

Harold Bloom and Anxiety of Influence

- **Anxiety of Influence** is a concept in [literary criticism](#) articulated by [Harold Bloom](#) in 1973, in his book, [*The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*](#). It refers to the psychological struggle of aspiring authors to overcome the [anxiety](#) posed by the influence of their literary ancestors.

Summer of 1969

- **Flax Dam:** pond where collected flax is left to rot, wearing down its fibers—Belfast famous for its linen.
- **Ghules** of wine (ghul): from Spanish and French meaning throatfuls of red wine
- **Holmgang:** Scandinavian duel to settle disputes, last man standing is the winner
- **Frederico Garcia Lorca:** famous Spanish playwright and poet, probably murdered by Franco forces during Spanish civil war.

Summer 1969 Seamus Heaney

- While the Constabulary covered the mob
- Firing into the Falls, I was suffering
- Only the bullying sun of Madrid.
- Each afternoon, in the casserole heat
- Of the flat, as I sweated my way through
- The life of Joyce, stinks from the fishmarket
- Rose like the reek off a flax-dam.
- At night on the balcony, gules of wine,
- A sense of children in their dark corners,
- Old women in black shawls near open windows,
- The air a canyon rivering in Spanish.
- We talked our way home over starlit plains
- Where patent leather of the Guardia Civil
- Gleamed like fish-bellies in flax-poisoned waters.

‘Go back,’ one said, ‘try to touch the people.’
Another conjured Lorca from his hill.
We sat through death-counts and bullfight reports
On the television, celebrities
Arrived from where the real thing still happened.

I retreated to the cool of the Prado.
Goya’s ‘Shootings of the third of May’
Covered a wall—the thrown-up arms
And spasm of the rebel, the helmeted
And knapsacked military, the efficient
Rake of the fusillade. In the next room,
His nightmares, grafted to the palace wall—
Dark cyclones, hosting, breaking; Saturn
Jewelled in the blood of his own children,

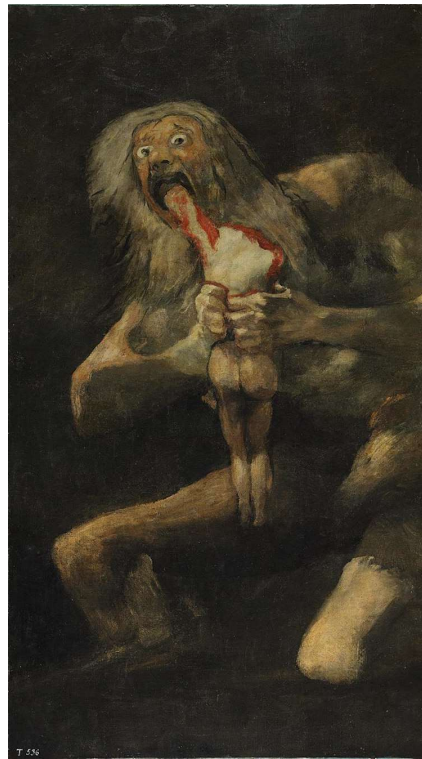
Gigantic chaos burning his brute hips
Over the world. Also, that holmgang
Where two berserks club each other to death
For honour's sake, greaved in a bog, and sinking.
He painted with his fists and elbows, flourished
The stained cape of his heart as history charged

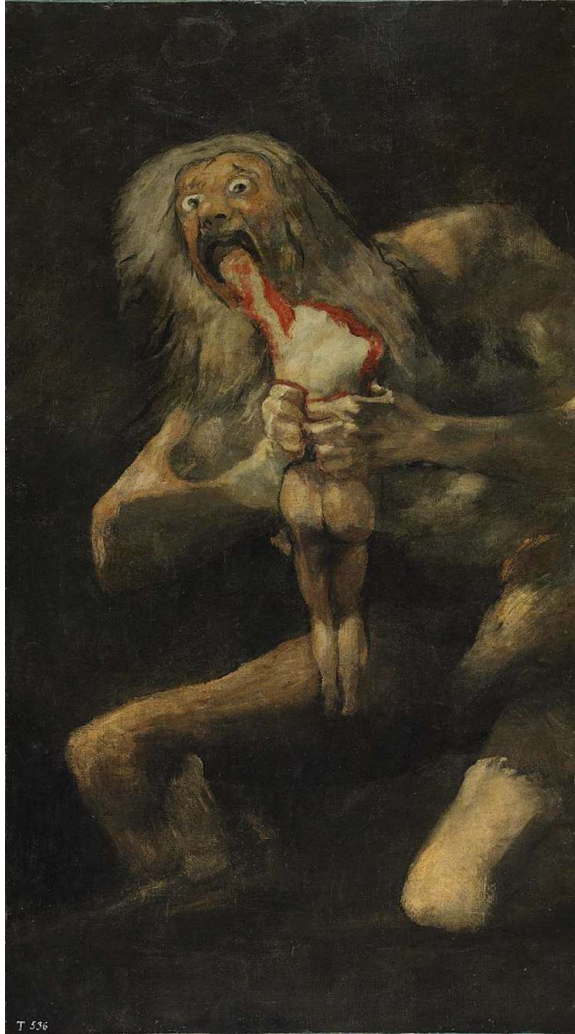
El Tres de Mayo (The Third of May)



Saturn Devouring His Son

One of the “Black” paintings Goya painted on the walls of his home





Fight with Cudgels





The Cry (El Grito) Federico Garcia Lorca

- The arc of a cry
- curves from hill
- to hill.

