonial past and local traditions. Cooper, the first American novelist, became a Romantic celebrator of wilderness/frontier virtues by reacting to an English novel he was reading out to his wife when he insisted he could write a better novel himself. He actually wrote several traditional novels before he finally made a breakthrough in his five-part work of *The Leatherstocking Tales* that included *The Deerslayer* which effectively depicts the heroic frontiersman and the American wilderness. In effect, Cooper, the latecomer, misread his precursors (i.e. British novelists) so as to complete them, presuming that they failed to go far enough. Though in his early novels, Cooper was greatly influenced by the works of English writers, especially the *Waverly* novels of Sir Walter Scott. In his third novel *The Pioneers* (1823), Cooper tried to break free of European constraints. Unlike the early novels, this one takes place in a frontier community and contains characters from an Indian tribe. Although he was writing in a long-established tradition, Cooper felt he could go further. In fact, in his works, the novel in America moved toward a new wilderness experience that the long-settled Europe did not possess.

Cooper's work, then, can be seen as an act of antithesis and completion of earlier English models. Viewing the English novel he was reading as boring and below his own artistic standards, Cooper tried to curtail and reduce the importance of his precursors' (*clanamen*), but the sense of his precursors still persisted beyond his strategic reductions of their works. Hence, he was forced to acknowledge the English novelists' art of writing at a time when he was trying to install the genius of his work by completing what was lacking in the precursors' works (*tessera*). However, the process of emptying (*kenosis*) will be implemented at a further stage of development, in the work of other American writers to come, as will be explained later.

Like Cooper, Poe wanted to write something distinctly American. His precursors were the European models such as Baudelaire, Byron and Shelley. In both form and content, Poe's early poetry was typically Romantic though of an unusually limited range. It is perhaps this distinct quality that later made Baudelaire himself recognize something different in Poe's works when he later revealed that he found his works were completed by Poe when he said he discovered in Poe's book "poems and stories which I'd already conceived, but only in a vague and formless manner, which Poe had planned and brought to perfection" (qtd in K. K. Ruthven: 120). In saying this, Baudelaire was showing that he owed as much to Poe as Poe did to him. Both of them completed each other's work (i.e. *tessera*). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Poe's position was more moderate than that of most of his contemporaries. In a decade later, Poe became an international celebrity. Though he argued that the American literature should not imitate the European literature, Poe was concerned that the American literature was becoming "nationalistic" as opposed to being universal in nature.

Similarly, Emerson's relationship to the antecedent English literary and philosophical tradition can be seen as a "*tessera*" or link. According to Bloom, in *"tessera"* "a poet antithetically "completes" his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough" (*Anxiety*:14). Influenced by a range of idealistic philosophies, ancient and modern, Emerson developed his distinct version of transcendentalism that has continued to be associated with him. In his European visits, Emerson met Coleridge and Wordsworth and collaborated with Carlyle. Furthermore, Emerson borrowed the term "transcendentalism" from the German Romantic philosopher, Immanuel Kant (*Elements*: 183). In developing his version of transcendentalism and romanticism, Emerson grafted ideas from Europe and the Far and Middle East onto a native American philosophical system.

Despite his borrowings from European and other cultures, Emerson, as Bloom argues, "denied there was any history; there was only biography" (qtd in Leech: 142). Actually, Emerson invariably insisted on self-reliance and a break with foreign influences:

> Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the mere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, and that will sing themselves. Who can doubt that poetry will require and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp which now flames in our zenith?
> (qtd. in *Norton Anthology 2*: 859)
With his prophetic and defiant attitude, Emerson was paving the way for more poets who would adopt a nationalistic stand that would serve the quickly developing American literature. Earlier, Emerson had written: "We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; and we will speak our own minds" (qtd in James E. Miller et al.: 220). The then modern writer hated to think of himself as serving the past. Instead, he would, metaphorically speaking, have an attitude of parricidal antagonism towards the founding fathers of the literary traditions imposed on him. The paradox here is that by denying the past, Emerson was actually affirming it and, consequently, able to establish a place for himself in the literary arena.

