THREE WAYS OF LOOKING AT NEGATIVE CAPABILITY: WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, JOHN BERRYMAN, MARK STRAND

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Dissertation Abstract

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Negative capability, coined by the romantic poet John Keats in early 19th Century, is a significant literary concept which defines the creative process and provides tentative guidelines determining the relation between a poet and his/her poems. Although the concept belongs to the romantic period, it has been appropriated and interpreted by many modern critics and poets.

This study aims to show that during specific periods in their careers three 20th century American poets - William Carlos Williams, John Berryman and Mark Strand - present three different ways of looking at negative capability. In this context, terms, concepts and theories which are linked to negative capability such as subjectivity, mimesis, autobiographical writing and objectivity as well as imagism, deconstruction and post-structuralism are also questioned and examined.

This dissertation is the product of close reading of selected poems by the three poets and it demonstrates that the concept of negative capability remains a valid approach to the analysis of poetry because it highlights certain limits of poetic expression and creativity.

Tez Özeti

Nejat Cihan Yurdaün, "Negatif Beceri'ye Üç Bakış: William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Mark Strand"

Romantik şair John Keats tarafından 19.yy başında ortaya konan Negatif Beceri, bir şairin şiirleriyle olan ilişkisini belirleyen adeta bir yönerge ve yaratıcı süreci tanımlayan önemli bir edebi yaklaşımdır. Romantik döneme ait olmakla birlikte, kavram birçok modern eleştirmen ve şair tarafından benimsenip yorumlanmayı sürdürmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, üç 20.yy Amerikan şairi William Carlos Williams, John Berryman, Mark Strand'ın kariyerlerinin belirli dönemlerinde negatif beceri'ye farklı yaklaşımlarını irdelemektir. Bu bağlamda, negatif beceri'yle ilintili olarak, sübjektivite, mimesis, otobiyografik yazım, nesnellik ve bunlarla beraber imgecilik, yapı-çözümü ve post-yapısalcılık gibi terimler, kavramlar ve kuramlar tartışılmıştır.

Bu tez üç şairin şiirleri arasından negatif beceri bağlamında tartışılmaya elverişli olanların derinlemesine analizinin ürünüdür ve kavramın hala güncelliğini koruduğunu, yaratıcılık ve şiirsel ifadenin sınırlarını sorunsallaştırmasıyla şiir analizine zenginlik kattığı tezini ortaya koymaktadır.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Taking the concept of negative capability as a guide for analysis, the present study focuses on the works of three poets which reveal attempts at self-effacement in unique ways. This dissertation posits that three 20th Century American poets William Carlos Williams, John Berryman and Mark Strand, in certain poems, enact different kinds of self-effacement that are fundamentally in touch with the concept of negative capability. Looking for Keatsian negative capability in three 20th Century American poets may appear at first glance as an anachronism. However, upon closer scrutiny, one can see a thread running from Keats' "camelion poet" to attempts at taking the "self" out of poetry by Williams, Berryman and Strand.

Negative capability has been one of the most influential and widely interpreted poetic terms since it was coined by the English romantic poet John Keats in early 19th century. However, it is also interesting that there is no precise explanation by Keats which fully defines the concept and sets its framework. Donald Goellnichtt points to the fact that the term is mentioned only once in his letter to his brother – now called by the critics the negative capability letter – where Keats briefly explains the term (5): "It struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean *Negative Capability,* that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats, 57). Because it is mentioned only once, Goellnicht argues that the term itself is only a stepping stone and the idea of negative capability constantly evolved in Keats' mind along with other related ideas about writing poetry, the poet's identity and aesthetics in general. On the other hand scholars like Walter Jackson Bate claims that "the 'Negative Capability' letter is best understood as a phrasing and extension of several thoughts, with at least three further extensions" that are basically the "problem of form or style in art", "egoistic assertion of

one's identity" and finally "the sympathetic potentialities of the imagination" (13). In this study, the term will be employed both in this larger, more encompassing sense – based on Bate's interpretation of Keats' views on poetry - and also in conjunction with various related terms and interpretations that have developed in literature and criticism.

Despite the fact that the term was first introduced into literature by Keats, according to Li Ou the concept had its major influence and share of critical and creative interpretations in the 20th century. Ou draws attention to the fact that critics started to show serious interest in the term especially after the 1920's because "the currency of negative capability grew together with modernism, and with its evident affinity with the modernist precepts of impersonality and dramatic presentation" (153). The idea that there is close affinity between negative capability and modernist writing and its premises has been evolving into various directions. In this way the idea stays fresh and ample with each point of view that absorbs and reinterprets it. Critics and poets such as Harold Bloom, Denise Levertov, Frank O'Hara and many others have either commented on or appropriated the concept in their own works. To give but one example the poet Charles Simic in his 1978 article "Negative Capability and Its Children" emphasizes the "uncertainty" aspect of the term drawing a similarity between the identity crises many people undergo in contemporary times and assesses the situation for poetry (343).

Thus, different poets and critics highlight different aspects of the term, but at its core the term puts emphasis on the relation between the artist and the world, suggesting how an artist should establish contact with the world in order to create a remarkable artwork. Hence, Keats portrays Shakespeare as one of those artists who has achieved much because he possessed negative capability. Shakespeare as a default example of an ideal artist plays a crucial role not only in Keats but in other poets and critics who incorporate and develop the term in their own way. Nevertheless, the phrase – together with Keats' other comments upon the artist as the

subject - has a depth and a much wider scope than is evident at first sight. Ou provides a definition, drawing attention to other meanings that the term may entail:

> Negative capability, therefore, with its development over time, has evolved into a more mature and pregnant conception without contradicting its original central idea of opening the self to the multifarious otherness of the world and human beings. The composite key elements of negative capability may include imaginativeness, experiential and artistic intensity, submission of the self, sympathetic identification, the dramatic quality of the poet, disinterestedness, a neutral intellect tolerating diversity and contradiction, and a tragic vision of human experience, all of which are intricately related to one another. (8)

Ou asserts that negative capability requires the key act of "opening the self" and emphasizes traits such as "sympathetic identification", "imaginativeness", "submission of the self" and "disinterestedness" as possible interpretations of the term. "Opening the self" and "disinterestedness" are particularly significant with regard to poetry as they have been appropriated by many modern critics and poets including T.S Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson. However, before dwelling on these interpretations - some of which are essential for the kind of analysis attempted in this study - it is important to fully understand how Keats develops his idea of negative capability and thus depicts a general notion of the character of a poet that he deems ideal. The following section from a letter Keats wrote to his friend Richard Woodhouse is a fundamental passage and contains some of the main premises of his views on the ideal poet:

> As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am any thing, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself - it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. (209-210)

In describing the ideal poetical character Keats carefully distinguishes his own "poetical character" from that of William Wordsworth and labels "wordsworthian" poetry as the "egoistical sublime". Against the "egoistical sublime" Keats envisions a poet without a "self": "it has no self - it is every thing and nothing - It has no character –" (ibid). Because "it" has

no character “itself”, the poet possesses the unique ability to be anyone and represent anything. Keats calls such a poet the “camelion” poet, using the archaic spelling of the word chameleon. The “camelion poet” has the potential to be anything and to embrace equally and without reservation contrary concepts such as good and evil, rich and poor. Thus the notion of the “camelion” poet falls in line with the idea of negative capability. One common denominator in establishing such an affinity resides in the mention of Shakespeare’s evil Iago and innocent Imogen, and Shakespeare was designated in an earlier letter to have possessed negative capability.

In the above quoted section of the same letter Keats adds that the camelion poet “has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body” (210). This statement, as much as it is inspirational and suggestive, is also problematic in itself. Even if we ignore the teleological argument that to be nobody also means to be somebody or in other words to be a camelion poet denotes a character - a character who can imaginatively be anyone but not consistently a particular individual – there are certain other steps or assumptions that need to be taken into consideration. First of all Keats assumes that everyone has a kind of definite identity that they are fully conscious and in total control of; thus traits of this character can be identified by the owner and held back or annulled at will. This assumption inevitably posits questions about subjectivity, the idea of the self and the will.

The second assumption by Keats is that the poet after annulling or effacing the self should be able to imagine and perhaps not only imagine but feel what the other feels. In one of his letters Keats writes the following phrase: “if a Sparrow come before my Window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel” (54). With this statement, he expresses his sensitivity and also displays his capacity for imagination; in order to feel like a sparrow he must be able to imagine that he is a sparrow. In a similar manner Keats writes in the last section of the camelion poet passage: “When I am in a room with People if I ever am free

from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated" (210). This passage reveals that Keats almost involuntarily exercises negative capability – as if it is an innate ability; he opens himself up to the others in the room, thus the identity of the others emerge in him. Goellnicht offers the following comment:

> Keats seems to have had a remarkable ability to participate in the thoughts and feelings, the very life, of not only people but animals as well. He achieves this effect of annulling self by imaginatively projecting himself into the character or characters he contemplates. And so intense is his imagination and its capacity for empathy that he does not even have to will himself into the identity of the other people; their identities press upon him without his own active involvement, even to the point that he sometimes dislikes the feelings he gains from sympathetic identification. (47)

Goellnicht also notes that negative capability and sympathetic identification/imagination are not the same things (2-3). Rather it can be said that negative capability is a stance towards world that can be appropriated by anyone, hence it is not necessarily indigenous to the poet. It means annulling the self or holding back the self, "opening the self to the multifarious otherness of the world and human beings" (Ou 8). This receptivity does not require the poet's will because it comes naturally.

The primary aspect of negative capability is the ability to block the self and withhold the will in order to perceive/receive the world as it is without the interference of any personal judgment or bias. The writing of poetry requires sympathetic imagination/identification; the case where Keats feels like and identifies with the sparrow. Therefore the process of self-annihilation can happen simultaneously with the creative act when the poet identifies him/herself with the things he/she is contemplating/imagining. The self becomes totally immersed in the idea or object, forgetting its own being. According to Richard Benton, Keats' man of negative capability possesses "the ability to lose his self-identity, his 'imaginative identification' with and submission to things, and his power to achieve unity with life" (38). Benton bridges Keats' term and Zen Buddhism highlighting their similarities; hence he writes

“to achieve unity with life” (ibid). However, as Newell Ford argues, what Keats has in mind is closer to what modern psychology would call “empathy” of an artistic or aesthetic kind, based on imagination – a crucial trait of the romantics – rather than existentialist and religious views or ideologies. On the notion of “empathy” Ford writes: "But if it is realized that the term denotes a particular kind of mental *impression* rather than an actual immersion of the ego in the non-ego, and if there are repeated descriptions of the impression by the one who experiences it, the term becomes a convenient, and fairly precise, label" (477). Such is with Keats, "fusion or identification of himself with an aesthetic object", when this happens Keats speaks of the "annihilation" of his "identity” (Ford 477). As Samuel Maio says, however, "no poet can actually efface himself or herself from the poem. Any poem is a direct manifestation of the poet's presence" (180). Moreover, “before the existence of modern psychology, He [Keats] could scarcely be expected to discern that during empathy he was really *projecting* his own sensations into an object rather than actually identifying himself with it" (Ford 481). Nevertheless, what is significant here is a sense of leaving the self and imagining being something/someone else for the duration of time in which the poem is composed. "During emphatic identification his [Keats’] normal and everyday self gives way to an ecstatic poetic self produced by an intense imaginative concentration on the aesthetic object; after the fervent empathic moment has passed, he returns, often rather jarringly, to his normal, everyday, unecstatic self" (Ford 480). The imaginary flight from the self to the “other” (encompassing any and everything else in the world), annuls the self before or during the process. This is the key point under scrutiny in the present study.

It is important to state that most of the time Keats’ poetry and poetics do not coincide. In other words Keats does not practice what he preaches. Many of his poems are very personal and defy his concept of negative capability. For instance his famous odes contain several examples of pathetic fallacy - a type of personification - which is almost the stark

opposite of negative capability. Joan Aleshire presents Keats' sonnet "When I Have Fears" as an example in which Keats "was able to use the stuff of his own life and at the same time to find form and language to express not the facts of that life but his concerns" (27) and defines the poem as "remarkably specific and personal" (28). On the other hand there are longer poems by Keats such as *Lamia* which suits and exemplifies his concept of negative capability very well. The analysis of his poetry particularly to see whether he has achieved negative capability in his poems can perhaps be the subject of another study. In this dissertation the focus is on Keats' poetics and thoughts on poetry and specifically on his concept of negative capability as well as its modern interpretations by other poets and critics.

The capability to annul the self or in Ou's words, the idea of impersonality, selflessness or having no-ego, are the major elements that link Keats' poetics and negative capability to the 20th century, to modernism. One of the most prominent figures of modernism is unquestionably T.S Eliot. He is not only a modernist poet but also a prominent critic and a theorist of the movement. In his well known essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot comments on how an artist should progress and provides a guideline: "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (47). Eliot seems to agree with Keats on the basic premise that the artist should keep his personal feelings or ideas about himself apart from his poetry. Eliot further defines this artistic process as a perpetual self-sacrifice. It can also be inferred that Keats and Eliot agree that the self-sacrifice has to be done over and over again each time a creative work is attempted. In this respect self-sacrifice ceases to be a life style, a mystic or religious credo; it remains in the realm of the arts. In a way the artist becomes a conduit by self withdrawal or self effacement and he/she is able to create art. In the same essay Eliot writes:

> [F]or my meaning is, that the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which

> impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality. (50-51)

As evident in the second sentence of the above quotation, when Eliot says that the poet has no personality, he clearly does not deny individuality or existence to the poet as a human being. He distinguishes between the poetic personality and the personality of a poet and marks the former as a medium where "impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (ibid). Eliot's distinction involves two different selves interacting with each other. Yet Eliot supposes that, as the poet progresses in his art the self that needs to cope with daily life withdraws in order for the poetic self to take over temporarily. The camelion poet and Eliot's poet differ in that the latter idealizes poetic depersonalization and a union with literary tradition, whereas the former points to a perception of and a blending into the world as it is perceived without the intervention of the will. However, the notion of selflessness or leaving the will behind is common to both.

After Eliot, Charles Olson in his famous 1950 essay "Projective Verse" also talks about a certain attitude of disinterestedness on part of the poet and writes that "objectivism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects" (180). Olson here refers to the objectivist movement which can be defined as a movement which has developed out of the imagist movement and according to *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* it aims to "present concrete objects not in order to convey abstract ideas but for the sake of their sensuous qualities and haecceity" (849). Olson places objectivism in opposition to lyric poetry the "lyric interference of the self as ego in poetry" (ibid). Moreover he questions the subject

position of the poet and emphasizes that the poet is also an object in the world: “for man is himself an object” (Olson, 180).

Like Keats and Eliot, Olson agrees that the subjective experiences of the poet, his/her feelings and ego should not be part of his poetry. Olson also claims that “if he (poet) stays inside himself, if he is contained within his nature as he is participating in the larger force, he will be able to listen, and his hearing through himself will give him secrets objects share”, and defines the projective art he envisions as the “act, which is the artist’s act in the larger field of objects, (which) leads to dimensions larger than the man” (180). Participation in a larger force and the ability to listen remind us both of negative capability and Eliot’s theory of impersonality in poetry. The self becomes a medium – and one of many other objects in the world - through which art opens up to a reality that is much bigger than the poet’s self. The self, the ego as we know it is sacrificed or curbed in order for art to emerge.

While, Eliot writes that poetry “is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality”, Italian critic Filippo Marinetti in his “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” proposes in the early 20th Century a roadmap for the modernist literature to come, and writes “Destroy the I in literature: that is, all psychology” (58). Around the same time, the Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov asks the rhetorical question “Is a poem not a flight from the I ?” and adds that “without flight from the self there can be no room for progression” (95).

Considering the diversity of poetic output and the variety of movements in the arts and specifically in poetry, it is of course not possible to simply devise categories such as poetry against the “I” and poetry embracing the “I”. Yet analyzing poetry through the notion of the “I” or the self, the involvement of the poet in his/her poems and the way the poet constructs or annuls his/her self, provides a unique perspective on the idea of subjectivity and its aesthetic manifestations that tell us about the power of poetry as an art form.

The concept of negative capability is closely linked to the question of subjectivity and "voice" in poetry. Subjectivity in poetry, in other words the question of the "I", best in turn is explained in terms of the poetic voice. The poetic voice and how it manifests itself in a poem can be seen as indicators of the extent to which the poet wishes to intrude himself/herself into a poem. It gives clues about the self that the poet is trying to conceal or reveal mainly through the persona/personae she/he creates. For instance the persona in a dramatic monologue and a love lyric differ greatly in terms of poetic voice. The choice of poetic voice exploits the possibilities of poetic language to talk about the world and the self. Therefore it is a crucial tool for analysis in this study.

With post-structuralism and then with theories of post modernism the idea of subjectivity gets to be defined in terms and categories which alter the way one thinks about the self and the world. Referring to the second half and especially to the end of the 20th century, Nick Mansfield says that "the theories of subjectivity that have dominated the last thirty years of literary and cultural studies all agree on one thing. They reject the idea of the subject as a completely self-contained being that develops in the world as an expression of its own unique essence" (13). Here "expression" is the key word as the role of language in the formation of the subject has become central in literary and cultural studies in the last couple of decades.

The linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure, specifically the idea of the signifier and the signified changed the way people think about language and opened up new horizons.[1] Psychoanalysis was already knee deep in the theory of subjectivity, with its emphasis on language. Jacques Lacan took things a step further and "challenged the idea that language

[1] Saussure claims that the relation between a signifier (the word "horse") and the signified (a horse) is arbitrary since there is no discernible connection between the word "horse" - composed of specific letters- and a real horse. "Drawing on Saussure's theory of the *SIGN, Derrida argues that the stable self-identity which we attribute to speech as the authentic source of meaning is illusory, since language operates as a self-contained system of internal differences rather than of positive terms or presences" (Baldick 60).

exists in order to communicate", claiming instead that language is "the very material of subjectivity" (Mansfield, 38-39). What Mansfield writes is significant in terms of exposing the stereotypical conception of language: "It is not that subjects exist in the world and then use language as their tool. This may seem at first glance a logical explanation for how language came into being in the first place, but it does not represent the relationship we have with language as individual subjects" (39). When we think of our personal relation with language, we can easily sympathize with Mansfield's explanation. An individual, a subject does not choose the language that she/he is going to learn as a child, she/he acquires it by heritage and through direct experience with the world. Moreover, one is incorporated into a readymade, culturally and historically constructed language. Concepts and ideas about subjectivity are already inherent in this language and are passed on to the individual. The conceptualizations of the "I", "you", "we", and so forth are already there in the language. Therefore the notion of a "romantic" subject, an individual who can genuinely express becomes questionable.

The main premise behind such theories resides in the criticism of the subject-object distinction that was assumed to be self-evident. The idea of the clear cut subject-object distinction materializes in the famous formula of Rene Descartes, *Cogito ergo sum* "I think therefore I am". According to Mansfield, this famous formula "stands at the head of the modern tradition in Western thought, that has seen the conscious process of observation, analysis and logic as the key instruments in the search for objective truth" (14). The common sense notion of cause and effect based on reason and intelligence was taken to be the primary distinguishing factor for human subjectivity. The ultimate subject was the human being and everything else was thus its object. Reason is then the governing faculty.

Even before the 20th century, two important philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer and Frederick Nietzsche, responded negatively to the deification of the faculty of reason.

Schopenhauer has been a great influence on especially the early Nietzsche, and broken ground for modern concepts such as the “unconscious”.[2] Schopenhauer is also one of the first philosophers to criticize the subject/object distinction and the deification of reason. However, his importance for this study resides in his conception of the term “will” and how he relates it to the arts in general. The following quotations from his *The World as Representation and Will* provide a glimpse into his insight that "my own body, of which I am doubly conscious, on the one hand as representation, on the other as will" (18). He adds in another passage that he “started neither from the object nor from the subject, but from representation, which contains and presupposes them both; for the division into object and subject is the first, universal, and essential form of representation" (25). What Schopenhauer means by “representation” in the latter quotation entails one’s perception of the world, all the data that is received by a person. According to him, only after perception – for example only after seeing a sparrow or feeling a tingling in the hand - a distinction between a subject and an object can be made. However his crucial insight comes in the first quotation: a person perceives the world and his/her body, his own limbs as representations similar to the way one perceives objects of the world, but at the same time he feels and experiences his body as something directly connected to this perceiving thing. There is also something that forces the person to eat, sleep, desire and comes from within. He calls this the “will”. Therefore a person is “doubly conscious” of his/her body; the mind and the body are intrinsically integrated, rather than representing a duality.

At this point it is not hard to see how Schopenhauer has been an influence on both Nietzsche and Freud, in the conception of the idea of the “will” in the former and the “unconscious” in the latter. In Schopenhauer the term “will” is complicated, it is used both as

[2] Freud’s well-known concept the “unconscious” is especially important in this dissertation as it designates a part of the human psyche which is not simply governed by reason and cannot be mapped out clearly. Therefore it almost becomes a symbol of the unknown in the human psyche, something like a force that is interpreted differently by each critic/philosopher.

a name for a force - similar to the “will to power” in Nietzsche – and at the same time as an objectification of this meta “will” in each person, represented by urges such as hunger or desire, basically a yearning for something. Schopenhauer writes "my body and my will are one; or, What as representation of perception I call my body… My body is the objectivity of my will" and points to a mysterious unity between them (102). Thus the concept of the “will” provides an interesting vantage point from which to transcend the subject/object distinction.

Schopenhauer’s concept of the “will” and especially it’s relation to art and poetry are important in this study, particularly because of the affinity of his thinking to the idea of negative capability. Schopenhauer in his description of the genius artist almost matches the definitions of negative capability that we reviewed earlier:

> The gift of genius is nothing but the most complete objectivity, i.e, the objective tendency of the mind, as opposed to the subjective directed to our own person, i.e the will. Accordingly, genius is the capacity to remain in a state of pure perception, to lose oneself in perception, to remove from the service of the will the knowledge which originally existed only for this service. In other words, genius is the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard entirely our own personality for a time, in order to remain pure knowing subject, the clear eye of the world. (185)

Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche opposes the deification of the faculty of reason. One of his counter arguments is particularly important for this study as it is based on the primary role of language in forming subjectivity. In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche writes:

> It thinks: but that this 'it' is precisely that famous old 'I' is, to put it mildly, only an assumption, an assertion, above all not an 'immediate' certainty. For even with this 'it thinks' one has already gone too far: this 'it' already contains an interpretation of the event and does not belong to the event itself. The inference here is in accordance with the habit of grammar: 'thinking is an activity, to every activity pertains one who acts, consequently-'. (29)

Nietzsche’s criticism of Descartes’ “I think therefore I am” couldn’t be clearer. He claims that what distinguishes the act of thinking as an effect of the “it” or the “I” is only discernible in language. Normally there is no such distinction, at least it is not something that can be known with “‘immediate’ certainty”; hence the subject is an assumption based on the subject-object

difference created by language. Nietzsche gives a similar example in *On the Genealogy of Morals* about lighting and its flash. Mansfield quotes Nietzsche: "…the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning" (56) and explicates Nietzsche's thought: "It is *language* that gives the illusion that something called lighting exists separate from the fact of its flash. Grammar gives the impression that lighting is a thing, and flashing merely something that it may or may not sometimes do" (57). In this regard, if it was not for language which makes the subject-object distinction a must for syntax, perhaps such a clear difference between what is called subject and object would not be possible. Quoted by Gilbert Chaitin, Lacan in a similar spirit says that "it's because there is a syntax, a primordial order of the signifier, that the subject is maintained as separate, as different from its qualities" (46). According to these views, the subject that we call the self is mainly a product of language.

In the light of theories that undermine the individual subject as a distinct entity, poetical concepts and theories such as negative capability, the camelion poet or impersonality and schools of poetry such as confessional poetry, lyric poetry or even romantic poetry become problematic. If the subject is created by language when he/she enters what Lacan calls the symbolic order, then it would be impossible to talk about a distinction such as the poet and the poetic voice, or the poet holding himself back in order to create a persona, to be objective or efface his/her identity. On the other hand and interestingly enough, both Lacan and Nietzsche also realize that by stating that subjectivity is a linguistic construct leave some very important issues unresolved if not underrepresented. For example Nietzsche's insistence on the concept of the "will" which develops into "will to power" can be seen as an attempt to explain the forces of the self that cannot be grasped solely by the idea of a subject created by language. Similarly Lacan's emphasis on the pre-verbal stage of the imaginary where the infant is not aware of his/her subjectivity (before the mirror stage) and the third order of the "real", which

is described by Sarup calls the "reality which we can never know is the real-it lies beyond language" (26) points at a wider and deeper understanding of subjectivity which undercuts the notion of a subject created merely by language.

If we are to accept that the subject's identity is established by language and it is syntax that creates the individual, then poetry - as an art which is based on language but is not necessarily constituted by syntax and is imbued with the potential of transgressing the rules of it - becomes a way for the poet to experience the limits of his/her own subjectivity/self beyond the self=language equation. On the other hand if we accept that there is a subject prior to language, then negative capability proposes ways of holding back the self and letting pure representation or poetry come into play. Examples of both can be found in the poems discussed in this study. As this is a dissertation which focuses on poetry, my aim is not to contribute to theory but to build my arguments around the concept of negative capability as a method for poetic analysis, with special emphasis on poetic voice and the notion of persona.

In the second chapter, William Carlos Williams' poetry is discussed as a unique attempt to circumvent the self and attain pure representation as Keats or Eliot have imagined and as a consequence opens up a new perspective on negative capability. The idea of objectivity in a poem, the voice of the poet, and terms such as impersonality, mimesis, isolation and estrangement are discussed with reference to Williams' poems. In this chapter the Imagist poetry is the reference school of poetry.

The third chapter focuses on the unique middle position John Berryman holds through by his famous character Henry in *The Dream Songs*, between the poet and the created persona, and between lyric/confessional poetry and dramatic poetry. Here confessional poetry is the reference school of poetry. The basic idea behind this chapter is the notion that the creation of so many different selves or identities (without fully appropriating any one of them)

eventually functions as a means for transcending the self, hence bringing back the idea of negative capability in a new way.

The fourth chapter on Mark Strand examines the poet's original way of looking at negative capability and its possible limits in poetry. In this chapter, the key notions of negation, self-effacement and absent presence are discussed with a focus on the poetic voice. A variety of terms such as "trace", writing under erasure, "open", "real", deconstruction and "will" are employed in this chapter to shed light on Strand's technique of self effacement leading to negative capability.

In poetry there are abundant opportunities and almost infinite possibilities for self creation and effacement. As much as it can be an escape from the self, this may also be a journey into the self. Sometimes the attempt to escape is only a return, and sometimes to reflect the self is to create it. This study aims to trace and highlight different attempts at self effacement, with special attention to poetic voice, in the poems of William Carlos Williams, John Berryman and Mark Strand that can be considered original examples of negative capability in the 20th century.

CHAPTER II

W. C. WILLIAMS: "SAY IT, NO IDEAS BUT IN THINGS"

This chapter is a study of Williams' attempt to show the world as it is, independent and free, by withdrawing the self/subject from the poem. In this chapter Williams' poetry will be studied in several sections each referring to a certain aspect of his poetry all in lieu with the general thesis that a good portion of his poetry – some call the most successful or characteristic – manifests a withdrawal/absence of the self from the poem, a type of impersonality which constitutes the prime link with negative capability. The first section will discuss Williams' poetica, followed by a discussion of what is meant by the involvement of the personal voice, mainly through the use of the personal pronoun "I" in a poem. The next section is going to concentrate respectively on visual and imagistic elements in Williams' poetry where the act of seeing, the objective stance replaces the personal voice and "I" becomes an "eye". The following section is going to be on the technique of isolation, showing how Williams isolates an object/scene and turns it into a poem in the absence of the self and the crucial role this technique plays in achieving negative capability. The last section is going to consider Williams' poems especially from the perspective of the reader, discussing in what ways negative capability effects a reader's perception and understanding of a poem. However, I would like to add the following caveat that material under these headings cannot be contained in water-tight compartments and that there will be some crossing over, some inevitable overlapping. Therefore it would be better to consider the sections in this chapter as working together building up to constitute a whole as each section adds a layer and is naturally intertwined with the other sections.

Poetica of William Carlos Williams and Negative Capability

"Say it, no ideas but things" is a simple motto about the kind of poetry William Carlos Williams envisaged and worked to attain. Proclaimed in the first book of *Paterson* it became one of the important poetic slogans of 20th century American poetry. Its appeal no doubt lies in the emphasis it puts on objects rather than the subject. In this respect the motto is not only emblematic for what he aims at in his poems but it can be considered essential for both the imagist and objectivist movements in poetry for it succinctly articulates the gist of those movements. David Perkins explains Williams' motto with the following words:

> We are in the world: our senses register it. But like all arguers of this tendency, Williams means that we live too much in our minds, not our bodies, in concepts, memories, worries, hopes, desires, not in the fullness of the moment. The thing offers itself, now and always, in all particularities of its being, but we are too busy, abstracted, repentant, or dreamy, too beset by our own internal uproar or too stereotyped and conventional in our responses. So we do not take it in. It is an old theme. Maybe any perception we can have of anything must inevitably be a stereotyped one, so great is the pressure of culture on us, of "tradition". (264)

According to Perkins, the motto pertains to a moment of clarity where the subject-object distinction is reduced to a minimum and one is able to perceive the world as free from the self. Perkins claims that Williams' intention is to come out of or overcome the stereotypical and traditional way of seeing objects. Yet the main obstacle against such an attempt at breaking free is that "we are too busy, abstracted, repentant, or dreamy, too beset by our own internal uproar or too stereotypes and conventional in our responses" (264). An individual, because he is so preoccupied with himself, his worries, his concerns about his future, fails to grasp the immediate moment where things posses the chance of offering themselves as themselves. Therefore the individual's own conception of him/her, his/her identity ironically become a hindrance to him/herself in establishing direct relation with the world, with "being", unmediated by ideas. Linda Wagner writes that Williams "believed that a poet's personality

should never draw the reader's attention from the poem. [to] avoid making himself more important than his art" (12)... What Williams proposes is a different way of looking and enjoying things out in the world with the help of an impersonal attitude. Similar to Keats' camelion poet, Williams calls the poet who is able to attain such a perspective the "writer of imagination":

> The writer of imagination would find himself released from observing things for the purpose of writing them down later. He would be there to enjoy, to taste, to engage the free world, not a world which her carries like a bag of food, always fearful lest he drop something or someone get more than he.
>
> A world detached from the necessity of recording it, sufficient to itself, removed from him (as it most certainly is) with which he has bitter and delicious relations and from which he is independent - moving at will from one thing to another - as he pleases, unbound – complete. (*The Collected Poems* Vol.1 207)

Williams does not want the writer to observe the world and its objects to write them down later. He wants the writer to engage the "world", enjoy and taste it and not categorize or constrain it according to the self's needs or the subjective point of view. When he looks out he sees an independent world "sufficient to itself, removed from him" (ibid.). "Him" here refers to the poet/writer of imagination portrayed as being free to move in this world without an agenda. "Removed from him" implies that the writer of imagination is not connected to the world in the classic way, seeing it as a place for his "bitter and delicious relations" but considering it a "free world" where he too becomes "independent, unbound – complete" (ibid).

What Williams says naturally reminds one of the term negative capability. The writer of imagination has a similar stance towards the world. Like Keats, Williams does not want the writer/poet to impose his/her ideas, perceptions or identity on to the world but to receive the world - with it contradictions and all – as it is. This point is in almost one to one agreement with how negative capability is defined in Keats' letter. The writing processes they propose are also similar. Williams aims to present objects as they are and this goal is enabled through

imagination. Therefore imagination here is not something set against the world outside and the objects of the free world; on the contrary it is what we would call the sympathetic identification or sympathetic imagination which is a key part of the writing process in view of negative capability. After contact with the "free world" poetry should come naturally, not as a result of a deliberate act of recording or reasoning. This is in line with what Keats says: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (93).Williams aims to hold himself back – the self is first of all an idea – and bring the world as it is into his poetry.

"No ideas but in things" is the motto for Williams: to write of "things", objects of the world, materializing what he calls the "free world" through his verse. In the second stanza of "Offering", one of the poems on his own poetica, Williams writes:

> The red, the yellow, the purple – blues –
> So do my words catch and bear
> Both leaves and flowers that are fallen –
> In all places before the feet
> Of the passing many – to bear them
> Yet awhile before they are trodden. (11-16)

In this early (1914) poem, Williams designates a special role for his words which reflects his approach to poetry and tentatively marks the guidelines for his future poems. He wants his words to "catch and bear" things from the world, such as leaves and flowers and even colors. In this metaphor Williams' words almost become his hands that touch the world, bestowing a nearly tangible and visual character to his poetry. If taken one step further, it can be said that he wants not only to see and touch things but also desires his words to become the things themselves. In this regard he leaves the first two lines of the above stanza loosely connected, creating the impression that his words are also colors. Since he is "materializing" autumn and the falling leaves, he puns on "blues" which imbues into his lines a sense of sadness and melancholy through his reference to the songs we call "blues" and to the color blue itself, which may signify sadness as well.

If read in a symbolic way, a mode of reading which Williams' claims to detest in many instances but is an inevitable consequence of publishing one's poetry, the rest of the poem can be read a roadmap to what he wants to achieve in his poetry. The fact that he touches and catches the leaves and the flowers with his words is a sign of his ambition to reflect things according to his motto, nature and objects as they are. This idea of "in itself" can be found in the works of many philosophers. Schopenhauer claims that the world has two aspects. One is the side which is available to us as presentation, comprised of all the sensory stimuli that we receive and perceive, such as seeing and hearing things. On the other side lies the "innermost being, its kernel, the thing-in-itself" of objects, which means for example that only a tree knows what is to be a tree or only I know what it means or feels to be me (31). The representational side of objects (the world) is open to all, but the individual nature of the thing is not and perhaps Williams' attempt can be considered an attempt to gain insight into this "thingness". Rod Townley explains Williams' aims in poetry in the following manner: "In his poetry, he tried to 'become' the objects he describes. His intent was not to 'describe' at all, but to fuse the imagination with the things he was contemplating so that his words would 'express' those objects, almost speak for them" (141). This desire to become the things he describes, in certain periods of his poetic career, establishes Williams' link with the idea of negative capability and constitutes the main argument of this chapter.

In "Both leaves and flowers are fallen- / In all places before the feet / of the passing many – …", "many" refers both to readers, and poets before his time and at present. They have written and read poems of a descriptive and mimetic nature but failed to grasp the thing in itself as they have not attempted to catch the thing. It also proclaims that he will try to do otherwise. In this endeavor time is also of the essence as Williams says in the last line "before they are trodden" because the "passing many" are going to destroy the thing under their feet without even seeing it, with no recognition of the thing in itself. With this poem, Williams

makes things visible and tangible, with blues music in the background. This poem also accounts for the concern Williams has for nature, how it is wrecked by mankind and modernity, a subject many times dealt with in his later poems. At the same time it portrays his early vexation with poetry cut off from the local, tangible and the natural, what he criticizes in T.S Eliot and Ezra Pound as “high modernism”.