- From the olive trees,
- a black rainbow
- Over the blue night.

- Like a viola's bow,
- The cry has made the long
- strings of the wind vibrate.

- Ay!

Georgie Hyde-Lees

(1892-1968)



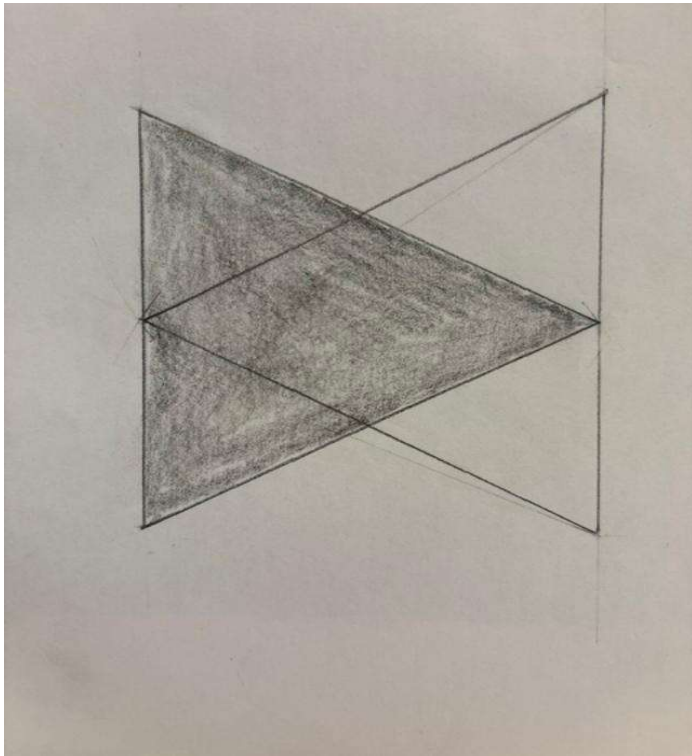
Yeats and his family: George, Anne and Michael



Theosophy

- **Theosophy** is an **umbrella system**, drawing on Neoplatonism, western occult traditions, Greek philosophy, the Kabbalah, Hindu mysticism, and similar philosophies (like American transcendentalism.)
- Theosophical Society founded by Madame Blavatsky (Russian mystic) and Henry Steel Olcott in New York City in 1875. They defined theosophy as a belief system where **science, religion, and philosophy are synthesized**.
- Adherents like Yeats believed **fate determines history**.
- **History** occurs in 2000-year cycles, when wrenching changes occur periodically.
- **Reincarnation** occurs across history and **interlocking gyres** map the soul's reincarnation.
- Mankind is a participant in the **cosmos' evolution**, overseen by a **hierarchy of advanced spiritual masters**.

Yeats and Widening or Whirling Gyres



- Interpenetrating gyres or whirling cones... Richard Ellman says Yeats “imagined ... [them] as whirling around inside one another, one subjective, the other objective.” (231) Note the apex of each “triangle” or plane funnel penetrating the base of the opposite triangle.
- This mutual interpenetration of subjective and objective (mind and outer reality) is reminiscent of the Hindu concept of the Brahman-Atman. Or, put another way, perhaps in historical terms, the swirling of past in present and present in past.

The Second Coming

(from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, 1921)

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Leda and the Swan (from *The Tower*, 1928)

- A sudden blow; the great wings beating still
 - Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
 - By dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
 - He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
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- How can those terrified vague fingers push
 - The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
 - And how can body, laid in that white rush,
 - But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
-
- A shudder in the loins engenders there
 - The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
 - And Agamemnon dead. Being so caught up,
 - So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
 - Did she put on his knowledge with his power
 - Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

The Mother of God

(From The Winding Stair and Other Poems, 1933)

- The three-fold terror of love; a fallen flare
 - Through the hollow of an ear;
 - Wings beating about the room;
 - The terror of all terrors that I bore
 - The Heavens in my womb.
-
- Had I not found content among the shows
 - Every common woman knows,
 - Chimney corner, garden walk,
 - Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes
 - And gather all the talk?
-
- What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
 - This fallen star my milk sustains,
 - This love that makes my heart's blood stop
 - Or strikes a sudden chill into my bones
 - And bids my hair stand up?