In this respect, Emerson was similar to Nietzsche who, "like Emerson, is one of the great deniers of anxiety-as-influence" (Bloom, Anxiety: 50). According to Bloom, some great writers borrow, but they remain unperturbed by the anxiety of literary influence, and this applies to Emerson as indeed it applies to Nietzsche:

Nietzsche owed as much to Goethe and to Schopenhauer as Emerson did to Wordsworth and Coleridge, but Nietzsche like Emerson, did not feel the chill of being darkened by a precursor's shadow. 'Influence,' to Nietzsche, meant vitalization. But influence, and more precisely poetic influence, has been more of blight than a blessing, from the Enlightenment until this moment" (Anxiety: 50).

Thus, we find Emerson denying the influence of his sources and asserting self-reliance at the time when we can easily detect striking parallels between Emerson's *Nature* and the works of English Romantics, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge. Actually, Emerson was bringing together the riches of others together and making all this his own; and it is by so doing that he was able to bring something great into being. As Bloom again states: "The great deniers of influence-Goethe, Nietzsche, Mann in Germany; Emerson and Thoreau in America; Blake and Lawrence in England; Pascal and Rousseau and Hugo in France-these central men are enormous fields of the anxiety of influence, as much so as its great affirmer, from Samuel Johnson through Coleridge and Ruskin in England, and the strong poets of the last several generations in all four countries" (Anxiety: 56). In a Bloomian sense, Emerson was proceeding to enlarge the work of the precursors by completing a link with the past and expanding it further. A rejectionist though he was, Emerson is, as Francois Jost points out, a comparatist (Jost: 10). According to Jost, Emerson's method of comparative study was heuristic, enabling the learner to investigate further by looking at a vast spectrum of knowledge. Indeed, in "The American Scholar" Emerson writes: "The next great influence into the spirit of the scholar is the mind of the Past, in whatever form, whether of literature, of art, of institutions, the mind is inscribed" (Norton 2: 861).

The ratio of *Tessera* seems to be the predominant characteristic not only of Emerson but also of most American writers throughout American literary history. Bloom maintains that this ratio of "completion and antithesis" is more characteristic of American literature than English literature. In his view, the English writers affirm the ratio of "clinamen" more than they uphold the "tessera" strategy. As he puts it: "It seems to me that British poets swerve from their precursors, while American poets labor rather to 'complete' their fathers. The British are more genuinely revisionists of one another, but we (or at least some of our post-Emersonian poets) tend to see our fathers not having dared enough" (Anxiety: 68). Even a quick look at the American literary works would reveal Emerson's influence in astonishing permutations, on writers as diverse as Thoreau, Whitman, Robert Frost and Wallace Stevens. Actually, Bloom is keen on establishing a continuous link between post-Emersonian American writers on one hand and Emerson and other poets of the Romantic tradition on the other, asserting that the literary relationship between Wallace Stevens and the Romantics (English and American) provides a good example of *tessera* (69). He further argues that Stevens antithetically completes Whitman by writing "The Owl in the Sarcophagus" which he sees as "his [Stevens'] elegy for his friend Henry Church, [and] which can best be read as a large *tessera* in relation to Whitman's "The Sleepers". Bloom writes:

Where Whitman identifies night and the mother with good death, Stevens establishes an identity between good death and a larger maternal vision, opposed to night because she contains all the memorable evidence of change, of what we have seen in our long day, though she has transformed the seen into knowledge.

(Anxiety: 68)

But it is interesting to note that Stevens is anxious to
deny any literary or philosophical influence coming from any source, particularly modern literary celebrities. In a Harvard lecture that appears in his Collected Poetry and Prose (1997), Stevens asserts: "I am not conscious of having been influenced by anybody and have purposely held off from reading high mannered people like Eliot and Pound so that I should not absorb anything, even unconsciously" (Stevens: 783). Despite this initial denial, Stevens then looks at the problem from a different angle and affirms that the latecomer has the advantage of having at his disposal the entire heritage. In the same lecture, he says: "While, of course, I come down from the past, the past is my own and not something marked Coleridge, Wordsworth, etc. (Ibid, 783).