Rod Townley highlights Thomas Whitaker’s comment on "the frightening joy of hearing the world talk to itself" as one of Williams’ goals in poetry (120). On the surface, “The Botticellian Trees” (1930) may be considered one such poem that can be affiliated with this aim. In this poem Williams tries to hear the tree speak for itself with its leaves as words or as an alphabet. Yet there is a crucial difference between letting something speak and giving voice to something. Here are the first four couplets of the poem:

> The alphabet of
> the trees
>
> is fading in the
> song of the leaves
>
> the crossing
> bars of the thin
>
> letters that spelled
> winter (1-8)

In these four couplets of this poem, Williams creates a striking blend of language and “things” out in the world, concentrating on a tree, depicting the wind move among the leaves and making sounds which can be spelled as words in the alphabet of the tree. He is not only trying to catch leaves, trees, wind or winter with his words but through his gaze which turns into a meditative, almost miraculous act, objects reveal themselves as words, as letters and language that is decipherable by the poet. The coming winter is literally read from the movement and sound caused by the wind that Williams follows with his eyes and ears, simultaneously

turning them into words. Yet this is not personification, but rather a translation of something non-human into human language.

Although this poem constitutes an important stepping stone towards the pure presentation Williams wants to achieve with his poetry, it still lacks certain elements. For example when we measure the poem against the motto, “say it, no ideas but in things” the act of saying and the elements of language dominate the poem instead of the things. Things are not described as they are, they are not given voice but depicted with metaphors culled from language itself, for example Williams uses words such as “alphabet”, “songs” or “letters” or further in the poem “sentences”, “muffled words” and “praise” to describe the tree. The final lines of the poem, “In summer the song / sings itself / above the muffled words” (349), reach the point where the world becomes a text to be read or listened to. For instance if the trees posses an alphabet and spell out winter, then in the integrity of the poem “muffled words” pertain to the sound the leaves make in the summer breeze. Again, it is noteworthy that this is not simple personification where the persona speaks not through his own mouth but through things in the world, and hence the presence of the persona can be felt clearly with his direct reference to sounds and language. In this poem, it can be said that Williams shows that “the world talks to itself,” and tells us its language, but his voice is present in the poem.

This takes us to the question of personal voice which is closely related to negative capability. The presence of the persona in a poem is one of the fundamental indicators as to what extent the poet desires to be in the poem and it directly affects what is desired to be achieved by the poem/poet. If it is a dramatic monologue there should definitely be a character or if it is a lyric poem an “I” should be there. But when the aim is to write the world as outside the self, as it is, without the involvement of the self – the way it is imagined in negative capability and the idea of the camelion poet – then what we expect from the poem is minimum involvement in the poems. Williams writes: "All I'm interested in - or almost all- is

impersonally, as impersonally as possible, to get the meaning over and see it flourish." (Wagner 12). Therefore in the analysis of Williams' poetry one prominent criterion is going to be his voice or presence in the poems. The presence or absence of the personal voice will be our key in assessing his poems. It is to be noted that at the outset, however, Williams did not always adhere to his own pronouncements and sometimes allowed the personal voice to intrude into his poems.

The following two poems from different periods of Williams' life are good examples showing how and to what extent the "I" may enter a Williams poem. They will not only help us understand what we mean by personal voice, but by forming a contrast, also show what we should expect from the absence of a personal voice. The first poem, "Woman Walking", was written in 1917:

An oblique cloud of purple smoke
across a milky silhouette
of house sides and tiny trees—
a little village—
that ends in a saw edge
of mist-covered trees
on a sheet of grey sky.

To the right, jutting in,
a dark crimson corner of roof.
To the left, half a tree:

—what a blessing it is
to see you in the street again,
powerful woman,
coming with swinging haunches,
breasts straight forward,
supple shoulders, full arms
and strong, soft hands (I've felt them)
carrying the heavy basket.
I might well see you oftener!
And for a different reason
than the fresh eggs
you bring us so regularly.

Yes, you, young as I,
with boney brows,
kind grey eyes and a kind mouth;

you walking out toward me
from that dead hillside!
I might well see you oftener.

The first two stanzas of the poem consist of scene painting, the precursor of the imagist poetry. In these first two stanzas Williams describes with vivid words a semi-rural scene, a little village with smoke over the houses, and trees and the sky. The persona is neither seen nor felt by the reader, the stance seems very objective. Yet in the middle of the poem this distanced stance changes abruptly with the persona exclaiming, "– what a blessing it is/ to see you in the street again". With this personal comment, and direct address – indicated by the use of the personal pronoun "you"- the persona suddenly shows up as a first person singular voice. Then, the persona describes a woman walking. With the use of adjectives pertaining more or less to body parts, physical strength and movement, such as "powerful", "strong", "supple", "swinging" and "heavy", Williams presents the image of a woman doing manual labor or menial work, someone tangible and very real. However, her hands are soft, which may be attributed to her youth that the reader learns about at the end of the poem.

In the middle of the stanza the persona speaks of his own experience of her soft hands and in brackets, says "(I've felt them)". This is important because it brings the persona into the poem as a character for the first time. In the last four lines of the same stanza the involvement of the persona as a character in the poem escalates. He says, "I might well see you oftener / And for a different reason / than the fresh eggs / you bring us so regularly." With the personal pronoun "I" the persona becomes a person, a character in the poem who not only observes but wants to have some kind of concrete relation with the woman.

The last stanza starts off with the line "Yes, you, young as I" which makes the poem immediately very personal. It almost takes the shape of a letter from the persona to the woman. The direct address "you" and the word "yes" which implies a conversation support this imagined intimacy. Here the woman is displayed with her more feminine features such as

“kind grey eyes and a kind mouth” compared to her depiction in the previous stanza. The last line of the poem is a repetition “I might well see you oftener” which hints at the intentions of the poet. Before this line, the persona had already declared that he wanted to see the woman “for a different reason” but this reason was not clear. However, as the poem builds up with the soft hands, the fact that they are both young and the repeated wish to see her oftener begin to seem more like desire. This creates another possible way of reading this poem, as something more than a bucolic encounter, namely as the emergence or realization of love/desire that grows with each line.

The movement in the story, the voice of the persona and his involvement go parallel with the level of intimacy. To recap, the first two stanzas are depictions, where the persona is not involved and there is no story and the reader is observing from a distance, listening to the words of the unidentified speaker of the poem. With the third stanza the persona enters the story as a character and interacts with the world he is describing, yet he can only be seen as part of the scenery. However, the moment he distinguishes himself as an “I” and marks the other as “you”, the reader realizes the poet as a character and the poet loses the observer stance that he initially provided. At this point the reader either has to identify with the persona and try to forget him/herself in this subjective experience, or try to stay outside and witness the subjective narrative of an experience in verse.

In the last stanza, as the persona articulates his own thoughts and feelings, the reader is left with the impression of having witnessed something very personal. Displaying the personal shows itself even in the vocabulary used, which becomes much less descriptive: “Yes, you, young as I / … / you walking out toward me/ … / I might well see you oftener” (66). At the end of the poem the “I” almost invades the poem with his desire for the “powerful woman”. The character in the poem asserts his will, renouncing his objective stance. The “powerful

woman" at the beginning of the poem transforms into an object of desire for the persona and the voice of the persona becomes one with the voice of the poet.

In the introduction to his poetry collection *The Wedge* Williams says that "there is nothing sentimental about a machine, and: A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words" (Williams, 54). "Woman Walking" is crafted masterfully and it works as if it is a machine from the first line. It is true that this particular poem, just like many of his other poems, function like the working of little cogs, indeed like a small machine taking the reader from an outside observer position into to the heart of a story word by word. The structure of the poem, in accordance with Williams' definition can be considered a machine, which in this case, slowly winds the reader to its core. Yet although the machine itself is not sentimental, the poem, with the powerful imagery and the desire it invokes, arouses some kind of emotion in the reader. Moreover it begins to tell a story. Although it starts off almost as an imagist poem, it turns into a short lyric/narrative poem. Hence this poem is exemplary in the sense that it embodies two different styles at the same time; the almost imagist description on the first half and the more lyric and romantic second half. The voice of the poet and his involvement in the poem is a clear determinant of these different styles.

A later poem "A Negro Woman" (1955) is from William's mature period when he employed his technique of the "variable foot" as meter. This poem also focuses on a female figure similar to "Woman Walking" but with a different register of personal involvement by the poet. This difference is crucial in showing what is meant by personal voice in this study.

Carrying a bunch of marigolds
wrapped
in an old newspaper:
She carries them upright,
bareheaded,
the bulk
of her thighs
causing her to waddle
as she walks
looking into

the store window which she passes
on her way.
What is she
but an ambassador
from another world
a world of pretty marigolds
of two shades
which she announces
not knowing what she does
other
than walk the streets
holding the flowers upright
as a torch
so early in the morning.

The poignant the central image of the poem is “a bunch of marigolds” that the woman is holding in her hands “wrapped in an old newspaper”. The poem emerges from this intense and colorful image and builds upon it. Each line supports the following one, revealing successive details of the scene about a Negro woman holding “a bunch of marigolds” as she walks and looks into a store window.

From the very beginning the persona assumes the observer position. There aren’t any personal pronouns such as “I”, “you” or “we” in the poem that would hint at the involvement of the persona as a character. Up until the middle of the poem the persona is just describing what he sees without any personal comment. In this regard it resembles the first part of the “Woman Walking”. With “What is she / but an ambassador / from another world”, this impersonal approach gives way to a comparison. The woman is an ambassador from another world, “a world of pretty marigolds”. The flowers she is holding become a symbol of this other world and she as the torch bearer, has almost a ceremonial office. The torch metaphor for the marigolds is a visual image, as marigolds are usually in “two shades” of red and yellow resembling from a distance a burning torch. Yet the woman is neither aware of the fact that she is carrying a torch of marigolds nor of the office bestowed upon her: “not knowing

what she does / other / than walk the streets". For the woman this walk is perhaps part of her daily routine, something trivial or common for her.

With the involvement of the persona the poet (forfeiting the observer stance), the woman turns into a spectacular object in the imagination of Williams. Even if this other worldliness is simply a trope to depict how a poor black woman looks strange and out of place in perhaps a white/rich neighborhood and how white people and black people are segregated, it is still a deduction from the traditional and cultural codes the poet is immersed in. The persona, who was observing the woman at the beginning of the poem, later sees the woman as something else, something specifically other than herself by applying his personal vision. Here, not only is the presence of the poet discernible, but the poet's vision or point of view which we can call his/her "will" shapes the "thing" it sees. Williams does not simply recount or present what he sees but adds a layer of meaning and in a way draws a conclusion about the woman. When compared with the "Woman Walking", here the poet does not join the poem as a character or become involved in the story/scene yet he is clearly not absent from the poem.

The persona makes himself felt in a very elegant way, with a metaphor which becomes a visual symbol and blends in with the visual character of the poem. Williams sets the following principles for keeping his distance from his subject while writing: "Do not become involved, too intimately involved, in your subject but hold it away from you as an artist should always do. An artist should always speak in symbols even when he speaks most passionately; otherwise his vision becomes blurred" (Wagner 12). Compared to the previous poem "Woman Walking", in this poem Williams is able to achieve what he preaches much better in the sense that the persona maintains his observer position to a certain extent and makes his presence felt only by a metaphor. He does not lose his distance but supports his observation with a tint of creativity.

In “A Negro Woman” even though there is no usage of the pronoun “I” the poet is there. In terms of negative capability and the camelion poet, despite the fact that the poet is minimally present in the poem, he is not totally absent; the “I” of the poet can be felt. However, the two kinds of presences in these two poems are very different. Each type of involvement shapes the poem in a unique way.

Williams with his imagist tendencies enhances and emphasizes the visual element by effacing himself far more and takes the idea of “no ideas, but in things” to its extreme especially in his more imagist/objectivist years between 1920’s and 1950’s. In this period the “I” becomes almost Williams’ eyes, only looking and expressing the world as it is and tells nothing more. Williams thus comes close to achieving negative capability in his own way.

Moving From the “I” to Williams’ Eye

Perkins’ contribution to our understanding of the development of Williams’ poetry in respect to the presence of the first person “I” is substantial. He claims that with the 1921 collection *Sour Grapes* “the talky “I” was less present” and “[t]he engaging doctor telling his feelings and responses was replaced by relatively impersonal descriptions” (252). Although it is true that Williams’ early poetry up to his breakthrough *Spring and All* in 1923 consists of poems with frequent use of the personal pronoun, and direct involvement or commentary by the persona, it would be erroneous to claim that later he totally abandoned this direct usage of the “I”. Even in his last collection of poems *Pictures from Brueghel* there are poems such as “Song”, “Poem”, “The Stone Crock” or “The Fruit” that contain the personal pronoun “I” or “we” and include direct addresses to a “you” in the poem.

On the other hand, Perkins’ remark that Williams’ “[p]oems without a first person speaker made their effect by the interactions among their images” points to a key factor in

Williams' poetry. The distant non-involved persona, talking from an almost impersonal observant stance naturally foregrounds images and visual elements. The simple, very short and succinct descriptions become Williams' forte. Wagner seems to agree with Perkins: "The effectiveness of what Williams called 'a fascinating sort of composition' is derived from the presentation of details without comment: ' nothing 'about' the subject, a bare placing of the matter before the attention, as an object, that which with wit a man might see for himself- swiftly and to the point'" (60). The reader, by reading the lines as if they were part of a puzzle that gets closer to completion with each new word, uncovers images that are linked together to form a picture or a scene which sometimes involves a story. In this way Williams' poems are very fluid and vivid. The "interaction" between the images makes the eye and the poem, and if there is one, the story, flow naturally. Hence, the "interaction" Perkins refers to grants Williams' poems much of their power. The following poem from 1940, "A Portrait of the Times" is an excellent example of this kind of interaction and movement:

Two W.P.A men
stood in the new
sluiceway

overlooking
the river –
One was pissing

while the other
showed
by his red

jagged face the
immemorial tragedy
of lack-love

while an old
squint-eyed woman
in a black

dress
and clutching
a bunch of

late chrysanthemums
to her
fatted bosoms

turned her back
on them
at the corner

W.P.A is the abbreviation for "Work Progress Administration" which was a program initiated by President Roosevelt in 1935 as part of his New Deal policies to rebuild the economy of the United States during the Great Depression. It aimed to employ mainly the unskilled and unemployed part of the population in public works projects such as construction of roads, public buildings and canals.

The two W.P.A men are probably standing in the sluiceway where they have worked, considering that it is designated as "new" by the poet. The first tercet of the poem simply opens up with this image. Yet the whole poem is a sequence of linked images. Not only the lines, but each tercet is to be connected to the following one with enjambment. However, the lines and especially the stanzas end at such convenient points that the reader does not feel a break in the poems. Instead, this makes the reader focus on a particular image. For example the first stanza ends with the word "sluiceway" but when the second stanza is read the reader realizes that the sluiceway is "overlooking / the river", thus the depiction of it does not cease; on the contrary, Williams starts to draw a larger picture full of syntactically linked images. The diction is simple almost colloquial, the lack of punctuation is a significant factor in establishing the enjambments and thus maintaining the fluidity of the poem.

The second stanza ends with the line "One was pissing" creating expectancy for more details but the third stanza starts with the line "while the other" abruptly changing the focus onto the other W.P.A worker. The juxtaposition of the two workers is rather interesting. While one is described with a single line performing a private activity in public, the other, for

the duration of two stanzas, which is a lot for the quick pace of this particular poem, is depicted in detail:

> while the other
> showed
> by his red
>
> jagged face the
> immemorial tragedy
> of lack-love (7-12)

These two stanzas are especially significant in respect to the persona of the poem. This is the only instance where the so far observant poet, makes his presence felt as a persona with the comment about "immemorial tragedy / of lack-love". Williams, first of all, describes the face as jagged but more importantly, he tells the reader how he interprets that face, that the reason for the jaggedness of the red face of the worker is "the immemorial tragedy / of lack-love". Not only does the persona make an assumption, perhaps even an association he deems noteworthy, but at the same time, a generalization or rather a personal abstraction that lack of love is an immemorial tragedy.

For the rest of the poem the persona recedes back to the observant position. The last four stanzas consist of a minute description of a woman holding chrysanthemums, seeing the workers and turning her back at them. The persona does not offer any personal comments but basically sees and tells the reader about these trivial happenstances which take place simultaneously or at very short time intervals. So if the poem is cut into half from the middle, right after the fourth stanza, there appear two simultaneous events connected with the conjunction word "while" at the beginning of stanza five. Yet because of the way Williams cuts the lines, creating different sets of images, the reader does not feel the time as continuous but to be suspended through these images connected to each other. For example the duration of this poem in real life and the perception of the scene would be very short, but here, the time for perception is slightly prolonged.

When compared to the poem “A Negro Woman”, with respect to the presence of the voice of the poet in the poem, here, the persona makes his presence felt in a similar manner with a comment that he makes about the scene he sees/imagines.

Williams creates a poem which is almost like a tangible art work such as a painting where time is suspended and the reader focuses on a series of images. Instead of the “I”, the eye of the poet is there. The reader follows the eye of the poet and thus a whole picture made up of words reveals itself. “Autumn” (1937) is an excellent example of such a pictorial poem.

A stand of people
by an open

grave underneath
the heavy leaves

celebrates
the cut and fill

for the new road
where

an old man
on his knees

reaps a basket –
ful of

matted grasses for
his goats

Similar to the poems discussed previously, this poem also consists of a simple observation of a scene by the poet. The diction is quite simple befitting the rural scene described. The lines are very short, naturally forcing enjambments.

What is striking about this poem is how the scene that forms the poem is built word by word by Williams. Until one comes to the end, what the poem portrays in its entirety is not revealed, because each line adds a new detail to the poem and changes the scene. This is done in such a way that the reader is always waiting for the other shoe to fall. At the end of the first

stanza we are made to stop and wonder: “Open what?”, and after a stanza break which forces us to pause we are confronted by a metaphysical grave. At the beginning the reader imagines “a stand of people” by an open grave, but when he/she comes to the third couplet he/she has to imagine them “celebrating” because the grave turns out to be a metaphor for the earth dug to build a new road. Similarly the old man is not introduced until towards the end of the poem, so besides the new road, at the beginning, one only sees a stand of people, but not the old man nor the goats nearby, or notice the matted grass.

One of the main factors contributing to the pictorial quality of the poem is the lack of any personal pronouns. Instead of the “I”, there is the eye of the poet that moves from object to object and changes focus revealing new details. So the persona takes a very objective stance, almost effaces himself completely in order to let the things show themselves. Townley writes that "the thing perceived invades the perceiving consciousness and overmasters it. For the poet it is a temporary death, and eye for an I for which is no remedy but the speed of time and space" (150). What Townley calls “a temporary death” is nothing short of self effacement or negative capability. Figuratively and perhaps ironically the poet scarifies his “I” for an eye. Through this, he loses his individuality, his voice and when Townley writes that there is no “remedy but the speed of time and space” he underlines the fact that despite the loss of personal voice or direct involvement in the poem, the poet by becoming an eye, gains freedom to move fast and widely as he/she sees/observes/imagines and perhaps even becomes part of what is seen. In order to support his point Townley quotes what Williams wrote in a letter to Marianne Moore: "Things have no names for me… As a reward for this anonymity I feel as much a part of things as trees and stones" (149). Williams feels as if he is giving voice to things as he holds himself back and become part of things – a stand - which aligns him perfectly with negative capability.

On the other hand the statement “things have no names for me” may at first glance seem contradictory in a poet who aims to materialize the world through words. However, here, Williams emphasizes his wish to see things as they are, without already constructed conceptions. Townley explains this with an example: "Take the context of romantic love away from the rose and you have freed the rose to be what it is" (146). If we follow Townley’s example, Williams would like to see the rose as itself as part of a scene he describes, how it emerges there, as if seeing it for the first time.

The visual and the pictorial are of great importance for Williams. Wagner underlines the fact that painting and poetry are similar artistic endeavors for Williams (73). In his essay "William Carlos Williams and Charles Demuth: Cross-Fertilization in the Arts", Breslin highlights the affinity between the painter Charles Demuth and Williams, where he designates Williams’ poetry as “cubist realist”, after the “cubist” movement in painting. From his own autobiography we know that Williams painted (actually wanted to be a painter in the first place). Naturally he had a general interest in painting and met many of the artists of his time. One of his late collections of poems is called *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (1962) and many of the poems in it are inspired by the paintings of the famous Dutch master Pieter Brueghel. What is interesting about these poems is that they are almost like attempts at pure descriptions of the scenes depicted in the paintings. For instance the following poem, “Peasant Wedding”, is inspired by Brueghel’s painting with the same name:

> Pour the wine bridegroom
> where before you the
> bride is enthroned her hair
>
> loose at her temples a head
> of ripe wheat is on
> the wall beside her the
>
> guests seated at long tables
> the bagpipers are ready
> there is a hound under

the table the bearded Mayor
is present women in their
starched headgear are

gabbing all but the bride
hands folded in her
lap is awkwardly silent simple

dishes are being served
clabber and what not
from a trestle made of an

unhinged barn door by two
helpers one in a red
coat a spoon in his hatband

One can easily recognize the objective stance the poet takes - the key signature of the analysis in this chapter - the poet simply depicts what he sees without getting involved. At very beginning Williams almost becoming one with the scene himself, calls out to the bridegroom "Pour the wine bridegroom", which starts the poem. We witness this kind of simple comment or a statement indicating that the poem is based on a painting in many of Williams' Brueghel poems as well. After this introduction where the poet makes himself felt, he recedes into the background, to the negative capability position. It is the same here as well, there is no "I", not even a personal comment, the eye takes the place of the persona and reports what it sees.

"Guests seated at long tables", "dishes are being served", and "hands folded in her" are examples of short depictive lines heavily enjambed. It resembles Williams' other imagist poems and in this regard, if one did not have the prior knowledge that this is a scene from a painting, he/she could have thought that this is a wedding that Williams imagined or witnessed. The poetic registers and the syntax are very similar to his other Imagist poems. The objective stance and the pictorial quality, enable the capturing of a scene just as it is with the lenses of the poet. The eyes of the poet become the means of capturing images.

"Simplex Sigilum Veri: A Catalogue" appears to be a list of various things and it is an excellent example for the eye movement. The poem which consists of nine quatrains is

relatively long and the first two quatrains that I am going to quote here provide the general idea for the rest of the poem.

> an american papermatch packet
> closed, gilt with a panel insert,
> the bank, a narrow building
> black, in a blue sky, puffs of
>
> white cloud, the small windows
> in perspective, bright green grass
> a sixinch metal tray, polished
> bronze, holding a blue pencil (1-8)

Both quatrains are built in a similar manner, stringing things and objects of various kinds. Apparently, they are depicted randomly without adherence to any kind of descriptive pattern such as first telling the color than the shape or how they are related to the next item. Reminding us of the modernist narrative style, stream of consciousness, the invisible poet's eye moves around and puts them on paper one by one. However the distinctive element in the poem is the resemblance to stream of consciousness but should perhaps be called as a stream of things connected to each other by the poet's eye. The "I" has once more turned into an eye that picks up things of the world and the act of choosing and focusing initiates an artistic process. This time the eye as much as it sees things, also connects them together. Rather than a poem, it reminds us of an impressionistic painting; a painting for instance of office life where one is confined in a room and observes one's environment and also, looks out of the window. In this regard there is no story and even though the poem is not a short one, there is no narrative in the classical style. The poem aims to achieve its poetic effect through dense enjambments, line and word isolation. The enjambments in this poem are so forceful that if we are to disregard the visual connections between objects, they almost become the sole effect that associates the objects to each other. It reminds one of his Brueghel poems.

In "Simplex Sigilum Veri: A Catalogue" the poet's voice (as the first person singular) is totally absent in the sense that there is no "I" or any other personal pronoun. Williams

presents the thing and uses no more words than it would take to sustain a visual consistency and continuity. He wants to make a catalogue of things and any direct involvement of his character or voice would ruin the objectivity he pursues.

The Latin part of the title of the poem "Simplex Sigilum Veri" literally translates "simplicity is the sign of truth" and in daily usage means "keep it simple". The title fits Williams' poetics overall. For Williams, to state things as simply as possible – in "Simplex Sigilum Veri: A Catalogue" simply by listing - is equated with truth. However, especially after postmodernism, according to many contemporary theorists it is hard to accept that any use of language is capable of expressing truth or reality, let alone that there is such a thing as the truth or the real. What Williams means would be called the reality effect.

From the vantage point of negative capability, the reality effect can be described as the observing and of writing down of what is there, without the introduction of personal feelings or ideas. It is an effect because the thing written down is not the tangible object itself (literally) but it is the word for the thing. In this regard, to state the thing as simply as possible, mostly how it is perceived, withholding as much feeling or opinion on the part of the poet, best creates this reality effect.

Reality or the real are indeed elusive terms and hard to define. However, the way reality as used by Williams refers more or less to the idea of objectivity. This objectivity is also a mark of negatively capable camelion poet. The reality effect is based on the assumption that when a poet or any common person enters a room, although the point of focus or the perspective may differ, he/she sees the same objects, a definable material world. After this point the basic premise is that the fewer words a person uses – as is the case with Williams' poetry or in the majority of imagist poems- the more objective and less personal the poem seems, hence creating a reality effect.

The following short poem called “Poem” (1930) is a good example of capturing a scene in slow motion:

As the cat
climbed over
the top of

the jamcloset
first the right
forefoot
carefully
then the hind
stepped down

into the pit of
the empty
flowerpot

Here the eye of the poet follows a cat’s “careful” movements and this makes the entire poem; there is nothing else. There is no “I” other than the poet’s eye. The only involvement by the poet in the poem is his rather neutral comment “carefully”. Yet even this comment contributes to the pictorial quality as it creates a sense of slowness befitting of the cat’s movements. Otherwise, as they are agile animals, one can mistakenly assume that the action in the poem happens very fast, almost in the blink of an eye. On the contrary this slowness, the minute details, such as “first the right / forefoot” and “then the hind / stepped down”, broken into very short lines to emphasize the individual actions and the time it takes to execute them, are deliberately sought. Thus a cat’s movements are captured by the eye, in real time, and turned almost into a moving picture in words.

James Breslin describes Williams’ what we call here the “eye” poems in the following manner: "The poem records an instant of perception - of color, movement, and sound, of force - that flashes by sudden, swift, and unexpected yet is lifted from the rush of experience and of time (where it might speed by 'unheeded'), lifted by art from fleeting instant to eternal moment" (259). As Breslin underlines, Williams turns “an instant of perception” – visual and

image based - into a poem and offers it to the reader almost as a tangible object. Thus it can be said that this poem, as much as it reflects Williams' idiosyncrasy, is also an excellent specimen of imagist poetry.

"Gifted with an observant eye and an ear remarkably well attuned to free-verse rhythms, Williams produced his share of that body of verse which still stands as a definition of Imagism" writes Frederick Morgan locating Williams in a central position in the imagist cannon (675). In order to understand Williams' poetry and poetics, especially in terms of the poetic voice and its connection to negative capability, it is of the essence to look briefly at the Imagist movement and its principals which align with Williams' poetry at crucial points especially in relation to the negative capable poet.

Imagist poetry was born at the beginning of the 20th century mainly as a reaction to the overly sentimental and personal poetry of the times and sought a modern kind of poetry that avoids abstraction, generalization and lyric romanticism. An impersonal tone and emphasis on visual elements, the abundance of images are of utmost significance and considered determining characteristics of Imagist poetry. (In this respect they are closely linked with the focus of this chapter.)

The imagist movement had an international character with both American and English poets among its ranks. The initial group included Hilda Doolittle, T.E Hulme, Ezra Pound, T.S Flint and Richard Aldington located at the time in London. Later on there were additions and desertions: Amy Lowell got involved a few years after the group was formed in 1912 and Ezra Pound, although he was the one who coined the term Imagist – originally "Imagiste" - left the group after Lowell's increasing influence and he took part for awhile in another movement called Vorticism[3]. However, it would not be wrong to say that what set the Imagist movement rolling was Pound's compilation and publication of an Imagist Anthology in 1914

[3] The movement was founded by Wydham Lewis in 1914. Pound's involvement aimed to revitalize poetry with the energy that imagist poetry lacked. In Vorticism the image was considered a force not a picture (Preminger 1367-1368).

that included poems he deemed Imagist by poets such as William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell, D.H Lawrence, Marian Moore, John Gould Fletcher (Jones 13-43).

Many of the poets involved in the Imagist movement contributed to the theory of it as well. Ezra Pound, T.S Flint, Richard Aldington and the theoretical forefather of the group T.S Hulme were leading figures. Nevertheless the well known doctrines of the movement came from Flint and Pound. Flint's guidelines for Imagist poetry were published in 1913 in *Poetry* magazine which was back then the voice of the Imagist poets. Ezra Pound the editor of *Poetry* magazine included his own views and commentary on Imagist poetry alongside Flint's short essay on the subject. The following three important points were highlighted by both Pound and Flint:

> 1. Direct treatment of the "thing," whether subjective or objective.
> 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
> 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of a metronome. (Jones 129)

According to Roger Mitchell these three points were sometimes called the "the Imagist credo" and they constituted the theoretical backbone of the movement (38). Considering the Imagist credo in terms of negative capability yields interesting results especially in tandem with Williams' involvement in the movement. At the same time, it is of the essence to remember that only certain crucial points in Imagism complement negative capability. For example one of them is the "direct treatment" of the subject, which evidently refers to a pure/unsullied relation with the topic chosen by the poet. The aim of the poet is to treat the thing directly without bringing in anything extra, such as extra narratives or allusions to other works or ideas. It fits negative capability in the sense that only the object should be brought to the poem, naturally leaving out the subjective feelings or ideas of the poet. Hence, it is also very much in line with Williams' slogan "No ideas but in things". Williams writes that "the objective in writing is, to reveal. It is no to teach, not to advertise, not to sell, not even to communicate (for that needs two) but to reveal, which needs no other than the man himself"

(Wagner 63). The "man" here is the poet. Yet the poet is only a medium that makes the revelation possible. In a nutshell, what is out there, as perceived by the poet, becomes valuable and is turned into a poem and revealed to the reader. The second point of the Imagist credo is also important in this respect: "to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation". According to this, the aim of the poet should be to present what is out there or what he perceives – whether in his mind or in the world- employing just the right number of words, nothing superfluous. Again this principle requires the minimum personal involvement of the poet and a minimal presence of personal voice, which aligns it with negative capability.

For example let's re-write the poem "A Portrait of the Times" in prose and see how the imagist tenets discussed above work: "Two W.P.A men stood in the new sluiceway overlooking the river – One was pissing while the other showed by his red jagged face the immemorial tragedy of lack-love while an old squint-eyed woman in a black dress and clutching a bunch of late chrysanthemums to her fatted bosoms turned her back on them at the corner". In prose, none of the poetic elements seem to survive which is a clear sign of the significance of how lines are placed. The English is plain, the diction simple without ornamentation of any kind. There is almost no figurative language or trope. The detailed visual descriptions remind us of a very short film sequence or a vivid picture. Neither is there anything spectacular about the subject at hand. At most it is just a small disturbing anecdote of a woman witnessing a man's public pissing. However, because in the prose version word order becomes dense, the sharpness of the images cannot be conveyed, thus the sentence feels over-long and the images are blurred. Without the short lines of the original poem, which create space and time for the reader, the prose gives the impression that the words just run one after another.

So how does Williams create a poem out of something which can be rendered as a long and dense prose sentence? What feels as the most annoying element - the density of the prose

-is transferred by the poet into aesthetic lightness in the poem. Many of his Imagist poems can be analyzed in this manner and yield similar results. Williams, like a sculptor, cuts the lines in such a way that he almost enables the words to stand out as objects. This can also be called word isolation. In this way words almost cease to be instruments of conveying meaning but become the things that they want to present. And in order to present the things, individually and as they are, Williams has to keep himself at a distance, in line with negative capability.

(I)solation

Williams uses isolation to move his eye like a camera lens, focusing on the objects individually, making everything impersonal and this objective movement of the eye is represented by the isolation of words and individual lines in his poems. Therefore "isolation" has a crucial function for Williams in achieving his unique style of negative capability. In order to understand Williams' negative capability it is important to analyze how this process works for him. It may be that the isolation of words in short, sparse lines of verse work so effectively because of the way human beings process language and decipher meanings out of words. Schopenhauer's view on this process is as follows:

> While another person is speaking, do we at once translate his speech into pictures of the imagination that instantaneously flash upon us and are arranged, linked, formed, and colored according to the word that stream forth, and to their grammatical inflexions? What a tumult there would be in our heads while we listened to a speech or read a book! This is not what happens at all. The meaning of the speech is immediately grasped, accurately and clearly apprehended, without as a rule any conceptions of fancy being mixed up with it. (39)

What Schopenhauer says is that while reading or listening to sentences made up of words, one does not really translate or imagine each and every word but gets a grasp of the meaning from the whole. The word "fancy" in the last sentence of the quotation points to the fact that vereyday language has very little to do with visualization or imagination. Isolation works as a

counter force to this tendency and gives us time to imagine and feel the words, like tangible objects of the world. In this way words take the reader directly to the scene, closer to the real. What is unique to language is that – Ferdinand de Saussure says much the same half a century after Schopenhauer – the signs in the language are arbitrary constructs. Schopenhauer writes: "Thus language, like every other phenomenon that we ascribe to reason, and like everything that distinguishes man from the animal, is to be explained by this one simple thing as its source, namely concepts, representations that are abstract not perceptive, universal not individual in time and space" (41). By the term "concepts" Schopenhauer refers to any word regardless of the fact whether it is a noun or a verb. His basic thought here is that when a thing or an action is named it turns into a concept, because it is not the thing (action or the object) itself but its verbal/sign abstraction. Therefore language is an abstraction, a certain way of representing. Any poetry that attempts to foreground the object or the action, the real thing can be seen as a journey to the individuality of the thing and an endeavor at perception, not abstraction. With isolation because the lines are very short they hold the attention of the reader, providing ample time to imagine the thing presented before the reader moves on to the next line. The technique employed almost seems to slow time so that meaning creation is replaced by image creation. Perkins' discusses how and why Williams' short lines work so effectively:

> His uncompressed, short lines seem peculiarly weightless and rapid because they offer in a line a lesser nexus of stimuli than our normal experience with verse has prepared us to expect. But since traditional poetry has trained us to bring a more active and concentrated attention to verse than we would to the same words in prose, we make the most we can out of whatever a Williams line presents. Attention creates vividness. Meanwhile the momentum is all the greater because these short lines tend also to be enjambed – sometimes violently so, for the lines may have very weak terminations ("of", "as"). And the accelerated momentum heightens attention all the more because it intensifies the counterpoint of the rhythm of the line against the rhythm of the syntax. (255-256)

The most salient point that Perkins makes perhaps resides in his observation that "attention creates vividness". Perkins claims that this is because the reader expects more from verse than

prose. On the other hand, since there is an abundance of words pertaining to visual images in Williams' poetry, when these words are isolated in very short lines they stand out almost as individual objects. This isolation enables the reader to see the word and immediately envisage the image conveyed by the word before acknowledging the word as one link in a chain leading to complete meaning at the end of the poem or the syntactic unit. Explaining Williams' technique, Wagner says: "He liked the short, quick-moving line; the poem presented its content rather than telling it; the abstraction seen in terms of actual objects or persons instead of as bald words; the art object stripped to essential detail so that its impression is made quickly" (124). Enjambments and weak terminations enable the images to follow each other like a slide show and the rhythm of the line counterpoints the rhythm of the syntax. Thus meaning emerges as a consequence of the image, as a result of the perception of the pictorial and only after that.

