

## I. Introduction

William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* (1979) is about a young writer's anxiety to occupy a literary space. It presents the story of twenty-two years old young character, Stingo who sets for writing a book, that he hopes will be the next great American novel. This research is concerned with how a young man competes with his precursors while aspiring to become a successful writer. It aims to explore how, in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Stingo struggles to occupy the literary space and to what extent he succeeds to make that space.

Styron in *Sophie's Choice* projects Stingo, the narrator and character as an alter ego of himself. The old narrator demonstrates how the author himself has struggled in his early days to establish himself as a writer amid his anxiety of not being able to create his own original space in writing. Thus, the present research focuses on how Stingo, the young character, aspiring to be a writer, is haunted by the sense of being late to be a writer in the mode of Southern literary writing and the author's own anxiety to create his own space in writing.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize 1968, for his novel *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, Styron burst into the literary space with his debut novel *Lie Down in Darkness* in the year 1951. After his success with *Lie Down in Darkness*, Styron was considered the Southern writer most worthy of comparison with Faulkner and most likely to revitalize the Southern School for Post-World War Two readers. But quite contrary to his readers and critics' expectation Styron took a distinct turn. He never wanted to include himself in any Southern School of literary tradition and neither did he allow himself to be

recognized as a regionalist comparable to Faulkner, Warren, Wolfe and others. James L W West justifies this fact:

“. . . [Styron] had a larger vision in mind: he wanted an international audience and public voice; he wished to speak to broad issues of his day – moral, social, political and philosophical. Styron was sure he would continue to write about the South and about Virginia but he did not want to be known as a regionalist. He needed separation from the territory of his upbringing if he were to see it clearly. (189)

Though Styron didnot want to be known as regionalist, he had indeed written steadily and well about Virginia. His novels *Lie Down in Darkness*, *Set This House on Fire*, *The Confession of Nat Turner*, and *Sophie’s Choice* are set wholly or in part in the state. A reader of these works could take a strong sense of Virginia: its climate, its people, the clamor of new industrialization. All of these things are constantly in his mind as he wrote.

Styron's position as an American writer rests on four full-strength novels and a novella published over a period of nearly thirty years. But as a writer he has shown no particular talent for the form except in his one or two novels. Styron's aesthetics of style, imagery and charactcer development can basically be traced in his books *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Sophie’s Choice*. Still, Bloom regards Styron as an anomaly among the American novelists of his generation. He hardly doubts on Styron's gifts in storytelling: “he is a powerful storyteller, a considerable stylist and rhetorician and a writer of authentic moral and intellectual courage” (1). Like Bloom, other critics are also agreed on

Styron's stylistic mastery, structural virtuosity, creation of multifaceted characters and depiction of private grief as well as public dilemmas in his works.

Samule Coale, on the other, sees Styron's strength as a writer in his association with Southern fiction. For Coale, "baroque rhetoric powers his narratives; Faulkner's ghost lingers in his language" (11). Coale believes that feeling guilt is all there is in Styron's novel and finds that question of evil remains ambiguous in his novels. There is portrayal of evil in his novel but his characters want to escape this nightmare vision.

Introducing William Styron, Chester E. Esinger writes, "During the decades on which William Styron's fiction from *Lie Down in Darkness* to *Sophie's Choice* appeared, the Southern renaissance went into a sad decline, suffering a loss of authority and coherence" (822-23). Southern writing could not take a distinct turn especially after Faulkner. There are other writers who continued to write but after Faulkner it could not be established as dominant force. Styron is emblematic of this decline, both in his ambiguous relationships to the South and distinct nature of his work.

Apart from above discussion, in Styron's writing, we can sense the matter of the South, he deals with the problems of sin, dissolution, and decadence that Southern history has thrust upon the imagination of many Southern writers. In this respect, he is a traditionalist in subject matter and in values as well. After his first novel *Lie Down in Darkness* where the principal thrust is nihilistic, his fiction depends upon ideas of the dignity of man, the reality of guilt, and the possibility of redemption, the recognition of decadence, the need for love and the desirability of freedom. In writing, Styron believes more on presentation of subject matter rather than experimentation in technique. Styron believes more on power of art to order and examines political and historical world.

Identity crisis, alienation are other themes that Styron included within his novels. He seeks for the spiritual identity of the self. Thus, Styron's fictional career is remarkable for his power of characterization, the polish of rhetorical style and the complexity of moral vision.

During the decade, Styron began his career in writing, Southern writing is in its heydays. William Faulkner, R.P. Warren were the prominent novelists at that time. Therefore, their influence is inescapable for Styron. So, his first novel *Lie Down in Darkness* is regarded as the continuation of Faulknerian tradition. Styron took on Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Warren, Wolfe and Joyce, absorbing their influences while asserting his own voice and vision. In *Set This House on Fire* (1960), he demonstrated a determination to move beyond his Southern heritage, choosing an Italian setting and an existential situation. So, up to *Sophie's Choice*, Styron's work had shown a steadily increasing awareness that his early discourse toward harmony, stemming partly from the notion of artist's separation from society, became less adequate the more he took on political and historical concerns. He shifted from a straightforward attempt to compose aesthetic, moral, and social harmony from chaotic events toward a position that set other aims ahead of the achievement of harmony.

While he wrote *Sophie's Choice*, most of his contemporaries were decamped to deconstruction. However, Styron was untouched by such movements. He was a stylist in his own way and still concerned about traditional notions of plot. Guilt, suffering, truth are his subject matters to write. As a die-hard conventional novelist, Styron became an anomaly in the *avant-garde* of the Seventies.

Faulkner's originality has always been a misfortune to Styron in his writing career. Apart from that, Norman Mailer and Melville's pervasive influence can also be noted in Styron's writing. When asked in 1977, while writing *Sophie's Choice*, which novelists continue to mean the most to him, the first writer Styron mentioned was Melville. Styron continuing with the old-fashioned novel, in the era of accelerating experimentation with language, form and the idea of history, follows the lead of Mailer.

Like Warren's *All the King's Men* and Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Styron's *Sophie's Choice* is preoccupied with the problem of knowledge. The text draws a familiar distinction between abstract and concrete knowledge. Moreover, the genesis of the novel is a waking dream and which works as a controlling metaphor for the whole work.

The importance of the novel, *Sophie's Choice* is proved as Harold Bloom has edited different critics' commentaries in the book entitled *William Styron's Sophie's Choice*. Different critics, writers and scholars have commented on this book from different perspectives. Some critics comment on the basis of its historicity, some others on its presentation of evil, whereas some see the inclusion of sexual politics as Styron's moral dilemma.

Nancy Chinn commenting on the Styron's style in *Sophie's Choice* writes:

The use of quotations, especially as epigraphs to novel is a technique that William Styron has employed throughout his career. His [. . .] novel, *Sophie's Choice* published in 1997, contains twelve passages from fiction to poetry, including two epigraphs from Rilke's *Fourth Duino Elegy* and Andre Malraux's *Lazarus* [. . .] is consistent with the scope of the literary allusions which permeate the novel. (3-4)

Here, Chinn sees the novel from the perspective of its inclusion of literary allusions and Styron's use of rhetorical style. The use of different literary quotations not only is part of the fabric of the story, but also, they help make the story more realistic. These different literary allusions as a whole express the novel's central concern that is death, evil and brotherhood.

Suzane Dovi, unlike Chinn, comments Styron's *Sophie's Choice* as an example of a genuine moral dilemma. Dovi writes, "Sophie's choice is a genuine moral dilemma to the degree that she cannot avoid making a choice that will violate a moral obligation" (176). Dovi, thus, examines the book how Sophie could not restrain herself to choose one of her child in Auschwitz platform to send in the gas chamber. If she refuses to choose, then she violates her obligation to protect her children as much as possible. And, if she decides to pick one child, she violates the obligation not to choose. Therefore, Sophie faces a moral dilemma in Dovi's term.

Similarly, Lisa Carstens analyzes *Sophie's Choice* on the basis of its inclusion of sexual politics. Lisa in her essay "Sexual Politics and Confessional Testimony in *Sophie's Choice*" writes:

The fact that examinations of the book's sexual politics have sometimes preoccupied critical assessments reflects the degree to which the story unfolds in sexual terms. If Sophie's victimization in the Holocaust is the novel's nominal center, her sexual and emotional subjugation by male characters commands more constant attention. (295)

As an archetypal figure, Sophie's victimization before and during the Holocaust is, in part, sexual violence against her. Lisa's central concern is sexual violence against woman and how female is represented in sexual discourses by patriarchy tradition.

