

Alistair Heys, *The Anatomy of Bloom: Harold Bloom and the Study of Influence and Anxiety*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. Pp. 280. £17.99. ISBN 9781441183460.

I was not quite sure what to expect from Alistair Heys's *The Anatomy of Bloom*. The description at the back of the book, however, seemed quite promising. The book offers to survey the life of Harold Bloom as a literary critic and to provide a chronological examination of his works, in the hope that the examination will reveal that Bloom's works, and, predominantly, *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), are 'best understood as an expression of reprobate American Protestantism' that is nevertheless 'haunted by a Jewish fascination with the Holocaust' (blurb).

Unfortunately, *The Anatomy of Bloom* fails to achieve this ambitious outline. From the very beginning, it is obvious that the work does not intend to survey Bloom's life. Although Heys offers some biographical anecdotes, offhandedly woven into the text, he fails to provide an insight into Bloom's life in correlation with his intellectual development. This, for me, is the book's main shortcoming. The small sections in which Heys does dwell on Bloom's life are truly interesting and entertaining. For example, Heys comments that when starting his academic career in 1950s America, Bloom only received a small basement office in Yale. Later in the book, Heys briefly mentions that Bloom's career coincided with the dying of anti-Semitism in the USA. I found these little instances far more interesting than the actual work as a whole. It is also in these instances that Heys's somewhat tangled style of composition becomes lighter and easier to follow, thus making the experience of reading far more enjoyable.

In many ways, as much as this is a book about Bloom's theories, it is also quite obviously a tribute to Bloom's literary achievements. Heys's awe and admiration of the critic are easily detectable, particularly when Heys (more often than not) adopts Bloom's tone and style of writing. Heys sees Bloom as 'Mr Self-Invention, a questing critic from a poor background, who came to the ivory tower of Yale, an iconoclast who left behind the Orthodox Judaism of his Bronx family background to redefine himself as an American gnostic' (1). Accordingly, Heys marks Bloom's cultural Jewish background and the American-Protestant culture he entered as an academic, in order to showcase how these two strands of thought forged Bloom's gnostic theory and writings.

The book is divided into seven sections, each exploring the gnostic elements in Bloom's literary theories. The first section, examines Jewish and Protestant influences. Heys looks at how Judaism and Protestantism define Bloom's own cultural identity and how they are expressed in his works. In short, Heys claims that 'ideas associated with Protestantism and Judaism are frequently combined in Bloom's oeuvre in the form of his own brand of Gnosticism' (15). Continuing this line of investigation, the second section elaborates on how Judaism and Protestantism contributed to Bloom's conception of 'the Scene of Instruction'. Sections three and four continue the book's religious standpoint while examining Bloom's relationship with deconstruction and the deconstructionists whom Bloom calls his 'remote cousins, intellectually speaking' (53). In particular, Heys compares Bloom's theories to those of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man. Section five explains Bloom's attitude towards 'the School of Resentment' while section six explores Bloom's writings about the Kabbalah and Judaism. Section seven is dedicated to Bloom's writings on Protestantism.

The Anatomy of Bloom is indeed rich in research and insight, and Heys's breadth of reading is truly impressive. Heys's summary of Bloom's works and his insightful commentary will be particularly of value to students interested in literary theory, but the scope of the writers and subjects covered may also make it appealing to a wider spectrum of undergraduate students. With regards to how this work contributes to our reading of

Romanticism, it fails to innovate and push existing scholarship. In general, the book offers a wealth of material on early British Romantic writings and American Romanticism, primarily Emerson. But even these constitute a summary of Bloom's work, which simply invites us to go directly to the source and read Bloom's original publications.

Rachel Schulkins
Independent Scholar