"Attention creates vividness" and the isolation of a word in a short line enhances this vividness. No wonder that the motto from Robert Browning's 1855 poem "Andrea del Sarto", "less is more" was appropriated by the minimalists.[4] The less becomes more because it foregrounds the object of art or the "thing" which is turned into an art object by the poet for the reader to ingest over time. Patrick Moore sees this as Williams' ability to play with time in order to create art. "For Williams, the present is not fixed. It can be lengthened, broadened, and deepened, allowing the intelligence to roam freely" (Moore 903). By isolating the thing, by the rhythm, by the varying length of the lines, Williams controls time for his purposes. He turns the mundane moment or the thing into art by foregrounding, providing individualized foci on things and by stretching out time.

One of the major factors that renders Williams' poetry unique is his word isolation that can almost magically change any object in the world into a subject for poetry. Peter Jones'

[4] Minimalism, as the name suggest is a style/movement in poetry which can be defined by the terms "spareness, tautness, understatement, and reduction". It is very much in line with Williams motto "No ideas but in things" (Preminger 788).

take on imagist poetry is also valid for Williams' poems: "It was line length or word isolation rather than the syntax that pointed the image or the cadence – often there is broken syntax in imagistic writing" (39). This distinction creates the effect that a "thing" is being shown/presented by the poet –with emphasis on the visual qualities - but not simply being told/represented as a story that a poet tells. In other words, the poet does not talk about the thing but talks/tells the thing.

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

This poem, together with Pound's "In a Station of the Metro", is considered the epitome of the Imagist tradition. Frederick Morgan marks the poem as the "atomization of experience into images which are sufficient unto themselves, and from which all potentialities of expansion or interaction have been rigorously excluded" and further adds that "such imagery conforms to the purest ideals of Imagism" (676). The exclusion of "all potentialities of expansion or interaction" refers mainly to the self contained nature of the image, requiring no background story, narrative or a prior context to the poem, simply nothing other than the object the "eye" focuses on. This shows itself in the simplicity of diction, shortness of both the lines and the poem and most importantly the non-involvement of the poet. The only personal comment that suggests the presence of the poet is the first two lines: "so much depends / upon" which attaches a sense of mystery to the poem. Otherwise Williams once more takes an observant position, adhering to the definition of the negatively capable poet, and presents the dazzling image of a wheelbarrow.

The emphasis is squarely on the visual elements. In this succinct poem, two colors, white and red are used together with the word “glazed” which alludes to brightness. Each word is almost like an object in itself. Lines with three words and single words are paired in twos, forming very short couplets. There is no punctuation; the spaces/lines provide the breaks. Each line supplies ample time for the reader to take in the tangible character of the words which are seen/felt/read as isolated. Other than the line breaks, in the colloquial register of Williams, there is no trope or figure of language. As Morgan says the rhythm of the poem is set by the short lines: “The short line favored by Williams is of prime importance to his rhythmic idiom. The break at the end of the line supplies by visual means an extra punctuation of the rhythm that prevents it from falling into shapelessness; it is useful also in isolating individual images or in contrasting one image to another" (680). In a similar vein Kingsley Weatherhead claims that it is the rhythm created by the short lines that gives this poem “The Red Wheelbarrow” its poetic character or in other words what makes it a poem (128). Actually this can be said for many of Williams’ poems. Weatherhead quotes Williams’ comment about a grocery list being poetic solely on the grounds of its rhythm: “if you treat that [the list] rhythmically, ignoring the practical sense, it forms a jagged pattern. It is to my mind poetry” (128). Weatherhead explains that “if one conceive of the elements pragmatically one has a fragment of reality – a grocery list; if one conceive of them rhythmically – in a rhythmical context – one has a poem or part of one” (128). Therefore it can be said that for Williams, poetry is part of the real, it is out there and imagination only needs to grab it, find the rhythm, take it out of its context and make it visible.

How the red wheelbarrow is positioned in the scene is also distinctive in the sense that it creates a contrast with the white chickens and puts the emphasis on color and light, suppressing any story or context such as a farm scene that could be naturally associated with the poem. This contrast, how the wheelbarrow is isolated from its context and presented as a

primal object on which "so much depends", provides this poem its essence. The reader, because of the way it is presented, sees the red wheelbarrow, beside the white chickens more or less as a beautiful red sports car rather than a banal farm tool. So the key point here is the isolation of the object from the context.

What Williams did was actually the trend in art and especially in painting. In his autobiography he talks about the time when he saw the famous artist Marcel Duchamp and comments on the subjects Duchamp chose for his art: "The story then current of this extraordinary and popular young man was that he walked daily into whatever store struck his fancy and purchased whatever pleased him – something new – something American. Whatever it might be, that was his 'construction' for the day" (*Autobiography* 134). Williams clearly cherishes the idea of going out and finding something tangible, something mundane, perhaps a trivial object and turning that into a work of art. For him it is a means to establish contact with what America is. Anything that would contribute to the idea of the American Idiom can be the subject of his art. For example the porcelain urinal that Duchamp submitted to an art exhibition was a controversial and astounding piece of work. The way Duchamp transformed it into art, by turning it into a fountain, seems to have impressed Williams immensely. He criticizes the committee that rejected it in the following words: "The silly committee threw out the urinal, asses they were" (*Autobiography* 134). Perkins quotes Williams' response when he was told that Duchamp did not actually make the urinal himself: "(it) has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object" (Perkins 257). As we have discussed earlier anything could be an art object for Williams. For him the act of choosing is a crucial part of the artistic process. In the case of Duchamp's urinal, the important thing is to get rid of the object's "useful significance" and be able to exhibit it in a new way, from a fresh point of view under a different title.

Perhaps an analogy can be found between what Freud says about the erogenous zones in the human body and art objects. Mansfield commenting on Freud says that “any part of the skin and any sense-organ - probably, indeed any organ- can function as an erotegenic zone' and 'any relatively powerful emotion' can become sexual” (1977, 57) (108). It means that any organ can become sexual with the right amount of stimulation and interest. In a similar manner any object in the world with the right amount of attention and techniques such as estrangement can become an art object. However, when looking at the daily world, in a sea of things defined by human representation (mainly language and culture) it is not easy to use the method of getting rid of the “useful significance”, especially since some ‘things’ do not have useful significance.

Henry Sayre in his article "Ready-Mades and Other Measures: The Poetics of Marcel Duchamp and William Carlos Williams", compares the two famous art works, the *Fountain* (Urinal) and Williams’ poem “The Red Wheelbarrow”, underlining the affinity between Duchamp’s and Williams’ techniques of isolation. Sayre claims that “just as Duchamp revitalizes our aesthetic sense by placing a urinal in the context of the museum, Williams places his material in an equally strange environment – the poem – and the wheelbarrow’s accidental but very material presence in this new context invests it with a new dignity” (12). In this way an object is isolated from its usual common/ordinary place in the world and presented in a new context, as a consequence of which it turns into an object of art.

In Williams’ defense of Duchamp’s urinal as a work of art, the trick was to get rid of the “useful significance” and to be able to show the object as something different, something new wrought by the artist’s point view. Townley explains this as "the removal of mental build-up from the surfaces of reality” to reveal “a new and unexpected beauty beneath" (147). So the creative act involves only this act of getting rid of the constructed meanings the objects of the world are layered beneath. Sayre writes that "the same could be said of the American artist

generally, but the point is that the imagination must work upon the object if the object is to be of use: art uses 'the banal to escape the banal', as Williams put it in 1939 (SE 236), and it escapes the banal by discovering form" (9). To repeat once again Williams discovers visually the forms in things, he does not create them. In this respect, he does not project his feelings, state of mind or opinions on objects but only observes and concentrates on them, putting "things" in a kind of isolation that brings out their true forms. "Both Williams' and Duchamp's' works testify to the artist's role as magus and seer, the ability of the artist to give a mundane thing magical presence and to reveal to our uninitiated eyes what we would otherwise pass over as trivial or chaotic" (Sayre 12). Williams would probably dislike the labels "seer" or "magus" and even the word "magical", in the sense that his attempt is to capture the reality of what he calls the "American Idiom", but agree with the rest of Sayre's commentary. He takes something ordinary and turns it into an art work by bringing out its form and foregrounding it in a new realizable context.

According to Weatherhead the object that becomes the subject of the poet gains meaning via the new context in which it is presented. This context is actually the space of art. The objects that are captured by the poet, by his vision are presented as words on the page. As Breslin says:

> An object surrounded by nothing is also an object perceived without forethought, without memory - an object that has been stripped of all literary and personal associations and thus freed from time. For Williams, to be out of temporal sequence is to be suspended in a kind of spatialized moment, and objects so suspended are not suggestive, shimmering with evocations, with hints of what is beyond their literal actuality… these objects are hard, opaque, sharply outlined and simply physical, defined by color, mass, and shape. (253)

To be as objective as possible is a key factor because as Breslin claims it contributes to the perception of the object "without forethought, without memory" and particularly "stripped of all literary and personal associations". So the way in which Williams achieves an impersonal

effect through reading his observation, calling the reader only to witness this observation without lecturing him/her or revealing his own self, fits with the idea of negative capability.

The conversion of what Williams calls the real into art relies on the talent of the artist, his creativity and point of view. In this context, one cannot over-emphasize the significance of the technique of word and line isolation. This technique works at different levels. In taking an object, a person or a simple event from life, the choosing process is the first step in isolation. For example if we think of Duchamp's urinal, especially the way he chose it in a hardware store, his choice is the isolation of the urinal among other things he saw in the store. In a similar manner the poet chooses his subject and isolates it. This kind of isolation is similar to the term in literary studies known as estrangement or Defamiliarization coined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky.[5] Yet the key difference is that the way we employ the term here accentuates the isolation of words and lines in a poem and not just an object's isolation out of its context in the world.

The isolation of words or lines, as I have shown earlier and I am going to study further with the next few poems, compels the reader to stop and visualize the word or the phrase that is portrayed.

"To" is a short poem by Williams written in 1932 and it is a good example where the technique of prolonging perception is attained by word/line isolation and simplicity.

a child (a boy) bouncing
a ball (a blue ball) –

He bounces it (a toy racket
in his hand) and runs

and catches it (with his
left hand) six floors

[5] Shklovsky uses the phrase "make it strange" when explaining defamiliarization and bestows art with such a mission. Baldick writes that for Shklovsky "art exists in order to recover for us the sensation of life which is diminished in the 'automatized' routine of everyday experience" (62). What Duchamp did with the urinal and Williams with the wheelbarrow are good examples.

straight down –
which is the old back yard

The poem is very straightforward and direct, written with almost childish simplicity and diction. This type of documentary narration, if we can call it narration, fits the topic of the poem which talks about a child playing with a ball. The descriptions are not mainly of things or objects but of the simple action that takes place. Similar to the action that takes place in the "A Portrait of the Times" which can be summarized or paraphrased in a few words, the main action here in this poem is a boy's bouncing a blue ball, then dropping it with his left hand six floors down and going after it to catch it in the old backyard.

The persona never shows himself, the voice of the poet is objective and his eye describes the scene from a distance without getting involved. There is not a single word that would suggest the personal sentiments or the presence of the poet other than as a seeing eye who witnesses this perhaps trivial event of a child's play. Williams provides just enough details for the reader to imagine the event in the poem, nothing more. What is different in this poem is the employment of parentheses to supply information piecemeal which is a method rarely applied by Williams as he usually refrains from using punctuation. The poem starts off with the phrase "a child" then immediately Williams specifies the sex and says in parentheses "a boy"; the short line finishes with the word "bouncing". In a similar manner, the second line begins with the phrase "a ball" followed by the detail in parentheses "a blue ball". Moreover with the use of alliteration and assonance, the line imitates the bouncing action of the ball with words and sounds as much as it mimics the simple speech of a child.

In this poem, besides the short lines with enjambments, the bracketing of certain phrases that contain extra information help the reader imagine the images/scenes created. Williams coaxes the reader to stop and imagine before the line ends. This too is a form of isolation as well and lengthens the time of perception.

By stating that it is “a child” Williams creates space for the reader to envisage a child of their own imagination, then he restricts it to the image of a boy. In the same way he first says “a ball” and then restricts the imagination of the reader by painting the ball blue. The poet provides the information that the boy catches the ball with his left hand because he is holding a racket in his other hand. These are almost the only descriptive details of objects in the poem. He simply puts into words the action of the poem: the boy bounces the ball, runs after it and catches it six floors straight down in the old back yard.

“Between Walls” is a poem written in 1938 and it is one of the high points of Imagist poetry as well as a poem in which Williams, as the camelion poet, holds himself back and offers us almost a camera eye view of a small plot of ground.

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

piece of a green
bottle

“Between Walls” is also one of Williams’ very short and laconic, yet striking image based poems. Compared to “To” this poem contains no action but consists only of keen observation, in simple diction. Word isolation once more acts as the main technique to create the imagist slide show effect of the poem which prolongs the time of perception. The unidentified persona hides the poet, rendering him nearly non-existent and lets the voice of the poet speak from an observant position. Townley remarks that this poem "works like the zoom lens of a camera - moving in from the hospital wings to the cinders and finally to the shining edges of glass"

(118).The voice is like a camera and slowly zooms to the object (the broken piece of a green bottle) that reveals itself at the end of the poem almost as a treasure.

Concerning the presence or absence of the “I”, we have started from poems involving presence and moved gradually to absence. In this regard these two poems are at one extreme of the presence/absence scale where poet’s direct presence as an “I” is totally absent. Invoking the perfect pun once more in these two poems, the voice of the poet as “I”, has disappeared only to be transformed into an “eye” that looks towards the world to see the things as they are. This transformation of the “I” into an objective “eye” is perhaps the most potent relation Williams’ poetry establishes with negative capability as to the effacement of the self in his poems.

The wording both in this poem and the previous one is so simple that the poems can be understood by anyone who has some knowledge of English. In other words, on the surface, these poems are stark naked, stripped of any symbolism, trope and outside reference. The imagist side of Williams is a camelion poet. Williams tries to establish a visual and mental “free world” on the page for the reader. The absence of the poet’s direct voice contributes greatly to this effect as the persona seems merely to spread out word-objects and open a space for the reader to witness them. Townley’s explanation for it is that “the selection and arrangement of the details control the reader's reactions, without any need for comment by the author" (116). The only moment the poet’s presence can be felt is when he says “nothing / will grow” because it seems to mark an opinion rather than mere observation. However, in the totality of the poem this becomes part of the natural observation and statement of a physical fact.

In an analysis of Hilda Doolittle’s imagist poem “Oread” Peter Jones writes a commentary, which I believe not only explains the elements in the “Oread” but also functions as a generic definition and portrays a set of principles for a poem written in the imagist way.

> There are no similes in the poem, no symbols – presentation rather than representation; no moralizing tone; no reflection on human experience (a danger here perhaps in lack of human concern): no striving for the spiritual; no fixed meter or rhyme – but a rhythm organic to the image itself; no narrative – it needs none; no vagueness of abstractions – it would destroy the image. There is however a strong sense of the abstract caught within the concrete; and no form but the poem itself. It is not forced to take upon itself a fixed shape, except that of the image in isolation ecstatically held. It is not merely description, but evocation; and to use Pound's words: 'The gulf between evocation and description… is the unbridgeable difference between genius and talent. (31)

Each point that is divided by a semi colon in Jones' commentary (though he ignores the poetic voice which says "cover us") is almost like a principle in itself that calls for interpretation and I would like to discuss a few of them in detail. The first of those principles is that presentation is preferred instead of representation which suits William's motto "no ideas but in things". This attitude manifests itself in the language used as well and an interesting minimalism is applied in the grammatical sense too. Williams, particularly in his short imagist poems, refrains from using any extra words that do not refer to the object that he focuses on. So any grammatical element – for example personal pronouns or conjunctions - other than nouns, adjectives and verbs that directly treat the subject at hand are absent, unless they are really necessary. We see this in many of his poems, sometimes in his longer ones too.

Patrick Moore's assessment of Williams' poetry is particularly significant. Moore writes that "by breaking down the sentence and the line, Williams hoped to write a poetry that would emphasize the dissimilarities of things, and thus their particular perfections" and affirms Williams' wish to concentrate on things and their material, tangible and visual qualities as purely as possible (902). For him words were the way to reality as they were the closest tools to present what was out there or in the mind of the poet. Sentence, grammar and even syntax shadowed this reality since to a degree they were elements of artificiality. Moore quoting Williams underlines the fact that "it's the words, the words we need to get back to, words washed clean. Until we get the power of though back through a new minting of the words we

are actually sunk" (163). This desire to get back to the word is actually equivalent to the desire “to say it, in things”.

Moore claims that Williams had in his arsenal five different techniques of syntactic deviation. Among these parataxis is particularly important for our discussion. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines parataxis as:

> [A] stylistic term referring to a relative paucity of linking terms between juxtaposed clauses or sentences, often giving the effect of piling up, swiftness, and sometimes compression. A paratactic style is one in which a language’s ordinary resources for joining propositions are deliberately underused: propositions are set one after another … without the expected particles, adverbs, or conjunctions. (879-880)

Moore claims that Williams employs this style as a technique. Yet it is crucial to indicate that parataxis is not a mere listing of things, at least it is not the way Williams uses it. Moore’ makes his point clear by providing the following stanza as an example of parataxis from Williams’ poem “Sunday”:

> Small barking sounds
> Clatter of metal in a pan
> A high fretting voice
> and a low voice musical
> as a string twanged – (1-5)

Here, in this first stanza of the poem Williams tells his impressions almost in the form of a list where each line pertains to an individual impression. The first four lines do not make up a complete syntactic unit either individually or as a whole because they lack a verb and a subject. The verb “twanged” at the end of the last line only describes the sound of the “string” and what is plucked, which is simultaneous with the listed impressions of the first four lines. There are no conjunctions or adverbs to connect the lines but there is only an “and” at the beginning of the fourth line. In four lines almost four different sounds are piled up. This listing of sounds is considered as a parataxis by Moore.

This can be attributed to the fact that Williams aims to present things in the purest form possible even if it means to disregard some rules of language, syntactic or even grammatical

elements. This can very well be tolerated in poetry. According to Moore the main reason for this was that "Williams separated syntax from logic. Things were merely there for Williams, or, better still, things merely *were*. He did not like to use syntax in his poetry to assign a single meaning or a related set of meanings to a thing and then use the newly assigned meanings to prove a point or convey an idea" (904). Williams equated the word or the line with the image or the object out there. For example when one writes the phrase “black book” one needs to either make it the object or subject of a sentence in order to form a grammatical sentence, one may not leave it just as it is without properly situating it. Yet Williams quite intentionally does this because, as Moore claims he does not wish “to prove a point or convey and idea” in his poems but only present things as true to the real as possible (ibid). This way images conveyed are once more isolated (even from rules of language) and foregrounded for the reader to see. With this, Williams comes closer to pure negative capability in the sense that even language itself becomes a hindrance, which of course is an extremist position and the ultimate paradox in itself.

Another implication of the paratactic style is that the poet, in line with negative capability, stays in the background, hides his presence and just presents his/her observations. As a consequence, this style requires much from the reader, because the reader has to make the connections between things, imagine the images for there is no connecting narrative or story other than the images presented by the poet.

Williams believes in the power of words. "In his own poetic syntax, Williams wanted to be sure that the meanings of words could not be easily blurred into each other" so that each thing he highlights is isolated from the general context and has a chance to turn into art (poetry) (Moore 901). Nearly all of the poems analyzed so far are paratactic to certain extent, if not as a list of things, as a style where the poet attempts to present things individually

without the context they are usually embedded in. "Young Woman at A Window" (1934) is an illustration of this style.

She sits with
tears on

her cheek
her cheek on

her hand
the child

in her lap
his nose

pressed
to the glass

There are only two verbs in this poem one semi-active located in the first line (sits) and the other at the end of the poem used more as an adjective (pressed). Again this poem is like a list of objects/images. Yet here each line, thus each image, is linked to the other with a kind of enjambment that can be called very natural, following almost the eye movement of the poet who perceives this scene as a poem. The poet here is again a mere observer, negatively capable.

Wagner writes that "concentration, suggestion replaces statement; complete sentences may be reduced to fragments, the adjective series to a single word, similes to compounds" (11). We witness this keen concentration on individual things, in this particular poem as well. The woman, tears, hand, child, cheek (occurring twice), nose, lap, and glass every individual image earns its due share of concentration via isolation and minimalism. On the other hand they are loosely connected to form a poem and not a mere list of things, thus forging the backbone of the paratactic style as well as lengthening perception.

Wagner designates three tendencies in Williams' poetry: interrelation, concentration and indirection (11). Interrelation refers to the connection between the depicted things, she

describes it as the Williams' tendency where "one line leads directly into the next, as does one stanza into another; speech measures flow throughout the poem rather than being arbitrarily divided; punctuation serves to define both rhythmic and grammatical units" (11). So far we have seen this almost in all of the poems studied. Indirection is defined as Williams' non-involvement in a poem; the poem itself should always be more important than the poet or what the poet tells. Poet must always present things while he is in the background to increase the physical reality or basically the reality of the objects presented. This is also a crucial aspect of the argument in this chapter. Concentration, as we have recently touched upon is basically a combination of minimalism and isolation. In Wagner's view "principles of interrelation (to create the complete whole), concentration (to ensure 'instantaneous' impression), and indirection (to avoid sentimentality) " are the key elements in Williams' poetry (118). Yet as we have seen so far, other elements such as a simple diction, isolation, paratactic style and minimalism are also crucial in analyzing his poetry.

Parataxis and especially leaving out the grammatical elements or verbs to underline the "things" as images can also be considered a type of minimalism. To sum up the paratactic argument, minimalism in language and especially in grammar can be seen as an attempt to break with any element in the language that does not directly talk about the object itself. As I had briefly mentioned upon in the introduction, syntax and grammar necessitate a subject, a doer, a persona. This was argued by both Nietzsche and Lacan. By getting rid of the subject or the persona, the poet gets closer to the object world, the free world. On the other hand, it can also be claimed that because language itself is an artificial construct, to expect from something artificial to "present" the world (not to represent it) becomes problematic.

What Williams does with his poetry, especially around 1930's, can be seen as an idiosyncratic version of the attempt to go beyond the limitations of language as far as representation is concerned. He wants to offer the object to the reader as it is, as he sees it in

real life. Parataxis is one of the stylistic methods towards this goal. For him the poetry is already there, in the thing. The idea of the "American Idiom" is born out of this concern, as part of his search for novelty in poetry. However, at its root lies the basic assumption that the world needs to be somehow converted into poetry. The same thing goes for the camelion poet of negative capability as well. This conversion is inevitable; otherwise there would be no art. The question concerning art and poetry resides in the possibilities and impossibilities of this conversion. Williams writes in the fringes of this conversion, trying as much as possible to hold on to the thing that is out there. For example by almost singling out the broken piece of green glass in "Between Walls" or the red wheelbarrow he puts the object before the reader's eyes, making it concretely visible. This once more reminds us of his wish, in the poem "Offering", to be able to catch the world with his words.

In "The Attic Which is Desire", Williams perhaps reaches the apogee of this tendency to make the image/the thing real for the reader. In this short poem which is based on observation, Williams assays to literally reflect what he saw. Therefore he writes or rather lays out the poem on the page in a very unique way.

from the street
by

***
S
O
D
A
***

ringed with
running lights (9-18)

Quoted above is only a portion of this poem, the part which is essential for my argument and which constitutes the central image. It is situated nearly at the middle, discernible as a graphic sign. The striking element about this poem is that Williams is trying to bring the image of a soda sign, a familiar image for any American reader, directly onto the page. He is not trying

to convert visual information into words but to bring the thing into the poem as a concrete object.

This is one notch further up than his desire to hold the world in his words. Morgan acknowledges this tendency and sees it as the poet's attempt to reproduce "the object on the page by pictorial means: a soda sign in 'The Attic Which is Desire'; a price-list, a skull and crossbones and pointing arrows in 'April'"(678). Here the goal is to bring the world directly, as much as possible, onto the page. The image, the visual elements are once more the point of emphasis. The word soda written vertically from the top to the bottom is framed in asterisks. This frame resembles a tangible electrically lighted sign that one would see on a store wall, window or façade in real life. The asterisk signs correspond to the bulbs or flickering lights of an electrical sign, therefore are a kind of representation. The image as a whole, from the first impression it creates, takes the mind of the reader to a familiar concrete object in the real world. Williams does not need to describe the thing, therefore he almost creates a moment when a kind of a pure presentation is possible. The only kind of description pertaining to the soda sign is the fact that the soda sign is "ringed with / running lights". He obviously does this because we cannot have flickering asterisks on the printed page and therefore we need to be told in words about the "running lights".

In this extreme example, the voice of the poet is absent and leaves the ground almost totally open for the "thing" to show itself. The soda sign needs no description except for the running lights, no voice other than itself. Williams has gotten rid of any extra words that would spoil the purity of the image. This is the kind of reality he wants to bring into poetry. The moment when he simply presents the object to the reader and withdraws everything else, including himself, he realizes the ideal that Keats proposed with his concept of negative capability. One step further would not be poetry but painting or another art form or perhaps, though rather farfetched, the real itself. But then what kind of a relation is formed between art

and the real with a writing style that is negatively capable in its essence? Williams' own words can be illuminating:

> -the illusion once dispensed with, painting has this problem before it: to replace not the forms but the reality of experience with its own
> Up to now shapes and meanings but always the illusion relying on composition to give likeness to "nature"
> now works of art cannot be left in this category of France's "lie", they must be real, not "realism" but reality itself -
>
> They must give not the sense of frustration but a sense of completion, of actuality - it is not a matter of "representation" - much may be represented actually, but of separate existence. (*The Collected Poems* Vol.1 204)

Williams sees the problems in the concept of mimesis, particularly with respect to painting: In the above quotation he basically claims that paintings are not judged or evaluated merely on account of their artistic and aesthetic qualities but in their ability to resemble reality which manifest itself as likeness to "nature". He considers likeness to nature as "realism" and adds that works of art must be "real" themselves, but not necessarily realist, which for him is an illusion. According to Williams a poem is an art object complete in itself, with its intrinsic qualities and without reference to an outside "real" that can be used as a yard stick for its artistic performance/quality. If art works are evaluated according to their ability to mimic truth or likeness to reality, they are doomed to produce a "sense of frustration" as they will always fall short of the mark, which is perfect replication or mimicry, and go against Williams' notion of art. The art object (the poem) can be part of a "real" that when encountered provides "a sense of completion, of actuality". Williams specifically emphasizes that "it is not a matter of 'representation'" but "of separate existence". Williams' real as presented by art, actually reveals a part of the world by creating a sense of completion.

Going back to Peter Jones' commentary on H.D's poem "Oread" that we took as a general guideline for Imagist poetry, we come across another significant dictum: "no moralizing tone; no reflection on human experience (a danger here perhaps in lack of human concern)"(ibid). If we recall our previous discussions of specific poems, especially in the last two sections of this chapter, the lack of a personal voice in Williams was seen as an important factor that enabled a certain kind of objectivity, an objective stance. Lack of a personal voice naturally entails the absence of a "moralizing tone". However, the second principle, "no reflection on human experience" of this statement, is rather interesting, especially as Jones feels the need to counterpoint it in parentheses with the input: "(a danger here perhaps in lack of human concern)" (ibid.). As much as Jones appreciates the imagist principles such as the objective stance, absence of a moralizing tone or reflection on human experience, he also draws attention to the danger that they pose because basically "no reflection on human experience" may mean no human interest in the topic and therefore in the poem. The discrete question here is why anyone would be interested in poems about material things, objects, nature and simple observation that have no direct contact with human existence.

By human experience Peter Jones means feelings, thoughts and anecdotes on the part of the poet, moments that can be actually lived or imagined by the poet. In this respect, Jones' definition does not include mere visual perceptions, observations and descriptions of things as part of this human experience unless they are somehow related to a person's life. Therefore the defining elements here are objectivity and direct involvement of the poet in a poem. Otherwise, as I have mentioned earlier, any and every work in this sense is a poet's view. Yet one answer to Jones lies in our earlier discussion of the term isolation especially in tandem with Duchamp's art, which points to the fact that in the innovative ways they are portrayed,

simple objects may arouse the interest of people and make them see the familiar as novel. Some may consider the discussion that this question leads to as a matter of pure aesthetic taste, simply saying some like poetry about people, lived life experiences and some, on flowers, cities, nature and all non-human things. For example Futurist poet Marinetti in his manifesto claims that "the warmth of a piece of iron or wood is in our opinion more impassioned than the smile or tears of a woman" (59). However, especially in terms of the human involvement manifesting itself through the voice of the poet and separate existence, there is a significant point that is worthy of further investigation. Williams' poem "The Term" (1937) provides a good example for this inquiry.

A rumpled sheet
of Brown paper
about the length

and apparent bulk
of a man was
rolling with the

wind slowly over
and over in
the street as

a car drove down
upon it and
crushed it to

the ground. Unlike
a man it rose
again Rolling

with the wind over
and over to be as
it was before.

This poem is another example of Imagist poetry but as I will attempt to demonstrate it holds a special position in terms of the role of human agency in poetry. It focuses on a simple and trivial object that is depicted in the first two lines as "a rumpled sheet / of Brown paper". The poet takes an observant position. The diction is simple; the same registers of isolation,

concentration and interrelation are also evident. Like the poem "To", it depicts an action in a fastidious manner without excessive description. A rolling, rather large rumpled sheet of paper (the bulk of a man) is run over by a car in the middle of the street and then it rises up, finds its form and continues rolling; this is a summary of the event in the poem.

Obviously line and word separation and the natural cadences of language are the main elements that lend poetic quality to the lines. However, there are two crucial points in the poem that make this poem somewhat different from the ones previously examined. At two instances, first in the second stanza and then in the fifth, the rumpled sheet of brown paper is compared to a man from various perspectives. In the first instance it is the size of the paper that resembles a man "… apparent bulk / of a man…" and in the second one it is the ability of the paper to rise after being run over by a car, unlike a man under the same conditions.: "Unlike / a man it rose / again rolling". In these two instances of metaphor and simile, Williams maintains his objectivity and yet makes his voice as a poet felt by the readers and asserts a degree of human agency.

Williams successfully shows a rumpled sheet of paper as a unique existent and breathes life into it without direct personification. For example when compared with "A Negro Woman" where Williams had intervened and asserted that the Negro woman was an ambassador from another world, here Williams acts much more subtly. He does not intervene but rather forges a brilliant metaphor, making it feel like an organic part of the story of the rumpled sheet of paper. He is not projecting his feelings or ideas upon an object or overtly trying to see it, to name it differently but beckons elegantly a similarity. In view of Peter Jones' statement "no reflection on human experience (a danger here perhaps in lack of human concern)", the poem does not rely much on human experience (other than the logical conclusion that a man run over by a car cannot rise up immediately) and at the same time with these two comparisons maintains human reference.

Let's take the analysis a few steps further and delve deeper into the idea of human agency from another angle. In order to do this, I am printing the poem without those two points of intervention:

A rumpled sheet
of Brown paper

rolling with the

wind slowly over
and over in
the street as

a car drove down
upon it and
crushed it to

the ground. It rose
again Rolling

with the wind over
and over to be as
it was before.

With the human comparisons removed – except for the subtle personification suggested by "it rose"- the poem now lacks any trope such as personification or simile. The feeling of objectivity - hence the notion of negative capability - is thus intensified in the sense that now it feels more like something found, something realized by Williams, not forged or created. Thus the poem feels much more like an object out there unsullied by human agency.

For poems with such little interior explanation or comment, there is always an opportunity for a subjective or intuitive reading. With or without those two human references, for example the poem can be read as the symbolic journey of a person who despite hardship and adversity has managed to rise on his feet and continues his life. The wind which is a force of nature, hence intractable, may represent misfortune whereas the act of rolling alludes to the passing of time as well as walking, even rolling with the time. "(W)ind over" and "rolling"

are repeated in the poem which attests to their significance and from a reader's point of view to the cycle of life.

Another interpretation based on one of the three capitalized words in the poem may also be possible: the initial letter of the word brown is capitalized. Proclaiming the color of the paper actually does not change things very much in the poem. So perhaps it is intended to give the bag a human name or with racial interpretation, "Brown" would refer to African Americans. Then the word "rumpled" would allude to wrinkled clothes, old age or the lifelong struggles of an African American.

Going back to "A Negro Woman", a reader may deduce that the Negro woman is in front of a shop, possibly because she cannot or is not allowed to get in. Moreover it can be assumed that her marigolds are wrapped in a newspaper because she can't afford proper wrapping paper, hence she looks out of place, as if she is not from this (social) world. Williams' poems indicate that he is sensitive to racial and economical problems as well as class differences. In this regard the brown rumpled paper run over by a car may be interpreted by the reader as a symbol of oppression of the working class or of the blacks by the whites or by capitalism represented by the car in the poem.

However, as it can be seen from the simplicity of the poem, the sheer clarity of both diction and register, without any visible allusions, Williams does not lead the reader willfully to any kind of symbolism. He keeps himself apart as much as possible in order to establish a pure relationship with things and leaves his readers free to interpret the poems. Wagner explains:

> Consistent with another if his basic artistic tendencies - that the poem is to create an immediate relationship with the reader, *without* interference from the poet - Williams avoided unnecessary commentary, background, and subjective impressions. In 1913 he wrote that art was to be ' a matter of concrete indirections'. Somewhat paradoxically, the more *direct* a presentation - i.e., immediate, free from didacticism -the more indirect it becomes in that no discursive remarks or asides interfere with the reader's response. (50-51)

So here the pivotal point is that Williams, “without interference from the poet”, presents things, presents them as part of the real and proposes a direct and “immediate relationship with the reader” (ibid). The indirection (in the sense that the poem does not instruct/lead the reader but presents things) is established by directness (in the sense that the object is presented, in the imagist style, as it is, usually outside its usual context). Townley asserts that "Williams' poem offers no encouragement, it merely presents" which is true for especially his pure Imagist poems (117).

Yet at times offering no encouragement itself becomes encouragement. With short poems that lack a definite story or narrative, the tendency for the reader to look for symbolic meanings, out of text references and human agency may sometimes be heightened. Because the poem is so simple and at times so short and clear, the reader may instinctively look for more, thinking that he is fooled or that there is something beyond what meets the eye. At this point it becomes important once more to remember that Williams was a visual poet, and that he worked for a pure presentation of things and not overtly for something symbolic. If we revisit the short poem “Between Walls”, we can see how different interpretations can be made about this minimalist poem, just as in the case of the poem “Term”.

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

piece of a green
bottle

With such a short poem and the usual register of Williams, each word becomes extremely important and catches the attention of the reader, sometimes more than the poet intends to. With words isolated, lines isolated, the implications of the words multiply; especially if they are not pinned down by a story. In "Between Walls" we can see that the insignificant – perhaps what we would call trivial- piece of glass is positioned in a very special manner on the background created by the poem. So the way the reader reaches the green glass can be seen as a mythic and mysterious journey. The first stanza starts off with "the back wings / of the" and thanks to the effect of isolation the reader who reads the wings, in a split second before moving onto the next stanza perhaps imagines the wings of a bird, not parts of a hospital building. Because language in general works with significations it does not guarantee that the reader would not imagine something else, particularly when, through isolation, Williams provides time for the reader to imagine each word.