Bloom's third revisionary ratio of interpoetic relationships is kenosis which is the psychic defense of "emptying," "undoing," "regression, "repetition and discontinuity," and an "isolating movement of the imagination" (Anxiety: 87). In other words, the new poet reduces the precursor's vision to a nonvisionary status by recognizing a similarity between his work and the precursor's. By emptying and undoing the relation of his own poem to his precursor's work, the new poet hopes to follow a path independent from the precursor's and so disaffiliate himself, and in this way present his poem as his own original creation. According to Bloom, in kenosis, both precursor and the new poet are emptied or undone in the same poem. But by this simultaneous action, the new poet is able to isolate and disconnect himself from the precursor and in this way avoid repeating him. As he puts it, "What the precursors did has thrown the ephebe into the outward and downward motion of repetition, a repetition that the ephebe soon understands must be both undue and dialectically affirmed, and these simultaneously" (Anxiety: 83). For Bloom, this twofold emptying is "a liberating discontinuity" since it makes possible a kind of poem that a simple repetition of the precursor's poem could not have allowed (Anxiety: 87-88).

Kenosis can be seen in the works of Thoreau and in his relationship to both his European and American antecedents. Writing in Walden (1854), Thoreau reveals self-consciously a specific American direction that he wants to follow: "Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side…. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe" (qtd. in Stevenson: 93). What Thoreau is actually trying to achieve is to fend off against his European sources of influence, particularly the works of English Romantics especially Wordsworth. Thoreau seems to be feeling more comfortable "adventuring at home"; but even there, he cannot escape the immense influence of Emerson either. In fact, Thoreau is writing Walden in relation to an established mode of Romanticism historically and spatially distanced in order to ward off or repress the more influential proximity of Emerson's essays on nature and self-reliance. By slighting his "eastern" influences, Thoreau is "emptying" the relation of his work to them and consequently dissociating himself from them and eventually able to claim the originality of his own writing. As Bloom puts it: "Where the precursor was, there the ephebe shall be, but by the discontinuous mode of emptying the precursor of his divinity, while appearing to empty himself of his own" (Anxiety: 91). Thoreau seems to feel that the discontinuity with the past leads to freedom, to a new realm of original creativity. In Bloomian terms, the latecomer tries to avoid repeating his precursor's by moving away from him/them. He is emptying the precursor's/poet's poem and, thereby, produces the illusion of his ability to repeat or rewrite the previous poem as if it was his own. As Louis A. Renza explains, in kenosis, the new poet "reduces the precursor's/poet's vision and in the process, his own) to nonvisionary status. Its apparent synecdochial resemblance to his own vision becomes merely accidental, contiguous, and metonymical – as if no precursor existed at all" (190).

Bloom gives as an example of kenosis the relationship between Emerson and Whitman which he compares to that between Wordsworth and Shelley, and argues that Emerson had a great impact on Thoreau and Whitman in the same way that Wordsworth influenced Shelley and Keats (Anxiety: 90). And so, when Whitman writes his poem "As I Ebbed with the Ocean of Life" and when Shelly writes "Ode to the West Wind", the son seems to be undoing the father and himself as well in an attempt to defend against the father. In both cases, the new poet is trying to disaffiliate himself from the precursor, but still we are aware of a sense of continuity and connection, i.e. a kenosis kind of interpoetic relationship.

The fourth strategy, "daemonization", includes converting the precursor's sublime into merely "low" or human desires so that the new poet can propose his own "counter- sublime" against this already desublimed vision (Anxiety: 15). In the process, the new poet forgets about the precursor's vision and tries to transcend it. An example of this can be found clearly in the writers of the late American Romantic period particularly Poe, Emerson, Whitman,
Melville and Twain. For example, Poe's poem "The Black Cat", which deals with the killing of a cat, exemplifies a daemonized misreading or forgetting of Coleridge's poem about the killing of the white albatross in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". This strategy is also characteristic of Emerson, who, in Bloom's view, is "the unsurpassable prophet of the American Sublime" (103). As Vincent B Leech observes: "daemonization implies the extraction, countering, and celebration of an 'alien,' though present, element in the precursor" (Leech: 134). To be able to write his transcendental works, Emerson had to sustain the illusion of the precursor's minor significance or even virtual nonexistence. In this way, he can transform the "sublime" (high) transcendental intimations of the precursor's vision into the effect of "low" or merely human desires. Now, the new poet can propose his own "Counter-Sublime" vision, which expresses the imaginative experience as a virtually inhuman (daemonic) force. Actually, Emerson's attitude to English and European sources has always been reductive. Better than anyone before him, Emerson expressed the advantages of the new American land in contrast with what he considered as the old and moribund fashions of Europe; its laws that came directly through nature rather than through the books and the past. In "Self –Reliance," he calls for a philosopher who "shall reveal the sources of man, and tell men…that with the exercise of self-trust, new powers shall appear; that man is the word made flesh… and that the moment he acts from himself, tossing the laws, the books, idolatries, and customs out the window –we pity him no more, but thank and revere him" (qtd. in Robert Anderson et al. 187). Emerson as a newly "strong" poet, fits that description of the philosopher very well. Emerson denied the "sublime" of his predecessors in order to present his own sublime.