Dawn Trouard, on the other hand, sees the book from different lenses. According to Trouard, Styron makes a turn to postmodern career with *Sophie's Choice*. He writes "infact it is my contention that Styron's fiction strategies [in *Sophie's Choice*] in the appropriation of history place him front and center, preempting not just his text, but virtually placing him in postmodern showdown over the role of *auteur*" (247). It is often said that the Holocaust is a some sort of sancosanct area that could not be treated. Similarly, Styron struggles to find language sufficient for this historical place. In his hands, the tradition of Post-modernism creates an opportunity for a new kind of meditation.

Richard G. Law deals with the issue of narration. For him, "*Sophie's Choice* is written in the form of a *bildungsroman* in which the organizing axis of the narrative is Stingo's quest for knowledge. All of the elaborate excursions and digressions contribute to that developing line" (136). In Law's view, even if *Sophie's Choice* has double story line, other part of the story is equally contributive to Stingo's story. It is an overall strategy of the novel.

Despite all these criticisms from many scholars, the issue of sense of belatedness has not been explored yet. So this issue is a new way of reading the text and deserves being researched. And this issue aims to be explored applying Bloom's theory of poetic influence as a methodological tool. Bloom's theory of poetic influence that is presented in his book *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) is, of course, a new approach in the field of

literary paradigm. In this book, Bloom figures out the relationship between poets or writers and their works. In the process of writing something new, Bloom asserts, newly born poets are hindered in their creative process. It occurs due to their ambiguous relationship with their precursors. On the one hand, they cannot create very original version of writing on their own, on the other, they fail totally abandon earlier literary figures. So, newly born poets must struggle with their precursors to invent something new. Regarding this pathetic situation, Bloom states, the young poets are guided by the anxiety principle. They fear being influenced from precursors.

Bloom's theory of poetic influence is also termed as "Anxiety Principle". A new poet is inspired to write because he has read and admired the writing of previous poets, but this very admiration turns into resentment when one discovers that the poets whom he idolized have said everything he wants to say. Only the 'creative misunderstanding', according to Bloom, is the way to solve this problem. Only the 'misreading' allows younger poets to come out of this chain and guarantee their survival in posterity.

Bloom states that reading is also a belated act and is always a misreading and those writers who feel the sense of coming late or have the consciousness of being late comers are the belated poets. These poets are always guided by anxiety and consciousness of death. They fear being overshadowed by precursors. Bloom believes that poetic creativity emerges from poetic influence and those who aim to be an influence for others cannot succeed rather than being influenced and every poet is the result of influence. Influence remains everywhere. Thus, Bloom believes influence of father poets inspires a sense of anxiety in son poets. And strong poets are those who could take anxiety as a challenge and could render with clarity what the precursors could not offer.



In Styron's *Sophie's Choice*, Stingo, the character, is in the wrestling court to fight against his precursors. Stingo, as a young writer is inspired to write as he has read and admired the writing of Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner and other Southern novelists. He wants to set a new trend in Southern literary writing and is currently working for his debut novel *Inheritance of the Night*, but finds his precursors as hindrances in his way ahead. It becomes really a pricking situation for Stingo to deal with that novel. He seeks for the subject matter to write but finds everything is written. He is interested to create morbid themes, wants to write on the theme of suicide, slavery; but finds himself on the vaguest notion of writing. In addition to this, Styron further complicates the situation by projecting his own self in the character Stingo. Stingo, the character becomes the alter ego of Stingo, the narrator and that of the author.

In sum, Stingo's aspiration assumes a centrality in the novel; his education involves the perspective adequate for his ambition to become a writer. So, here, the task of the researcher is to deal with how Styron as a novelist raises the issue of sense of belatedness in his character Stingo who is aspiring to be a writer. The research also aims to explore the causes that inspire a young writer to write along with the difficulties that he has to bear.

## II. Dialectics of Poetic Influence

Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* subtitled "A Theory of Poetry" asserts that behind the creation of every new poem, old poems play a vital role as primary struggle of the young poets is against the old masters. While writing, the fledgling writer wants to achieve his own poetic vision and maturity without being influenced from the precursors, but he can not escape this because precursors are the source of inspiration for the young writers to write. So, the young writers must undergo a creative misreading of their precursors in order to create room for their fresh poems.

Bloom's book deals with the difficulty, or rather the impossibility of reading and, by inference, the indeterminacy of literary meaning. Bloom's book has much to say on the encounter between latecomer and precursor as a displaced version of the paradigmatic encounter between reader and the text. The main insight of *The Anxiety of Influence* is the categorical assertion that reading can be a misreading, or as Bloom calls it, 'misprision'. In addition, the main interest of Bloom is not the literal theory of influence, but the structural interplay between the types of misreading and the intricate evasions that govern the relationship between texts.

Bloom has developed his theory of poetry being based on the idea of Curtius's book *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*:

By "theory of poetry" I mean the concept of the nature and function of the poet and of poetry, which has to do with the technique of poetical composition. This distinction between the concept "theory of poetry" and "poetics" is fruitful one for knowledge. [ . . . ] The history of the theory of

the poetry coincides neither with the history of poetics nor with the history of literary criticism. (qtd in Bloom 2)

In Curtius' view, the poet's conception of himself necessarily is his poem's conception of himself, and central to this conception is the matter of the sources of powers of poetry. Bloom's books from *The Anxiety of Influence* to his work on Wallace Stevens develop a theory of poetry just in this sense.

Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray in *Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* discuss Bloom's theory of poetic influence with the assertion that "Bloom acknowledges the long standing view that any given poet is, in fact, influenced by a "precursor" poet or poets, but he further contends that the belated poet (or *ephebe*) fears that the precursor poet has overshadowed him, encroaching upon his territory and thereby negating his creativity" (18). So, influence consists of direct borrowing or assimilation of the materials and features found in the earlier writer.

What is influence for Bloom, then? Bloom writes, poetic influence – when it involves two strong authentic poets – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. 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-serving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom significantly developed ideas set forth by Walter Jackson Bate in his book *The Burden of the Past and English poet* (1970), which described the struggle by poets, since 1660, to overcome the anxiety that their precursors may have accompanied all that can be accomplished and the possibilities of writing great

original poems vanished. Bloom, then, elaborated the theory and demonstrated its application.

In the first edition of *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom has almost completely avoided Shakespeare, whom Bloom considered, at the time, barely touched by the psychological drama of anxiety. However, in the second edition, published in 1997, adds a long preface that mostly expounds on Shakespeare's agony with his contemporary Christopher Marlowe. In this revised edition, Bloom sees that, Shakespeare also has his anxieties of influence in the form of Marlowe, Chaucer and of course, the English Bible.

Allen Graham commenting on Bloomian influence, in his essay "Harold Bloom: Poetics of Conflict" writes, "Influence for Bloom is the swerve or *clinamen* a poet makes away from the strong poet who has influenced the poet to write"(Literary Encyclopedia 426). In order to swerve away from the inspirational and yet potentially suffocating influence of the great original poet, the young poet must misread the earlier poet. The anxiety of influence that creates modern poetry, Bloom argues, is a form of misreading.

In *The Anxiety of Influence*, it is often stated, "Bloom relies heavily on Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipal Complex to explain the anxiety of the belated poet, who jealously regards the precursor poet as a competitor even as he admires that earlier poet's work" (18). Freud's theory of sublimation provides with an analogue for influence.

Critic Allen Graham, dealing with Bloom's inclusion of Freud's Oedipal Complex within *The Anxiety of Influence* writes:

Bloom's use of the theory of the Oedipal Complex, in which the son wishes to murder the father in order to possess or repossess the mother (or in Bloom's poetic vision, the Muse). [. . .] Freud and the Oedipus

Complex exist within *The Anxiety of Influence* on the same level as Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Shelley's *The Defense of Poetry*, the writings of Kierkegaard, Oscar Wilde and Ralph Waldo Emerson. (426)

In Grahm's view, Bloom's theory of poetry, as he has frequently insisted is not Freudian but poetic, the psychological motives presented in the book are those of strong poets and not of Freudian or psychological men or women. Unlike Freudian men and women, for whom some form of cure from anxiety is available, whereas for the Bloomian poet no cure exists to save them from the anxieties involved in influence. Thus, *The Anxiety of Influence* offers the modern poet the chance to create new, strong forms of poetry.