Another implication can be found in the third stanza in the word "cinders" which simply means ashes or the incombustible material left over after a fire. With these two words "wings" and "cinders" left in isolation, left in the open for the reader to pick up and make the connections, perhaps one reader may think of the mythical bird Phoenix, born out of its own ashes after it is consumed by fire. The broken piece of a green bottle which is found at the end of the poem – found because it is purposefully left to the end to suggest that it is something to be uncovered/discovered – is not simply a piece of glass. In the way it is positioned it resembles a jewel, perhaps jade, suggested by the color. At another level, deeper than the visual, the poem may gain a mythical character for some readers, alluding to the story of the Phoenix and the retrieval of the jewel that it once possessed.

Evidently the poem becomes the space for/of the reader once it is published. In essence this is not very different from the term Intentional Fallacy.[6] Yet even though the reader plays

[6] According to Intentional Fallacy, "a literary work, once published, belongs in the public realm of language, which gives it an objective existence distinct from the author's original idea of it" (Baldick 126).

a crucial role particularly in poetry, the word choice belongs to the poet. And because it is the poet who chooses where to focus, he/she has the upper hand. It is true that the reader is free at interpretation to an extent, but still she/he is bound by the words the poet has chosen, and his/her reading is affected greatly by how the poet designs a poem on the page, sometimes stressing visual images, sometimes emphasizing rhythm. It can be said that the space of/for the reader is left to the reader but eventually it is set by the poet. Townley quotes Williams: "Always, in a work of art, leave a large part to the imagination of the spectator, thus to arouse his imagination also (never block it) & give him work to do. For that is the prime destination of the thing produced, the created object, the new born infant, to have the beholder through his imagination take *part* in it, thus & only thus to complete it" (117). The key is to leave the poem to the "imagination of the spectator" and to take part in the reality of "the created object" and "only thus to complete it". So imagination is necessary both for the poet and the reader to imagine the created object.

I have discussed earlier that the absence of the voice of the poet creates a sense of objectivity and thus conveys a feeling of reality. Williams writes that "it is not necessary to count every flake of the truth that falls: it is necessary to dwell in the imagination if the truth is to be numbered. It is necessary to speak from the imagination" (*The Complete Poems* Vol.1 199). This may seem contradictory especially considering how he wants to touch the real and desires art works to be real, not realist, but actually it is not. Williams creates real poetry in the sense that he renders objects in themselves, not as mimetic representations; but these objects have to pass or filter through the imagination which constitutes the creative process. Williams' poem on Brueghel is a good example of the relation between the real and the poem.

Self Portrait

In a red winter hat blue
eyes smiling
just the head and shoulders

crowded on the canvas
arms folded one
big ear the right showing

the face slightly tilted
a heavy wool coat
with broad buttons

gathered at the neck reveals
a bulbous nose
but the eyes red-rimmed

from over-use he must have
driven them hard
but the delicate wrists

show him to have been a
man unused to
manual labor unshaved his

blond beard half trimmed
no time for any-
thing but his painting

In this 1962 poem from *Pictures from Brueghel* Williams actually turns a self portrait by Brueghel into a poem. In a sense it is a transformation from one artistic medium into another. The real of the painting becomes the inspiration and source for Williams. The poem itself can be called imagist, with the usual simple diction, the impersonal observer stance, isolation and the paratactic style. However, compared to the earlier Imagist register of Williams, here the lines are a bit longer, the syntax slightly more regular. Perhaps it would not be too farfetched to say that if someone does not know that Brueghel is a long dead Dutch Master, (Of course one needs to ignore the word "canvas" in the second stanza or take it as a metaphor) one can think that this is a poem about a painter friend of Williams. The depictions are so real that the reader can imagine such a person without much trouble. As it was with the "Peasant Wedding" this poem which is inspired by a painting, contributes to the argument that art creates a certain kind of real through the reality effect that may very well count for the real itself, which inevitably coincides with the goals of negative capability. The voice of the poet

is instrumental in creating the reality effect, because with just a few words and comments, (as it is the case here with the word “canvas”) the poet can spotlight the fact that it is an art work.

In poems like “Woman Walking” and “A Negro Woman” the presence of the personal voice creates the impression that the reader is hearing a story told by someone, the poet. The reader may be intrigued by the story and thus be guessing, feeling, and indulging in the story. However, the “I” and the “you” always make sure that the reader is at all times conscious of his or her own self. Whereas in poems like “To”, “Between Walls” and the “Red Wheelbarrow” the absence of the direct voice of the poet, the lack of an “I” or a “you” offers the reader the chance, momentarily, to forget his or her identity and see through the eyes of the poet. The reader flows with the poet’s mind or eye almost as one with him/her and the poet loses the mediator position as the teller of some story, becoming a medium like T.S Eliot or Schopenhauer desires the poet to be.

Williams in this latter group of poems absents his voice and presence, and lets the reader meet the things themselves, not in the shape of someone else’s ideas. He explains what he does in his own words: "To be nothing and unaffected by the results, to unlock and flow, uncolored, smooth, carelessly - not cling to the unsolvable lumps of personality (yourself and your concessions, poems) concretions - " (*The Complete Poems* Vol.1 315). This self-effacement is a form of negative capability unique to Williams. Interestingly, like Keats, Williams also talks about Shakespeare, and what he appreciates in him is not very different from the negative capability of the camelion poet: "Shakespeare had that mean ability to fuse himself with everyone which nobodies have, to be anything at any time, fluid, a nameless fellow whom nobody noticed - much, and that is what made him the great dramatist. Because he was nobody and was fluid and accessible” (*The Complete Poems Vol.1* 307). This clearly shows that Williams not only knows about the idea of negative capability but also cherishes it. However, it would be misleading to denote Williams’ sole aim in poetry as achieving negative

capability. As I have tried to show, he has poems written in different styles and voices. Some of his poems and also his grand project *Paterson* do not aspire to negative capability. On the other hand, many of his poems actually are manifestations of the term in 20th century poetry.

No matter how objective the poet tries to be, she/he ends up describing something through his/her words from his own point of view. This takes the issue to a dead end, rendering pure and uncontaminated self presentation of the world an impossibility, as it is inconceivable for an object to write about itself. For one thing, the mind of others is not accessible to the poet. In one of his earlier poems "Pastoral", Williams refers to this problem:

> The little sparrows
> Hop ingenuously
> About the pavement
> Quarreling
> Over those things
> That interest them
> With sharp voices
> But we who are wiser
> Shut ourselves in
> On either hand
> And no one knows
> Whether we think good
> Or evil.
> These things
> Astonish me beyond words!

In this poem Williams contrasts the apparent transparency of sparrows to human beings to the incomprehensibility of men and women. The natural world of objects seems clearer to his comprehension. The main reason for this feeling or assumption is that it depends on visual perception and for Williams, demands no further inquiry. However, with human beings it is not so simple because "… no one knows / Whether we think good / Or evil". So this goes against the motto "no ideas, but in things" because if you are not able to read the ideas of a person then you are not able to reflect the person except for his/her physical appearance, only a superficial impression. In theory the purest relation with the world would require the voice to tell its own story and the poet to receive it in words exactly as it is (which could still be

unreliable since the teller is never neutral and his/her narrative entails self-fiction). However, negative capability does not suppose this. It is important to remind ourselves once more that in negative capability there is always the author. It never supposes the poet's total absence to give voice to the object itself, which is practical impossibility. Perhaps it only shows the extent a poet can efface the self and marks a limit. For example Williams' poem "The Trees" is an attempt to personify and give voice to the thing out there:

> The trees – being trees
> thrash and scream
> guffaw and curse-
> wholly abandoned
> damning the race of men-
>
> Christ, the bastards
> haven't even sense enough
> to stay out in the rain-
>
> Wha ha ha ha
>
> Wheeeee
> clacka tacka tacka
> tacka tacka
> wha ha ha ha ha
> ha ha ha

The trees are personified by being shown to perform human activities like screaming and cursing. Yet after the second stanza, with an act of onomatopoeia he speaks as the trees imitating their sounds with non-word sounds. One can nevertheless argue that it is still the voice of the poet, not of the trees. An absolute separate existence which is not dependent on or shaped by the poet's will or identity is thus impossible. Therefore this is not negative capability, especially not the way we considered Williams a negatively capable camelion poet, mainly because the voice of the poet can easily be discerned and negative capability is not synonymous with personification. However, as I have tried to show, it does not mean that there may not be degrees of negative capability and Williams with his poetry shows us one of its extreme points, the limits of poetry and language perhaps.

It would be better to think of negative capability and the camelion poet it envisions as a search, a quest that can never be completed with total success but in that endeavor, new possibilities of seeing and understanding the world through poetry are revealed. It can be seen as an attempt to break free of the conventional methods of seeing and of assessing the world. Beasley's analysis of Mallarmé's thoughts on language and poetry points both to the shortcomings and promises of language:

> For Mallarmé, the very diversity of human languages indicates the shortcomings of all of them: the 'supreme language', the language that could fully represent Truth 'is missing' (1956:38). But this pessimistic view of language is accompanied by a much more optimistic sense of the opportunity this presents to poetry. It is precisely because language is imperfect that poetry is important, Mallarmé argues, because poetry 'atones for the sins of languages, comes nobly to their aid' by supplying a representation of that which language itself cannot describe (1956:38). (27)

The imperfection of language as a means to represent the world creates a ground which facilitates a different kind of relation with the world. Williams sees a similar strength in poetry and chooses to associate it with the ability to re-create the real with the help of the imagination. The poet re-creates the real in his/her poetry which then becomes a space of the reader. Breslin defines this space as "a world of hard, literal objects, yet a world that is detached from the 'real' world - autonomous, self-referential, multidirectional, the world of the imagination" (263). Thus the ground of poetry becomes a free world where things are both themselves and much more, because although a poem is an art work, it never sheds its relation to reality. This double character prevails at almost every level and each level is connected with the other. Even though a poem is a poem, it is still connected to the world and negative capability as executed by Williams carries features that strengthen this connection. In this respect the absence of the voice of the poet is a crucial factor that enhances this reality effect and reifies the connection. The reader who is left only with "things" forgets that it is told by someone especially if this feeling is not disturbed by a personal pronoun or a comment. Metaphors, similes and tropes and even certain linguistic elements that make the poet's

identity felt can be hindrances. In this regard Moore emphasizes Williams' phrase "pure exchange" and writes:

> He wants a 'pure exchange' (SE, 234) between the audience and the work of art. Similes defeat this purpose, as do non-copulative verbs when used to restrict prediction, because they limit the 'pure exchange' to the quality of facet isolated by the prediction. In doing so, they shackle the reader's imagination, forcing her or him into channels created by the writer's intentions. (909-910)

The reader's freedom and imagination is necessary for this "pure exchange". If the poet is less present in his/her poems, there is much more space for the reader to interpret as he/she is not directed by the poet. This is the contribution of negative capability to the reality effect. In this manner, in many of Williams' poems analyzed here, the reader is not reminded of his/her existence or of the poet's but is presented the world as it is.

To sum up, Williams, in many of his poems, attempted to show the world as it is, independent and free, by withdrawing the self/subject from the poem. Even if he did not copy/mimic reality (as it is impossible) he created a very successful and original reality effect in his poems. It was my prime argument that this is a form of negative capability peculiar to Williams. So the aim in this chapter was to express how and with what techniques this negative capability was attained by Williams. Negative capability is possible only to a certain extent and it has its limits. Williams pushed these limits. His singular style, deeply rooted in imagism, no doubt manifests one of the many possible types of negative capability in 20th Century poetry.

CHAPTER III

BERRYMAN, HENRY AND THE "I"

One of the three ways of looking at negative capability manifests itself in *The Dream Songs*. Berryman with his multiple selves effaces his own identity without totally abandoning it, which constitutes a unique style of negative capability. This chapter is comprised of four sections. The first section studies the relation between Henry and the poet Berryman, showing how Berryman creates an air of ambiguity and to what end. The psychological aspects of this relationship are also highlighted. The second section situates *The Dream Songs* in a unique in-between position and portrays the ground Berryman forges for himself out of two extreme ends of the poetic spectrum - lyric/confessional and dramatic. The third section delves into the different guises of Henry and explores how this multiplicity paves the ground for a unique rendering of negative capability. The last section is on the concept of the self. Inspired by two notions, "freedom of the poet" and the "embattled self", it aims to discuss how the concept of the self in the Dream Songs offers a new perspective on negative capability.

Based on his own self, Berryman creates a very original persona named Henry in *The Dream Songs*. In an interview Berryman says that "Henry is accused of being me and I am accused of being Henry and I deny it and nobody believes me", refusing an autobiographic, one to one correspondence between himself and Henry. On the other hand many events in Berryman's and Henry's lives coincide perfectly and at times it becomes almost impossible to separate one from the other. David Perkins notes that "to take Henry as Berryman is naïve; not to do so would be more naïve" (402).

It may seem strange to focus on Berryman in a dissertation on negative capability since much is made of the connection between Berryman and Henry as well as the poet's confessional mode. However, the complicated relation between Berryman and Henry is

actually the source of negative capability. Christopher Beach considers Berryman as “an exceptionally talented and an extremely ambitious poet, whose work is so idiosyncratic that it has not yet been fully understood by critics and readers” (164). Berryman’s idiosyncrasy stems from the unique relation he establishes with his Dream Song persona Henry. His dictions and registers, which vary from slang to academic, render his Dream Songs hard to fathom. The carefully crafted and playful language of *The Dream Songs* is also a result of Henry’s relationship with Berryman. Dona Hickey makes the following comment: "His seemingly infinite stylistic range is partly due to Henry Pussycat, the multi-dimensional character who speaks in first, second, and third person in *The Dream Songs.* This schizophrenic character appears to inspire Berryman's ingenious use of language" (34). So Berryman is not Henry but also Henry is not himself either in the sense that he has no strictly defined identity with certain permanent traits, but he is rather “multi-dimensional” and almost “schizophrenic” as Hickey puts it.

In this respect, by creating a double self or even multiple selves, by making these selves extremely fluid Berryman masks his own self. Louise Glück claims that “in *The Dream Songs*, the drama of the poems, is the absence of a firm self” because the “I” in the poems cannot be identified with the “central intelligence” of the poems which is the usual tendency of the reader (77). In the absence of a clearly identifiable, coherent “I”, we can argue that Berryman becomes a camelion poet, a “subject” which is impossible to pin down. He seems to be playing out what Shakespeare’s Antony claims: “Here I am Antony, yet cannot hold this visible shape”. Like Shakespeare’s protagonist, Berryman’s self also shifts its shape like the clouds. Therefore at these particular moments of shape shifting he effaces his own identity and becomes like the negatively capable camelion poet who “has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body”, clinging to the concept of negative capability in its heart (Keats 210). In *The Dream Songs* Berryman makes a new take on

negative capability possible – perhaps ironically - by using the self as his subject. Hence, Berryman with his character Henry expands, transcends and re-creates himself in diverse ways, and his Dream Songs take negative capability to one of its possible limits.

Henry and "I": the Ambiguity of *The Dream Songs*

In order to tap into this vein of negative capability, which is the claim of this chapter, it is crucial to survey some of the poets Berryman studied as a poet and scholar throughout his career. In this regard William Wordsworth plays a special role and Berryman through Henry mentions him in several key instances, as in Dream Song 380 "Wordsworth, thou form almost divine, cried henry, / 'the egoistical sublime' said Keats, " and in an unpublished Dream Song quoted by Paul Mariani "Yeats knew nothing about life: it was all symbols / & Wordsworthian egotism: Yeats on Cemetery Ridge" (xii). The striking common denominator of these quotations is that Berryman employs Wordsworth's name together with the accusation of egotism against Wordsworth. Keats, who according to the poet, calls Wordsworth's poetry "egoistical sublime". The kind of poetry and the poet Keats envisions goes against egotism in art. In fact his idea of the chameleon poet grows as a reaction to Wordsworth. Keats is not alone in this and as Donald Goellnicht points out, William Hazlitt's essays and the literary circle they were in together proved to be a great influence on Keats (35-40). Hence in his 3 February 1918 letter, Keats while acknowledging his literary merit, criticizes Wordsworth's egotism:

> It may be said that we ought to read our contemporaries, that Wordsworth &c. should have their due from us. But for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain philosophy engendered in the whims of an egoist? ... Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway, crying out, "Admire me, I am a violet ! Dote upon me, I am a primrose! ... I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur

> and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not to be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtrusive. (81-82)

This letter is significant in that it sheds light on what Keats deems egotism. The egotism of Wordsworth – 'egoistical sublime' – is explained with a flower metaphor. According to Keats, flowers would lose all their attractiveness if they were to openly advocate themselves and their beauty, overtly seeking admiration. Flowers should delight a person not directly but with the sense of pleasure they give. The gist of the metaphor is that poetry should be great, not the poet. Hence a poet is to act like a medium to depict a certain beauty or truth without being obtrusive. The idea of negative capability is easily discernible in this metaphor. In Keats' view, the poet should filter the world through himself into art without forcing his own identity, feelings and ideas into his verses: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all" (Keats 93).

Berryman no doubt recognizes and accepts Wordsworth's egotism; it is almost constantly attached to Wordsworth's name whenever Berryman mentions him. He does not try to defend Wordsworth, although he admires him very much. He confirms Wordsworth and Whitman as great poets of their times and writes, "Wordsworth comes first to mind as being far the greatest poet of his century in England, as Whitman was here" (*The Freedom of the Poet* 227). The reason for this admiration can be traced to the essay "'Song of Myself': Intension and Substance" that Berryman wrote on Whitman's poetry and especially the long poem "Song of Myself". In this essay Berryman pays detailed attention to the use of the personal pronoun "I".

Although the essay is about Whitman and scarcely mentions Wordsworth, the pronoun "I", the voice that allegedly represents the self of the poet stands out as a significant point, as it does in Wordsworth's autobiographical work *The Prelude*. In the same essay Berryman writes that "a poet's first personal pronoun is nearly always ambiguous" and further adds that "for Whitman a poet is a voice" (*The Freedom of the Poet* 230). These two statements are

particularly significant because Berryman, in *The Dream Songs*, attempts to combine these two notions. While trying to maintain the ambiguity of the "I", he associates and disassociates it with different voices representative of different characters, but most of the time he sticks to the main voice, Henry.

Despite the fact that it has been frequently quoted and analyzed by critics, the first Dream Song is an excellent example to initiate a discussion of the persona and the ambiguity created by Berryman through different voices.

> Huffy Henry hid the day,
> unappeasable Henry sulked.
> I see his point,--a trying to put things over.
> It was the thought that they thought
> they could *do* it made Henry wicked & away.
> But he should have come out and talked.
>
> All the world like a woolen lover
> once did seem on Henry's side.
> Then came a departure.
> Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.
> I don't see how Henry, pried
> open for all the world to see, survived.
>
> What he has now to say is a long
> wonder the world can bear & be.
> Once in a sycamore I was glad
> all at the top, and I sang.
> Hard on the land wears the strong sea
> and empty grows every bed.

The Song not only introduces Henry but also provides a glimpse of the different voices that will be employed in the sequence. There is no doubt that in the entire Dream Songs, the most central dialogue takes place between Henry and the persona "I". This differentiation is put into effect immediately. The initial two lines with three foregrounded words ("huffy", "unappeasable" and "sulked") sound rather like a judgment pronounced by the persona. Then Berryman employs the first person pronoun "I" and directly comments upon Henry: "I see his point." With this remark the poet intervenes and makes his presence felt in the poem.

It can be assumed that the personal pronoun “I” implies or reveals the voice of the poet, yet what is striking is that at times the “I” that intervenes becomes or as Berryman says referring to his first Dream Song, “melts” into the voice of Henry. For this particular Dream Song, Dona Hickey claims that "the pronoun ‘I’ in line three introduces a favorite habit of Berryman's. Although it looks as if the narrator has suddenly stepped into the poem, the initiated reader knows that in the earlier lines Henry has been speaking of himself in the third person… this is Berryman's subtle way of shifting point of view" (41).

Berryman’s own words from an interview - just after the publication of his *77Dream Songs*- for the *Contemporary American Poetry* collection edited by Howard Nemerov throw some light on the matter: "Subject: a character named Henry, who also has a friend who calls him 'Mr. Bones'. Here's the first section, or Song, where the 'I' perhaps of the poet disappears into Henry's first and third persons (He talks to himself in the second person, too, about himself)" (130). Perhaps the most important point in this quotation is that Berryman openly accepts that there is no reliable and consistent ‘I’ which can be attributed to a particular voice. So the personal pronouns used may or may not belong to Henry. The ‘I’ may express the voice of the poet or Henry’s voice addressing himself. Kathe Davis supports view:"[A]s Berryman explained that 'context', 'Henry, for instance, refers to himself as "I", "he" and "you," so that the various parts of his identity are fluid. They slide, and the reader is made to guess who is talking to whom'"(48). In this regard, a traditional reading, where the poem can be categorized as a dramatic monologue, a confessional poem or an objective poem, according to its persona, is impossible. Denis Donoghue, quoted by Peter Denman, focuses on three voices in the first Dream Song and he applies the tripartite structure to the rest of *The Dream Songs*:

> The first voice is objective, the poet introducing his character, giving the gist of his theme. The second voice may be received as Henry's voice, recalling the good times, sycamores and songs. But the third voice is different from either; it is generic, representative, apocalyptic, Mankind rather than any particular man,

> Henry or J.B or anyone else. In this third voice the feeling is universal rather than local; it is consistent with the first and second voices, but distinct, as if its experience was the history of the world rather than the fate of a man. It is my understanding that these three voices are nearly as many as the poet requires for his long poem. (89)

Donoghue notes that the first voice in the first line "Huffy Henry hid the day" belongs to the poet. This voice knows about Henry and tells his story from a distance that may be objective. Donoghue does not dwell much on the second voice that is characterized by the 'I': "Once in a sycamore I was glad / all at the top, and I sang". However, this voice is extremely important because the "I" is employed both by the poet persona and Henry in a very ambiguous manner and the decision is left to the reader to decide who is speaking. On the other hand, the third voice that Donoghue marks with adjectives such as "generic, representative, apocalyptic, and universal" and claims to be giving voice to world history and experience rather than personal matters seems exaggerated, considering especially that each and every song is at some point personal and never leaves the vicinity of the unique character Henry. This issue is dealt with in detail later in this chapter, when the confessional quality of the sequence is discussed.

Indeed, it can be said that the identity of the poet, his self, intervenes at almost every possible intersection. Helen Vendler draws our attention to the fact that "Henry is not Berryman, but neither is Henry not-Berryman" (*Part of Nature* 120). The distinction between them is constantly blurred. Therefore, the "I" of the poet and Henry constantly form a mixture that reflects on every other character that appears in the songs as well. No identity represented by a pronoun or a character is safe; the "I" can never be appropriated for good by either the poet or Henry. This mixture is in constant flux and it creates an equivocal effect. Yet this is not the only ambiguity about voices and characters in the sequence.

In the last three lines of the first stanza, two more personal pronouns – "they" and "he" - are introduced in a very tight space. However, instead of bringing clarity to Henry and his situation these lines work to complicate matters even more:

I see his point,--a trying to put things over.
It was the thought that they thought
they could *do* it made Henry wicked & away.
But he should have come out and talked. (3-6)

Who are "they"? "To put things over" or "to put over" means to deceive or make a fool of. By positioning the phrase "I see his point" just before this statement and after the initial two lines that refer to the discontent of Henry, the persona refers to both, but more to the act of deceiving. The "I" here can belong to Henry – reflecting on himself – or to the interfering poet. The mysterious "they" may refer to a group of people but best can be linked to the beginning of the second stanza- to the phrase "all the world", meaning a group of people other than Henry and the poet. "All the world like a woolen lover / once did seem on Henry's side", but "the world" comes up in opposition to Henry, referred to as "they". This view is supported by the last two lines of the second stanza "…pried / open for all the world to see, survived." Here Henry becomes a spectacle for everyone to see, but his reality is at every point undermined.

In "the world against Henry", "it" points to the deceiving/fooling of Henry by the world. This is one of the main reasons why at present Henry feels out of place. Berryman writes "All the world like a woolen lover / once did seem on Henry's side." The phrase "woolen lover" is particularly pertinent here. By using "woolen" instead of "wool" or "wooly" Berryman leaves the field open to both negative and positive associations of wool as well as reminding the reader of the idiom "to pull the wool over someone's eyes", that is deceiving a person. It may refer to the warmth and fuzziness, hence the comfort that something woolen can provide as well as the roughness, toughness and the uncivilized nature of the thing. In the last stanza, as well as the positive side of being in nature, Berryman also brings out the roughness of nature with the strong sea wearing down the hard land. The last stanza also supports this idea:

Once in a sycamore I was glad
all at the top, and I sang.

Hard on the land wears the strong sea
and empty grows every bed (15-18)

These four lines from the last stanza allude to a time when Henry or the poet (it is hard to distinguish here) was happy in nature but eventually lost that happiness. He is left alone in the world, suggested by the line “empty grows every bed”. In relation with the image of the bed, “a woolen lover” brings to the mind the image of a blanket (or a lover) once wrapped around Henry, who is now all alone in his bed.

Yet the crucial point, especially in terms of why this first Dream Song is treated in detail here, is that the ambiguity of the pronouns forms a unique style for Berryman. For instance, in the lines “Once in a sycamore I was glad / all at the top, and I sang”, one cannot distinguish whether the “I” belongs to the poet or Henry. Both work equally well. This becomes almost the generic case in all the Dream Songs. He is neither in the poem as a lyric poet nor does he create a character totally independent of the poet.

Kathe Davis draws attention to Berryman’s reading of Freud, especially in terms of selfhood and how the self is repressed or limited by the notion of a self (48). This self can be seen as the ego created by society’s demands from an individual. With Henry, Berryman sought an escape, liberty for himself from this kind of a limitation. Therefore Davis writes that "[s]pecifically, he [Berryman] imagined this liberty of spirit as a liberation from the constraints of various forms of selfhood" and considers Henry an escape hatch for Berryman (48). Many other critics also assess the relation between Berryman and Henry not just in artistic terms but in psychological terms, and try to explain it through psychoanalysis. Ron Callan sees the coming out of Henry as the repressed gaining expression against a world that wants to subdue the poet’s self and writes that "Henry is at odds with others who represent, for him, oppressive behaviour and values" (65). The emergence of Henry is then seen as a kind of psychoanalysis where Berryman finds an artistic voice for his Id. Helen Vendler calls some of the poems of several poets - including Berryman, Anne Sexton, Robert Lowell and

Sylvia Plath - “Freudian Lyrics” and specifically traces the psychoanalytic elements in Berryman’s poetry (*Recent American Poets* 31-33). Dream Song 4 is a good example to study the psychoanalytic map Vendler lays out for us to understand the relation between voices in *The Dream Songs*:

> Filling her compact & delicious body
> with chicken páprika, she glanced at me
> twice.
> Fainting with interest, I hungered back
> and only the fact of her husband & four other people
> kept me from springing on her
>
> or falling at her little feet and crying
> 'You are the hottest one for years of night
> Henry's dazed eyes
> have enjoyed, Brilliance.' I advanced upon
> (despairing) my spumoni.--Sir Bones: is stuffed,
> de world, wif feeding girls.
>
> --Black hair, complexion Latin, jewelled eyes
> downcast . . . The slob beside her feasts . . . What wonders is
> she sitting on, over there?
> The restaurant buzzes. She might as well be on Mars.
> Where did it all go wrong? There ought to be a law against Henry.
> --Mr. Bones: there is. (6)

In this Dream Song, which is a parody of the courtly love lyric, Henry speaking as “I” sees a woman in a restaurant. He fancies her immediately and she glances back at him twice. Judging by the first stanza “Filling her compact body & delicious body”, “and only the fact of her husband & four other people / kept me from springing on her”, the attraction that Henry feels appears carnal. Crudely speaking, Henry simply wants to jump on her. The reader hears what Henry would like to say to her: “'you are the hottest one for years of night / Henry's dazed eyes / have enjoyed, Brilliance'”. In the last stanza Henry describes the beauty of the woman in detail. However, the key point is that despite the strong attraction and the manifest desire, Henry does nothing but think and yearn. In many other Dream Songs similar situations occur, Henry is upset about something, but he usually does not do anything other than

complain about the events that bother him and tries to imagine the events in more favorable "if" related terms.

Another significant issue is that in the second and third stanzas of Dream Song 4, in which the poet persona does not speak at all, Henry's "friend" intervenes with his own black American South accent (as in a minstrel show in "black face") at two different instances, criticizing and warning Henry. This friend, who calls Henry "Mr.Bones", warns him about the consequences of his actions. Helen Vendler makes a striking psychological/psychoanalytic reading of their relationship and calls Henry's friend the voice of conscience. According to Vendler, Henry is the "Id" but: "there is no integrated Ego in *The Dream Songs* : there is only Conscience at one end of the stage and the Id at the other, talking to each other across a void, never able to find common ground" (*Recent American Poets* 36). Vendler proposes Henry's friend as the voice of the conscience.

As Vendler and many other critics have pointed out, Henry can be analyzed as the "Id" of Berryman: then *The Dream Songs*, becomes the account of the "Id" of Berryman. Vendler depicts Henry as ""petulant, complaining, greedy, lustful, and polymorphously perverse; he is also capable of childlike joy and disintegrative rage" which suits perfectly the conception of the "Id" (*Recent American Poets* 36). How Henry acts or speaks in Dream Song 4 is almost a text book example for the definition of the "Id". "Biological functions of personality" and "basic instinctual drives, particularly sexuality" are reflected in the lines that refer specifically to sexuality and food. Henry almost meshes these two basic drives, lust and hunger, together in his shifting register which here moves back and forth between the high romantic style and vulgar language, creating the impression that a woman is like food to him. Henry's friend seems to keep a check on Henry, yet if his friend was not restraining him would he act upon his desires? It is highly questionable.

However, we cannot really talk about a rigid structure in *The Dream Songs* and see Henry as the "Id", the infrequently appearing poet persona as the "Ego" and Henry's friend as the "Super Ego". The main ambiguity does not stem from the difference between Henry and his friend but from the exchange and play between the poet Berryman and his character Henry where the two sometimes become indistinguishable.

The use of a variety of pronouns is the key. Berryman employs almost every pronoun in his Dream Songs as a method to blur distinctions as to where the "Ego" ends and Henry the "Id" begins or the friend speaks as superego and the voice of reason. Berryman in an interview says that "a pronoun may seem a small matter, but she matters, he matters, it matters, they matter" (126). An excellent example of this is Dream Song 36, which at first glance seems to consist of a conversation between Henry and his friend:

> The high ones die, die. They die. You look up and who's there?
> - Easy, easy, Mr Bones. I is on your side.
> I smell your grief.
> - I sent my grief away. I cannot care
> forever. With them all align & again I died
> and cried, and I have to live.
>
> - Now there you exaggerate, Sah. We hafta die.
> That is our 'pointed task. Love & die.
> - Yes; that makes sense.
> But what makes sense between, then? What if I
> roiling & babbling & braining, brood on why and
> just sat on the fence?
>
> - I doubts you did or do. De choice is lost.
> - It's fool's gold. But I go in for that.
> The boy & the bear
> looked at each other. Man all is tossed
> & lost with groin-wounds by the grand bulls, cat.
> William Faulkner's where?
> (Frost being still around.) (40)

Henry is disgruntled - discontent can now easily be seen as a trait of Henry –that many of the "high ones die". With the "high ones" Henry refers to famous writers and poets of his time. The only clue about this comes at the end of the poem like a punch line when Henry asks

“William Faulkner’s where? / (Frost being still around)”. However, the crucial point is that through the deaths that Henry witnesses, he becomes aware of his own mortality and almost falls into an existential crisis that becomes the topic and inspiration of this poem.

The abundance of the first person singular pronoun “I” can be easily discerned in this particular Dream Song which is in the format of a conversation between Henry and Henry’s friend. Henry in the first line is nervous and uneasy, even panicky, which is implicit in his repetition of the word “die”. His friend soothes him by saying “- Easy, easy, Mr. Bones. I is on your side. /I smell your grief”. The way his friend soothes and comforts him and the idea of smelling grief resembles a man trying to soothe an animal. In this regard they seem to be playing their roles as “id” and “ego” or in other words will and reason. Throughout this poem and in the rest of *The Dream Songs*, Henry’s friend usually tries to keep Henry calm and abides by his role as the voice of reason and conscience, as when Henry feels panic at the beginning or when he naively and childishly wants to know if he “just sat on the fence” like a child sitting on a fence, doing nothing “roiling & babbling & braining”. As the behavior of a child are rather impulsive and defined more by his/her primary needs, every time Henry acts/speaks in a childish manner, the voice may be that of the “id”.

On the other hand, the voice who says “– I sent my grief away. I cannot care / forever. With them all align & again I died / and cried, and I have to live” cannot belong to an “id” because the idea behind this is rational. It is the voice Henry but this voice belongs to a person, an ego who after obsessing with the death of his fellow writers feels their deaths so powerfully that he himself feels like dying and decides that his obsession with death cannot go on like this, that he has to live and thus sends his grief away. Moreover, when his friend very subtly and coldly says “- Now there you exaggerate, Sah. We hafta die. / That is our 'pointed task. Love & die” and thus normalizes death, Henry, who is supposed to be the “id”, responds not in an outburst but accepts it calmly “Yes; that makes sense”. Designating the

aim of life as to love, his friend speaks like the "superego" rather than the "ego". Henry in the fourth line of the second stanza asks "But what makes sense between, then? ..." This is such a significant question that it almost matches Hamlet's ultimate question "to be or not to be" in the way it questions life profoundly, asking for meaning. This is a question that normally the "id" would not ask as it would only reflect basic instincts, desires and its own will. If the "id" is considered the animal side possessing the primal instincts, then an animal questioning its own death would not make sense because we commonly assume that animals do not even know that they are going to die, let alone ponder upon it.

However, the switch here in the last three lines of the second stanza is rather interesting. From the supposedly superego position who questions the meaning of life, Henry goes back to his initial "id" position conveyed by his childish, petulant words "… what if I / rolling & babbling & braining, brood on why and / just sat on the fence?"

The use of ambiguity can be attributed to the idea of merging identities. The friend saying "I is on your side" is not only an example of broken English, but it also imparts the line a double meaning: "I" here may refer to the identity of the friend and it may also underline self-talk, indicating that the voice of the friend is not differentiated from Henry's and maybe even from the poet persona's. The ambiguity of the "I", Henry and his friend in *The Dream Songs* is a constant reminder of this merger. Davis quotes Berryman, that he insisted 'Both *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* and *The Dream Songs* are built around the notion that individual identities can merge'" (36-37). Yet the key point is not to lose the different identities in a merger; Berryman, quoted by Davis, writes that "*The Ball Poem* of 1942 as well as, later, *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* (1948-1953) and *The Dream Songs* (1955-1968): namely, the dissolving of one personality into another without relinquishing the original'" (36).

Anthony Caleshu thinks that "Berryman's poetry relies on 'postures'" (101) and his "exploitation of the 'dramatic' has its roots in the dramatic monologue, where not only the poet but the speaker is hidden behind a mask of intentions" (102). Considering the ambiguity of the pronouns and the stylistic discrepancies and the characteristic differences in the voices, Caleshu's point may illuminate the position of the persona vis-à-vis the voice in the Dream Songs better than an analysis solely based on Freud. On the other hand Vendler notes that "Henry is invented so that the lyric protagonist can appear to be the deranged analysand rather than the cool analyst" (*Recent American Poets* 47). Rather than taking Henry simply as the "id" it is much more revealing to consider him as one of the postures of the poet Berryman, a voice that he turns to when he desires to lose control or as Vendler points out, to be the analysand who is free to speak out his dreams and desires. Otherwise we would be imposing a structure which is non-existent onto the poems.