In the next strategy, "askesis", the new poet effectively identifies with his precursor and subsequently transfers, substitutes and displaces the precursor's influence but in a manner that binds rather than separates them. The aim is to generalize away the uniqueness of the parent poem. For Bloom, askesis also involves a process of self-purgation or purification (Anxiety:15). As Bloom himself observes: "Askesis", as a successful defense against the anxiety of influence, posits a new kind of reduction in the poetic self, most generally expressed as a purgatorial blinding or at least a veiling. The realities of other selves and of all that is external are diminished alike, until a new style of harshness emerges, whose rhetorical emphasis can be read off as one degree of solipsism or another" (121).

This strategy of poetic defense is characteristic of the works of the writers of late American Romanticism particularly those of Walt Whitman, Henry Melville and Mark Twain. In an anecdote reported by Gary Q. Arpin, a meeting in 1850 brought Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne together which resulted in a magazine essay in which Melville vehemently defended the American literature over the English literature. Stating that "England, after all, is in many things, an alien to us," Melville urged American readers to "prize, cherish her [America's] writers" (181). In the same essay, Melville claimed that in Hawthorne, America was close to producing her own Shakespeare. He also went on to add in a burst of vehement nationalism that "even if there were no Hawthorne, no Emerson, no Whittier, no Irving, no Bryant,… nevertheless, let America first praise mediocrity, even in her own children, before she praises…the best of excellence in the children of any other" (qtd. in Robert Anderson et al.: 181). Melville's words coincided with the beginning of an extraordinary explosion of American literary creativity. By this time, America had produced many of its great writers, most of whom keen on establishing a national American literature. It was also at this time that America had achieved a kind of cultural literary maturity. With the works of these above mentioned writers, the expectations for an independent American literature were finally achieved. In about five years (1849-1855), Emerson's Representative Men, Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, Melville's Moby Dick, Thoreau's Walden, and Whitman's Leaves of Grass were published. Such works enhanced these writers' confidence in themselves and in the vitality of the works they had produced. The period was rightly called America's Golden Day or the American Renaissance. In Bloomian terms, this is a period of self-purgation, aimed at attaining a sacred solitude against the precursor. In other words, the new poet, as it were, is turning his aggression against himself, or is withdrawing from the Oedipal rivalry altogether in order to attain a state of poetic "solitude", isolation or independence.

Similarly, Mark Twain's The Innocents Abroad (1886) poked fun at the traditional American Pilgrimage to the European monuments of civilization (in addition to the Holy Land) in an apparent show of isolationism and solitude. And in his Huckleberry Finn (1884), Twain established a new tradition in American native literature, a literary language based on American colloquial speech in a deliberate attempt to create a distinct American literature. The attempts and works of such writers as Whitman and Melville provide a good example of Askesis.
Though the writers of this period displayed a more obvious degree of independence from the main current of European literature than did their predecessors in the previous periods, the influence of the Old World is still felt through the works written during the first half of the 19th century and even those produced in the second half of the century though to a much reduced degree. Actually, the second half of the 19th century produced writers that came to be acclaimed all over the world and who no longer had to look for European models. Such writers as Emerson, Twain, Melville, Whitman, Dickenson, and Crane were more concerned with finding new points of departure in theme, subject matter, regional fiction and naturalism. Emerson had been accredited with the development of transcendentalism, Whitman with the introduction/invention of free verse, Twain, with the use of the vernacular, Melville, with the exploration of regionalism and local dialect, Dickenson, with poetry as private observation, and Stephen Crane, with the exploration of the possibilities of naturalism. Nevertheless, the American writers toward the end of the 19th century still considered themselves part of the European tradition. Increasingly, Europe versus America became a dominant theme in the works of Henry James who lived between the two sides of the Atlantic, writing novels in which the characters are pulled between the cultures of the two worlds. This situation is comparable to that of the ephebe who has reached the stage of *askesis* in which he is struggling with a precursor whom he cannot leave forever like two parties that cannot be separated. *Askesis* involves an opposition to a literary precursor whose demise would facilitate the ephebe's quest to recover the Muse whom this precursor has claimed for himself. This sense of limitation is conducive to the revitalization of the poet's quest for radical originality.

