

The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry is a 1973 book by [Harold Bloom](#). It was the first in a series of books that advanced a new "revisionary" or antithetical^[1] approach to [literary criticism](#). Bloom's central thesis is that [poets](#) are hindered in their creative process by the ambiguous relationship they necessarily maintained with precursor poets. While admitting the [influence](#) of extraliterary experience on every poet, he argues that "the poet in a poet" is inspired to write by reading another poet's poetry and will tend to produce work that is in danger of being derivative of existing poetry, and, therefore, weak. Because poets historically emphasize an original poetic vision in order to guarantee their survival into posterity (i.e., to guarantee that future readers will not allow them to be forgotten), the influence of precursor poets inspires a sense of anxiety in living poets. Thus Bloom attempts to work out the process by which the small minority of 'strong' poets manage to create original work in spite of the pressure of influence. Such an [agon](#), Bloom argues, depends on six revisionary ratios,^[2] which reflect [Freudian](#) and quasi-Freudian defense mechanisms, as well as the [tropes](#) of classical [rhetoric](#).

Before writing this book, Bloom spent a decade studying the [Romantic](#) poets of the early nineteenth century. This is reflected in the emphasis given to those poets and their struggle with the influence of [John Milton](#), Robert Browning, and Edmund Spenser. Other poets analyzed range from [Lucretius](#) and [Dante](#) to [Walt Whitman](#), [Wallace Stevens](#), and [John Ashbery](#). In *The Anxiety of Influence* and other early books, Bloom claimed that influence was particularly important for post-[enlightenment](#) poets. Conversely, he suggested that influence might have been less of a problem for such poets as [Shakespeare](#) and [Ben Jonson](#). Bloom since has changed his mind, and the most recent editions of *The Anxiety of Influence* include a preface claiming that Shakespeare was troubled early in his career by the influence of [Christopher Marlowe](#). The book itself is divided into six major categories, called "six revisionary ratios" by Bloom. They are [clinamen](#), [tessera](#), [kenosis](#), [daemonization](#), [askesis](#), and [apophrades](#).

The six revisionary ratios

Bloom introduces his six revisionary ratios in the following manner, which he consistently applies in this book as well as his successor volume titled *A Map of Misreading*.

- **Clinamen** – Bloom defines this as “poetic misreading or misprision proper”. The poet makes a swerve away from the precursor in the form of a "corrective movement". This swerve suggests that the precursor "went accurately up to a certain point", but should have swerved