Richard Hugo in his book *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing* notes that a poem has two subjects; the subject that triggers the poem and the subject that the poem discovers along the way. He considers the first subject the map and the second the treasure, valuing the latter over the former. This particular definition suits Berryman's Dream Songs quite well. The Idiosyncrasy of Berryman stems from his focus on his self, which can be seen as the map, especially on his unconscious, and turning it into a source for poetry which is the treasure rich with multitude of selves. Thomas Travisano writes *"The Dream Songs* emerged out of a period of intensive dream analysis for Berryman. And the poems' sudden shifts and surprising juxtapositions reflect his extensive exploration of and immersion in unconscious experience" (246). Most of *The Dream Songs* possess this dream like quality – it is no surprise that the sequence is called Dream Songs especially considering Berryman's interest in Freud[7] – where the reader is brought into the poem to witness those

[7] It can be said that Freud's major contribution to literary criticism stems from his analysis of dreams. He considered dreams coded messages from the unconscious of a person and called this process of encoding the

allegedly dream-inspired, dream like works. The language maintains the dream quality and in this regard it is full of word play and allusions, with shifting registers, syntax and the use of different dictions. On the other hand, because those allusions are like images in a dream, often very personal, it is hard for the reader to decipher the meanings and they become another source of ambiguity. In dreams one can see a person to be both x and y at the same time. The term “condensation” coined by Freud refers to the identification of a single object in a dream by various different symbols and it fits the logic behind *The Dream Songs*. Since in dreams shifting identities, names and faces are very common, in many of the Dream Songs, Berryman’s dream format harbors the ambiguity of Henry, the “I” (poet) and the friend.

A reader can never be sure what triggered a certain poem but what we may feel is that Berryman discovers a large part of the poem as he is writing it. His aim to “terrify & comfort” is based on this dream notion where one will be shocked but will also be comforted because it is after all dream and because overall it is the story of the “pussy-cat” Henry. Justin Quinn comments that "our dreams are endlessly, panoramically, luridly, violently, erotically about ourselves, and our egotism is measurable by the extent to which we think they are interesting for other people" (71). This is especially important in regard to the argument of negative capability. It reminds us of Auden’s outburst when he criticized confessional poetry: "Who the hell cares about Anne Sexton's grandmother?" Here it may turn into a question like why the hell should we care about Berryman’s dreams? Well, the initial response is that first of all they are never simply dreams. They may be dream inspired, dream like poems - many of them at least - but they have a poetic form unique to Berryman. Moreover, there is a certain kind of aesthetic novelty that is sought in these poems and in this respect they are not written just to convey the unconscious of the poetic voice, but rather they are designed to creatively reassemble it on the paper. Travisano, referring to the quartet (Berryman, Lowell, Bishop,

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dream-work. This is almost a literary process. “The dream-work performs what many (including Freud) recognize as a literary activity in which metaphor, metonymy, and other figures represent in a disguised form the secret wish that lies hidden in the unconscious” (Castle 164).

Jarrell) writes: "[T]heir particular postmodern aesthetic concerns itself principally with exploring the vicissitudes and displacements of the individual human self" (9). So yes, Berryman is in his poems, but it is not a coherent self that is reflected in the text. On the contrary there are at least two, often three different selves so that we have a speaker/persona wearing different masks, revealing different aspects of the poetic voice. Vendler writes that "Henry's sole means of utterance is song, as his sole medium of appearance is dream" (*Recent American Poets* 52) and this makes perfect sense considering that only dream-like or comical-satirical works can accommodate so many different versions of a single character.

The Camelion Poet: Between Two Extremes

Vendler writes: "The Dream Songs, one must always recall, are written not by Henry, not by the courteous end-man Conscience, but Berryman the writer - not the often sodden, cruel, incompetent historical John Berryman, but by the poet who never lost his respect for accuracy of language, and who eventually found a miraculous comic poise" (*Recent American Poets* 46). There is a delicate balance here that needs to be worked out carefully. Vendler characterizes Berryman's voice as "comic poise". Caleshu calls these different voices in *The Dream Songs* "postures". This "comic poise" and "postures" or simply the different characters and voices remind us of dramatic monologues; yet, *The Dream Songs* never turn into formal dramatic monologues.

A dramatic monologue needs a "single fictional or historical character" and such a poem should reveal "the mind of the impersonated character". In this regard dramatic monologues can be considered an example of dramatic poetry. Yet the uniqueness of *The Dream Songs* resides in the fact that Henry is both a fictional character and is the self revelation of the poet Berryman himself while the friend is the voice of his conscience.

Carol Hirst establishes the following link between dramatic monologue and negative capability:

> In composing the dramatic monologue, the poet assumes a persona, a mask, a voice not his or her own, so that the form itself is an exercise in negative capability, the lyric poet's excursion into the dramatic to fill some other body. But in the very act of impersonation, the poet displays his own skill, his own accents. The poem thus has the potential to project two identities - that of the poet and that of the voice he or she creates. (218)

Hirst considers dramatic monologue "an exercise in negative capability" mainly because the poet tries to fill another body. She concentrates on Keats' letter where he declares that the poet he has no identity and actually fills others. Yet Keats at no point advises the poet to try to speak for the thing/person but only asks the poet to imagine the thing, to become one with it. Negative capability and the idea of the camelion poet require the poet to be selfless, in the sense that he/she is open to the world, to present it as it is. When the poet speaks for the thing, mimicking or imagining being that thing, giving voice to it, then the poet transgresses the boundary set by the concept of negative capability namely that there has to be a poet (if only a camelion poet) even if he/she is left in the background.

A dramatic monologue is an attempt at imitating the character imagined by the poet. Hirst sees this as negative capability. Since negative capability is not a strictly defined concept, open to interpretation at various points, Hirst's view is also tenable. Yet the way negative capability is considered in this study is that if a poet totally abandons his observer position and tries to speak through the voice of the thing he/she presents to, impersonate a thing or a person, it is then no more negative capability but a drama of a kind.

A dramatic monologue by definition is at the end of the scale where the concept of negative capability is transgressed because the poet creates and impersonates another character. At the other end of the scale lies lyric poetry or confessional poetry because here the poet talks about his/her own life and feelings, thus violates the basic rule of negative

capability which is impersonality. Davis remarks that "the first thing that must be said about Berryman's central thought is that it's not central. It tends to extremes" (33). In line with this remark it can be said that Berryman tries to incorporate these two poles in his Dream Songs. He wants to be both himself, Henry and the friend, and he wants to be both dramatic and personal. Robert Hahn writes:

> What Berryman longed to become *in The Dream* Songs was a fiction like the Shakespeare which Borges has imagined for us: everything and nothing, everywhere present but nowhere to be completely identified or summed up. The minimum condition for such a fiction is the ability to create *personae* which are both projections of the self and dramatic alterations of it - Crazy Jane or Crispin or Mauberly - and its full accomplishment, the mounting of its theatre, requires that the ego be transcended by a larger identity including both the author and his characters (118).

To create a character like Henry and to be Berryman at the same time can be considered an in-between position arrived at from two opposing ends of the lyric and dramatic styles. Moreover, it validates Hahn's observation that Berryman wanted to be "everything and nothing". Davis writes: "Berryman believed that there are two kinds of people, and he wanted to be both of them. He seems to have been temperamentally committed to trying to have it both ways" and further adds that "[t]he same double tendency is clear in his poetic convictions" (33). Berryman said that he wanted both to merge his characters and at the same time try to maintain these different identities, quoted a few pages earlier. Thus by trying to be both, Berryman, creates a unique position of negative capability. Although different versions of his selves are created they are never totally independent of the self but because Berryman blends with Henry and Henry's friend, and Henry shows up in a multitude of guises, there is no fixed single self that can be identified as Berryman either. Lyric poetry, dramatic monologue and confessional poetry are among those poetic styles from which Berryman appropriates certain features and shapes according to his own style.

In the Dream Songs, the ambiguity of the “I” is never resolved. This is the expertise of Berryman and perhaps the main element that makes the Dream Songs so unique. Davis even claims that "Berryman's whole career could almost be seen as an investigation into 'what "I" is', and at the end of his life he was still investigating, still pointing out that we don't know" (42). Therefore he maintains his ambiguity, and keeps the reader guessing about who is speaking, mixing his autobiographical details with Henry’s relentless and wild character which he both discovers and creates at the same time. In this sense the ambiguity is only natural as Dream Songs are artistic reflections of this genuine attempt at self-discovery.

Sometimes the confessional tendency takes over; hence the personal and symbolic references become self-referential. Caleshu points to the fact that "Berryman wears the mask of Henry quite well in the early Dream Songs, by the later ones he is so obviously documenting autobiographical matter" (104). Although it would be unfair to make such a clear-cut distinction, it would not be wrong to say that his second book *His Toy, His Dream, His Rest* entails much more autobiographical details. Yet what matters is not the presence of autobiographical material but how it is presented. For example Dream Song 172 directly addresses Sylvia Plath’s suicide (qtd. In Mariani 396-397):

> Your face broods from my table, Suicide.
> Your force came on like a torrent toward the end
> of agony and wrath.
> You were christened in the beginning Sylvia Plath
> and changed that name for Mrs Hughes and bred
> and went on round the bend
>
> till the oven seemed the proper place for you.
> I brood upon your face, the geography of grief,
> hooded, till I allow
> again your resignation from us now
> though the screams of orphaned children fix me anew.
> Your torment here was brief,
>
> long falls your exit all repeatingly,
> a poor exemplum, one more suicide,
> to stack upon the others
> till stricken Henry with his sisters & brothers

suddenly gone pauses to wonder why he
alone breasts the wronging tide.

Henry's name comes up only once in the Dream Song, in the last stanza. Considering all the Dream Songs, most of the time the reader does not need Henry's name to feel his presence. Usually, Henry reveals himself to the reader through his language. Here more than Henry, it is Berryman the poet who feels grief for the death of Sylvia Plath.

Dream Songs like 172 are the main reason why Berryman is called a confessional poet by many critics. There are also other Dream Songs where Henry speaks but because of the personal and biographical information, one can easily identify Henry with Berryman. Dream Song 256 is such an example:

Henry rested, possessed of many pills
& gin & whiskey. He put up his feet
& switched on Schubert.
His tranquility lasted five minutes
for (1) all that undone all the heavy weeks
and (2) images shook him alert.

A rainy Sunday morning, on vacation
as well as Fellowship, he could not rest:
bitterly he shook his head.
-Mr Bones, the Lord will bring us to a nation
where everybody only rest. –I confess
that notion bores me dead.

for there's no occupation there, save God,
if that, and long experience of His works
has not taught me his love.
His love must be a very strange thing indeed,
considering its products. No, I want rest here,
neither below nor above.

Mariani places this Dream Song in a specific time frame and elucidates the details:

> When classes ended on the eighteenth, he was interviewed by several young men, 'armed with taperecorders [and] cameras', while his two telephones rang constantly. But already his mind was on the delicious fogs of Ireland. Exhausted by his creative outburst, he tried to rest. On Sunday morning, August 21, with five days to go before sailing, he composed song 256. (418)

In some of his Dream Songs Berryman brings not only details from his personal life but also expresses his own feelings. Considered in the light of Keats' negative capability and the chameleon poet, in certain poems such as Dream Songs 154 and 172 Berryman fails to satisfy Keats' criteria and at first glance falls into the category of the egoistical Wordsworthian poet. However, the situation is much more complicated than it seems and it requires a small detour into the confessional paradigm.

From the perspective of negative capability and the chameleon poet, if we imagine Keats reading Lowell's confessional poetry, say "Life Studies", he would probably call his poetry "egotistical" as it is based on the self. The main reason for this resides in Billy Collins' distinction between "writing from memory and writing from imagination". Although most of the time they work together, thinking, imagining and remembering are not the same. It can be easily said that in poems like "Father's Bedroom" Lowell works from memory. If not, at least he is giving the impression that he is, because we can never know the truth. This is not very different from the same "truth effect" that w as introduced in the chapter on William Carlos Williams' poems. Truth is not the question here, it is the craft of poetry that matters and creates a distinction. David Graham's and Kate Sontag's joint commentary on this subject is very apt: "We really have no way of knowing, apart from always contestable biographical research, whether a given poem actually does confess personal intimacies, or simply wants to give that impression. Is Robert frost's great poem "Home Burial" *about* the children he and Elinor lost? What better answer will we ever have than yes and no" (7-8) Whether a poem is based on truth or not is always a secondary issue. How one determines the quality of a poem is a complicated aesthetic matter and cannot be judged by secondary criteria.

One of the criteria to measure a poem's success, as stipulated by Joan Aleshire, is the ability to draw in the reader. It is a prominent criterion and is closely related with the discussion of negative capability in this study, particularly with an eye to the pronouns in a

poem. Aleshire claims that "the ‘I’ of the poem is the fulcrum on which the action of the poem turns, the agent by which the reader can enter the experience, can - in that overused but apt word - "share” experience with the speaker" (15). As the voice of the poet expressed through a powerful and effective “I” is a crucial part of the lyric tradition, it does not necessarily mean that every usage of it enables the reader to identify with that “I”, put her/himself in the shoes of the voice and flow with the poem. If this lyric “I” is not powerful and effective enough to pull in the reader into the poem, then it may work in exactly the opposite direction, keeping the reader out. Then the “I” becomes a means to remind us only that it is not the reader’s poem but someone else’s.

On the other hand it is not only the use of pronouns that facilitate the participation of the reader. Despite the fact that there was no “I” and only one “my” in the poem, Lowell’s poem “Father’s Bedroom” for example is very personal. Quite aptly Sydney Lea states that “pronouns are not people”, so how they are employed in a poem is a prominent factor but they do not single handedly determine the intrusion of a poet in a poem (50).

In order to pinpoint the main dilemma of the confessional paradigm, Travisano writes that "the paradigm assumes the author's creative passivity" meaning that the poet only needs to delve into his memory and come out with stories already there (63). The criticism here is similar to Collins’s and Aleshire’s in the sense that absence of imagination (because it is just from the memory) renders a poem less valuable. Another important poet who thinks along these lines is Robert Bly. In his essay “A Wrong Turn in American Poetry” he criticizes both the poets and the critics for expecting too little.

Yet it is crucial to note that confessional poets are not simply expressing a self that is coherent and known to them but more or less finding out about themselves and creating art simultaneously. Travisano notes: "Labeled ‘confessional poets’ are not primarily engaged in a process of revealing the self. Rather they are engaged in a process of exploring the self, of

reaching back through a consideration of surviving artifacts, documentary records, lingering memory traces, dreamlike recurrences, symptomatic behaviors, and verbal slippages …" (12). Perhaps this is one of the main reasons why Berryman fiercely rejects the label confessional despite his antagonism towards impersonality. Although Berryman could never accept Eliot's separation of an artist's work and his/her life (44), "Berryman always thought of his own work, even at its most personal, as art" (Davis, 45).

His poetry, especially *The Dream Songs* cannot be simply relegated to the category of memory-driven poetry. On the other hand, it can be said that the "process of exploring the self", with reference to Collins' distinction, may seem like a memory-driven event, yet memory is not the mere storage place of past events exactly as they happened. Perspective and reconstruction are involved in the process. Quoted by Travisano, the poet James Merril writes:

> It should be clear that one is not dealing with self-photography, with a literal translation of life into art, nor even with a unified, autobiographical self. Rather, the poet goes through an uncertain, intuitive process of reinvention or re-creation by which a poem, even one that appears to closely parallel the author's actual experience, is imaginatively reassembled (52).

As Merril points out confessional poetry or poetry that concentrates on the self should not be seen as reflecting "a unified, autobiographical self". This self is both remembered and also created by the artist. Brendon Cooper tells us that "language is a vehicle of articulation that is forced to point back to an irretrievable and inarticulable past wholeness". Nietzsche in a similar spirit has said (169):

> For in the past one believed in 'the soul' as one believed in grammar and the grammatical subject: one said 'I' is the condition, 'think' is the predicate and conditioned - thinking is an activity to which a subject must be thought of as cause. Then one tried with admirable artfulness and tenacity to fathom whether one could not get out of this net - whether the reverse was not perhaps true: 'think' the condition, 'I' conditioned; 'I' thus being only a synthesis produced by thinking. (63)

Nietzsche dethrones “I” from its position as the inevitable truth, something set as a condition before anything else and opens it up to question. The premise he criticizes is the notion that one needs a subject-object distinction to be able to explain or talk about a phenomenon or event. This distinction kills simultaneity and a wider, deeper understanding of things in a more connected and holistic manner. The interesting point is that he gives the example of language and grammar. As mentioned in the introduction, Lacan also believes that there cannot be a human subject without language (Sarup 10). If this is the case and because language needs a speaker, then this self is something created and most importantly in no way represents what we call the human subject or the self hood. As Annie Finch remarks that "all poems, however incoherent their syntax, posit a central self or speaker because poems are made up of language" (143). In this respect, the self that is expressed or explored by a poet is only a certain portion of a fragmented whole that is called the self. Maybe there is no single self but a camelion self which can multiply itself so that instead of a self there are selves created or discovered during the process of writing and Berryman’s “Dream Songs” provide ground to explore this possibility.

A Multitude of Henries

Vendler describes the voice of the poet in *The Dream Songs* as “the ultimate familiarity of the dialogue of the mind with itself” (*Part of Nature* 123). Unlike Bakhtin’s concept of “polyphony”[8] where each individual finds a voice, Vendler says that a single voice making intimate conversation with itself predominates in the *Dream Songs*. However, the conversations are never simple dialogues; the boundaries between Berryman and Henry are

[8] Russian formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin along with polyphony employs several similar terms such as Dialogical and Heteroglossia to describe a type of literary work where different characters are represented with their individual voices. In Heteroglossia, against an omniscient narrator who knows it all, the author/poet creates distinct characters who speak for themselves. See. Castle 115-120, 196-197, 278-280.

usually blurred. Berryman attempts to give voice to different characters mostly through the mask/voice of Henry. However, the key point is that Berryman does not give up either Henry or the central "I" that he interchangeably employs. Therefore rather than "polyphony" and "dramatic monologue" we witness a division of the self similar to impersonation or one man wearing different masks. Hahn calls this a failure especially when Berryman is compared with his contemporaries who sought to create characters, and writes that "the 'wide cast of characters' is only Berryman in a narrow range of moods, lacking even such thin disguises as Roethke's old woman, dying man, or young girl; or Jarrell's war widows and stranded suburban housewives; to say nothing of Lowell's Mad Negro Soldier, Marie de Medici, and Hart Crane" (119). Yet it would be unjust to state that Berryman was not able to "create *personae* which are both projections of the self and dramatic alterations of it", contrary to what Hahn says it was exactly what he achieved. Hahn claims that Berryman aimed to become "*The poet beyond the poet"* and explains: "*The poet beyond the poet* is that Shakespeare who is all of his speakers and finally none of them; more modestly, the consciousness able to orchestrate *The Wasteland* and paint *Life Studies*" (122). However, Berryman wanted to merge and keep the distance simultaneously. Therefore it would be erroneous to compare *The Dream Songs* with *The Wasteland* and *Life Studies* as they are very different in both style and poetic agenda. What Berryman did in *The Dream Songs* was something new as Vendler says: "A new multiple-Berryman appeared in uninhibited dialogue with himself and his possible selves, a straight man in his own minstrel show, conducting his dreams in public, taking his pills and drinks onto the printed page with him" (*Part of Nature* 119). Here the key phrase Vendler introduces is "multiple-Berryman" and it is one of the linchpins of my argument.

Berryman constructs his other selves and different identities in *The Dream Songs* through Henry. Stephen Matterson writes that *The Dream Songs* "is after all a song collection

in which the main protagonist inhabits various identities, black and white, male and female" (146). For example in Dream Song 381 Henry is called a “cave-man” and the poem is inspired by this “posture”. The poem starts with a blunt exclamation: “Cave-man Henry grumbled to his spouse / ‘It’s cold in here. I’d rather have a house. / A house would be better.’” (403). As it can be inferred even from these three lines, Henry never completely appropriates his role but rather wears it loosely. The reader is not naïve enough to believe that in this Dream Song Henry is going to simulate the life of a cave-man. This is obvious from the mocking line “A house would be better” because the concept of a house has not yet been discovered. So we sense that it is a guise, a mask and a posture – as Caleshu calls it – that is utilized by Berryman to provide perspective and a better insight into his own life. This shows itself clearly in the second stanza:

> Leslie we lost all down the pure rock-face
> & that was terrifying. Junior tried a trip in space
> & ever since then he’ll stutter.
> I woke our wiseman over an awful dream:
> Vividest his shrew-spouse: Scream.
> I’m writing Mr Antelope a letter. (7-12)

Berryman here uses autobiographical details and blends them with the the cave-man posture. Again it is a melding of two different times and life styles. The fears of a cave-man his struggle against the forces of nature, asking a Wiseman when a nightmare needs to be interpreted - are incorporated into the modern day anxieties of Berryman. So he is both a caveman and not a caveman at the same time.

According to Hirst the created characters act as an outward fictional correlative for some emotion inwardly real to the poet (219). Once more it is important to emphasize that Dream Songs are not dramatic monologues yet the creation of Henry and his different guises similarly enable the reader to see different characters. How Hirst describes the poetry of Tennyson is close to how perhaps we would describe Berryman’s: "Tennyson has fused the introspection of the egoistical sublime with Keats's negative capability. He creates a form that

contains the potential for expressing intense lyric emotion with an irony that separates that emotion from the poet. The poet can thus inhabit a position without identifying himself with it" (220). For Berryman, Henry serves a similar purpose - that of a fictional outward objective correlative. Here cave-man Henry is employed to express the fears, anxieties and psychological entanglements of the poet Berryman. Yet it can also be appropriated by any reader who empathizes with the metaphor of the caveman.

When one thinks of a cave-man and a cave, the images of cave painting also come to the mind almost naturally. We think that cave paintings were made to depict important events and functioned as pictographs (earlier forms of writing). Employing a mocking tone Berryman plays with the idea and says that he is "writing" this letter - meaning the poem – to a Mr. Antelope. Of course who Mr. Antelope, Leslie and Junior are remains a mystery in the poem. Yet by bringing in a cave-man – it can also be related to the wild and raw nature of Henry the "id" and by bringing in a house, writing a letter he manages to be not-id. Thus he can slide from one to the other.

Some of the most interesting and intriguing examples of impersonation are found in those Dream Songs where Henry is identified with an animal or when animal traits are bestowed upon him. At the beginning of Dream Song 13 Berryman says "God bless Henry. He lived like a rat," and in the first line of the second stanza makes this interesting suggestion: "So may be Henry was a human being. / Let's investigate that" (15). Similarly in Dream Song 97 Berryman writes "Henry of Donnybrook bred like a pig, / bred when he was brittle, bred when big, / how he's sweating to support them" and compares the arduous life that Henry leads with lots of children to that of a pig with its litter of piglets (114).:

> Of brutal revelry gap your mouth to state:
> Front back & backside go bare!
> Cats' blackness, booze, blows, grunts, grand groans.
> Yo-bad yõm i-oowaled bo v'ha'l lail awmer h're gawber!
> —Now, now, poor Bones. (14-18)

Henry is seen to act almost like an animal at the end of the poem. He goes naked and he starts to lose words and begins making pure sounds. This is first depicted as “grunts” and “grand groans”. Then he takes it one step further and his words become unintelligible resembling sounds that animals make. In the last line Henry’s friend feels the need to intervene and call Henry back to his senses; saying “now, now, poor Bones” he tries to bring him back to the moment, asking him to calm down and come to his senses. His call to Henry corresponds to a person soothing a child or an animal and his address “poor Bones” resembles an address to a dog.

The name “Bones” comes from the” end” characters of the Minstrel show but if we trace it further back it is related to dice and a game of chance. On the other hand Bones can also be a name for a dog and in the vulgar use, as boner means erection, it has sexual connotations as well. In this regard the name with its bestial and sexual connotations suits Henry. By calling Henry Mr. Bones, he solidifies his position as the voice of conscience and Henry’s position as the voice of the “id”.

There are numerous references to animals in the *Dream Songs.* Matterson says that there is almost a “bestiary” in the poems and that Henry identifies himself with or associates with others animals (147). This process of identification with animals resembles shape shifting where for instance a trickster assumes different animal shapes. According Matterson, Berryman employed certain aspects of the trickster figure when he conceptualized Henry and wrote *The Dream Songs* (141). Tricksters are God-like figures with special abilities and powers such as shape shifting and assuming animal form. The trickster figure is very hard to define as it incorporates contradictory characteristics. For example he is a figure of strong masculinity but at the same time he may change his sex and can bear children. He is cunning but again simultaneously he can be very ludicrous and even stupid. He can be a comic figure, the butt or maker of jokes, on the other hand he can also be cruel and vengeful (142).

Matterson claims that Berryman probably read Paul Radin's study *The Trickster* published in 1956 and if not influenced he was inspired by it. In terms of shape shifting or assuming multiple identities and possessing contradictory characteristics it can be said that Henry greatly resembles a trickster figure. Henry seems to incorporate disparate identification such as human, animal, non-human, supernatural simultaneously. Matterson even offers a list of animals to which Henry is compared, the most frequent ones being "pussycat" and "fox" (147). *The Dream Songs* are devoid of a strict chronological order and a coherent narrative, and Henry resembles the trickster figure even more since a trickster is also a being who possesses supernatural abilities such as living more than 900 years. In trickster cycles – the stories told about tricksters in different cultures the trickster figure does not evolve or develop in the stories. However, the main difference between Henry and the trickster is that the trickster figure does not have a conscience, does not analyze his life, empathize with anyone or feel any kind of remorse. In this respect and also in his dense self scrutiny and his inability to act, Henry is very different from the trickster figure. As Matterson writes, looking at *The Dream Songs* in terms of the Trickster tradition can remind us that "Henry is an amenable construct rather than a confessional representation of Berryman's life" (149).

Dream Song 31 is a good example both for animal symbolism and for displaying yet another face/self of Henry:

> Henry Hankovitch, con guítar,
> did a short Zen pray,
> on his tatami in a relaxed lotos
> fixin his mind on nuffin, rose-blue breasts,
> and gave his parnel one French kiss;
> enslaving himself he withdrew from his blue
>
> Florentine leather case an Egyptian black
> & flickt a zippo.
> Henry & Phoebe happy as cockroaches
> in the world-kitchen woofed, with all away.
> The International flame, like despair, rose
> or like the foolish Paks or Sudanese

> Henry Hankovitch, con guítar,
> did a praying mantis pray
> who even more obviously than the increasingly fanatical Americans
> cannot govern themselves. Swedes don't exist,
> Scandanavians in general do not exist,
> take it from there.

Henry Hankovitch is only of the many versions of Henry in the *Dream Songs.* What characterizes him is that this Henry plays the guitar, practices Zen and Yoga, and talks about the world. An important aspect of these different versions of Henry is that sometimes it creates such a discrepancy between Henry and Berryman that Henry turns into a pose or a creative impersonation thwarting any possibility of autobiographical or confessional reading. As Travisano points out, the persona Henry's surname neither was Hankovitch nor did Berryman ever play the guitar. Here when the autobiographical reading fails – due to a deliberate act by the poet – Henry becomes almost totally fictional. In the entirety of the *Dream Songs* there are numerous moments that go from being too personal to totally fictitious and vice versa. The complex diction and a paratactic poetic register create a sense of density and fictitiousness. Travisano, focusing particularly on Dream Song 31, writes:

> After experiencing this poem's dizzying sequence of puns, non sequiturs, solecisms, anacoulutha, and contrary-to-fact-statements, one emerges rather dazed from the other end of a fictive process in which the poet has in fact 'invented facts and changed things, and the whole balance of the poem (is) something invented.' Here a surreal irony, an unsettling indeterminacy, reigns – amidst a most emphatic rhetoric. (53)

According to Travisano "unsettling indeterminacy", "surreal irony" "solecisms" with "emphatic rhetoric" turn the poem into fictive performance where cognitive coherence and logic become secondary. This is done on purpose. In Dream Song 366 Henry says: "These Songs are not meant to be understood, you understand / They are only meant to terrify & comfort" and here we can be sure that it is Berryman speaking not Henry Hankovitch or any other of the various Henries (388). On the other hand, it can be also said that this Dream Song is a parody/impersonation of a typical member of the counter culture. It is the time of the Beat

generation and the flower children who would be interested in Zen and cultures which would be considered exotic in America at the time.

"Happy as cockroaches" is not an English language idiom. It can better be understood as a simile in Dream Song 31. Dona Hickey explains Berryman's comparison as "extravagant metaphors or similes that defy most readers to make accustomed associations" and considers them a crucial part of the singularity of *The Dream Songs* (38). In this simile, Berryman imagines a kitchen at night where one enters, flips on the light to see cockroaches. He utilizes this very common domestic scene. He suggests that the world is a kitchen and before a light is lit, Henry and Phoebe are here free and enjoying themselves in the abundant possibilities of the kitchen. So Berryman imagines himself and his girlfriend as cockroaches and he expects the reader to imagine the happiness that a cockroach would feel in a human-free kitchen. This reminds us of Keats' statement that he would feel the sparrow and take part in his existence and links very well to the idea of negative capability. But it does not mean that Berryman would speak like the cockroach or Keats would write from the sparrow's point of view. This simile also shows how low Henry feels and how he sees himself as suddenly exposed in his own form of animalistic and erotic being. Yet it is also connected to how Berryman feels too as he is never truly not Henry.

In Dream Song 31 Henry refers to several countries and makes politically liberal comments about them too. In the last stanza he writes "fanatical Americans cannot govern themselves" and further adds in the next two lines that Swedes and in general Scandinavians do not exist. Yet, he does not explain why and leaves it to the reader to guess, necessitating further inquiry into the politics of the time. For example "Florentine leather case, an Egyptian black [cigarette]" and a "French kiss" are among the elements that contribute to the "international" character of poem; the notion of the world as Henry's kitchen.

The existence of contradictions is another sign of the lack of a coherent self and a fixed identity. Again at this moment the trickster resemblance comes handy. Matterson writes that the trickster figure is the “exemplar of simultaneous multiple identities rather than serially chronological varied identities" (145). Since the Henry-Berryman relation is almost interchangeable, with every new identity, it may change subtly the readers’ opinion and perception of Berryman as well. "The negative capability it affords the poet of filling some other body allows him simultaneous expression and disguise" (Hirst 22). In Dream Song 136 Berryman imagines a Rabbi Henry and reports what Henry says along with his own comments:

> While his wife earned the living, Rabbi Henry
> studied the Torah, writing commentaries
> more likely to be burnt than printed.
> It was rumoured that they needed revision.
> Smiling, kissing, he bent his head not with 'Please'
> but with austere requests barely hinted,
>
> like a dog with a bone he worried the Sacred Book
> and often taught its fringes… (1-8)

Here Henry becomes a Rabbi. Through him Berryman not only becomes another character in his menagerie of extraordinary characters but also plays with different poetic styles. This is one of the main reasons why what Berryman does can be considered negative capability, because with each disguise or mask, the poems render Berryman absent. Thus, “everything” at the same time means “nothing”, which is similar to what Berryman strives for according to Davis, to be both everything and nothing.

Dream Song 260 is a good example of a similar contradiction:

> Loose to the world lay unimaginable Henry,
> Loose to the world,
> taut with his vision as it has to be,
> open & closed sings on his mystery
> furled & unfurled. (8-12)

Here Henry, twice said to be hanging “loose”, is defined as unimaginable. Yet the whole project of *The Dream Songs* is to imagine him in various guises. Furthermore, Henry sings his songs on his mystery in two contradicting ways “open & closed”, “furled” and “unfurled”. Davis writes that "the language of doubleness recurs throughout [Berryman’s] work and through the whole course of his career” and sees it as part of the poet’s motto: “'Double I sing,' he declares, and everywhere refuses the either/or, grasping at the both/and" (33). It can be said that this doubleness is based on the idea of refusing to choose either one in order to be both. If we think of Henry’s different guises from this angle it makes sense at many levels. For example to use opposing styles such as the lyric and the dramatic, to create two Henries who are polar opposites of one another in the same Dream Song (14) – the uncultured Henry who is bored by his bookish, art loving alter ego - to write to some extent like Whitman (with the dominant I) and to some extent like Eliot (impersonal and distant with Henry) all can be considered part of this tendency to grasp everything, and mostly the adverse points/features together as and/and.

Dream Song 365 is a meeting point of contradictions and the traits of unimaginable Henry:

> Henry, a foreigner, lustful & old,
> bearded, exasperated, lay in bed
> cursing his enemies.
> He loved his friends with a thick love, them to hold
> to him in all his bad times, which were rife.
> Henry living & dead
>
> was full of friends & foes: he had no team-spirit.
> He lashed the lapses of those who were to inherit.
> He sank back exhausted.
> Grimy dreams wore him out. He woke half-sane
> & screamed for stronger drinks. Open the main!
> Pour, if necessary, drinks down him.
>
> I, Henry Pussy-cat, being in ill-health
> & 900 years old, begin & cease,
> to doubt.
> When my old friend complained to my older friend

'Why don't you come see more often?'
'I'm afraid you'll find me out.'

There is now almost no need to say that whenever the persona says "Henry", it may be the fictional character or Berryman or both. It has to stay ambiguous, at the disposal of the reader to decide. The same is applicable in this Dream Song too. In the first stanza Henry is depicted as "lustful & old", these might or might not be contradictory depending on the context, but the apex of perhaps all contradictions is positioned at the end of the first stanza: "Henry living & dead". However, the way this last line is enjambed and continues in to the next stanza also suggests that Henry, probably lying in a hospital bed (as Berryman did several times) might perhaps be referring to his "friends & foes" by saying "living & dead". Yet the first three lines of the last stanza ("I, Henry Pussy-cat, being in ill-health/ & 900 years old, begin & cease, / to doubt") as well as introducing new contradictions such as "begin & cease", also more or less implies that "living & dead" is self reflexive and implies Henry. While each Henry is independent in himself, the idea of Henry as representing something like repressed desires, psychological tensions, as well as public concerns permeate all of the Dream Songs.

In some of the Dream Songs Henry speaks posthumously and afterwards he fully comes back to life. Dream Song 87 is one of those and it bears the title "Op. posth. No. 10". Berryman appropriates the term opus posthumous and employs it as title for some of his Dream Songs at the beginning of the second book.

Op. posth. no. 10

these hearings endlessly, friends, word is had
Henry may be returning to our life
adult & difficult.
There exist rumors that remote and sad
and quite beyond the knowledge of his wife
to the foothills of the cult

will come in silence this distinguished one
essaying once again the lower slopes
in triumph, keeping up our hopes,
and heading not for the highest we have done

but enigmatic faces, unsurveyed,
calm as a forest glade

for him. I only speak of what I hear
and I have said too much. He may be there
or he may groan in hospital
resuming, as the fates decree, our lot.
I would not interrupt him in whatever, in what
he's bracing him to at all.

Here the speaking voice belongs to the persona, perhaps the poet persona Berryman. His casual tone normalizes the act of resurrection. Like a person announcing the coming of a prophet or specifically the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Berryman portrays Henry's coming in the second stanza in the following words: "will come in silence this distinguished one". In this respect the oxymoronic definition of "living & dead" is not a farfetched definition for Henry. He lived, he died and as he is dead he is living through the words of Berryman and he is going to come alive again when he is linguistically resurrected. This circular motion alludes to the cycle of life and then contradictions such as "furled & unfurled" gain another meaning. Dreaming and waking up, being a trickster, an animal, a human being and a demigod refer to contradicting identities and different selves that Berryman creates.