### **Revisionary Ratios**

In an effort to preserve a sense of autonomy and individual creativity, the belated poet reads the precursor poet's work "defensively" subverting it through one or more of several processes or, as Bloom would put it, in accordance with one or more of several "revisionary ratios". Bloom identifies, in this process five relations of son poets to father poets -swerving, completing, emptying, displacing and diminishing, or in Bloom's terms, *Clinamen, Tessera, Kenosis, Daemonization, Askesis* - and reaches his Sixth ratio as he calls these relations *Apophrades*, the return of the dead.

Stuart A Ende discusses Bloom's six revisionary ratios in detail and remarks:

"Each of the six forms of anxiety or mechanisms of defense is ordered approximately chronologically in the poet's life cycle, running from his first knowledge that he is divorced from his precursor to his final confrontation and direct competition with the truths he finds at the core of the earlier poet's work." (611)

In composing his own works, Bloom asserts, the belated poet cannot help but incorporate elements of the precursor's work even as he ardently seeks to establish his originality.

Through his six revisionary ratios, Bloom is suggesting that fathers return in the poetry of the sons, but defeated now, so that sons seem to be the father's precursors.

Bloom divides his text in six different chapters and deals with these six revisionary ratios one by one. His first chapter deals with the *clinamen* or an initial move any modern poet must make if he or she is to enter into poetry and gain a poetic voice.

Allen Graham in his essay "Harold Bloom: Poetics of conflict" writes:

The most significant poetic text employed in Bloom's first chapter on *Clinamen* is Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in particular Books one and Two in which the fallen Satan attempts to marshal what forces remain available to him. The modern poet, Bloom argues in this chapter is very much like Milton's Satan, expelled from Heaven and yet desperate to deny that his fall is irredeemable and that it has rendered him powerless. Satan's famous statement "Evil be thou my Good" is, in these sense, a powerful modern poem, a strong *clinamen* or swerve away from the overwhelming influence of the precursor. (426)

Bloom's incorporation of *Paradise Lost* is typical of his poetic and philosophical models he incorporates into his text. Satan is a modern poet because at the incarnation of God's Son and his immediate rejection of the incarnation, he becomes aware of passing from a unified consciousness, an excessive self-consciousness. Satan is the modern poet, while God becomes his ancestral poet. Thus, Bloom's reading of *Paradise Lost* begins as an allegory of influence.

In *The Anxiety of Influence* Bloom likes to adopt Milton's own sequence in the poem and writes:

Poetry that begins with our awareness not of a fall, but that we are falling.  
 The poet is our chosen man, and his consciousness of election comes as a  
 curse; again, not 'I am fallen,' but 'I am man, and I am falling' – or rather,  
 'I was God, I was Man (for to a poet they are the same), and I am falling  
 from myself'. (20-21)

Satan's attempt to rally everything that remains – that is to create poetry – though cursed with the added awareness that his precursor, God, was able to be creative in the time before the division of consciousness. Bloom apprehends Satan's attempt to rally represents an antithetical gesture. And all poets who follow in Milton's line including Wordsworth, who for Bloom is the exemplary modern poet, the poet proper.

Interpreting Milton's Satan in allegorical manner Bloom writes, "Milton's Satan, who remains the greatest modern or Post-Enlightenment poet in the language. . . . His way of returning to origins, of making Oedipal trespass, is to become a rival creator to God-as- Creator" (*A Map of Misreading* 37). Satan embraces Sin as his Muse, and begets upon her the highly original poem of death, the only poem that God will permit him to write. Shelley, Yeats and the antithetical modern poets chose to follow the Solitary, who is aware of his falling, and accepts dualism as the condition of existence.

Stuart A. Ende finds parallelism in the idea of Yeats and Bloom, where Yeats in *Per Amica* asserts that the poet was born as poet during the moment at which the world that he loved broke faith in him. In addition, Bloom, in parallel observation, believes that modern poets are necessarily miserable dualists and that this poverty is the starting point

of their art. Bloom believes that Milton is the 'Covering Cherub' for later poets; he blocks their subsequent entrance to the poet's Paradise. 'Covering Cherub' means that Milton tends to make men victims rather than poets by destroying their desire.

The 'Cherub' is thus a demon of continuity, but a poet cannot fulfill his quest in present that is a precipitated past, so he needs the freedom from the past of discontinuity and in part achieves it by a necessary misunderstanding – Bloom calls it 'misprision' – of his precursor. Without that swerve away from the precursor's truth there can be no creativity, for acceptance in this context is imitation.

The remainder of *The Anxiety of Influence* explores five other stages in the difficult journey towards poetic strength. The second chapter introduces the *tessera* which like *clinamen* seeks to correct the precursor but in this case by "completing" him. The precursor is seen by the poet as one who over idealized, who was on the path to truth but, instead of failing to swerve, as in *Clinamen*, did not go far enough. In other words, tessera which is completion and antithesis, here, a poet antithetically completes his precursor, by so reading the parent poems to retain its terms but to mean to them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough. At the origins of all the revisions, Bloom finds "the fateful morasses of what, Freud with grandly desperate wit, called the 'Family Romance'" (56-57). What dominates Freud's notion about 'family romance' is the child's fantasy making power. What counts in this 'family romance' is not what the parents actually did, but the child's fantastic interpretation of its parents. The child provides a myth, and this myth is close to poet's myths of the origin of their creativity.



The primal scene for a poet is his Poetic Father's coitus or sexual intercourse with the muse. There he was begotten? No, there they failed to beget him. The poet learns to his sorrow that he must beget himself, and so begins a quest that yet another level must fail. Nietzsche thought that if a man does not have a good father he must invent one; but the poet learns that he must become his own father and establish his own power of divination. His word is not his own word only, and his Muse has whored with many before him. He has come late in the story, but she has always been critical in it, and he rightly fears that his impending catastrophe is only another in her litany of sorrows. What is his sincerity to her? This beautiful meditation shadows the melancholy Bloom finds in poetic tradition, for all the re-visionary ratios are necessarily reduction of the precursor.

Thus, *tessera* is to read the descendants as if we were their disciples, and so compel ourselves to learn where we must revise them if we are to be found by our own work, and claimed by the living of our own lives. Neither of these quests us yet antithetical criticism. That begins when we measure the first *clinamen* against the second.

Bloom assumes that "influence as the trope of rhetorical irony that connects an earlier to a later poet, then influence is a relation that means one thing about the intra-poetic situation while talking about another" (71). Whereas *clinamen* is the initial error, Bloom calls the second "conscious state of rhetoricity" (71).

Then comes another revisionary ratio called *Kenosis*, in which the poet empties himself out of the precursor's strength, thus making possible his own isolation, Bloom deals with this defense mechanism in his third chapter. In this stage, poets try to achieve discontinuity, and therefore, freedom from the past and repetition. It is a breaking device similar to the defense mechanisms our psyche employs against repetition compulsions.

*Kenosis*, thus, is movement towards discontinuity with the precursor. The later poet apparently emptying himself of his own afflatus, his imaginative godhood, seems to humble himself as if he were ceasing to be a poet. But this ebbing is so performed in relation to a precursor's poem of ebbing that the precursor is emptied out, and so the later poem of deflation is not as absolute as it seems.

Bloom calls the *Kenosis* a metonymy for influence; it conveys an emptying out of a prior fullness of language, even as the irony of influence was the voiding or absenting of a presence. In the stage of *Kenosis*, Bloom writes, "Influence as repetition is thus substituted for influence as genesis, or to adopt the linguistic trope, contiguity replaces resemblance" (72). Bloom writes *kenosis* isolates instinctual impulses removing them from their context before acquiring them in consciousness. In other words, in this stage, *ephebe* removes precursors from the context. So that his composition seems more complete.

*Daemonization* (or the counter-sublime) is another form of revisionary ratio that Bloom discusses in the fourth chapter of *The Anxiety of Influence*. In this stage another form of repression occurs. Stuart A Ende writes, "Yeats thought that the finest poets – Dante and Villon – became at maturity, "phantoms in their own eyes" and he himself believes that "the Daemon is our destiny." Bloom in his study of the poet writes that "Yeats' faith actually was that the daemon was our ultimate self" (613). According to Bloom, in *Daemonization* the later poet turns against the precursors' sublime and establishes his own counter sublime; or he rejects his predecessors' primary vision in favor of his own antithetical vision. But as the poet is daemonized his precursor is

humanized; the poet achieves his 'Great Originals', but as in *Kenosis*, at the cost of further reduction of his humanity.