In the last phase of these defenses, the new poet turns to the ratio of *apophrades* or "the Return of the Dead". This ratio allows the new poet to incorporate or absorb the precursor's past vision and to project his own vision as if it had not existed. Thus, the ephebe's work appears to realize what the precursor's vision longed to express but could not realize. Here, the identification with the poetry of the precursor becomes complete. He is no longer the other; and as a result, the new poet gives himself the right to make covert references or allusions to the precursor's imaginative work or even to plagiarize it. Here, the new poet moves not as a genial successor but as a violent expropriator. As Eliot puts it: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal" (qtd in Ruthven: 120). As an American-born English poet, Eliot himself offers a good case in point. Eliot's work appears to realize what his precursors longed to express but could not realize. Eliot became interested in 17th century English writers perhaps with an attempt to rewrite what they had written. Asserting that, "we should not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past," Eliot was able to exercise a powerful influence on seventeenth-century Metaphysical poets. Actually, Eliot misread seventeenth-century English poetry, Laforgue, Arnold, and the English Romantics, among many others, in order to establish his own radical originality. In effect, Eliot's satirical poetry is a configuration, a recreation of such masters. As Bloom observes about this final ratio, "The poem is now held open to the precursor, where once it was open, and the uncanny effect is that the new poem's achievement makes it seem to us, not as though the precursor were writing it, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work" (*Anxiety*: 15).

Though this ratio bears an obvious resemblance to "tessera" in being an attempt to complete what the previous works failed to do, the new ratio provides a sense of difference and originality for the new poet. Here, the identification with the poetry of the precursor becomes complete and in an act of narcissism, the new poet appropriates the otherness of the precursor. In the present case, the previous European literature becomes, as it were, an essential part of the American tradition and poets can borrow or make allusions freely to all previous European writers and works. This is all the more obvious in Eliot's conception of literary influence. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) lessens the implicit negative effect of the influence theory in favor of the new poet who manipulates to his own ends the texts of his ancestors a system of equal, copresent texts. In fact, the relevance of Eliot's theory lies in the fact that it views literary works as a network or a structure rather than as an evolution or a gradual development. Seen from this perspective, literature becomes a balance between synchrony and diachrony. In Morgan's words, "Eliot here reverses the defectiveness of historicism and suggests the possibility that literature has no origins but exists only as open sets of transformation within a closed system—a paradox that will occupy the semiotics of intertextuality" (243). Accordingly, texts become multicultural, multietextual and multintertextual.

Eliot locates the individuality (roughly the equivalent to Bloom's *apophrades*) of a poet neither in his innovativeness
nor in his imitiveness, but in his ability to include all previous literature in his work so that past and present discourses coexist. As Eliot writes in his famous essay, "We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poet, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously" (qtd. in Norton Anthology, vol. 2: 1202). In this way, Eliot reverses the traditional concept of influence and "instead of using filiations to support the linear schema of literary history according to which the father is more worthy because closer to the origin than the son, Eliot reverses the implicit negativity of influence in favor of the son who acknowledges but also manipulates to his own ends the texts of his 'ancestors'" (Moragan: 243). Eliot's view contrasts sharply with that of Emerson. Unlike Emerson, Eliot treats tradition not as an inevitable burden of the past, but rather as a future goal. Moreover, Eliot defines the historical sense as being necessary for the making of a poet in terms that balance diachrony and synchrony. The poet must read the literature of the European tradition, the literature of his own tradition and the works of contemporary writers in order to understand that all these works have simultaneous existence. Thus, Eliot is suggesting "the possibility that literature has no origins but exists only as open sets of transformation with a closed system" (Morgan: 242).