Is using these opposite or contradictory ideas together point to a desire to find a middle ground to appropriate them all? Davis answers this quest in the affirmative: "So a middle that is a place safely between, a place of moderation, becomes a desire for him, a home, a figure of achieved wholeness. The desire motivates the entire *Dream Songs,* appearing perhaps most poignantly in the final Song, where he laments the lack of 'a middle ground between things and the soul'" (34). Davis writes that "Berryman wanted a synthesis that was not a compromise, and strove his entire life in the tradition of the Romantic dialectic. He tried to manage both polar positions simultaneously, but he also acknowledged the impossibility of doing so in both his art and life" (34). Berryman did not see art simply as an escape from life; moreover, it was actually the preeminent point he criticized in the modernists who advocated

impersonality. By creating Henry and his different guises he sought for freedom, a chance to be someone else, but not simply escape from (his) life. "Strong as his own escapist impulses were, Berryman recognized them for what they were, and himself pursued self-transcendence, or, better, self-reformation, in the hope of transforming his world rather than just being carried out of it" (Davis 44). It is no surprise that Berryman's well-known book of essays is called *The Freedom of the Poet.*

The Freedom of the Embattled Poet

One of the pillars of negative capability, stated in Keats' original letter, is the ability to be "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Keats 57). Two crucial warnings to poets that can be inferred from this statement are the avoidance of prejudice and of black and white judgments. Keats would like the poet to perceive and accept the world as it is with its contradictions and reflect them as such in literature. In this regard it can be said that the contradictory elements in *The Dream Songs* that do not reach "after fact & reason" work in favor of negative capability. The reader's inability to get to know the fragmented self of Berryman's personae is in line with negative capability. Moreover this unearths the post-modern aspect of negative capability. In this respect Matterson considers the Songs a post-modern text questioning "the validity of grand narratives" and claims that the individual songs "endorse and embrace the apparently contradictory as a form of multiplicity and which suggest that the concept of a coherent identity is a fiction that should be discarded" (149). While Claudine Rankine writes that true coherency is fragmented (132), Henry feels perhaps real and attractive to many readers possibly because deep down every reader knows and feels that one can be "furled & unfurled" at the same time or at different times.

In the last stanza of Dream Song 87 Berryman writes "I would not interrupt him in whatever, in what / he's bracing him to at all". He makes a clear-cut distinction and puts space between himself and Henry. This distance, this particular space is essential because it gives Berryman the opportunity to be someone else; particularly the multitude of Henries he imagines. This is the basic freedom of the poet.

Just as he sometimes puts a distance between Henry and the voice, Berryman sometimes collapses this distance. Quoted by Travisano, Richard Flynn claims that this is something worse than "egoistical sublime" and says that it is "egoistical ridiculous" (45).[9] For example to write three Dream Songs - one of which is almost like a love letter - for Adrienne Rich because Berryman got praises from her may only fuel this argument. Quinn defines Berryman in *The Dream Songs* as "a narcissist who projects his psychic states into the poems" (72). Moreover he marks the distance that I believe afforded Berryman creative space and according to Vendler made him the analysand as well as the analyst as narcissism. Referring specifically to the first Dream Song - but actually to all – to emphasize how Berryman differentiated himself from Henry, Quinn writes: "This sets up a distance between Henry and the Berryman-speaker, and it is a kind of narcissism" (72). Quinn sees the distance between Berryman and Henry as narcissism whereas Flynn sees the collapse as narcissism.

In my opinion the kind of narcissism that can be imputed to the poems is where Berryman takes over and talks about the details of his own life. However, sometimes even those very personal poems turn out to be a way of merging the self in the other, hence connected to negative capability. For example Dream Song 242 has such a quality:

> About that 'me'. After a lecture one
> came up a lady asking to see me. 'Of course.
> When would you like to?'

[9] As discussed earlier, egoistical refers to the self-absorbed poet who indulges in writing about his/her own life, feelings and thoughts. On the other hand, "sublime" points to the romantic notion of "a quality of awesome grandeur in art or nature" different than simple admiration of beauty (Baldick 247). Keats defines Wordsworth's poetry by a combination of these two concepts as the "Egoistical Sublime", half appreciating half criticizing Wordsworth. Of course, "egoistical ridiculous" is a full, negative criticism.

Well, *now*, she said. 'Yes, but I have a lunch-
eon-' Then I saw her and shifted with remorse
and said 'Well; come on over.'

So we crossed to my office together and I sat her down
and asked, as she sat silent, 'What is it, miss?'
'Would you close the door?'
Now Henry was perplexed. We don't close doors
with students; it's just a principle. But this
lady looked beyond frown.

So I rose from the desk & closed it and turning back
found her in tears- apologizing- 'NO,
go right ahead,' I assur-
ed her, 'here's a handkerchief. Cry' She did, I did. When she got
control, I said 'What's the matter- if you want to talk?'
'Nothing. Nothing's the matter.' So.
I am her.

This can be considered among the more confessional type of Song with a single mention of Henry in the second stanza. The reader can immediately recognize the "I"s anxiety when he says "Now Henry was perplexed. We don't close doors / with students; it's just a principle…" The transition, perhaps the only one in this poem, from Berryman to Henry is significant in the sense that anything that reminds of sexuality is directly appropriated by Henry's voice. This rule to leave the door open, when a professor and his student are in congress, is a precaution against sexual harassment in the United States. Therefore Henry picks this up almost immediately. However, other than these two lines, the poem is a minute depiction of what happened in an unexpected office meeting between Berryman and one of his students. Not much happens but this is also fertile. The air of mystery created and the suspense are spectacular. Why does she cry? What is their relationship? And why does the poem end by the sole striking line: "I am her". Who is she? Or is it Berryman who says "I am her"? Since the professor cries along with the student, it is possible that it is not she, but he who utters "I am her" in empathy with grief.

Henry's attempt to empathize with his student's situation ("I am her") in Dream Song 242 can also be seen as a reaching out to the world, to human contact. We remember how Henry is often depicted as lonely, lowly, old, impossible and how Henry, like Hamlet, lacks the ability to transform desire into action.[10] In this respect one of the underlying motives for the creation of multitudes of selves is no doubt the frustration with the self: Berryman the poet. The negative moods, the contradicting Henries can all be attributed to this embattled poet, who at times identifies and distances himself from his creation Henry. Here creation of multitudes becomes a way of erasing/effacing fixed self and therefore can be seen as a form of suicide born out of despair/loneliness. Ironically and tragically Berryman ends his life by committing suicide in real life.

Vendler draws attention to the fact that Berryman read Kierkegaard and appropriated some of his views. She quotes the underlined passage from Berryman's copy of *The Sickness unto Death* which I believe is relevant to our discussion: "This form of despair is: in despair at not willing to be oneself: or still lower, in despair at not willing to be a self; or lowest of all, in despair at willing to be another than himself" (*Recent American Poets* 55). This kind of despair seems to correspond to Henry's self loathing, humiliation, loneliness that almost lingers in the proximity of self hatred. What Vendler says on this issue is enlightening: "Berryman did not want to be the person he found himself to be, which fell short of his perfectionist compulsions. His constant temptations to suicide, recorded in many notebooks long before the act, show him unwilling to be a self at all. Willing to be another than himself, John Berryman willed to be Henry" (*Recent American Poets* 55). I think there are two noteworthy observations in Vendler's comment that need further investigation. The first one is that Berryman does not wish "to be a self at all"; he wants to get rid of the self and become a voice like Whitman, which I believe is true especially with regard to his taking an

[10] In Shakespeare's Hamlet, the protagonist at almost every instance fails to transform his thoughts and feelings into action.

inspiration from Kierkegaard. The second one is that according to Vendler “Berryman willed to be Henry”, someone other than himself but somehow related. She also says Berryman is and is not Henry. Hence Henry is already a part of Berryman and through this poetry Berryman exposes and breathes life into Henry. Not to be a self, to be tens of Henries in different guises or to be Berryman, this is the freedom of the poet. In Travisano’s words the *Dream Songs* is "the realm of the embattled self" (10). This battle is not fought by Berryman in an effort to transform himself into Henries; this battle is fought to overcome and transcend the self and perhaps not to be a self at all. Not to be yourself can be considered the most profound of freedoms and perhaps a way out of despair.

The levels of despair Kierkegaard defined and Berryman underlined disclose a three layered schema of freedom which can shed light onto the thinking behind the different selves in *The Dream Songs*. If we recall the three levels quoted earlier, first level of this kind of despair is defined by the wish not to be oneself. Crudely put, this would resemble something like Berryman saying “I do not want to be Berryman anymore”. According to Kierkegaard the second level would be to not want to be a self, any self. At this level Berryman would say something like “I do not want to be anyone” or “I do not wish to be”, which is highly self destructive. As these are hierarchical in Kierkegaard’s view, the lowest level is the third level and it entails the wish to be someone else. Interestingly enough in *The Dream Songs* we encounter every level of despair. The initial level, the wish not to be Berryman, is perhaps the defining element of this poem sequence. The other two levels are much more complicated, many times interchangeable yet usually working with some kind of reference to each other.

The destructive force directed against the self and the wish to commit suicide as well as the self loathing embodied in Henry (possibly fueled by the deaths of Berryman’s friends) is explicit in many of the other Dream Songs. This may be considered one of the primal

freedoms, to be free from life and to be able to vanish but also to live through art. The second and third stanzas of Dream Song 85 are revealing in this sense:

> Triune! My wood or word seems to be rotting.
> I daresay I'm collapsing. Worms are at hand.
> No, all that froze,
> I mean the blood. 'O get up & go in'
> somewhere once I heard. Nowadays I doze.
> It's cold here.
>
> The cold is ultimating. The cold is cold.
> I am—I should be held together by—
> but I am breaking up
> and Henry now has come to a full stop—
> vanisht his vision, if there was, & fold
> him over himself quietly. (1-12)

In this Dream Song, among those titled opus posthumous, the reader hears the slow demise of the poet persona from the first person singular perspective. He is slowly moving toward death or rather non-existence. His words are “rotting” – along with his “wood” which probably symbolizes both his poetry and his body, he is collapsing and literal and metaphorical worms are going to devour his body and his poetry after death. The word “cold” is repeated several times alluding to death, due to the fact that near death one feels cold. In the second line of the last stanza Berryman writes “I am – I should be held together by” and in the following line adds “but I am breaking up”. When these two lines are read together the initial “I am” is grammatically unnecessary, for the phrase “I should be held together by” amply points to the first person and could be followed by “but I am breaking up”. However, it seems like the extra “I am” is there on purpose in order to emphasize what should be held together, represented by the utterance “I am” which embodies the grammatical unity and the idea of the self that is breaking down. Here, we witness once more how Berryman sees the “I”, which is a construct, an infinite ground of exploration for him. In this regard, what Davis writes is very apt: "The pronoun is a 'shifter', in some grammatical terminologies, varying in its 'reference' with the speaker and context. The self is a grammatical construct, and thereby open: 'we do not yet

know what 'I' is.' Berryman's self-proclaimed mastery of pronouns was motivated by that recognition" (48).

The word “Triune” often used in the context of Christianity and which means three in one, supported with the exclamation mark, can be taken as a symbol for the divided nature of the self which is only held together perhaps by the “I am”. In this respect “triune” may include Berryman, Henry and friend or poetry in general. Even when we consider the structure of *The Dream Songs* we see that each one is made up of three six lines stanzas that constitute a whole.

Berryman writes “but I am breaking up” and then starts the line with “and Henry has now come to a full stop”. If Henry comes to a full stop when “I” breaks up, then they are one and the same. As Berryman or the poet persona is breaking up, and vanishing gradually, Henry cannot go on either, because their connection is mutual thus fatal. If Berryman vanishes, becomes nobody, then Henry is going to “fold over himself quietly”. The act of folding over himself in order to come to a full stop, which would be synonymous with death, coincides with Berryman’s slow death. Moreover, folding over implies very cleverly a duality – naturally of Henry and Berryman - that the reader can almost visually imagine.

A similar duality between Berryman and Henry has been voiced in other Dream Songs as well. In one section of Dream Song 255:

> My twin, the nameless one, wild in the woods
> whilst I at Pippin’s court flourish, am knighted:
> we met & fighted
> on a red road, made friends, and all my goods
> now are half his. I pull this out of the past,
> St Valentine’s forecast. (1-6)

It begins with the line “My twin, the nameless one, wild in the woods” where Berryman most probably refers to Henry (nameless since his identities change constantly). If we are to think of them as twins the wild one would definitely be Henry. While Henry is in the wilderness,

Berryman is at a medieval court receiving knighthood and being honored. In a way, Berryman is talking about his journey with Henry in the guise of a chivalric narrative. The register shifts from chivalric and courtly to informal. "We met & fighted" and "all my goods are half his" he says, upholding the duality established by the idea of fraternal twins. The fight is to be expected in the realm of the embattled self.

Returning back to the twin issues of multiple selves and the desire to get rid of the self, there is another significant Dream Song that needs to be analyzed.

> I stalk my mirror down this corridor
> my pieces litter. Oklahoma, sore
> from my great loss leaves me.
> We pool our knowless in my seminar,
> question all comers that they may not jar
> their intrepidity (1-6)

Dream Song 195 invokes the concept of the mirror and plays with it in a unique way. The first stanza is the key in this regard. Berryman "stalks" his mirror rather than his image in the mirror chasing him and as he chases down the corridor, he finds his pieces, which may allude to his different images or selves that litter the floor. Litter is not a positive word and connotes dirtiness or at best messiness. However, I think that just as in Dream Song 294, this poem entails two different impulses: self annihilation and self creation (in the form of becoming someone else) and becomes one of the key Dream Songs in the sequence to show this duality. So "breaking up" and breaking into "pieces" pertain to a double motion. First, Berryman turns into many selves with and without Henry - all born out of his own image – this constitutes one aspect of the *Dream Songs*. Secondly breaking into pieces can be considered a type of self-effacement of or escape from a certain kind of self. This second idea is also supported by the reference to "Oklahoma" where he was born and the "great loss" (his father's suicide) in the second and third lines which pertain to Berryman's past, perhaps to a self that he longs to abandon or deconstruct.

We know that Berryman studied Kierkegaard. According to Kierkegaard the self is what the mirror shows us (it is a relation), yet we should not mistake the image in the mirror for ourselves. We may see different images of ourselves each time we look at the mirror. At this point, we can say that Berryman attempts to pursue and in a manner of speaking exploits this idea to its extreme. Although the core character stays intact, each time Berryman looks at a mirror he sees a different version of Henry in various guises. The different pronouns used are references to this, but everything eventually accrues at the ambigious "I" which is not a self but which creates a shell to harbor the self, incorporating the different selves. Davis writes, quoting Berryman:

> The passionate sense of identification is with himself, then, perhaps as the only means to Unity of Being. The situation is the same in *The Dream Songs*, he seems to say, except that there are more selves: 'in the very long poem [*The Dream Songs*], of course, many personalities shift, reify, dissolve, survive, project - remaining one' ("Scholia"). The "one" they remain is however as ambigious as the pronouns themselves. (48-49)

Caleshu in his analysis says that Berryman and Henry mutually create each other (106). For a person who took his stepfather's name when he was a boy after his father committed suicide, an obsession with identity, different selves and death is not surprising. This obsession is turned into art. Therefore, for example the statement "I broke a mirror, in which I figured you" which opens up Dream Song 294 is one of the key moments in *The Dream Songs.* Each Dream Song is a piece of the mirror and each piece not only reflects but creates by the multiplying images in each fragment of the mirror. After the initial shattering, with the pieces littering the floor– whether one takes it as stalking the loss of a father or the realization that there is no coherent subject, we are faced with an infinitely fragmented self. This fragmented self is battling itself under different masks or guises. It can be said that there is a kind of opposition between Henry and Henry's friend who calls Henry Mr. Bones and is always trying to convince Henry to do something other than what Henry actually wishes to do. This is reflected in the division of the self into parts such as "id", "ego" and "superego", where each

wishes or yearns for something against the wishes/yearnings/characteristics of the other part. The shell housing all these may be called the embattled self/poet. To be able to give voice to each self, creating them simultaneously without destroying the others is the freedom of the poet to be anything he/she wishes to be. When these two are combined, what we see in *The Dream Songs* is the freedom of the embattled poet.

Dream Song 22 is perhaps the most significant song we are going to analyze:

I am the little man who smokes & smokes.
I am the girl who does know better but.
I am the king of the pool.
I am so wise I had my mouth sewn shut.
I am a government official & a goddamned fool.
I am a lady who takes jokes.

I am the enemy of the mind.
I am the auto salesman and love you.
I am a teenage cancer, with a plan.
I am the blackt-out man.
I am the woman powerful as a zoo.
I am two eyes screwed to my set, whose blind—

It is the Fourth of July.
Collect: while the dying man,
forgone by you creator, who forgives,
is gasping 'Thomas Jefferson still lives'
in vain, in vain, in vain.
I am Henry Pussy-cat! My whiskers fly.

This particular Dream Song is generally analyzed in relation to the American identity and seen as a criticism on the American way of life. With each character created by the “I am x” statement, a stereotypical American cultural defect such as consumerism, shallowness, television addiction and anti-intellectualism is mocked though the “the lady” and “the woman” have the speaker’s sympathy. Davis, establishing a link with Whitman’s “I” comments on this Dream Song in the following manner: "Consider the difference between Whitman's 'I am large, I contain multitudes', and Dream Song 22, *Of 1826*, with its catalogue of 'I am's.' Berryman's survey of common American humanity is a bitter satire…" (45). However, there is much more depth to the poem than crude and rather common cultural

criticism. Berryman creates an "I am x" template and for the duration of two stanzas fills the "x" position with disparate characters. And each character is cartoonish and in a way mocks itself or satirizes the type it refers to. In this respect they are not very different from the various Henry figures we have met.

If we think of Henry, this cartoon quality is almost always present in him. Self mockery, self loathing and surreal surroundings, events, comments integrated with unending suffering, biographical details, lust, despair, desire for death, these are all present in Henry's stories in the *Dream Songs.* Therefore it would be unjust to single out this particular Dream Song is a criticism of American society. Henry himself as a generic moldable character is himself a criticism of life in America and with each Dream Song reflects a different façade of that life. Berryman's stance against the world is generally melancholic and sardonic if not pessimistic. What makes this poem special is that instead of creating different Henry figures, Berryman incorporates various characters into to himself with the "I am x" template. Supported by the views of numerous critics from Helen Vendler to Stephen Matterson, it has been one of the main premises of this chapter that all the different versions of Henry and other characters are masks, postures, different voices and guises of Berryman and they never leave the realm of the embattled self that belongs to him.

In Dream Song 24 a wide array of different guises - Berryman or Henry whichever suits the reader – are assumed by the persona. He becomes a girl, he becomes a woman, he becomes a salesman, a person watching TV, but at the end of the poem he becomes Henry the pussy-cat. He is all and he is none; just like Kierkegaard's idea of the self, he becomes all those possibilities and relations without disconnecting from his self. He does not create characters and audaciously claim that they are characters that he breathed life into. In his essay "Song of Myself" Berryman writes that Whitman with his almost universal "I", the voice that encompasses all, seems much more arrogant but feels much less pretentious than

T.S Eliot and his impersonality (230). Berryman definitely favors Whitman's all-encompassing ego than Eliot's alleged objectivity.

Even from his praise of Whitman we can deduce that the kind of "I" Berryman employs is influenced if not inspired by Whitman's. Keats writes:

> A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body - The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. (232)

This passage is from one of Keats' letters and it is closely related to the concept of negative capability. Here he defines the poet as "the most unpoetical thing" because in his view a poet does not have an identity of his own in his poems. What Keats really means by negative capability is that at the moment of writing and contemplating, the poet should be able to hold his self back. Then by observation, inspiration and imagination, he/she should become one with his/her work and assume a different identity according to the subjects he/she chooses to write about. Hence the label chameleon poet comes from this ability to assume the identity of other "bodies".

Berryman is one of the modern versions the of chameleon poet. When talking about Whitman with great admiration, Berryman in fact speaks of Keats' view of the poet: "It is as humble as, and identical with, Keats' view of the poet as having no existence, but being 'forever in, for, and filling" other things" (232). The "I" becomes expanded by assuming different identities. But does that "I" belong to a fixed Berryman character? Frost writes that "Berryman's poems are filled with autobiography, but the self that he presents is less himself than a person warring with several sides of his psyche, ourselves shifting emotionally and intellectually in the world" and claims that Berryman simultaneously was in and left out of a poem (165). Hence, *The Dream Songs* becomes the ground of the embattled self where the freedom of the poet provides him with the power to give voice to each self in different guises.

The “I” in the poems becomes a signifier that is related loosely to a poet called Berryman but at the same time turns into something that is created during the process of writing. Dunn notes that "The autobiographer takes his or her own life as material and, once it is material, it, for some purposes, stops being life and becomes primarily material" and sees the self as a character, not as real person, flesh and bones (187). Berryman is clearly not writing an autobiography, but the confessional elements in his *The Dream Songs* are also undeniable, as he writes himself together with Henry and many other characters as well. Perhaps what Nietzsche says in the following quotation depicts the extent of Berryman’s creative struggle within *The Dream Songs*: "In man, creature and creator are united: in man there is matter, fragment, excess, clay, mud, madness, chaos; but in man there is also creator, sculptor, the hardness of the hammer, the divine spectator and the seventh day - do you understand this antithesis"? (136) This antithesis reminds us of the embattled self and how Kierkegaard defines a human being as “a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity, in short, a synthesis. A synthesis is a relation between two. Considered in this way, a human being is still not a self” (351). Perhaps it is precisely this un-self that Berryman aims to portray in his *The Dream Songs*, the freedom of the poet and the self as a ground that contains multitudes and thus manifests the freedom of the embattled poet.

This brings about an entirely new and exciting way of looking at negative capability. The identity of the poet is effaced by being almost endlessly transformed into multiple selves because at the end of the poetic process there is no intact, definable poet left. Whether there was one at the beginning is beside the point. Davis writes that "if Whitman gave voice to 'others as himself,' he showed Berryman by inversion - a different sort of 'anti-model' from Eliot - how to give voice to himself as others" (49). There are so many different selves presented by Henry and the “I” that the initial “I” which in a confessional poem would

normally represent Berryman loses its meaning and no longer points to Berryman. Therefore it provides a new way of looking at negative capability and divulges a new style in poetry which I think has been appropriated by many others in the second half of the 20th century, especially the “elliptic poets”. Freedom for a poet like Berryman is to be able to imagine being different and even opposing things, the conflicting aspects of the embattled self simultaneously. Davis writes: "Poetry is where you have it both ways, or to be more accurate, where you both have it both ways and you don't. Henry both is and is not Henry because he is both Henry and an interested listener to Henry… because John Berryman is both John Berryman and Henry. Poetry both provides immortality and does not" (55).

To give one final example of a Berryman poem, I want to discuss “The Ball Poem”, which is not one of the Dream Songs, and in fact composed before the songs.

> What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
> What, what is he to do? I saw it go
> Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
> Merrily over—there it is in the water!
> No use to say 'O there are other balls':
> An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
> As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
> All his young days into the harbour where
> His ball went. I would not intrude on him,
> A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
> He senses first responsibility
> In a world of possessions. People will take balls,
> Balls will be lost always, little boy,
> And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.
> He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
> The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
> Knowing what every man must one day know
> And most know many days, how to stand up
> And gradually light returns to the street
> A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight,
> Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
> Floor of the harbour . . I am everywhere,
> I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
> With all that move me, under the water
> Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

The voice of the persona is heard with the powerful "I". It does not proclaim to have an objective stance as it claims to be based on personal experience. The voice openly derives symbolic meanings out of this simple event and empathizes with the boy; moreover he associates the event with a nostalgic sense of time past, as well as with what he has learned about losing things. The persona imagines what the boy must be thinking: "He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes, / The epistemology of loss, how to stand up / Knowing what every man must one day know" (ibid). The poem creates the impression that the boy may be the poet persona himself. It is reminiscent of the relation between Berryman and Henry in *The Dream Songs*. At the end of the poem the persona, using the first person pronoun, writes that he is not that "little boy" bringing his adult self once again directly into the poem. This may again remind us of what Berryman said about Henry, that he was not Henry but nobody believed him. Yet who the boy is still left vague.

On the other hand, by the personal comments he makes, the poet persona does not leave much ground for suggestiveness for the reader to exploit and indulge in. He openly tells the reader that the boy has seen "the epistemology of loss, how to stand up". The persona himself associates losing the ball with losing time as well as nostalgia and wisdom gained in life. The poem becomes a narration from different perspectives, converging and diverging simultaneously, happening in different time zones. The reader hears the story of someone, witnesses his understanding of life with a touch of didactic wisdom. Again at this point, the poem, is a precursor of *The Dream Songs* and the kind of relation Berryman is going to establish with Henry.

The idea of the un-self can be related to negative capability. Berryman actually reverses the process of negative capability: he does not withhold his identity, his desires and his past full of traumas, disappointments and sufferings. However, he does not express them as lyrics, biographical or confessional poetry but employs his memories and ideas - whether located in

his conscious or unconscious - as triggers to explore himself as a man, a human being. The identities that he creates from within his self, all these different Henry figures and others show such diversity that all attempts to categorize them under a single term such as the "id" or the "trickster figure" is impossible. By creating these different selves he simultaneously effaces his own identity like a true chameleon poet who possesses negative capability and opens himself up to other identities and lives/experiences/tastes them within himself. He does not attempt to forge a stable character or to reach "after fact & reason", thus stays true to the basic principle of negative capability. The first person singular pronoun acts as the shell for the other selves. Berryman has remarked that "a poet's first personal pronoun is nearly always ambiguous". We see this quite clearly in the *Dream Songs.* This ambiguity enables him to touch base at two contradictory points - himself and other(s) - almost simultaneously and change position according to the necessities of his design.

CHAPTER IV

SELF-EFFACEMENT AS NEGATIVE CAPABILITY: MARK STRAND'S ABSENT PRESENCES

In this chapter Mark Strand's use of certain concepts such as absent-presence, self-effacement and negation will be discussed in the attempt to show that Strand forges his unique type of negative capability in his poems. This chapter, focusing on the possibility of self-effacement in and through poetry, apart from this introduction is comprised of three sections. The first section concentrates on unveiling the technique of negation used by Strand to show how he develops his own method for self-effacement. The second section – with close reading of poems – discusses how the process of self-effacement in Strand functions, as an artistic/poetic technique. It also shows how this technique foregrounds a unique performance of negative capability from different angles and explores concepts like death as negation, self-effacement and self-divestment. The third and final section focuses on absent-presence in Strand's poems and shows how it is employed as a method to write what we can call here deconstructive poetry. Once more, as it was in the Williams' chapter, it is important to consider each section in a cumulative manner and to see possible thematic and theoretic incursions.

Strand himself seems to accept the claims of darkness, absence and negativity as the core themes of his poems. Strand's prose piece "A Poet's Alphabet" starts with "A" for absence and almost half of the alphabet represents terms and concepts similar in spirit to absence, negation and emptiness such as "before", "endings", "immortality", "nothingness", "oblivion", "passage" and the sign "X" for crossing out. In the entry for the letter N for example there are two words, "Neruda" and "nothingness". Strand writes "N is also for nothing, which, in its all embracing modesty, is the manageable sister of everything. Ah, nothing! About which anything can be said, and is. An absence that knows no bounds. The

climax of inaction. It has been perhaps the central influence on my writing. It is the original of sleep and end of life"(10). Strand designates nothingness as “the central influence” on his writing because he sees infinite creative possibilities in it. Hence “nothingness” is not a negative word for him and more importantly he associates it with absence, an absence that lays the ground for imaginative and creative.

Although it can be said that Strand’s style has changed over the years (the most obvious change is that he seems to have acquired a taste for longer lines and prose), his precise language, surreal imagery and most importantly, themes such as absence, self-effacement and negation are still his key signatures. "Strand has worked steadily on, transforming himself from a surrealistic, 'deep-image' poet of the 60's” and turned into “someone who, in a different voice, eludes easy categorization" writes Christopher Benfey (62). "To some, Strand is a confessionalist; to others - properly- the antithesis of a confessionalist. Some enlist him as a postmodernist; others choose to identify him with the long history of the Romantic tradition” (Nicosia 195), but it would also be an injustice to label his poetry especially in the 60’s and 70’s as simply surrealist or “deep imagist” implying somehow his later poetry as better.

Many of the determining poetic characteristics of Strand which will be dealt with in this chapter are rooted in what the critics call his early era, before the “turn” that Benfey underlines. After a fecund period of poetry writing that yielded six substantial poetry books *Sleeping With One Eye Open* (1964)*, Reasons For Moving* (1968)*, Darker* (1970)*, The Story of Our Lives* (1973)*, The Late Hour* (1978)*, Selected Poems* (1980) and a prose work *The Monument* (1978)*,* Strand did not publish any poetry until his return to the literary scene in 1990 with *The Continuous Life* (1990). David Lehman attributes the pause in his poetic creativity in the 1980’s to the fact that Strand arrived at a dead end in his career mastering two key signatures: the Surrealistic and the Spartan (66). The Spartan alludes to the simple, minimal and precise language of Strand’s poems. Perkins considers Strand among the

American Surrealists, claiming that surrealists "used spare, simple words and images. Vague, dreadful things happened or seemed about to happen in their poetry, but these were described or suggested with a lack of affect. Their verse was abstract in the sense that it presented elemental symbols or archetypal fables, stripping away circumstantial details of setting, plot, and character "(560). What Perkins writes for the surrealists in general holds mostly true for Strand as well. On the other hand the unique trait that Strand possesses, differentiating him from his peers, is that he not only strips “away circumstantial details of setting, plot, and character” but he attempts to strip away himself from his poems, a deliberate artistic gesture and technique, called self-effacement both by himself and by critics and poets who analyze his works.

Leslie Ullman writes that "Mark Strand whose work began appearing in the sixties, shares Merwin's obsession with self as absence, self stripped of possessions, and in this regard their names are often linked by critics" (22). Laurence Lieberman also underlines Strand’s obsession “in poem after poem, with absence, vanishings, disappearance of parts of his own psyche" (48). Benfey offers a similar view, saying that Strand “is in love with the negatives, privatives, the empty and erased"(63). Comparing him to Surrealist poet George Orr, Perkins writes that "Strand is a better craftsman with a more original imagination” and adds that “he conveys a chilling awareness of emptiness and isolation" (560). Samuel Maio in his book, *Creating Another Self Voice in Modern American Personal Poetry* devotes the whole section about the mode of writing he calls “self-effacement” primarily to Mark Strand. From Harold Bloom and Linda Gregerson to James Nicosia almost each and every critic despite their differences and individual perspectives point out self-effacement, negation and absence as the indispensable themes of his poetry.

At first glance, all of the terms, concepts and themes Strand is known for can be considered negative or simply dark. James Nicosia writes that "the darknesses that Strand

submits to are a necessary starting point for the poem - so necessary, in fact, that in one poem he literally erases the world. In others, he absents himself from the poem" (16). Nicosia's comment is pertinent to the underlying themes in Strand's poetry; it not only reveals a unique kind of self-effacement, but also enables us to establish the link between negative capability and Mark Strand.

One of the key features of the camelion poet is the ability to annihilate/efface the self or in other words hold back his/her subjectivity. Then through his/her imagination the camelion poet opens up to the world almost as a blank space to be imprinted by the world. Self effacement is the first requisite for negative capability, yet it may also be that self-annihilation comes as a result of intense concentration on the aesthetic object, rendering the act of self-annihilation simultaneous and continuous with the creative act. Newell Ford writes that Keats' "awareness of self disappears during such experiences, which 'annihilate' his 'identity' or are 'self-destroying'" (479). The phrase "such experiences" here refers to the creative act that presupposes empathy with the aesthetic object. To repeat, according to Keats, a poet "has no identity" and "because he has no Identity - he is continually in for - and filling some other Body". Because he has no self, he can maintain his artistic stance "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". Whether it happens at the inception or simultaneously with the creative act, self effacement is a key part of negative capability and it is held under scrutiny in this chapter as the core element of Strand's brand of negative capability.

"The self-effacing 'I' is a matter of technique, but it is a technique available only for use in certain poems whose content allows for it" (Maio 204). As Maio points out, the need for self-effacement is usually related to the subject matter of the poem. Many poets, in line with the subjects and demands of their poems, have chosen to eliminate their own selves or to assume other identities. Self effacement is usually not an end in itself but a means to an end for the poet. On the other hand, as I have already quoted earlier, Maio's assertion that "no

poet can actually efface himself or herself from the poem. Any poem is a direct manifestation of the poet's presence" (180). However, this attempt at self-effacement, when it becomes the subject of the poem in the hands of a poet like Mark Strand, yields some ground breaking results. Ford talks about a question of degree when it comes to the poet' self-effacement:

> It has not infrequently been objected to theories of empathy that it is a logical impossibility for the self or ego both to lose itself in the aesthetic object and to report on this loss. When therefore Keats insists upon the loss of his 'identity', it is probable that he is speaking in terms of degree. He would then not mean that his ego was obliterated, but that awareness of the 'I' was subordinated to an intense absorption in the aesthetic object. In fact, the phrase 'self-destroying' is preceded by the adverb 'more' (*Endymion* I, 799), and 'oneness' is qualified as 'a sort of oneness', showing that Keats was aware of degree in the process, and was not speaking absolutely. (479-480)

Indeed, no one in his right mind expects literal self-effacement, therefore as Ford says, it is not absolute but more or less a matter of degree and "this 'annihilation' can be regarded as substitution of an imaginative self for an everyday self, or as a projection of the poet's sensations into the object, where they seem to him to be embodied", an attempt to escape the daily self – perhaps the ego (484-485). What Hegel says about this, as explicated by Sarup is noteworthy: "We all know that the person who attentively contemplates a thing is 'absorbed' by this thing and forgets himself. He may perhaps talk about the thing but he will never talk about himself; in his discourse the word 'I' will not occur" (17). The gist of the claims in these discussions is that, in a state of creative empathy, when the poet exercises negative capability, the "I" disappears, the self is forgotten and this phenomenon is registered as self-effacement. However, this is the self-effacement of the poet during the process of writing. The prime question in this chapter is what happens when a poet tries to turn self-effacement into a creative act and put it on paper? The answer in Strand's case, which is also the claim of this chapter, is that it reveals a new way of looking at negative capability. The way Strand writes exposes another frontier of negative capability and how it can be handled artistically.

Negation and Negative Capability

It was the poet and critic Linda Gregerson who first associated Mark Strand's poetry with negative capability. She points to the huge difference between the "passive receptive" poet that Keats advocates against the "egoistical sublime" associated with Wordsworth and proposes a special, almost hybrid, position for Strand. She writes that his "wit (and that of other compatriots we might name) lies precisely in the conflation of these two poles, something on the order of a "passive egoistical" (2). The "passive egoistical" is a label by which Gregerson emphasized both the poetic focus on the self and the tendency of the poet to perceive the world as it is without the interference of the ego. At first this might seem contradictory but it is not. Gregerson uses the term "passive" in the positive original way Keats intended it; a poet open to the world, ready to accept it as it is. Likewise she uses the egoistical in the negative manner again similar to what Keats had in mind; obsessed with the self, focused on the idea of the self and its actions. Yet in a unique way, Strand writes the self in order to erase it so that the world can show itself in the self's absence. This is not easy to explain without analyzing the poems and "Black Maps" from the *Darker* collection is a telling example:

> Not the attendance of stones,
> nor the applauding wind,
> shall let you know
> you have arrived,
>
> not the sea that celebrates
> only departures,
> nor the mountains,
> nor the dying cities.
>
> Nothing will tell you
> where you are.
> Each moment is a place
> you've never been.
>
> You can walk

believing you cast
a light around you.
But how will you know?