Bloom thinks this process of counter sublime as hyperbole, which takes the later poet into “restituting for the emptying out of metonymy” (72). And, for Bloom hyperbole as the trope for influence seems the most important of his six re-visionary ratios and finds influence identical with all versions of the Sublime. In the stage of *Daemonization* the later poet opens himself to what he believes to be a power in the parent poem that does not belong to the parent proper, but to a range of being just beyond that precursor. He does this, in his poem, by so stationing his relation to the parent poem as to generalize away the uniqueness of the earlier work.

With *Askesis*, Bloom's fifth chapter on influence, the later poet passes to the mature poet's direct attempt to confront and match the precursor's strength. *Askesis*, according to Bloom, refers to the state of self-purgation and equals to super ego. It is a reduction of the poetic self that is attended by the formation of a new and harsh style.

Bloom writes in *A Map of Misreading*:

As a trope for influence, metaphor transfers the name of influence to a series of inapplicable objects, in an *Askesis* or work of sublimation that is itself a substitute gratification. This is an active defense, since under the influence of the ego; a substitute aim or object replaces the original impulse on a basis of selective similarity. Influence as a metaphor for reading thus takes the place of a more primal [. . .] imagination of reading.

(73)

Bloom believes that a poet of real achievement rose from the audience to protest that these poems were not about Yeats but about life, his own life. In the phase of *Askesis* the later poet does not, as in *Kenosis*, undergo a revisionary movement of emptying, but of curtailing; he yields up part of his own human and imaginative endowment. So as to separate himself from others, including the precursor, and does this in his poem by so sustaining it in regard to the parent poem as to make that poem undergo an *Askesis* too; the precursor's endowments also truncated.

Finally, Bloom deals with his sixth revisionary ratio called *apophrades* or the return of the dead. The later poet, in his own final phase, already burdened by an imaginative solitude that is almost a solipsism, holds his own poem so open again to the precursor's work that at first we might believe the wheel has come full circle, and that we are back in the later poet's flooded apprenticeship, before his strength began to assert itself in the revisionary ratios. But 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, but as though the later poet himself had written the precursor's characteristic work

*Apophrades* involves the ultimate victory available to modern poets, a victory, achieved by only a few of the greatest poets of the last centuries, in which, as in the poetry of Yeats and Wallace Stevens, the impression is created that they (the modern poets) "are being imitated by their precursors" (141).

In the final phase of poetic vision of later poets, the precursors are heard once more. How they are heard is the important matter to know. Stuart A. Ende says:

If the poet is strong and revisionary he will make their idiom so much his own that when we go back and read the work of the earlier poet we will be struck with the feeling that we are reading poetry written by the later poet – that the dead are imitating their poetic sons. If the dead return in the full strength the victory is theirs: thus, Roethke sounds to Bloom like Yeats or Eliot or Stevens. But, on the other hand, some of Shelley seems to have been written in imitation of Yeats. (614)

*Apophrades*, argues Bloom, involves the ultimate victory available to modern poets, a victory, achieved by only a few of the greatest poets of the last few centuries, in which, as in the poetry of Yeats and Wallace Stevens, the impression is created that they (the modern poets) “are being imitated by their precursors” (141). Thus, Bloom assumes that meaning of a poem can only be a poem, not itself but another poem.

Concerning these six revisionary ratios it should be noted that these ratios of 'misprision' may or maynot represent developmental stages of the *ephebes*. But Bloom suggests that younger *ephebes* are more likely to use first few strategies. While strong poets may use the latter ones in the final works. Such a developmental outlines of poetic misprision would be too unwieldy a thesis for all the complexities of the anxiety of influence especially as a theory of poetry for all poets.

### **Poetic Incarnation and Antithetical Criticism**

Bloom believes that poetic incarnation results from poetic influence, and poetic influence, in its first phase, is not to be distinguished from love, though it will shade soon enough into revisionary strife. Later on this revisionary strife turns into antithetical criticism. Poets, at their first hour, tend to think of themselves as stars because their

deepest desire is to be an influence, rather than to be influenced; but even in the strongest, Bloom asserts, whose desire is accomplished, the anxiety of having been formed by influence still persists.

The later poets attempt to gain divination, immortality, and their desire to free them from immortality, and their desire to free them from all influence is thwarted by their existing relation to precursors. Therefore, to achieve a poetic voice, Bloom suggests fresh poets must pass through love relation to experience of antithetical relation with their precursors. Critic practicing antithetical criticism, according to Bloom, might see all poetic Odes of incarnation are immortality Odes related to Wordsworth's Great Ode, *Intimations of Immortality*.

The concept of antithetical criticism, Bloom has proposed it in *Anxiety of Influence* and developed it in his *Map of Misreading*. Bloom suggests that writings of all poets involve the rewriting of earlier poets, and thus, writing always and necessarily involves some form of misreading or misprision. Interpretation of a poem, Bloom believes, is always interpretation of that poem's interpretation of other poems. And all interpretation depends upon the antithetical relation between meanings and not on the supposed relation between text and its meanings. So all reading can be considered misreading of sorts; any interpretation involves some misinterpretation and no one can understand a poem-in -itself. "Bloom justly described it as a story of intra-poetic relationships and says that individual poems are all part of a one great poem that is continuously being written, because individual poem can come into being only by means of the existence of another individual poem" (112).

Bloom valorizes strong poets to weaker poets. He calls strong poetry only misreading and poets of lesser lights merely become derivative flatterers and never achieve poetic immortality for themselves. In his essay “The Breaking of Form” Bloom writes “poetic warfare is conducted by a kind of strong reading that I have called the misreading . . .” (5). Then question arises, how we could recognize the true *ephebe*, the potentially strong poet. Bloom writes in *A Map of Misreading*:

By hearing in [the Ephebe’s] first voice what is most central in the precursor’s voices rendered with directness, clarity, even a sweetness that they do not often give to us. For the revisionary ratios that will be employed as means of defense by the maturing poet do not manifest themselves in the *ephebe*. . . . What we see in the *ephebe* is the incarnation of the poetical character, the supposed imagination that fails to displace the first birth into nature, but fails only because desire fails when confronted by so antithetical a quest, fiercer than the human can bear to undergo. (17)

Unlike weaker poet, who merely idealizes figures of capable imagination, strong poet persistently wrestles with his strong precursor, even to the death. As an antithetical man, the young citizen of poetry or *ephebe* quests for an impossible object, as his precursors quested before him. As a poet, he could not accept substitution and fights to create his unique world. Thus, the crux that remains in Bloom’s theory is “poem is a response to a poem, as a poet is a response to a poet” (18). To live the poet must misinterpret the father, by the crucial act of misprision, which is the rewriting of the father.

### **Poetry of Belatedness and Poetic Inter-textuality**

In belated poetry, Bloom in his essay “The Breaking of Form” writes, freedom and lying are intimately associated, and it can be named in another term “evasion”. Evasion is a process of avoiding, a way of escaping, but also it is an excuse and finds “in our poetry what is being evaded ultimately is fate. The study of poetry is (or ought to be) the study of what Stevens called “the intricate evasion of as.” And these evasions (positions of freedom and lying) are more even than the operations that Freud named defense” (8).

A power of evasion, Bloom suggests, is the belated strong poet’s most crucial gift. In the process of defensive struggle some sort of self-crippling and wounding of energies could occur even in the strongest poets. And poetic evasion operates through six-fold ratios of revision which constitute the value creating power of the anxiety of influence. Bloom alludes Kermode’s comment on Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* where Kermode wrote “deception is the discovery of the novel, not of its critics (17).” And Bloom writes more about evasion:

If evasion is the discovery of the post-Miltonic poem, it is also the discovery of the poem’s critics. Every belated poem that matters ends with either the narrative gesture, postponing the future, by projecting it, or, else the prophetic, hastening the future, *by introjecting it*. These defensive operations can be regarded as either the work of negation, intellectually freeing us from some of the consequences of repression, or the labor of paranoia, reducing reality to a code. (17-18)

Bloom’s argument is that in *The Anxiety of Influence* is that poetry since the time of Milton has increasingly suffered from an anxiety of influence, a fear that the writing of



great poetry is no longer possible. The anxiety Bloom argues, is not simply a matter of admiration and awe in the face of the achievements of the past, but is central to the creation. Meaning of modern poetry, since, Bloom goes to argue, poetry itself is inter-textual. If every poem has its meaning in its relation to previous poetry (inter-textuality) then, Bloom asserts, as the history of poetry lengthens the anxiety over poetic influence will increase. Bloom believes that interpretation of a poem necessarily is always interpretation of that poem's interpretation of other poems. To interpret a poem, necessarily you interpret its difference from other poems. Since meaning rhetorically depends upon troping, we can conclude that, tropes are defenses, and what they defend poems against are tropes in other poems.