Although Bloom does not speak of any connection between his own theory of influence and Eliot's notion of "tradition" and the "individual talent", there is some relationship between the two theories. Eliot's theory which strikes a middle course between the theories of influence and inspiration viewing literature as a system of coequal, copresent texts might have been disconcerting for Bloom who sees literary influence as dialectic between a well established master and a new comer striving for recognition. Nevertheless, there are similarities between Eliot and Bloom. For both of them, the new poet is not necessarily inferior to the predecessor. Indeed, both of them seem to reverse the implicit negativity of influence in favor of the son who manipulates to his own ends the texts of his ancestors. And for the two critics, originality is a dialectic between creativity and imitativeness, contemporaneity and antiquity. Although Bloom begins, like Eliot, with the idea that literature is a system of interrelated texts, he departs from Eliot, building his own concept of anxiety of influence on the idea of the psychological connection among individual authors and texts.

Like Eliot, Ezra Pound seems to have arrived at a point where he can absorb the precursor's past vision and be at one with him. In a poem addressed to Walt Whitman, he writes:

A Pact
I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman-
I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.
It was you that broke the new wood,
Now is a time for carving.
We have one sap and one root-
Let there be commerce between us.

(qtd. in Robert Anderson et al:325)

Finally, it is interesting to note that these strategies form a kind of repetition compulsion or self-propelling cyclical turning from one ratio to another. In A Map of Misreading (1975), Bloom explains that after the last ratio, the whole cycle begins again with the first ratio (qtd in Louis A. Renza: 191). Thus, showing the ever occurring inter- and intra-textual relations. Nor does any poet ever achieve a complete self-certitude that would free him from needing to resort to these ratios so as to support a writer's struggle, however illusory, to achieve his radical independence. In fact, each ratio encounters its own limits and gives way to the next one and so on ad infinitum.

CONCLUSION

The different reactions of the American writers during the various periods of American literature (Puritan, 18th, 19th and 20th century) roughly correspond to the six ratios of the new poet's reaction to the precursor as outlined in Bloom's theory of intraliterary relationships. Throughout the Puritan period and the 18th century, American writers, despite their attempts to "swerve" from the mainstream of English literature (clinamon), still considered themselves largely part of the English/ European tradition. In the first half of the 19th century, American writers tried to develop a literary and cultural style of their own by "completing" (tessera) their precursors; and in the second half of the century, they tried to "empty" (kenosis) their English European precursors and to break new ground in literary craftsmanship and technical ingenuity (daemonization), and then curtail their precursors and separate themselves from them (askesis) in an attempt to establish their own distinctly American literature. The 20th century (or the modern period) has been marked by a tremendous surge of American creativity and by a growing international influence
(apophrades). After a long period of anxiety about foreign influences on their culture and literature, of complaining about the negative influence of the Old World, American authors are now read in most corners of the globe. And so, the country that in the past was worrying about its having very little cultural background and literary influence, is now often criticized for having too much influence outside its national borders. Bloom's theory of literary influence turns personal as well as public literary history into a ceaseless process of psychic warfare. Seen from a Bloomian perspective, American poets entered an endless psychic warfare with a precursor or precursors of their own choice. In fact, all American literature, just like any other literature, can be read as an expression of an ephebe poet's repressed anxiety over his demonized precursor.

REFERENCES


الآدب الأمريكي ونظرية هارولد بلوم في التأثير الأدبي

ملخص

يحاول هذا البحث تطبيق نظرية هارولد بلوم في التأثير الأدبي على العلاقات الأدبية الأنجليزية الأمريكية، وذلك من خلال تبيان وتطبيق العناصر الستة المكونة لنظرية بلوم على العلاقات الأدبية بين الكاتب الأمريكي والكاتب الإنجليزي، وبين الآدب الأمريكي والآدب الإنجليزي. وهذه العناصر هي:

2. Tessera (الترشح): يقدم الوحيدين المجال للاختلافات بين الكتب الأمريكية والأوروبية.
4. Daemonization (المتحول): يشير إلى التأثير الذي يقدمه هارولد بلوم في مقالاته للعالمية.
6.考点 (المتحول): يشير إلى التأثير الذي يقدمه هارولد بلوم في مقالاته للعالمية.

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