The present is always dark.
Its maps are black,
rising from nothing,
describing,

in their slow ascent
into themselves,
their own voyage,
its emptiness,

the bleak, temperate
necessity of its completion.
As they rise into being
they are like breath.

And if they are studied at all
it is only to find,
too late, what you thought
were concerns of yours

do not exist.
Your house is not marked
on any of them,
nor are your friends,

waiting for you to appear,
nor are your enemies,
listing your faults.
Only you are there,

saying hello
to what you will be,
and the black grass
is holding up the black stars.

The striking element that immediately catches the eye in this poem is the intense negation in the first three stanzas, established by the frequent use of negatives such as “not”, “nor” and “nothing”. There is no palpable “I” in the poem and the persona is addressing a “you” who might very well be the poet or a persona. The register is casual and neutral and the diction is quite simple.

In the first and second stanzas, interestingly enough, this "you" is warned that neither nature nor the city is going to celebrate his arrival (I am using the male third person pronoun "he" for the second person in the poem, considering that it might be the poet persona). Stones, wind, sea, mountains, and cities: each one of these natural elements and the man-made cities (all of them personified) is invoked by a type of negation such as "not the attendance of stones", "nor the mountains" which registers their unresponsiveness. This unresponsiveness to his "arrival" in either sense (i.e. his birth or the fact that he has made it in the world) is pure negation. An apposite aspect of this negation is that except for the mountains, each item is related to some form of activity: the stones attend, the wind applauds, the sea celebrates and cities die. In the first and second stanzas, the positive festive words such as applauding, attendance and celebrates suggest a performance or a show, indicating that the "you" has achieved fame of some sort, but the world will ignore his achievement.

The third stanza begins in the same negating vein: "Nothing will tell you / where you are". So the "you" in the poem is told not to look at the world to take his bearings, for guidance or approval. "Each moment is a place / you've never been" writes Strand, drawing a parallel between time and space through a metaphor. So every moment not yet lived becomes a place the person has never been. This metaphor is particularly pertinent in relation to the theme of the poem announced clearly by the title "Black Maps". As it unfolds step by step in the poem, Strand is pointing out to the impossibility of drawing a map of life, a guide accumulated through experience or imagination for the "you" in the poem, which may point both to the reader and to himself.

In the fourth stanza, the persona questions the self confidence of the "you". (This may perhaps allude to self knowledge). The main question here is how one can be sure of himself or how his life is going to turn out and thus act accordingly. At the beginning of stanza five, the voice says that "the present is always dark / Its maps are black", meaning that the present

moment has a mysterious aspect; though "in" it, we cannot "know" it. That is why its maps are black. But that blackness hides in itself a dark potential. In the last two lines of the seventh stanza ("as they rise into being / they are like breath"), Strand forges another metaphor, comparing the coming up of events in one's life to the notion of breathing, vital for life. Breath is something that one both possesses and loses as it filters invisible through one's body. It is both in and out. Moreover when you breathe, the act of inhaling and exhaling that particular breath is completed, it is lived. In this respect it is like an experience. It can be known only when it is experienced but once experienced it is already over (for instance death is such an experience too). This notion is underscored by the three consecutive stanzas: eighth, ninth and tenth. The key phrase is placed at the beginning of stanza eight where the voice declares that it would be "too late" even if those moments are studied afterwards. Therefore the "you" is counseled not to gaze at these black maps, which now can be seen as symbols of the unknown present at the moment of living it and the unknown future to come. To seek in the dark map for friends and foes or anything else other than oneself is useless and unnecessary. "Only you are there" says the voice in the final line of the tenth stanza.

Looking at the black map is only going to reveal/reflect the person who is looking at it back to himself. The black map acts as a mirror, when Strand writes "Only you are there / saying hello/ to what you will be". It is actually the solipsist recognition of the self against the world which is negated. Gregerson writes:

> When Mark Strand reinvented the poem, he began by leaving out the world. The self he invented to star in the poems went on with the work of divestment: it jettisoned place, it jettisoned fellows, it jettisoned all distinguishing physical marks, save beauty alone. It was never impeded by personality. Nor was this radical renunciation to be confused with modesty, or asceticism. (5)

Despite the fact that Gregerson does not specifically refer to the "Black Maps", her general view of Strand's poetry holds true for this particular poem as well. First of all the continuous presence of negation in the poem excludes the world by counting each entity that it

individually leaves out. It jettisons place, “nothing will tell you / where you are”, “Your house is not marked”; it jettisons fellow human beings, “nor are your friends, / waiting for you to appear, / nor are your enemies”, as they are not marked on the map. The physical marks Gregerson refers to are in the poem – surprisingly Strand uses the word “mark” to refer to their absence. It is important to note that their absence does not mean that they do not exist, but because they remain mute and passive like a frozen audience, they are more like absent presences.

“It was never impeded by personality” writes Gregerson which is also true here because nothing is really personal in the poem. In the way it is used by Gregerson, personality here points to Strand’s character or life which almost never finds direct representation in his poems. One cannot say that this poem is a specific utterance addressed to a specific person, a “you”, in the sense of being memory driven. It is specifically this attribute that opens this poem up for everyone. Any reader can appropriate the “you” without much hesitation. The poem drags the reader in, especially because the voice refrains from giving concrete, very realistic details. For example Strand does not say the Rocky Mountains, the dying city of New York or the celebrating Atlantic. He presents images in a way that can be easily imagined by any reader as part of their own world.

The last comment Gregerson makes, that “radical renunciation” should not “be confused with modesty, or asceticism”, also holds true because the last two lines of the poem “and the black grass / is holding up the black stars” do not reflect a minimalistic or ascetic modesty. On the contrary the image of the self that the “you” encounters at the end is a symbolic assertion of the mirror in a mirror, used as a trope. The color black is the symbol for uncharted territories immeasurable dangers but also unlimited potential. Moreover the “grass” image brings to mind Walt Whitman. (In Whitman grass symbolizes unity - with each single blade of it representing an individual self – despite differences- under the banner of

democracy and naturally the United States.) In Strand's unique design however the grass is black. Therefore "black" takes the place of any other adjective or color that would modify grass. The empty darkness, which is full of both dangers and potential, becomes the primary signifier. Moreover this black grass holds up the black stars. Stars are frequently used as symbols referring to higher aims and celestial magnitudes. Furthermore, stars are also ancient guides for travelers. Strand applies another kind of negation here and reverses the background. Normally stars would shine and the sky behind them should be black in order to show this illumination. This reversal is also present in the fourth stanza:

> You can walk
> believing you cast
> a light around you.
> But how will you know? (13-16)

Darkness is the necessary ingredient for light to manifest itself. Any person who lives in a big city sadly knows this as one cannot see most of the stars because of city lights. Darkness is needed to see the stars. Strand asks the question "But how will you know". This question can be interpreted in two ways: first, is the impossibility of knowing the future or even the moment one is living in. In the more figurative sense it may mean that though one may see him/herself as a successful person (casting a light around him/herself), he/she can never know whether the world sees him/her in the same way. The second interpretation is the impossibility of one's seeing something bright in the absence of a dark background, as a foil. Strand conveys these two different senses of darkness equally effectively.

The last stanza starts with the lines "saying hello / to what you will be" and it is followed by the images of black grass holding up black stars; therefore in line with the above argument, the end of the poem signals that one can be anything as long as he/she realizes his/her own potential. As Gregerson underscores, this is not humility, asceticism or modesty,

on the contrary it focuses on the potential that one possess as one taps into the infinite possibilities darkness entails.

Darkness symbolized by black is a powerful and frequently used symbol by Strand. The potential that darkness holds negatively serves to define the self, tells the self what it is not, what it should not look for. Nicosia claims that "Strand's act of erasing or negating the world by application of the active imagination creates a system *of ex* nihilio, where the privative rather than the primitive dominates. Concerning the privative, when something is removed - creating an absence - there is a palpable presence" (16). Each object removed actually solidifies the presence of a self in the poem as well as its palpable presence once it is removed. This idea can be further explicated by an implicit suggestion in the poem. Black stars remind the reader of black holes, which are actually giant dead stars known to pull everything into themselves with incredible force including light so that they are themselves invisible. Black holes are only discernible or reveal themselves through this incredible pull which is measured by astronomers. They are defined by the absence they create. So is the world, the present and the future from the vantage point of the voice in the poem.

Two aspects of this poem make it stand out as a poem which achieves negative capability. There is a “you” but it is nobody and everyone, including the poet. It tells a story of absence rather than of presence. Secondly, in line with Keats’ statement of “without any irritable reaching after fact and reason”, it leaves both the persona and the reader in limbo, where he/she knows nothing for sure other than the self which is still a mystery. There is no closure other than “and the black grass / is holding up the black stars” and whether this statement is a reaching after fact or just an excellent metaphor is debatable. In a further comment Nicosia says: "As a precept to these concepts of darkness, it is important to recognize that things get their form from what is removed. What *is* not the thing helps us understand what the thing is. What defines my parameters is what is not me." (16).

Negation is one of the techniques that attempts to illuminate something that is hard to define and in some cases to experience. Maio writes that “unfortunately, there's always the problem of language, the problem of conveying experience" (346). “Elegy for My Father”, which can be considered one of the masterpieces by Mark Strand, is an outstanding attempt at conveying lived experience. Among the fifty six lines of the part named “Your Dying” in “Elegy For My Father” twenty seven lines start with the words “not” or “nothing”, and these two words occur a total of 36 times in the poem. With such frequent use of particular negatives, together with the repetition and alliteration, Strand articulates one after another things that ought to give one reasons to go on living. Each negation (such as “Not defeat. Not success”, “Not the wind that shook your lapels”, “Not your shoes that grew heavier”, “Not your friends who gave you advice”) is connected to the phrase “nothing could stop you” or one of its variations. Each negation that highlights the father’s determination to go on with the process of dying later gives place to the repetition of “spaces” left empty by his death and therefore each absence brings forth his father’s palpable presence. With this poem in mind, Nicosia writes that "each time [Strand] mentions his father's absence, his father becomes more present in the reader's imagination" (46). So Strand turns absence into presence while holding on to absence and consequently divulges what is meant by absent-presence in this chapter.

The basic idea behind the technique of negation is called “ironic process theory” in psychology, and it is related to thought suppression. Perhaps a more lucid explanation of this process would simply take us to the well known phrase/expression: “don’t think of a pink elephant”. The moment one is told not to think of a pink elephant, usually the first thing one imagines is a pink elephant. Negation necessitates an initial presence so that there is something to negate or efface. Language itself first provides the thought of the thing that it desires to erase. Without this initial act of presence a negation or erasure is not possible. In

"Elegy For My Father", negation plays a pivotal role, because each negative points actually not only to an absence but a failure against the continuous and insistent process of death.

Madan Sarup when discussing Lacan refers to Hegel in terms of post-modernity, which throws light on our discussions:

> Human beings are always negating the given. Negativity is the negation of identity. Human beings are truly free or really human only in and by effective negation of the given real. Negativity, then, is nothing other than human freedom. The freedom which is realized and manifested as dialectical or negating action is thereby essentially another creation. (19)

Regarding the poems we have analyzed so far, this interpretation touches something significant at the core of the idea of negation. Taking into consideration Kojevo's interpretation of Hegel, Sarup defines the human being by negation. In a poem called "Courtship" Strand too, proceeds by negation, first negating the more bestial side of the human psyche for the more civilized. Then he goes to the other extreme, this time negating the more civilized side of the human psyche. If we recall "Black Maps" we can trace a similar negation where the world and its objects are sacrificed to bring out the real self who exists by negating. In the "Elegy for my Father", we see memories, moments, people, objects which are foregrounded as things that cannot stop death. Yet the main desire in the elegy is to negate death. Only by fighting against what is given, whether it is death, the unknown world/future as in the "Black Maps", sexual desire or cultural constraints as in "courtship", one becomes really human and free.

The Art of Self-Effacement

The way Strand writes poetry enables the reader moments of clarity where the self is seen together with what it erases or restricts. This feels much truer to the reader in the sense that one can see the human object in the poem from the multiple perspectives that constitute

him/her. There is always a trace of the previous identification and negation in the subject. Poetry enables us to trace the negated to manifest itself as Derrida has discussed in the context of deconstruction, and coining the term "the trace" in language.[11] The traces of previous feelings, desires and memories remain dormant, waiting for the right signifier to come alive again. Especially when the subject is the self that demands erasure for new beginnings or the possibility of an origin, poetry has immense potential. Strands writes:

> A poem is a place where the conditions of beyondness and withinness are made palpable, where to imagine is to feel what it is like to be. It allows us to have the life we are denied because we are too busy living. Even more paradoxically, poetry permits us to live in ourselves as if we were just out of reach of ourselves. (*Weather of Words* 44)

According to Strand, to deny the ego - the part which is "too busy living" – in order to search for "beyondness and withinness", can only be possible through poetry. Imagination plays a pivotal role here. Only through imagination can one see oneself from different perspectives and turn the self and life into objects of aesthetic contemplation. Negation makes up a crucial part of Strand's poetry. When negation is executed on the self then it is called self-effacement. As we have discussed before self-effacement is a significant part/principle of negative capability because withdrawing/holding back the self is the requisite for negatively capable writing where the self is abandoned for the direct and objective treatment of the object of focus. Yet this act is usually left out in the classical Keatsian negative capability. For instance, Keats or even Williams while writing would not say "I have killed myself" or "I am the absence of this room" and then describe the room. In negatively capable writing they would just describe the room as objectively and as far from personal opinions as possible. Strand's novelty is that he includes the act of self-effacement, which is normally an invisible constituent of negative capability, in his poems and creates very original and idiosyncratic

[11] According to Derrida "meaning is continually moving along on a chain of signifiers, and we cannot be precise about its exact 'location', because it is never tied to one particular sign" and "in each sign there are traces of other words which that sign has excluded in order to be itself. And words contain the trace of the ones which have gone before" (Sarup 33-34).

versions of negative capability. Therefore negation, as discussed in the first section when applied to the self becomes self-effacement.

One of the most obvious ways to negate the self is no doubt through death. Death is the ultimate negation in the sense that it is the negation of life. One can only imagine one's own death because it is a secret to him/her. In the *Space of Literature* Maurice Blanchot writes: "… a sovereignly balanced death can be grasped only as the unknowable secret: only as that which could never be elucidated unless, already dead, we could look at ourselves from a point from which it would be granted us to embrace as a whole both our life and our death …" (116). The idea behind Blanchot's remark is that death is a kind of experience that unless it is experienced it cannot be known. However, the moment one experiences death, one cannot report on that experience. Yet if one were able give an account of this experience then he/she would have seen, not only his/her death, but his/her life as a whole, in a coherent way that is not available during life.

Writing about the self enables one at least to move in the direction of such a holistic vantage point. One can imagine one's own death. "Suicide" by Strand is one such poem:

I jump from a building
As if I were falling asleep,

The wind like a pillow
Slowing me down,

Slowing me down,
As if I were dreaming.

Surrounded by air,
I come to a stop,

And stand like a tourist
Watching pigeons.

People in offices
Wanting to save me,

Open their mouths.
"Throw me a stone," I yell,

Wanting to fall.
But nobody listens.

They throw me a rope.
And now I am walking,

Talking to you,
Talking to you

As if I were dreaming
I were alive.

The diction is quite simple and the register is casual. The physical shape of the poem looks like a tall building and each couplet perhaps indicates one floor/storey of the building. Death and falling sleep are equated from the very beginning. The metaphor of the wind as a pillow is striking. The pillow-wind slows the persona down. The idea of death becomes a dream, and a dream is one of the few spaces where one can simulate a free fall and the feeling of death. The persona stops in midair, suspended and observes the surroundings; he notices other people. When he recognizes their desire to save him, his response is: "'Throw me a stone', I yell / Wanting to fall". The persona, who uses the first person pronoun "I" lavishly all along the poem, wishes to continue falling to his death.

The reversal of the poem is self reflexive, taking us back to the beginning, negating the conception of linear time. They throw him a rope and the result is this poem, yet the paradox is that the poem starts with the jump to death, which enables other people to throw a rope. At the end, in the last two couplets, the persona inserts a "you" and writes, "… Talking to you / As if I were dreaming / I were alive". At first it seems like the persona is imagining his suicide fall and death while he is alive. Yet the end is a reversal of the whole poem, suggesting that the persona while writing this poem is not alive. In the last two lines, where he says he's talking to "you" from beyond death, the persona imagines himself dreaming to be alive after death. What Blanchot writes about death seems like an interpretation of this particular poem:

> What is done first must be dreamed, thought, grasped in advance by the mind, not in a movement of psychological contemplation, but through an actual movement – a lucid effort on the part of the mind to advance outside of itself, to see itself disappear and to appear to itself in the mirage of this disappearance, to gather itself all up into this essential death which is the life of consciousness... (111)

“To see itself disappear and to appear to itself in the mirage of this disappearance” is exactly what Strand aims at not in only this particular poem but in many of his poems of self-effacement. Maio writes that "the self-effacing mode of voice serves to define Strand's speaker's growth from alienation to achieving absence from the physical world without physically dying, and it mirrors each poem's content" (203). The self that achieves the kind of death that Blanchot foresees is the self that annihilates itself in order to reveal a truth that is beyond all words. Strand writes in a prose work that "… reading poetry is often a search for the unknown, something that lies at the heart of experience but cannot be pointed out or described without being altered or diminished - something that nevertheless can be contained so that it is not so terrifying" (49). In this quote Strand touches upon two important points that I would like to discuss in relation to “Suicide”. First of all, like many other modern poets, Strand emphasizes the inability to represent experience exactly with words and thus underlies its ineffable nature. Charles Simic mentions another aspect of a similar inability: "In addition, there's the problem of simultaneity of experience versus the linear requirements of grammar. Grammar moves in time. Only figurative language can hope to grasp the simultaneity of experience" (346).

Intangible, abstract and most significantly unknowable, a concept like death can only be depicted or imagined through figurative language and with the metaphors that work to create images and moods to give a palpable sense of death. This is an attempt to domesticate or in Strand’s words to “contain” death with words to some extent “so that it is not so terrifying”. To think of it in relation with sleep and perhaps in the context of a dream endorses this sense of control over it. One who can imagine one’s own death; who can negate him/herself gains a

degree of freedom and ascendency over it. The title of the poem “Suicide” is no coincidence. Blanchot deems suicide as an attempt to domesticate death, to take control over it, making it knowable to some degree:

> There is in suicide a remarkable intention to abolish future as the mystery of death: one wants in a sense to kill oneself so that the future might hold no secrets, but might become clear and readable… Suicide in this respect does not welcome death; rather, it wishes to eliminate death as future, to relieve death of that portion of the yet-to-come which is, so to speak, its essence, and to make it superficial, without substance and without danger. (104)

In both “Suicide” and “Elegy for My Father” Strand tackles the topic of death. In the poem he wrote for his father, Strand negates death through remembered experiences of life and he comes close to what Blanchot writes, turning the event into something manageable, through art. In “Suicide” his own imagined death becomes art. Blanchot sees an affiliation between death and art, and writes that “both involve a power that wants to be power even in the region of the ungraspable, where the domain of goals ends” (106). By invoking self-annihilation and death in his poetry, Strand perhaps desires to step into the region of the ungraspable, leaving the self, the ego behind so that he can encounter whatever comes, without self’s restrictions. And this is negative capability executed as poetry, in poetry.

"Perhaps poetry is ultimately a metaphor for something unknown, its working-out a means of recovery. It may be that the retention of the absent origin is what is necessary for the continued life of the poem as inexhaustible artifact"; "it is for this reason that poems must exist not only in language but beyond it" writes Strand (*Weather of Words* 74). In order touch the absent origin and to retain it, which is what makes a poem an “inexhaustible artifact”, one has to pass beyond language and the self which is constituted by language. Hence we come back the discussion of self-effacement in the search for the absent origin.

One can simply ask why not just talk about the absent origin without indulging in the activity of erasing the self? The simple answer to this question would be to think of the

palimpsest. Absent origin is something resembling a palimpsest, where the self can be considered a text. First of all there is a necessity for presence so that it can be negated. In the wake of negating and effacing the self, the original darkness or absence comes to surface. It is nothingness, so in order to reach it you have to erase the self which is the text above. In "The Monument", part forty eight, Strand writes: "It is the giant of nothingness that rises beyond, that rises beyond beyondness, undiscovered in the vault of the future, in the leap of faith… The giant of nothingness rising in sleep like the beginning of language, like language being born into the sleeper's future, his dream of himself entering beyond" (129-130). Strand is well aware of the inadequacy of language, so he is trying to reach beyond it, to touch what is missing. Yet at the same time, he is also well aware that the self is part of language, defined and constituted by it. Therefore he is after new beginnings. In part forty five he gives a tangible example of his method: "… Give us a blank wall that we might see ourselves more truly and more strange. Now give us the paper, the daily paper on which to write. Now give us the day, this day. Take it away. The space that is left is The Monument" (128). How Strand describes this involves negation and reminds us of the palimpsest where something is inscribed and then erased. The monument for him is the "inexhaustible art work" in touch with the absent origin. In this regard, it can be said that a poem becomes a space where Strand applies his formula, particularly in his early poetry.

In his search for the absent origin Strand employs self-effacement and thus brings in negative capability into "The Remains" from *Darker.*

> I empty myself of the names of others. I empty my pockets.
> I empty my shoes and leave them beside the road.
> At night I turn back the clocks;
> I open the family album and look at myself as a boy.
> What good does it do? The hours have done their job.
> I say my own name. I say goodbye.
> The words follow each other downwind.
> I love my wife but send her away.
> My parents rise out of their thrones
> into the milky rooms of clouds. How can I sing?

Time tells me what I am. I change and I am the same.
I empty myself of my life and my life remains.

This poem can be called a poem of self-divestment, a term that Gregerson employs. The poet speaks through a first person singular persona. He speaks of getting rid of whatever he has. A quick line by line analysis would reveal to us the absence produced or in other words what is revealed by these series of abandonments.

To empty oneself of the names of others would in general mean either not to care or forget. As I have said at the beginning of this chapter, “oblivion” was one of the poetic words in Strand’s alphabet of the poet. To forget the names of others is the first step to forgetting the self, but the self is not yet annihilated because, in the popular example of murder and suicide, it would mean to shoot the self before killing others. In his alphabet entry, under the letter “o” for oblivion, Strand writes: "Forgetfulness, the fullness of forgetting, the possibilities of forgottenness. The freedom of unmindfulness. It is the true beginning of poetry. It is the blank for which the will wills" (*Weather of Words*11). This according to him is the beginning of poetry, it is the clean slate.

If we evoke religious symbolism, to name things is synonymous with knowing things and Adam (representing human kind) names things which allows him to hold dominion over everything else. As the story goes in many religious texts of Semitic origin, it is the curse of knowledge (the apple symbolizes knowledge) that causes Adam and Eve to be banished from the Garden of Eden in the first place. Therefore to forget the names of others – especially when “others” is ambiguous in the sense that it can be other people and also everything other than the self – is a wish to return to the origin. It can also be considered as a wish to lose consciousness.

If the first half of the initial line is a divestment of the intangible (the names), the following statement in contrast refers to material dispossession. To empty one’s pockets alludes to the act of getting rid of earthly or material possessions. Of course, emptying your

pockets would mean to get rid of everything in your pockets including wallet and identification. In this regard it can be read symbolically as part a process of stripping of oneself of a particular identity. If we go one step further and amplify the symbolic possibilities, it may also refer to letting out everything you've got.

In the second line, the persona "empties" his shoes of himself and leaves them beside the road. There are two allusions that we can think of symbolically here. First and the most obvious one is that by taking off and leaving his shoes beside a road the persona indicates his wish not to travel or to leave the house anymore. If the shoes were left beside the bed or the couch, it would suggest sleep, which would mean something totally different. However, the focus here is on the shoes because it would naturally symbolize movement, a continuation.

Perkins notes in his analysis of Deep Image poetry that "poetic suggestion has its effect precisely because its indefiniteness can never be completely resolved" and this suggestion is the key in trying to convey a feeling or an experience knowing that it is impossible (563). This act pulls in the reader into the poem as the reader is not simply told of things but asked to participate. Referring to this kind of poetry, among which Strand's poems are definitely included, Perkins says: "The apparent casualness of their phrasing reminds us that language cannot incarnate the experience to be presented, that at most it can only point toward it" (563). In this respect it is true that Strand can only lead the reader to his own sense of leaving himself behind or in this particular image refusing to travel and to hold commerce with the world anymore. (But as language is a cultural construct Turkish readers of Strand might read this line differently: Shoes left on the street mean the owner of the shoes is dead and anyone is welcome to take that pair of shoes.)

The act of leaving the shoes beside the road can be taken one notch further and in the coherence of the poem may be interpreted as a wish to live no more. To be in someone else's shoes is an idiom in English which means to empathize with someone, to try to see through

his/her eyes and imagine his/her experiences. With this in mind, the emptying of one's own shoes turns into a potent symbol of self abandonment. Perhaps, the persona sees his life as a void or a space that he reluctantly fills and now feels like leaving behind. This view can be supported by the next three lines: "At night I turn back the clocks; / I open the family album and look at myself as a boy. / What good does it do? The hours have done their job". This time the persona tackles time. His aim is to reverse time, and the act of turning back the clocks is a textbook symbol of this impossible desire. He looks at the family album and sees his own photo as a boy. Yet this it does not give comfort. With the difference between his boyhood photo and himself at the moment in the poem, the persona realizes the passage of time and we realize that turning back the clock is to no avail. The hours are personified as workers who have successfully done their job of pushing time along.

"I say my own name" is an attempt to reconcile the boy in the photo and the adult persona. It is actually this name that makes the persona a self, binding it, mending the fissure, the discrepancy between the boy in the photo and the man he is at the moment. By uttering the name he consolidates his self before he relinquishes it. "I say goodbye" refers directly to the previous statement "I say my own name" for it does not have any other object.

By renouncing his name/self and saying goodbye to it, the persona unleashes the language that constitutes his self, and he writes "The words follow each other downwind". Despite the fact that he loves his wife, he sends her away too. The rising of his parents from their thrones "into the milky rooms of clouds" may signal either that they do not appear as king or queen anymore as they did when he was a boy or that they may have already passed away and are watching him from above, in the clouds. On the other hand, the word "room" is a special signifier for Strand and symbolizes the mind. This is one of the reasons why the reader may suspect that they are dead and the persona can only imagine them in his mind.

Dethroning parents, stripping them of their godly stature is actually a sign of growing up. The child who sees his/her parents as almighty at a young age, as he/she grows up slowly sees them with their faults and mistakes as human beings. This rather romantic statement is a yearning or if not yearning, a nostalgic glance at the past. At the end of the line, the sadness and desperation in his gaze into a lost time materialize into the question of "How can I sing"? This question links up with the next line "Time tells me what I am" and translates almost into a longer rhetorical question: how can I sing (i.e. be a poet) and express myself, be myself when time defines me? What is called the self is vulnerable against time; not able to control it, he feels weak.

Then he makes a paradoxical statement: "I change and I am the same". On one hand the persona realizes the physical and mental/psychological changes he has experienced all along up to the moment when he is writing his poem. He has been a child, a boy, a teenager, a young man, a married man, each different in many ways from the earlier ones. He has changed both physically and character wise. On the other hand there is something called the self, the thing that names and is named that unifies this changing entity as one being. The name he has unifies him into a whole, combines his past selves into a single construct called Mark Strand. Thus he has changed and at the same time he has not changed. This notion also aligns with negative capability in the sense that a person over time may have many selves and does not wish to choose one over the other.

In the last line of the poem the persona utters this almost mystical statement: "I empty myself of my life and my life remains" which is a paradox. The key to this conundrum resides in the conception and definition of life that Strand provides in the poem. The first part of the proposition refers to each thing that the persona renounces, leaves behind or ceases to do. One can no doubt agree that friends, wife, the places to which one has travelled and the family album, all these with their corporeal as well as symbolic meanings make up the life of a

person. To get rid of them - albeit figuratively or symbolically – to perhaps forget them means to have no life, to empty oneself of life. One interpretation would be that the main reason for emptying the self of life here serves the purpose of showing what we call self (one which stays the same despite change) does not rely on anything other than itself. "Remove the chaos of the world and one can find the world. Remove the chaos of the self and one will find one self" writes Nicosia in a review of Strand's poetry (16). The final line of the poem is very intriguing: it sounds as if he empties his life out of his self – i.e. his self is like a container and his life is like water, sand or some other material which fills it. Yet his life (emptied out of the container) remains although it is no longer in his self (the container). It's as if self and life can stand independent of one another after the self decides to empty himself of life. So at the end, we have self without life and life without self.

David St. John observes that "Many readers of Strand's early poetry…are accustomed to work in which the self is predicated upon a renunciation of the world, or upon a recognition of the insubstantiality of all things. Indeed, it sometimes seems the self is barely held by the sieve of these poems" (65). As much as the world is that which constitutes the life of someone, daily life may also prevent one to see past it. This can also be interpreted as an attempt to overstep the ego in order to reveal a dimension beyond worldly relations. Sven Birkerts notes that "For Strand, it is thus: we have been hurled into being and there is no imminent or transcendent ground for the self" (53). Therefore the self appears to be a construct that needs to be undone in order to touch being – it is highly doubtful whether such pure being exist – and to reach out to the absent origin Strand talks about.

Strand sees the absent origin or nothingness as the ultimate possibility for poetry. Blanchot calls this the "open" and define it in his own terms. For Blanchot "*The Open is the poem.* The space where everything returns to deep being, where there is infinite passage between the two domains, where everything dies but where death is the learned companion of

life" and also adds that "The Open is the work, but the work as origin" (142). In *The Monument* part nine Strand writes the following:

> It has been necessary to submit to vacancy in order to begin again, to clear ground, to make space. I can allow nothing to be received. Therein lies my triumph *and* my mediocrity. Nothing is the destiny of everyone, it is our commonness made dumb. I am passing it on. The monument is a void, artless and everlasting. What I was I am no longer. And you shall perpetuate me not in the name of what I was, but in the name of what I am. (104)

Self-effacement is an emptying of the self in order to open space for the poem which intends to get rid of the representational aspect of things and come closer to the origin, being of the thing. This is Strand's negative capability. His difference perhaps from Williams is that Williams effaces the self to see the objects of the world as they are but we, as readers, do not witness the process of self effacement in the poem. On the other hand, Strand effaces the self to see beyond the self, which actually, in essence, is not much different from the aim to see the objects, but his reader witnesses this process in the poem. The last sentence of the quotation "And you shall perpetuate me not in the name of what I was, but in the name of what I am" is in line with what is meant in the line "I empty myself of my life and my life remains". The persona wants to get rid of all memories or names that would interfere with his connection to the moment he is in. When he achieves that, what is left is the life that remains. Nicosia notes that "By subtracting the world and even one's self from the poem as one begins (a privative action), all possibilities exist (a primitive condition). Once our worldly baggage is dropped from our shoulders and we assume a nearly tabula rasa state, we can go wherever the poem takes us" (4). This is what Strand means when he writes that he speaks for nothing, the nothing that he is, and the nothing that is his work. This nothingness is liberating for poetry. Moreover to be in a condition of nothingness, where "all possibilities exist", and to be able to go wherever the poem takes one are qualities that match the principles of negative capability: being open to anything and effacing the self in reaching this state.

Although he constantly uses the pronoun “I”, Strand actually makes the process of self-effacement (which normally is not part of the poem but a technique to withhold/erase the self in order to be negatively capable) the crux of his poems. In *The Weather of Words* Strand gives Wordsworth as a worthy example and criticizes his (Strand’s) own contemporaries because for them "experience must precede a sense of self". However, his vision of poetry is different:

> In most so-called confessional poetry, there is no governing vision of submergence or transcendence as there is in Wordsworth. Submergence occurs when the poet uses darkness as a medium and communicates with his own unconscious. It is through such process that the poet makes the universe internal until it takes on his form (106).

Strand uses the terms “submergence” and “transcendence” to define the artistic process whereby a poet uses “darkness” and reaches out to his own unconscious. In this regard darkness is utilized as a means to blot out the ego or the constructed self to expose the unconscious. The key point resides in the last sentence: “the poet makes the universe internal” and the universal “takes on his form”. For Strand this is submergence or transcendence, in either case a moving beyond the self. Through darkness the poet overcomes the self and opens up to the universe, connecting with it at the level of the unconscious and the universe takes on the poet’s form. In essence what Strand describes resembles Keats’ concept. Yet his conception of the self is very complex and for him, the role that language plays, particularly in constructing the self and representing the world, is complex and highly questionable. Hence, he is well aware of the intricate relation between the self and language.

What Billy Collins says of what Wordsworth writes in *The Prelude* also applies to what Strand does in his poems:

> [W]e see Wordsworth stopping to wonder what he is doing and how he is doing and how he is doing it. In one of these pauses, the complexity of the process of memory is admirably expressed through the extended image of a man bending over the side of a “slow moving boat upon the breast / Of a still water.” The autobiographical man can see under the clean water “weeds, fishes, flowers / Grots, pebbles, roots of trees and fancies more,” but he has difficulty

> distinguishing these things from the surface reflections he also sees, not just of the mountains, sun, and clouds above him, but of his own face, a "gleam / Of his own image," superimposed on the watery tableau. It is impossible to view the past, the image suggests, without also seeing the present and in it the mirror image of the self. The observer is an ingredient in the observed. This triple vision so well reveals the complicated nature of a poetry based on memory that it might act as a signpost, a warning for poets who assume that the past is easily accessible and that their play in the country-garden day school of nostalgia is a sufficient form of poetic activity. (89)

"The observer is an ingredient in the observed" is perhaps the most important statement in this lengthy passage. Although it seems to refer to autobiographical writing, actually every kind of creative literary endeavor, from an allegedly objective essay to a novel, shares the same feature to a degree. Negative capability is mainly a struggle against this. However, it can be successful only up to a certain extent because whatever the poet chooses to write first of all passes through his/her consciousness and somehow bears the mark of his/her creator.

As Collins argues, this is much more distinct and recognizable in texts based on the author's memories. Yet it is not very different in the case of works of pure imagination, because memories are most of the time created by people and they are neither exact nor pure as they are sometimes assumed to be; in fact imagination plays a large role in forming our memories. The main reason for this is that language is a system of meanings composed of signs and signifiers, only distinct from each other arbitrarily; moreover language according to Strand "belongs to everyone and no one" at the same time (57). The basic example is that whatever the name of a person may be, he or she has to use the same pronoun "I" to refer to him/herself.

Nevertheless the metaphor that Collins uses from Wordsworth almost flawlessly reflects what Strand wants to do by erasing himself. When we examine the metaphor, looking down into the river bed symbolizes the act of searching for things that can be turned into poetry. Whenever the poet gazes "he has difficulty distinguishing these things" (referring to his thoughts) "from the surface reflections he also sees, not just of the mountains, sun, and clouds

above him, but of his own face" (ibid). Therefore Strand's attempt at self-effacement can also be seen as an attempt to get rid of self images to reach a pure relation with being. This would then be the ultimate act of negative capability materializing as poetry.