Modern poetry, in this reading is almost exclusively generated by strategies of evading the truth about influence, and Bloom develops a reading of Romantic and Post-Romantic poetry, which views it as a linguistic and psychological defense against past poetry. Every great or strong poet has a major precursor, a figure analogous to the Freudian Father, against whom younger poet wrestles for existence. Bloom's vision of poetry (i.e. all literature) is thus highly competitive and many have asserted highly patriarchal in its insistence on male models of conflict and aggression.

Gilbert and Gubar in their work *The Mad Woman in the Attic* vehemently criticize Bloom's model of literary history being intensely male, and necessarily patriarchal. In their opinion, 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary "anxiety of authorship" - a radical fear that she can not create, that because she can never become a "precursor". Therefore, the male artist's struggle against his precursor has taken the form of what Bloom calls revisionary swerves

or misreading. Female writers, on the other, battle for self-creation involves her in revisionary process. Her battle, however, is not against her male precursor's reading of the world but against his reading of her. In order to define herself as an author, she must redefine the terms of her socialization.

To conclude, Bloom thus has internalized poets as he has internalized other critics which we can see through the instances of his development of Wordsworth, Shelley, Yeats, Stevens and others ideas. In his theory of poetic influence, a strong poet is said to try and kill his most powerful precursor, and to conceal his debt to that precursor by misreading and rewriting the enemy's tyrannically influential poem in a new poem that effectively buries the body of the old one. The strongest poem in this model thus would be one of which the precursor was unknown by everybody, including the strong poet himself.

### III. Sense of Belatedness in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*

#### Stingo as a Belated Writer

Harold Bloom in *Anxiety of Influence* has focused on how the young poets struggle to develop their own individual poetic visions without being overcome by the influence of the previous poets who inspired them to write. He further states every great or strong poet has major precursors—figure analogous to Freudian Father—against whom the younger poet wrestles for his existence. In addition, “the belated poet (*ephebe*) fears that precursor poet has overshadowed him encroaching upon his territory and thereby negating his creativity” (Murfin, 18). Keeping this statement in mind, it is insightful to study William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*. In *Sophie's Choice* Styron with his young character Stingo, who is inspired to become a writer, examines how Stingo as a fledgling writer struggles for his existence in literary arena.

When we first meet Stingo, he is an ambitious young novelist of twenty-two who is experiencing his first case of writer's block. Stingo has yearned passionately to produce the novel that had been ‘so long a captive’ in his brain but the problem he has is that when he attempts to write he couldn't produce more than first few line paragraphs—“I had the syrup” he says “but it wouldn't pour” (1). Writer's block is the preliminary stage, Bloom says, every *ephebe* passes through. As a junior editor of McGraw Hill publishing house, his dreams are of destined fame but his lowly jobs involves reading unsolicited manuscripts. With the spite that seems to make the literary world go around, as Stingo himself has the strong desire to be a writer, he rejects every single submission which he calls “all of them so freighted with hope and club footed syntax” (4). Taking a sadistic delight in his work he says, “I honestly enjoyed the bitchery and vengeance I was

able to wreak upon these manuscripts . . . oh, clever supercilious young man! How I chuckled as I eviscerated these helpless underprivileged, sub-literary lambkins” (4-5).

In the opening sections of the novel, Stingo is in frustration and turmoil that is what every belated poet passes through. Lonely, bored at work, then uneasy with freedom, he yearns for direction and encouragement in his writing. Stingo retreating into his “cubicle” (12) assuages his loneliness by reading widely and plunging into “make believe” (12) and he vents his frustrations that threaten to bury him. As a fledgling writer he finds himself with equal “ardor and the soaring wings of the Melville or the Flaubert or the Tolstoy or the Fitzgerald who had the power to rip (his) heart out and keep a part of it and who each night separately and together, were summoning [him] to their incomparable vocation” (13). With this statement it becomes clear that Stingo’s desire to write is not just a job, it is a vocation and passion for him.

Throughout the novel inexperience concerns Stingo and when he is dismissed from his position as junior editor at McGraw Hill, his meeting with Farrell (chief-in-editor at McGraw Hill), with whom he has had a good working relationship, is quite significant to develop Stingo’s writing career, thus important to discuss

Farrell tells Stingo about his son who, like him, aspired to become a writer. The two share common experiences: both were Marines and sent their fathers letters “written with the same weird amalgam of passions, humor, despair and exquisite hope that can only be set down by very young men haunted by the imminent appearance of death” (27). While telling his son’s story Farrell begins weeping and Stingo’s response is influenced by his own experience, or as he says, “ My lack of it - nothing ever pierced me so deeply

as Farrell's brief desolating story of his son Eddie, who seemed to me immolated on the earth of Okinawa that I might live - and write" (27).

In the novel, Farrell works as a supportive father figure when he commands Stingo "Son write your guts out" (28). In spite of the fragility of the artists's creation, artists bravely continue to create. Stingo concludes the first chapter of the novel by reaffirming his desire to write and recognizing the inexperience, which he calls "the large hollowness I carried within me . . . my spirit had remained landlocked, unacquainted with love and all but a stranger to death" (28).

Beside Farrell's story other things also happen to foster Stingo's ambitions: his father sends him necessary money (improbably derived from the sale in the past of a slave named, ironically enough, *Artiste*), Stingo learns of a childhood crush named *Maria Hunt* (she was beautiful enough to wreck the heart), and he meets *Sophie* and *Nathan*. With the money he can quit the job and devote full time to writing, using the death of *Maria* as his tragic subject and finding in his turbulent new friends the companionship and experience he has been longing for.

As a fresh writer Stingo is preoccupied with his fame and divination, which we can illustrate through his relation with other characters of the novel. The death of *Maria* with whom Stingo is hopelessly in love in his early adolescences provides a source for his working novel – "my subconscious was already beginning to grapple with that death as the germinal idea for the novel so lamentably hanging fire on my writing table" (53). But no sooner he thinks of this, he sees the lovely simulacrum of that dead girl in *Sophie*. Stingo's eye, however, is not on the suffering of others but his own. He tells us, after his failure of love relation with *Lesile*, "I was a writer, an artist" (217) who would not allow

“some misplaced notion of the primacy of the groin to subvert grander aims of beauty and truth. So onward, Stingo, I said to myself, rallying my flayed spirits, onward with your work” (217). “Flayed” as he may be, Stingo still has the feeling of certainty that “the wrenching anguish endured in the crucible of art would find its recompense in everlasting fame, and glory and the love of beautiful women” (218). Similarly, when Nathan claims priority over Sophie, Stingo dismisses his love for her as “futile woolgathering” (511) and returns to his novel, intensely aware that he had his own tragic chronicle to tell. Even at the end, when he has triumphed over his rival and has Sophie in his arm Stingo’s mind is on his all important career: Sophie, I’m in love with you . . . I want to write my books there, for the rest of my life, and I want you to be there with me and help me and raise a family”(565).

From Stingo’s point of view, then, Sophie and Nathan are crewmen on his voyage of discovery. They teach him about the complexity of human nature, the splendors of love the evils of Aushwitz, and the horrors of madness. They become, in a sense, a surrogate family for Stingo fostering his talent as they initiate him into the Freudian depths of life.

### **Bloom’s Revisionary Ratios and Stingo in *Sophie’s Choice***

As a belated writer Stingo passes through different stages of revisionary ratios in his writing career. Stingo as a young writer is seeking for his own voice in literary arena. However, as Bloom has asserted, in composing his own works, as a belated poet, Stingo must incorporate elements of the precursor’s work even as he ardently seeks to establish his own originality. He could not evade them. To gain a poetic voice Stingo must pass through what Bloom calls revisionary ratios (or defense mechanisms for Freud).

Among these revisionary ratios, first is *clinamen* or swerve the later poet makes away from the precursors. In his Map of Misreading, Bloom says *clinamen* is “a conscious state of rhetoricity, the poem’s opening awareness that it must be misread because its signification has wandered already” (71). Stingo’s selection of the working title for his debut novel from Matthew Arnold’s elegy *Requiescat* is the same case here. Stingo fashions his novel in the same manner of Arnold. Arnold’s *Requiescat* is an elegy for woman’s spirit and with its concluding line: “Tonight it doth inherit the vasty hall of death” (550) from where Stingo becomes able to derive the working title for his novel. Like Arnold, Stingo has fashioned his novel dealing with “the tormented alienated girl going to her lonely death on the indifferent summertime streets of the city I had just left behind” (550).

Stingo in his writing wants to do justice to his own native state, like other literary figures from south, as he is a writer from southern state of Virginia. Therefore, it is difficult to Stingo to evade the influence of writers like Wolfe, Faulkner, Warren and others. Like the influence of these writers, other literary figures like Dostovesky, Melville, Flaubert, and Camus has equally influenced him. Like Faulkner’s, a prominent literary from south, Mississippi Home, Virginia City provides a locale for his debut novel.

*Clinamen* and *tessera* are the initial stages that the belated writer must pass through. After the initial swerve, then, influence comes as a “belated completion” (72) termed *tessera*. In this stage, the *ephebe* comes to complete his precursor antithetically by so reading the parent poem as to retain its terms but to mean to them in another sense finding what the precursors failed to go far enough. In *Sophie’s Choice* Stingo’s

incarnation of confident self can be traced how he boasts to what he wrote in the prologue of his novel in progress:

I had written a dozen pages of what I planned to be the prologue of the novel – a description of a ride on a railroad train to the small Virginia City which was to provide the book’s locale. Heavily indebted in tone to the opening passage of *All the King’s Men* using similar rhythm and even the same second person singular to achieve the effect of the author grabbing the reader by the lapels, the passage was to say the least derivative, yet I also knew that there was much in it that was powerful and fresh I was proud of it, it was a good beginning [. . .] (39)

As Bloom writes in “The Breaking of Form” that poetic warfare has been conducted by a kind of strong reading that he has called the misreading, in the same way, Stingo wrestles to find out what the precursors’ could not. So, Stingo writes “moreover Warren this is Stingo arriving” and he takes enormous pride in “the sheer quality of what [he] had put into the work” (39). Even if Stingo is lost in the metropolis of New York, he has not still forgotten his native land. He wants to do justice to that place. His farmland is constantly in his mind. Similarly, as he attempts to be a writer, it seems obvious that, influence of Southern writers is constantly overwhelming him. Their influence is imprinted in his mind. So, the prologue of the working novel is result of his native writer’s influence in him.

To develop Stingo’s writing career Farrell in McGraw Hill and Nathan in Yetta’s house in Brooklyn play a vital role. The older male, denied a writing career, devotes himself instead to the support and encouragement of younger and more gifted son or



brother. Nathan also wanted to write and became instead a “supportive brother figure” for Stingo and the only reader and critic of his novel.

In Styron’s persona, as Nathan comments, we can see the incarnation of poetical character. In the novel, Nathan acts as a reader and critic of Stingo’s novel. Nathan becomes the first reader and critic of Stingo’s novel when he provides first hundred pages to read to Nathan. After reading, Nathan comments on:

You’ve read Faulkner [. . .] you’ve read Robert Pen Warren. He paused. I’m sure you’ve read Thomas Wolfe, and even Carson McCullers. I’m breaking my promise about no criticism. [. . .] Twenty–two years old! He exclaimed. And oh my god, you can write! Of course you’ve read those writers, you wouldn’t be able to write a book if you hadn’t. But you’ve absorbed them, kid, absorbed them and made them your own. You’ve got your own voice. That’s the most exciting hundred pages by an unknown writer anyone’s ever read. (225-26)

As Nathan comments on Stingo wants to achieve discontinuity and freedom from the past and repetition. As a belated writer, Stingo is in the stage of, in Bloom’s term, *kenosis* or a movement towards discontinuity with precursors. Bloom writes, in the stage of *Kenosis*, “influence as repetition is thus substituted for influence as genesis” (72). Stingo is thus heading to be a true *epebe*.

Stingo as a belated writer has well understood the affliction of belatedness and difficulty of finding out worth place in his writing career. He speaks:

My original strategy was pathetically derivative, lacking logic and design and substituting for both an amorphous hunger to do for a small Southern

City what James Joyce had done in his miraculous microcosm. For someone of my age it was not a totally worthless ambition, save for the fact that even on the more modest level attainment I sought, there seemed no way to invent Dixieland replicas of Stephen Dedalus and the imperishable Blooms. (131)

Earlier in the novel talking about the Southern Genre of Fiction, Nathan has told Stingo “Southern writing as a force is going to be over within a few years. Another genre is going to take its place. That’s why I’m saying you’ve got a lot of guts to be writing in a worn out tradition” (136). Even if it is difficult to find out poetic Voice, as Nathan has mentioned, Stingo becomes successful enough to render his poetic voice in the first hundred pages of his novel (in progress) though Southern literature is falling into desuetude, which we can trace from the earlier comment of Nathan. As Bloom has said in *Anxiety of Influence*, a poet makes a poet and to the poet in a poet, a poem is always the other man, the precursor. The case applies to Stingo and his relation with his precursor novelists from South. Stingo as a novelist is another version of Faulkner, Wolfe and Warren.

There is no question about a Southern cast to Stingo’s fiction. It derives above all from the influence of Faulkner, and of Warren and Thomas Wolfe as well. In his *Inheritance of Night* Stingo uses the matter of the South and deals with those problems of sin, dissolution, and decadence that Southern history has thrust upon the imagination of many southern writers. He deals here with the dissolution of Virginian family, who serve as the figures for the novel’s characters. In the novel, the sins of fathers are visited upon the daughter. Stingo narrates:

Maria and her family serve as the exemplary figures for the novel's cast of characters. The rather desperate wreck of a father, a chronic lush and also something of a womanizer; the mother, slightly unbalanced and a grim pietist, known throughout the upper middle class, country club and high-Episcopal echelons of the city for her long suffering tolerance of her husband's mistress, herself a social-climbing dimwit from the sticks; and the daughter finally, poor dead Maria, doomed and a victim from the outset through all the tangled misunderstandings, petty hatreds and vindictive hurts that are capable of making bourgeois family life the closest thing to hell on earth [. . .] (132)

Though Stingo could not fulfill his hopeless love in Maria, anyway, her death becomes the subject matter to write in his novel. The subject of death becomes like a 'fat golden egg in his brain.' He plans how he would move forward and imagines the scene for his novel: "The train would be arriving in the riverside station, a dismal quay filled with heat, commotion, dust. Awaiting the train would be the bereaved father, the importunate mistress, a hearse [. . .] A faithful retainer, a woman" (132).

Writer's bloc is another suffering that the *ephebe* has to overcome. He must select right word, appropriate rhythmic pattern that must match with the tone or situation of story and must make lively characters. As a young writer, Stingo also suffers from this, when he writes, "I was compelled to search, however inadequately, for the right word and suffered over the rhythms and subtleties of our gorgeous but unbenevolent, unyielding tongue [. . .]" (132-33).

For the belated writer problem is not only of subject matter but also of its presentation. On the one hand, he has to borrow it from the precursors and only way of borrowing is misreading on the other, he has to absorb the precursor and while reading his text he must sound like we are reading belated writer as precursor. Stingo in his novel absorbs the precursors broadening the impact of his novel by Freudian interpretation of the Electra myth and linking the suicide of Maria to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

Like other writers from South, as a man of Southern letters, Stingo depicts Virginia with a strong sense: its climate and topography; its people, its odors and vegetation; the heat of its summers; the slow and majestic movement of the James River; the mosquitoes; the clamor of the industrialized New South; the ham and the oysters; the broad tobacco and peanut fields; the accents of the black and white people and their complex interactions. All of these things, one feels, must constantly have been in Stingo's mind as he wrote. His father's perpetual urge to return in his farmland also heightens Stingo's seriousness to his native land. Once when he visits his son in Brooklyn he murmurs, "that old farm down in Southampton is waiting for you. I know it would be just a fine place to work. I hope you think over it, son" (365). Stingo's father also helps to nurture his son's writing career. He frequently asks his son's progress in writing and sends necessary information about South if it is needed to Stingo.

Even the narrative of the novel is contributive, in *Sophie's Choice*, to demonstrate the sense of belatedness in Stingo's character. The constant dialogue between the mature Stingo and younger Stingo provides a father-son tone in the novel. Earlier in the novel the older male (Stingo) speaks as a fresh writer how much he is preoccupied to his fame:

How I now cherish the image of myself in this earlier time. . . . Oh, Stingo how I envy you in these faraway afternoons of First Novelhood (so long before middle age and the drowsy slack tides of initiation on, gloomy boredom with fiction, and the popping out of ego and ambition) when immortal longings impelled your every hyphen and semicolon and you had the faith a child in the beauty you felt you were destined to bring forth. (133)

William Heath considers this mature narrator's nostalgic portrayal of his younger self; it's like "Whitman singing a song about himself" (77). The older Stingo reincarnates his younger and more confident self. As Bloom has said every poet wants to be but it remains unfulfilled. Similarly, Stingo's writing is guided by this immortal longing but difficult to achieve. Later in the novel, the older Stingo makes us clear how he has become successful writer and his dedication in writing:

The domestic tragedy which I had struggled so to bring to a parturition at Yetta Zimmerman's had long before been published (to a general acclaim far beyond my youthful hopes); I had written other works of Fiction and a certain vaguely unenthusiastic and uncommitted account of trendy sixties journalism. However, my heart was still with the art of the novel [. . .]  
(260)

He succeeds expediently to bring out the sorrowful destiny of Maria whom he had loved beyond hope. Though the mature narrator, here, is nostalgic about his days of "first novelhood" (133) he is also examining Stingo's behavior. He is striving to understand his young self – to trace the path by which Stingo matured. Anyway, Stingo becomes able to

publish a work, which fulfils his “philosophical and aesthetic requirements as a novelist, found hundreds of thousands of readers” (260).

Stingo approaches a far wider universe in writing only after his meeting with Sophie and Nathan. Before this, he is only restricted in the narrow domain of South: “outside of creative writing [. . .] the history of the American South was his only serious academic concern in college” (230). What is also apparent in these early stages is Stingo’s conception of the role of art. Stingo’s diction largely remains literary. Typically, he refers to a Southern novelist, Faulkner, whom he lauds in modernist fashion, as almost a redeemer of the region’s culture. He is incredulous that someone could read Faulkner and still has an intolerable attitude of superiority towards the place as if art could by itself redeem its shortcoming.

It becomes clear, with the above stances, in the early stages of writing career, it is actually difficult to find the literary horizon that is untouched and the budding writers struggle to find the proper place. Bloom has suggested that younger *ephebes* are likely to adopt first few strategies while strong poets may use the latter ones in the final works. The case is similar in Stingo’s story also. As a budding writer, it is certainly difficult to pass through each forms of ratios but Stingo successes to make the previous poets idioms sounding too much like his own and the dead are imitating his writing: “you’ve absorbed them, kid, absorbed them and made them your own” (225). Thus, Stingo could success to return in the poetry of the dead (*apophrades*) and impression is so created that precursors are imitating him. At the end of the novel, Stingo remarks “this was not Judgment Day – only morning. Morning: excellent and fair” (632). Stingo’s focuses, here, on himself. He

is concerned with the artistic form over the subject. He thinks he is in early stage of his writing and seeking independence in his writing.

### **Female as Muse in Stingo's Progress**

In *Anxiety of influence*, in an allegorical manner Bloom says "Satan embraces sin as his muse, and begets upon her the highly original poem of death, the only poem that God will permit him to write" (37). Similarly, in *Sophie's Choice* in Stingo's progress female characters act the role of Muse or become inspirational source. It is females, who help to broaden the horizon of writing, provide the subject matter and help invent the original poetry depicting the relations between those done to death and those alive then.

In the novel, the suicide of Maria provides a subject matter to Stingo's working novel whereas his relation with Sophie becomes contributive to initiate him to adulthood. On the other, with Leslie and Mary he learns that sex and speech are contiguous parts of the whole human organism.

In the opening stage of the novel, what seems especially significant insofar as the portrait of a young artist is concerned – Stingo's adolescent rebellion, his freedom through art- is that his artistic longings for the sublime are persistently undermined by his obstructed, broncobuster libido. Prolonged celibacy does indeed appear to take precedence over his novel as the chief cause of his anxiety. After he receives news of Maria's suicide, his sexual fantasies take a distinct turn toward the morbid and moribund, and the novel begins to take shape in his mind.

Like the news of Maria's death, Stingo's first sight of Sophie revives his creative urge as it stimulates sexual desire. Sophie, who has "a distinct but real resemblance to Maria Hunt, what is still ineffaceable about my first glimpse of her is not simply the

lovely simulacrum she seemed to me of the dead girl but the despair on her grieving shadows of someone hurtling toward death” (53), reclaims his very existence.

For Stingo, writing and sex are inseparable, indeed indistinguishable. In the key first chapter of *Sophie's Choice* Stingo progresses “an affinity for the written word – almost any written word- that was so excitable that it verged on the erotic” (12). However, in the course of the novel, he couldn't fulfill the dream of sexual frustration. Everywhere he fails: with Maria, with Sophie, with Lesile and even Mary. Nevertheless, whenever he failed in his love relation with them, writing becomes his central concern. Thus in *Sophie's Choice*, the role of female characters is also contributive to inspire Stingo in his writing, thus, inspirational source (muse).

While discussing female's role as inspirational source, to keep Gilbert and Gubar's postulation in mind, however, becomes necessary. In *The Mad Woman in the Attic* they said that “for Western literary influence is overwhelmingly male- or more accurately patriarchal” (1236). In *Sophie's Choice*, in addition, the female story ultimately turns out to be in the service of and subservient to that of male. In the story, the male narrator is consistently identifies the female as liar. Sophie tells her story when she is lying. In other words, unreliability is contributed to female where as male voice becomes the voice of truth. By the time, Sophie expresses her desire to write a novel about her own experiences, her project seems not only improbable but also comic. Even if she far surpasses in her linguistic competence and can speak Polish, German, Russian and French fluently, the situation is so created that she must speak in English, the single language in which male characters retain total superiority. Though Sophie wants to write her own personal history, she must delegate it to men. Gilbert and Gubar questioned



when there is no proper place for female writers where does the female poet fit in? and if she does have a muse, what is its sex? Thus in *Sophie's Choice* Styron models female characters as Stingo's muse or inspirational source.

### **Projection of Authorial Voice**

To make the novel more realistic Styron in *Sophie's Choice* projects the young character Stingo as his representative voice, in turn, displays how he himself as a writer has struggled to overcome the anxiety of not being able to create his original space in writing. Much of the book has highly self-conscious performance that is narrated by a man called Stingo whose career parallels Styron in many of the instances – Stingo like Styron was a native of Virginia, entered in Marine Corps before working in McGraw Hill Book House, and Stingo like Styron is inspired to become a writer. It is also stated that Styron's first novel *Lie Down in Darkness* has resemblance with Stingo's *Inheritance of Night*. So through the mature narrator Stingo, Styron reminisces early days of his writing career and how he was preoccupied to his fame. Thus, Stingo's anxiety is Styron's anxiety.

In *Sophie's Choice*, as the narrator muses on the role of writing in his life, he focuses particularly on its centrality for his twenty-two-year-old alter ego. Realizing not only “how intensely discontented, rebellious and troubled” he had been at that age; he emphasized the extent to which “writing had kept serious emotional distress safely at bay, in the sense that the novel I was working on served as a cathartic instrument through which I was able to discharge on paper many of my vexing tensions and miseries” (538). Thinking back on his work in progress, the older man remembers, having at one time “felt so serenely secure in the integrity of this novel that [he] had already fashioned for it

an appropriately melancholy title: *Inheritance of Night*" (550) which, it will be remembered, as the working title for what became Styron's *Lie Down in Darkness*.

The unnamed narrator explicitly states that he is not Stingo in name or nature. Stingo, he says, "evaporated like a wan ghost" (2) as the narrator became aged, although, Stingo he 'still was' in the summer of 1947. He thus lays stress on the gap that time has created between his present and former view of events, and varies his diction according to the viewpoint he adopts.

Thus in *Sophie's Choice* Styron gives us a dual portrait of himself as the fledgling artist struggling with his first novel and as a mature novelist struggling with his fourth. If *Sophie's Choice* is preeminently about the trials of a survivor, it is no less about the trials of a concentration camp survivor and no doubt, it is about the trials of survival as an artist in Post World War Two America. The novel is about the trials of art making process itself.

### **Poetic Inter-textuality**

In *Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom asserts that anxiety is central to the creation and meaning of modern poetry is itself inter-textual. Similarly, Styron develops the intersecting bylines in the novel. He couldn't remain untouched upon, what Bloom calls, no modern poets could evade the influence of earlier literary figures. In *Sophie's Choice* Stingo is depicted as another version of Melville's Ishmael figure in *Moby-Dick*. Dealing with the similarities between Styron and Melville, Rhoda Sirlin writes:

There are profound intellectual, emotional, and philosophical connections between Styron and Melville and, therefore, between Stingo and Ishmael their youthful alter egos. The most profound similarity is their interest in

Metaphysical questions, their pondering the nature of being.

Unsurprisingly, then, the problem of evil haunts both writers and spawns a moral quest, a search for moral values amid the stark realities of pain and suffering. Both writers stalk the riddles of personality and the riddles of existence, dramatizing human tensions. (171-72)

The first chapter of *Sophie's Choice* is reminiscent in many ways of the first chapter of *Moby-Dick*. Both Stingo and Ishamel are young narrators with little or no money in their purses and hostile to social surroundings. They are both feeling a winter in their souls. Stingo tells us he could not produce a novel, he is out of work, has no money and is a Southerner self-exiled in New York. Stingo tells us he would like to be a writer someday with the soaring wings of "Melville, Flaubert, or Tolstoy" (13) and when gets the time, he tells us, he reads "'The Bear' or *Notes from the Underground* or *Billy Budd*" (14). He is in search of knowledge of the self. Like that of Stingo, Ishamel experiences deep spiritual despair at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*. Sirlin writes, "Both Stingo and Ishamel establish themselves as lonely, sensitive, adventurous, romantic questers in search of things remote" (171).

In *Sophie's Choice*, Styron develops poetic inter-textuality centering Stingo's story in Ishmaellian model. Styron tells his story mimicking Melville's storyline. Thus, Styron must follow the line of his predecessors.

Another stance of poetic inter-textuality can be seen in Stingo's mimicking of Warren's model in the prologue of his working novel. He models the tone and rhythm exactly like that of the Warren. Though Stingo himself claims that it is 'least derivative' and more of it is 'so powerful and fresh', from this stance, it is proved that every poetry

has its meaning in its relation to previous poetry. Thus, Stingo has to wrestle to evade the influence of prior poets.

To conclude, in *Sophie's Choice* Styron aptly depicts the sense of anxiety in his young character, Stingo, who is on the verge of exploring his career in writing. In the process, he has to pass through different ordeals. As a fledgling writer, he suffers from writer's bloc, finding of subject matter and his immortal longings of fame as a writer. Styron, however, while depicting Stingo's story of First novelhood, becomes able to reflect his own struggle to be a writer in his early days.

#### IV. Conclusion

The writer always suffers, in Bloom's view, from a sense of belatedness, a sense that he or she has come after some important things have been said, and against which he or she has to struggle. Styron's protagonist in *Sophie's Choice* is also captivated by this sense of belatedness. He wants to create his original voice in literary arena but cannot evade the suffocating influence of the precursors. The only means left over to Stingo, the protagonist, is to misread the prior poet and find his place in writing. On the one hand, he is on the road to find his voyage of discovery in writing, on the other, he is equally guided by fulfillment of sexual fantasy. Whenever he fails in his love relation, mainly being guided by fulfillment of sexual fantasy, to other female characters in the novel, he turns to his most important career i.e. writing. Since he could not fulfill his libidinal urges in the real world, he wants to fulfill it in writing.

In reminiscing about the summer of 1947, the mature narrator speaks out of a successful career as a writer. While revealing his traumatic experience in writing, the older narrator plays a significant role, providing a tone of father poet to his younger self. He narrates, as a budding writer, how he passes out of successful career in writing.

As a young writer, Stingo reads the precursors' writing by the anxious mixture of love and rivalry. Certainly, in the beginning, he reads the prior poet's writing admiring them. But to find prominence in writing is not an easier job. To come out of this hangover, he must 'misprision', in Bloom's vision, earlier figures to secure his space. Without this his desire to be a writer is like making castle in the air. So, he must take the swerve from precursors. Rhoda Sirlin writes how Stingo as a novelist, is occupied to find

a path in his writing career, “Stingo is an idealistic, ambitious youth on a spiritual quest, a rebellious voyager in search of knowledge of the self” (170).

To find a prominence in writing, Stingo misprisons prior poets in the light of Bloom's revisionary swerves. To find historical occupation in southern writing he even moves beyond the territory of southern locale. He makes connection between southern historical forces and world beyond it. As a young writer, he even succeeds to make such connection of love in his working novel *Inheritance of the Night*; and also employs Freudian structure of love relation. He makes a link between his protagonist Maria's suicide with dropping of the bomb in Heroshima. In the process of his writing, he derives his voice by misreading the writer's like Faulkner, Warren, Melville, Tolstoy and others. He fashions the prologue of the novel deriving largely from Warren's *All the King's Men*. Like other writers from South, he bases his novel largely, in Southern territory applying Bloom's different revisionary swerves. Thus, Stingo becomes able to sugarcoat the bitter experience of anxiety in writing.

Ralph Tutt asserts that *Sophie's Choice* deals with chronicle of writer's artistic development. As Camus says, "We have to live and let live in order to create what we are" (241), in *Sophie's Choice*, Stingo's attempt is to produce literature of rebellion. In the act of writing, artists must continue their search for significant themes. Suicide, slavery, rape, murder etc are the themes that Stingo seeks for in his writing. Styron, through Stingo, dramatizes, how the latter one struggles, as a writer, to produce prominent voice in writing, thus reflecting authorial self.

To conclude, Stingo is obsessed by his desire to be a writer (in his twenties) as Bloom's belated poets. Stingo tends to fulfill his desire making swerves from prior poets.

So, to explore his self, Stingo creatively misinterprets where his precursors failed. He discovers his power by 'distorting' 'demonizing ' and then 'devouring' the precursors.

### Works Cited

- Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- - -. *The Anxiety of Influence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- - -. "The Breaking of Form." *Deconstruction and Criticism*. Bloom, Harold, Paul de Man et al. Chennai: Chennai Micro print, 2005. 1-31.
- - -, ed. Introduction. *William Styrom's Sophie's Choice*. Philadelphia : Chelsea House, 2002.
- Carstens, Lisa. "Sexual Politics and Confessional Testimony in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 47. 3 (Fall 2001): 293-307.
- Chinn, Nancy. "Games and Tragedy : Unidentified Quotations in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*." Bloom. 2002. 3-10.
- Coale, Samuel. "Styron's Dissuises : A Provisional Rebel in Christian Masquerade." Bloom. 2002. 11-20.
- Dovi, Suzzane. " *Sophie's Choice*: Letting Chance Decide." *Philosophy and Literature* 30. 1 (Apr 2006): 174-83.
- Eisinger, Chester E. "William Styron." *Reference Guide to American Literature*. Ed. Thomas Riggs. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Farmington Hills: St. James Press, 2000. 822-24.
- Ende, Stuart A. "The Melancholy of Descent Poets." *Boundry* 2. 3 (2005): 608-16.
- Ferguson, Frances. "Romantic Studies." *Redrawing the Boundaries*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn. New York: MLA, 1992. 100-129.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Susan Gubar. "Infection in the Sentence." *Critical Theory since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1992. 1235-44.
- "Harold Bloom; Poetics of Conflict." *Literary Encyclopedia*. (2005): 423-26.



- Heath, William. "I, Stingo: The Problem of Egotism in *Sophie's Choice*." Bloom. 2002. 73-90.
- Law, Richard G. "Narrative Technique in William Styron's *Sophie's Choice*." Bloom. 2002. 133-150.
- Murfin, Ross, and Supriya M. Ray. *Bedford Glossary of Literary and Critical Terms*. Boston: McMillan Press, 1997.
- Sirlin, Rhoda. "Sophie's Choice: An American Voyage into the Mystery of Iniquity." Bloom. 2002. 167-190.
- Styron, William. *Sophie's Choice*. London: Vintage, 1979.
- Trouard, Dawn. "Styron's Historical Pre-Text: Nat Turner, Sophie and the Beginning of a Postmodern Career." Bloom. 2002. 243-250.
- Tutt, Ralph. "Stingo's Complaint: Styron and the Politics of Self-Parody." Bloom. 2002. 257-262.
- West, James LW. "William Styron, Virginia writer". *Virginia Cavalcade* 49. 4 (Autumn 2000): 188-90.