"The observer is an ingredient in the observed"; although this idea has been re-articulated by post structuralists/modernists, the idea of the subject/object distinction or in other words the idea of the observer observing itself is much older and firmly based in philosophy. To do away with this distinction, to go beyond the ego, which is the perpetuator of this distinction, would mean to be in touch with pure being. This is what a poet, according to Strand, strives for. He writes "Most poets, I think, are drawn to the unknown, and writing, for them, is a way of making the unknown visible"(71). Roughly speaking Bly, Simic and others call this unknown the unconscious, yet it finds other names in modern theory. Lacan says it is the "Imaginary", Derrida the "trace", Blanchot "the open". The common point in all can be identified as pointing to a position or space beyond language and the subject-object duality created by it.

One other philosopher who also deals with this issue is Arthur Schopenhauer and his views, from the same age and sentiment of the romantic Keats, helps us in understanding Strand's pursuit because Schopenhauer represented the idea of the self by the term "will". In his argument, Schopenhauer insists on the body as much as the mind or the soul:

> But he himself is rooted in the world; and thus he finds himself in it as an individual, in other words, his knowledge, which is the conditional supporter of the whole world as representation, is nevertheless given entirely through the medium of a body, and the affections of this body are, as we have shown, the starting-point for the understanding in its perception of this world. (99)

The basic idea that Schopenhauer brings to the table here is the acknowledgement of the body as the primary medium and source of perception. One interesting point about this particular quote is the distanced tone regulated by the third person pronoun "he" Schopenhauer employs. Almost resembling 20th century philosophers it conveys the sense of lack of control

and the involuntary nature of being in a body and in the world: “But he himself is rooted in the world; and thus he finds himself in it as an individual” (ibid). The individual subject is not only thrown into the world but into a body as well. Sven Birkerts’ comment displays the similarity between Strand and Schopenhauer: "For Strand, it is thus: we have been hurled into being and there is no imminent or transcendent ground for the self" (53).

According to Schopenhauer one can know his/her body in two ways. First, through perception: for example one sees one’s own hands, arms and legs or looks at his/her face in the mirror or hears his/her own voice. The second one is through his will, which pertains to the notion of the self that there is something, some unknown force in league with the body that wills things and does things; for example the wish to move a hand or to satisfy hunger or a desire for power. The individual recognizes these as the “wills” of the self, which is almost synonymous at one point with the self (the other will in Schopenhauer is different and I will refer to it too) (100). Yet he also emphasizes that “only in reflection are willing and acting different; in reality they are one," and further adds that "finally, the knowledge I have of my will, although an immediate knowledge, cannot be separated from that of my body" (101). These two statements are significant in the sense that Schopenhauer undermines the classical mind/body and spirit/body dichotomies that endlessly refer to Heaven/Earth and subject/object. With his statement quoted above, similar to Nietzsche and Lacan, Schopenhauer draws attention to the unity of will and the act and disposes of the discrepancy between the subject and the object created mostly by the requirements of language.

Schopenhauer takes his notion of the will a step ahead and based on the union between body and “will”, he writes that "the whole body must be nothing but my will become visible” (106-107). Moreover he places will on a higher niche saying that "but only will is thing-in-itself; as such it is not representation at all but toto genere different therefrom" (110). According to him, “will” is the only thing that has its origin in us, not within in any exterior

phenomenon and claims that it is not an unknown quantity like god (111-112). So in each man "will" objectifies (shows) itself and this is how one can know about it as perception. The example that Schopenhauer gives is quite intriguing and connects well with the next Strand poem to be discussed. He says that the body is the objectification of the will: "Therefore the parts of the body must correspond completely to the chief demands and desires by which the will manifest itself; they must be the visible expressions of these desires. Teeth, gullet and intestinal canal are objectified hunger; the genitals are objectified sexual impulse…"(108). If this logic is worked in reverse, then each body part signifies a type of objectification of the will. As much as they render the "will" visible they simultaneously mask the will in-it-self; meaning, for example that hunger can be seen simply as the consequence of having a stomach. Yet the relation is much more complicated. The logical path to the will in-it-self involves first the acknowledgement of the desire, the realization represented by the body part and the negation or erasure of that desire or body part so that the "will" behind it can be discerned.

Let's look at the poem "Giving Myself Up" from this point of view:

I give up my eyes which are glass eggs.
I give up my tongue.
I give up my mouth which is the constant dream of my tongue.
I give up my throat which is the sleeve of my voice.
I give up my heart which is a burning apple.
I give up my lungs which are trees that have never seen the moon.
I give up my smell which is that of a stone traveling through rain.
I give up my hands which are ten wishes.
I give up my arms which have wanted to leave me anyway.
I give up my legs which are lovers only at night.
I give up my buttocks which are the moons of childhood.
I give up my penis which whispers encouragement to my thighs.
I give up my clothes which are walls that blow in the wind
and I give up the ghost that lives in them.
I give up. I give up.
And you will have none of it because already I am beginning
again without anything.

The gist of the poem is the act of self-divestment, and it has profound implications. It is rich with striking images so the reader before all is expected to savor this poem with his/her imagination. Anaphora and grammatical parallelism, through the repetition of the phrase "I give up" all along the poem till the very end, makes the poem sound like a song, a chant perhaps. With nearly each line, the first person singular persona "I" dispossess himself and leaves a body part behind. A line by line analysis reveals to us, particularly in relation with Schopenhauer's views, that there is much more than body parts in the poem.

The persona first relinquishes his eyes, which inevitably means abandoning the sense of sight. So this signals that the persona is turning inward and getting rid of the most basic and fundamental sense perception. He describes them metaphorically as "glass eggs", alluding to their physical features of color, shape and translucency.

In the second and third lines, the mouth is depicted as the constant dream of the tongue. Both of them are left behind, symbolizing the desire to cease talking and abandoning the sense of taste. We can deduce at least three implications from this rather bizarre depiction. Speech can be seen as something enacted in order to fulfill a dream, where dream should be understood as a wish. The basic idea is that one speaks because he/she wishes something; even expressing an opinion involves a wish. The mouth (perhaps the palate or the lips) is the dream of the tongue because it can never fully reach it but can only touch it and has to be pulled back. Because of the darkness of the mouth, if the tongue is personified, it can never see the mouth but can only dream that there is such a thing.

The fourth line depicts the throat as the "sleeve" of the voice and generates a visual image. Perhaps a sleeve-hand, throat-voice parallelism can be established in the sense that if the voice symbolizes giving commands and doing things, a hand is a viable metaphor for voice rendering a natural connection between sleeve and the hand. Yet with this metaphor the persona gives up his voice. Yet more importantly, from the very beginning, because of the

vivid metaphors for each body part left out, the reader visualizes something else in its stead and in this way creates a bizarre, surreal creature in his/her imagination.

The heart is “a burning apple” in line five. Simply, the notion of burning is clearly related with desire which is often associated with the heart. So here the aim is to leave behind desire or passionate love. The image of the apple is apt both because of the physical resemblance, the color red, and, also the real shape of the organ which looks like a red apple more than a graphic heart. It is also the forbidden fruit that causes the fall of humankind, and Adam and Eve’s banishment. In this regard it symbolizes temptation and desire, hence it fits nicely with the symbolic meaning of the heart where the desires and wants of people are said to be generated.

The persona, referring to the enclosed or captive positioning of the lungs in the chest and comparing them to trees because of a resemblance in shape, says that that they are “trees that have never seen the moon”. The metaphor is both visual and functional, because trees, just like the lungs clear the air and emit oxygen through photosynthesis. Yet the key point about photosynthesis is that it is only possible during the day for it requires sunlight. At night the process is reversed and this time trees produce carbon dioxide. Since lungs never do this, they are trees that never see the moon, visible only at night.

In line seven, the persona gives up something that is not an organ but one of the five senses, smell. It is pivotal to notice that the persona is in a way exchanging or switching his organs/body parts with things in nature as he describes them. The smell of a stone travelling through rain is original. It connotes heaviness because it is perhaps the first quality that comes to the mind with the image of the stone, (yet this is a flying stone), and secondly the smell of something getting wet in the rain. This line can be thought as the desire to get rid of the heaviness one feels in one’s body.

In the eighth line, the ten wishes no doubt pertain to the number of fingers. When the persona gives his hands up, he means that he does not want to wish anything anymore. Of course, if we think of religious symbolism it brings up the idea of the Ten Commandments. Yet that would be a little farfetched because there are no other indications in the line or in the poem to suggest such a link. Yet it may also refer to writing as well.

Arms are not specifically compared to anything, we only have a comment that they have wanted to leave the persona anyway. This can perhaps be thought of functionally, similar to the tongue in the second and third lines; as they extent outwards, their actions can be interpreted as if they are trying to break free of their limitations and origin.

Interestingly enough legs are associated with love, but only at night. The persona may be referring to the fact that his legs are separated during the day because one is usually walking, sitting, or standing. Another meaning would be that legs, which are normally not erotic organs, can turn into erotic limbs only at night, because that is when usually people make love. This means that the persona neither wants to walk nor make love.

The metaphor in the eleventh line is again based almost purely on visual images. The persona imagines the shiny buttocks of a child (himself) and compares them to the moon. It symbolizes the past that has gone by. With this metaphor the persona gives up his past too.

One can easily follow the downward movement in the poem, starting from the head and going down. The next item in the list is the penis, which occupies a median position. The persona, in line twelve, identifies his penis, which whispers encouragement for sex to his thighs. Thighs are often associated with the sexual act, and together with the penis the line pertains to abstinence from sex.

The last thing the persona claims he is giving up is his clothes. He imagines them as walls blowing in the wind, meant to either house or constrain the wearer but unable to do so. Moreover he does not end the line but adds that he is relinquishing the ghost who lives in

them as well. With the ghost the persona refers to himself. This can be seen as a consequence of the ongoing abandonment/divestment in the poem that finally leaves nothing but a ghost behind. With his vital organs, his five senses gone, parts of his flesh gone, what remains is like an empty house; only the walls remain and they are not very strong. It reminds us of "The Remains", especially its last lines: "I empty myself of my life and my life remains" (ibid). On the other hand, we can also deduce that there was always a ghost within that enabled such a divestment in the first place and this poem is its recognition. Moreover, to give up the ghost means to die. So we have come to the end of divestment.

The fourteenth line is a simple repetition of the phrase "I give up". With the fifteenth line the persona brings the second person pronoun "you" - something by now a Strand reader would not be startled by - and addresses the "you": "And you will have none of it because already I am beginning / again without anything". Nicosia writes that "throughout his career, Strand reveals a single persona who sees himself as two versions of himself, as someone else, or as no one at all" (15). Here, and in many other poems, the reader can get a sense of both. The "you" addressed here is not an ordinary someone, a stranger, the reader but rather another version of Strand. The persona takes the observer stance to look at it himself after self-divestment. The observing persona is no other than the divested self as well. In a manner it is both the subject and the object. It reminds us of the statement "The observer is an ingredient in the observed" (Collins 89). By saying that "you will have none of it" Strand emphasizes the fact that he does not wish to create another version of himself or carry over anything from the life/self he is giving up but intends to start afresh to join the nothingness that is laden with new possibilities.

At the end of the poem, the persona begins everything anew and forms the impression that after this self-divestment re-creation of the self will take place, that the two constitute an ongoing act which is perpetual. He strips off all the identifiers in order to touch the absent

origin, though he is well aware that this state of absence will not last and the absent origin – as the name indicates – cannot be known. Whenever one reaches for it, it disappears or ricochets between other signifiers (as perhaps Derrida would say). Schopenhauer writes "but this thing that withdraws from investigation is precisely the thing-in-itself, that which is essentially not representation, not object of knowledge; but only by entering that form has it become knowable" (121). By making a concerted effort to erase the self one can catch a glimpse of it, even if only momentarily. "Strand speaker never desires *full* retreat from the physical world, however, because he knows it is not possible. He is renewed by finding temporary sanctuaries while fully engaged in creative moments of pure imagination" (Nicosia 3).

Basically certain levels/types of consciousness/being are accepted as threshold between things. In the hierarchal order of the chain of being they can be listed in the following manner: humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects such as rocks, mountains, water. Galway Kinnell, one of the Deep Imagists and a surrealist poet, emphasizes the transition between these categories. Quoted by Maio, Kinnell writes: "If you could go farther, you would no longer be a person but an animal. If you went farther still you would be the grass, eventually a stone. If a stone could speak your poem would be its words" (215). With this statement Kinnell exposes simultaneously the two crucial principles of negative capability that we have been discussing. Each imagined movement from one type of being to the other is a kind of self-effacement or negation and also the attempt to make the thing speak as itself; as the thing-in-itself is the ultimate opening up of the self to the thing, taking its shape. Especially the second, making the thing speak, is an attempt to take negative capability to its limits that we mentioned in the Williams chapter.

Interestingly enough Schopenhauer lays out a similar schema as he applies his theory of the will. “There is a higher degree of this objectification in the plant than in the stone, a higher

degree in the animal than in the plant; indeed, the will's passage into visibility, its objectification, has gradations as endless as those between the feeblest twilight and the brightest sunlight, the loudest tone and the softest echo" (128). In his view "will" is objectified at, in different levels, similar to how Kinnell orders: inanimate objects, plants, animals and men (128). For example Schopenhauer associates the innate knowledge in animals of how to build nests, breed, hunt, nurture and in human beings the working of the bodily organs, the desire to live with the manifestation of the "will" (114-115). He considers "will", not as god, but as the mysterious force of life that resides in the forms unavailable to knowledge unless one "is" or takes that particular form: "But there will always remain over original forces; there will always remain, as an insoluble residuum, a content of the phenomenon which cannot be referred to its form, and which cannot be explained from something else in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason" (124). Schopenhauer's approach is actually very modern, in the sense that he does not claim knowledge of the "will", but only traces it from its objectifications. This kind of thinking influences and inspires many post structuralist/modern theories; for example in Foucault it becomes power relations, in Lacan the Imaginary, in Derrida the trace. However, the key point that binds Schopenhauer to negative capability and Strand's poetry is that, in order to catch and reveal a glimpse of the "will", he proposes that one should negate his own will (this will is the individual will, which coincides with the ego in modern psychology) and this is only possible through art. The absence of the self or in Strand's case deliberate self negation points towards a transcendent state where even if momentarily art takes us away from the will (197), raise the self to purely objective contemplation, "able to produce the illusion that only those objects are present, not we ourselves" (Schopenhauer 198).

Absent-Presence

As we have seen absence is a powerful concept and in this case a tool, its strength stems mostly from its peculiar and essential affiliation with language and linguistic signs. Sarup explicates Derrida's notion of the sign as opposed to that of Saussure: "In Saussurean thought a sign is seen as a unity, but in Derrida's view word and thing or thought never in fact become one. He sees the sign as a structure of difference: half of it is always 'not there' and the other half is always 'not that'" (33). In this post structuralist interpretation each word is considered a sign that can never fully represent what it signifies. The basic idea behind it is that the word "father" for instance when uttered brings to mind the idea of "the" father or "a" father but it does not materialize the father. Secondly it brings the idea of the father to mind, only because, according Derrida, it is not the word mother, bother or rather, deferring infinitely because there is only difference and deferral but not an exact equivalent or counterpart to the word (Sarup 35). "Signs cannot refer to something totally other than themselves. There is no signified which is independent of signifier. There is no realm of meaning which can be isolated from the marks which are used to point to it" (Sarup 33). Derrida calls the second aspect mentioned above "Différance". "In Derrida's view *the sign marks an absent presence.* Rather than present the object we employ the sign; however, the meaning of the sign is always postponed or deferred"(Sarup 44). The term "Différance" is a made up word by Derrida underlying these two different functions of deferral and difference. In this respect it actually points to an absence, absence of the thing.

Signs refer to what is absent, so meanings too are absent, and they point to the trace of that which is forever absent. Therefore, according to Derrida, "the sign must be studied 'under erasure', always already inhabited by the trace of another sign which never appears as such" (Sarup 34). Here the term "under erasure" is particularly significant as it resembles the

particular type of poetry which Strand writes with the technique of negation. Sarup defines the term “under erasure” in the following manner: "To put a term 'sous rature' is to write a word, cross it out, and then print both word and deletion. The idea is this: since the word is inaccurate, or rather, inadequate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary it remains legible" (33). In a way this is exactly what Strand does, he does not literally cross out the words, but he crosses them out figuratively by negation. He employs this as a technique and it coincides with the prime attribute of negative capability.

The absent origin that Strand himself talks about is described by Nicosia as “what has been lost to begin with” and they coincide with the core aspects of post-structuralist/modern thinking. For example Lacan is one such figure some of whose ideas seem to concur with Strand’s poetics. Sarup notes that "Lacan stresses the point that there is no subject except in representation, but that no representation captures us completely. I can neither be totally defined nor can I escape all definition. I am the quest for myself" (13). The subject represented by the self is as much a problem for Lacan as it is for Strand. In order to understand the subject, Lacan distinguishes three different orders: the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real.

There is continual and perpetual desire and thus lack caused by the sense of loss, of wholeness in Lacan, the Real (third order) is the dream realm of its fulfillment. So since we are human beings thrown into the life already set, the desire is endless. Sarup interprets the notion of desire in Lacan in the following way: “Desire emerges when satisfaction of need is not enough, when there is a doubt or gap which cannot be closed. Desire arises out of the lack of satisfaction and it pushes you to another demand” (21). Yet there is no quenching of this thirst. Schopenhauer says nearly the same thing:

> Every attained end is at the same time the beginning of a new course, and so on ad infinitum. The plant raises its phenomenon from the seed through stem and leaf to blossom and fruit, which is in turn only the beginning of a new seed, of a new

> individual, which once more runs through the old course, and so through endless time. (164)

Schopenhauer sees this as a vicious cycle, a cycle of life that is compelled by the "will". For Lacan, the "will" is the being in the Real, "resisting by nature capture in the comprehensibly meaningful formulations of concatenations of Imaginary-Symbolic signs" (ibid). "Every individual act has a purpose or end; willing as a whole has no end in view" (Schopenhauer, 165). "Will" has no end in view because it is both everything and nothing. What is beyond language or any other signification or categorization, is very similar to the register of the Real. This connects almost perfectly with Strand's lines at the end of the poem entitled "My Son" from *The Monument*:

> beyond love,
> where nothing,
> everything,
> wants to be born. (25-28)

Let us examine these lines in the light of Lacan and Schopenhauer. It is beyond love because love for Lacan is love of the ego, a narcissistic concept, whereas for Schopenhauer it is a need and a desire which is somewhat an objectified form of "will" expanding. Therefore the call for being must be beyond love, beyond the ego and the self. Moreover, nothing and everything are interlocked; they form a cycle that needs to be born exactly in this contradictory manner. Yet this is impossible because the moment something is born, in this case poetry, when it is written down, it becomes part of the symbolic order, it takes a certain pre-made form in language becoming a level objectification of the will. The words become objects and subjects and they get to be bound by relations such as lack and desire, binary oppositions and the like. Strand wishes to go beyond this.

In this regard, we can say that in the late 60's and 70's, Strand displays post-modern and even deconstructionist tendencies and traits in his poems. The absent-presence that Strand

achieves through self-effacement and negation shares fundamental components with deconstruction; he considers language as a system of signs that are, in a way, absent presences. Sarup writes that according to Derrida "the marks of erasure acknowledge both the inadequacy of the terms employed - their highly provisional status - and the fact that thought simply cannot manage without them" (39). This comment, which points to writing under erasure, is perhaps one of the best explanations for why one cannot simply ignore the self and write because simply one cannot do away with it. Thus total selfless writing is a dream or an illusion, unreachable, just like the Real or the "will", but negative capability up to a certain point is possible and the attempts at it turns the poet into Keats' "camelion".

In our day when the self is deemed to be a literary or linguistic construct, it is not surprising to see endeavors to do away with it, to see what this would bring about, to try to look beyond the self. Language and poetry have become enmeshed with, philosophy and criticism vis-à-vis the self, ventures that are also marked by language at the core. "One of the main features of post-structuralist theory is the deconstruction of the self. In place of a unified and stable being or consciousness we get a multifaceted and disintegrating play of selves" (Sarup 53).

What Strand does with his poetry is a kind of deconstruction of the self and the world with and through poetry. Deconstruction first of all requires the identification of hierarchal binaries, such as the self and the other, the real and the fictional, life and death. Then the deconstructionist looks for discrepancies, contradictions and gaps in the language to disassemble the binary oppositions. Gayatri Spivak explains deconstruction in "a nutshell", in the following manner: "To locate the promising marginal text, to disclose the undecidable moment, to pry it loose with the positive lever of the signifier; to reverse the resident hierarchy, only to displace it; to dismantle in order to reconstitute what is always already inscribed" (Derrida lxxvii). Strand partly does this in his poetry, undoing the binaries of the

self and the other, the self and the world. Perhaps he is one of the first to employ deconstruction as an artistic style and achieving his unique kind of negative capability.

The next poem we are going to analyze explores the ideas of self-effacement, negation and absent presence, which can be interpreted from a deconstructionist point of view as well as an exercise in negative capability.

Keeping Things Whole

In a field
I am the absence
of field.
This is
always the case.
Wherever I am
I am what is missing.

When I walk
I part the air
and always
the air moves in
to fill the spaces
where my body's been.

We all have reasons
for moving.
I move
to keep things whole.

The poem begins with a puzzling statement dispersed over three lines that at first glance causes a feeling of perplexity. In this poem the presence of the persona is defined by absence. What Strand achieves is that he actually finds a way to define himself by negation. The persona, who utilizes the first person pronoun "I" all along the poem, states that in a field he is the absence of [the] field. By being in a field, because he is not part of the field, he assumes that he is the space, particularly the absence that the field cannot penetrate: "Wherever I am / I am what is missing". One can read this as when "I wasn't in the field, the field had a lack. I am the missing thing". The field is complete when "I am in the field", "I move to keep things whole".

In lines four and five the persona says that this is always the case, adding that wherever he is always what is missing. The reader gets the idea that this is not the simple narration of a single or onetime event, but a perpetual state of mind or philosophy for the persona. The clue to this is found in the third line. Normally, one would write I am the absence of the field, putting the article “the” before the field to indicate that this is the particular field that he is in. Yet he does not because it is a general situation and it is the case with every field.

Similar to the words “free” or “freedom” that I discussed earlier in the chapter, absence is also the kind of word which is best understood through negation, with the support of the question “absence of what”. Simic, a surrealist and contemporary of Strand, quoted by Maio, makes this remark: "It is as if we were in a room from which, paradoxically, we were absent. Everything is seen from the perspective of that absence "(220). Simic here perhaps describes pure negative capability and points towards one of its limits in poetry that Strand reaches and stretches in his unique way. One step further would mean not to say “I” or even not to write at all in order not to represent the self, an extreme point. Nicosia writes that “the desire for perfect poetry is the desire for no poem at all, for to reach a place where one's words are furthest from metaphor and closest to the thing described is to attempt to say no thing at all" (158). If we equate “perfect poetry” with negative capability, particularly because pure representation of the thing seems like the common denominator, what Nicosia says explains what we mean by limits both for Williams and Strand.

In his discussion of post-structuralism and particularly Derrida, Evan Carton and Gerald Graff make the following comment about the role of language in post-modern/structuralist thought:

> Indeed, it is our sense of a lack in our world that makes us feel the need to supplement that lack with language, endlessly describing, redescribing, interpreting, and reinterpreting. A world in which language could bring us to a terminal destination would be a world of death, certainly one that would provide no reason to speak or write. The desire for completion that can never be reached is

> the condition of possibility for all expression, and it leaves traces in all expression that can be uncovered through a deconstructive reading. (379)

Strand seems to acknowledge and appropriate – in his poetry - almost each point Evan Carton and Gerald Graff mention. The phrase that "a world in which language could bring us to a terminal destination" also intrinsically aligns with the core attitude of negative capability that advices no reaching after fact or reason. In this respect, it not only emphasizes an artistic style but also proposes a philosophical idea in line with post-structuralism that there can be no such fixed truth/real or position other than what is offered/created/assumed by language. Moreover, the desire for completion is no different than the desire for the "other". For this "Other", to make it protrude Strand attempts to efface his own self/identity, perhaps bringing out not "a deconstructive reading" but a type of deconstructive writing in poetry, which in effect epitomizes a new way of looking at negative capability.

Richard Jackson underlines the fact that Strand (and also Simic) prioritize the ontological function of language (136). Quoted by Maio, Richard Jackson writes that "language always seems to be inhabited by the other, the elsewhere, the distant; it is hollowed by absence" (220). His commentary on the poetry of both poets concurs with the post-structuralist and post-modern view of language envisioned by Lacan and Derrida.

The two lines "Wherever I am / I am what is missing" points both to this specific attribute of language and also to his feeling of emptiness, the self that is defined only by the "Other" but has no other intrinsic meaning in itself. Lehman considers these two lines as the "cri de Coeur" of Mark Strand and it would not be farfetched to consider them among his most significant statements about his self and his poetry (66).

The same two lines of Strand further remind us of Lacan. According to Sarup "Lacan strives to denounce the common illusion which identifies the ego with the self. In contrast to those who say 'I think, therefore I am' Lacan asserts: 'I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think'. Or, ' I think where I cannot say that I am'"(Sarup 10). To define the self

only by one faculty such as reason is an immense restriction on the human subject. Kant, Schopenhauer and then Nietzsche were among the first to oppose this definition. Sarup claims that Sartre's view also underlines the notion that "consciousness can never grasp itself, Reflection always turns the subject into an object" (12). The attempt in "Keeping Things Whole" is to free the self from such a restriction.

In the second stanza the persona points to a physical reality: When one moves he/she parts the air and afterwards air fills the space where his/her body has been. Therefore the physical existence of the self might be a hindrance upon the integrity of the world. In the last stanza, the persona articulates his reason for moving, which can be seen figuratively as living, "to keep things whole". In this idea there is a profound implication of melancholy and guilt related to being and possessing a self. The implicit idea here can be compared with Schopenhauer's notion of the thing-in-itself in the sense that by being in the field as a self, one can never grasp what the field really is.

Alternatively, perhaps the self is necessary to keep things a whole. The poem permits both readings. From the title "Keeping Things Whole" we can infer that Strand seeks for that wholeness. Sarup notes that Lacan believes subject and object are irreconcilably divided: "Undoubtedly he has an ontology: we all have a need for wholeness, a longing for the state of unity, but the achievement of plenitude is a logical impossibility" (13-14). Yet as long as he has a self and is bounded by language, Strand cannot achieve this unity. This is perhaps why he writes "Wherever I am / I am what is missing". This has an innate relation with how language works. The words always symbolize what is missing and in constant deferral can only refer to others, but not clearly disclose the absent origin. Jackson links Strand's struggle towards a creative nothingness in terms of post-modern theories and writes: "This passage towards 'Nothing,' towards the absence of the author, must be seen as part of the structure of deferrals in the chain of signifiers" (140).

Schopenhauer expects the art work to break the boundary between the perceiver and the perceived, and he expects the perceiver to be him/herself entirely in the perceived object (178). In this respect, Schopenhauer's view coincides with the central premises of negative capability, namely that one mutes the self - the ego that takes the world as perception - so that one may know the world through poetry as the thing-in-itself. To speak actually in the name of a thing, for example a dramatic monologue or the personification of a stone or a field is not possible. Richard Benton, in his analysis of Keats' absorption and self-annihilation in the thing he concentrates on, writes that it "does not mean, however, that our individual ego is completely extinguished. As long as we remain in flesh we maintain our individual existence; we continue to 'exist as one manifested form in the world of forms" (46). The individual ego can never be totally done away with. To speak in the name of a thing is a momentary refuge from being a self, which is always haunted by language and its mechanisms. Even though it is momentary, still it grasps something fundamental about language: that language always presents absent-presences but not the thing-in-itself. Similar to saying "I am what is missing", language only points to an absent origin that can never be appropriated, always flees or stays as a trace. Nicosia claims that "Strand has made a career of absenting absences to leave monumental presences in their wake" (170). The field, which is the absence of Strand, and the son he never had are perhaps the best examples.

In his poetry, Strand questions the coherence of self and its intricate, fundamental and ontological relation with language. That is why some of poems can be seen as almost examples of a deconstructionist writing of poetry. The self, which can be called the ego or the daily self, is blackballed by the core premise of negative capability. Strand makes this a part of his poems. In his hands self-effacement and negation turn into an artistic and aesthetic endeavor that broadens the horizon for poetic creativity. As well as its debt to post-modern/structuralist theories, as mentioned before, Strand's poetry has connections to Deep

Image poetry and Surrealist poetry of his time. It was one of the main goals of this chapter to show that Strand's poetry is always at least a notch different from any categorization particularly because of its implicit negatively capable character. Hence, it can be said that Strand touches the essence of negative capability and enhances it with his unique style. He displays how far it can expand poetry, exposing the limits of the notion of self.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The three ways of looking at negative capability explored in this dissertation arise from the realization of the core idea of negative capability in different forms. This has attempted to show that each of the poets under discussion highlighted a different aspect of negative capability and based on that specific aspect forged their own unique negatively capable poetry. However, it is also essential to note once more that while these three poets never declared their Keatsian approach – the claim of this dissertation is that what they achieved nevertheless was to exercise negative capability in new and original ways. What led to this study was that in certain of their poems and during specific periods in their careers they produced works showing a close affinity with negative capability and its possibilities. Therefore my categorization is not meant to be a general label such as "Keatsian" for these three poets.

A comparative analysis of the following three poems "The Ball Poem", "To" and "The Remains" by Berryman, Williams and Strand respectively should provide a quick recap of the main arguments, the nature of the categorization and to what new horizons the discussions in this dissertation have led us. Such a comparative analysis is crucial in two respects: it offers a chance to compare three different voices and different styles analyzed in each chapter within the larger scope of negative capability.

In relation to voice and the involvement of the poet, Williams' ball poem is at the opposite pole of Berryman's ball poem. If we recall the poem, we are told the ball is blue, that the boy has a toy racket in his right hand, and that he runs six floors down. The event is turned into an art object. It is a simple display, a visual depiction of a scene from which the poet isolates himself and takes an objective stance. The persona is totally absent, almost non-existent and is only there because someone needs to depict the event, adhering to one of the

basic principles of negative capability. Other than visual contact, which may be imaginary, the persona establishes no connection whatsoever with the subject of the poem. The poet is simply not in the poem. In this respect this is the prime and most basic definition of negative capability where the poet disappears to present the thing as simply as possible, striving pure presentation of the thing-in-itself. In this case symbolic meaning has to be provided by the reader unlike Berryman's ball poem where the speaker freely conveys his feelings along with the symbolism he creates.

In Berryman's ball poem, the style is very different although we again have a boy and a ball at the center. In Berryman's poem the persona sees a boy who has lost his ball and it reminds the speaker of his own boyhood. The speaker is an adult, relating an anecdote about the crushing pain felt by a little boy who has lost his ball. However, the reader soon starts to think that the incident actually belongs to the speaker's own boyhood, and that the adult self is actually recording his own childish grief. The boy and the event may be totally imaginary, or this may be a real event which has inspired the poet to think about his past. From this point of view it reminds us of *The Dream Songs.*

The poet creates ambiguity by implying he is the little boy and then claiming he is not. The "I" refers to the adult poet. Then "he" may be either a little boy he actually sees or his own boyhood self. So like a camelion poet he inhabits two bodies and two minds. In an interview Berryman notes that "the discovery here was that a commitment of identity can be 'reserved' so to speak, with an ambiguous pronoun. The poet himself is both left out and put in; the boy does not become him, and we are confronted with a process which is at once a process of life and a process of art" (126). This is where the power of the poem resides and relates to the type negative capability Berryman achieved in *The Dream Songs*: we can never pinpoint the voice of the poet or identify it with a single character, thus the poet persona

opens up like a camelion poet to fill in any body. Anybody also means nobody in particular, hence, satisfying the first tenet of negative capability.

In Strand's "The Remains", the "I" is in the poem from the beginning till the end. The stance of the persona is not objective. However, as this is a poem of divestment and negation, the "I" is repeated almost in each line only to tell the reader that the speaker (identified with the "I") is there to step by step efface his/her identity. In the poem, the speaker gets rid of both material and intangible personal possessions such as names of friends and shoes, all of which can be read symbolically. The process of self-effacement as well as the poem itself ends with "I empty myself of my life and my life remains" which foregrounds the ultimate effacement.

In this poem the self is effaced to reveal the lived life. It resembles "Keeping Things Whole" in the sense that the self is seen as a component of life which can be effaced to reveal what is beyond it. Self is almost seen as a palimpsest. Compared to the other two poems, it can be said that although the voice of the poet can be felt, it is there to undo him/herself. The act of negation and divestment which leads to self-effacement becomes the art object like Williams' poem where the event itself becomes the art object.

These three poems represent the epitomes of the kind of poetry that was discussed in each chapter and their respective types of negative capability. All of the three personae created by the poets in these particular poems have a different tone of voice, and each poem has a different style and objectivity which together determine the aesthetic and artistic properties of the poems and contribute differently to negative capability. In the tripartite division, we can say that with each poet a certain tenet of negative capability is highlighted or taken as its core component.

In the chapter on Williams it is the desire to present the object without the hindrance of the self and personal feelings which leads to a distinct and visible type of negative capability. Therefore the objective stance defined as withholding any personal feeling and experience is

the core tenet. Williams' motto "Say it, no ideas but things" (263) stands out as the gist of this type of negative capability where the poet aims at the direct expression of the thing out there with his words. In this regard Williams' affinity with Imagist poetry is also highlighted.

In his groundbreaking work *Spring And All* Williams explains his aim lucidly, which seems very much in line with the "Imagist Credo": "What I put down of value will have this value: an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from "reality" – such as rhyme, meter as meter and not as the essential of the work, one of its words" (189). Williams' attempt to touch reality and to present the "thing" is deeply rooted in his endeavor to create a new poetics compatible with the developing, expanding and self-discovering American people. The "American Idiom" was the name he gave to this search in language. In Wendell Berry's opinion Williams "was trying to find a credible language with which to speak of the life around him" (19). Berry finds Williams' effort of great importance:

> [W]e need at the very least a speakable inventory of things particularly belonging to our own places and lives that are worth saving. First of all we must rescue our language from the generalizers, the categorizers, the classifiers, the reducers of things to ideas, the mongers of stereotypes and clichés… (57)

An innovator and experimenter in poetry, Williams sought to find a language that would maintain his relation with the real world around him. He even looked for a kind of rhythm suitable to this end. Perhaps we can say that what Williams called the American Idiom is his way of naming his style of impersonality that coincides with what we call here negative capability.

"Williams wrote with the aid of that impersonal part of himself, the reader; he observed himself in his daily activity in collaboration with another accurate observer" writes Mike Weaver referring to the detached observant stance that Williams takes in his poems (48). Williams almost becomes a reader and reads the world as a reader would read his poems and this act of reading "impersonally" is Williams' prominent way of writing poetry. When the

poet does not intervene and make his presence felt or according to Weaver, when there is less human emotion, there is a greater chance that the poem can be seen more as an object. The main reason for this and its limitations are also articulated by Wagner: "Yet, although impersonality may increase the physical reality of the persona or object presented, it also may repress or limit the poet's responses and expressions" (51). Actually to limit his own responses as a poet in order to represent the world, the thing-in-itself is the exact goal of Williams. The discussion of negative capability and hence impersonality is important because it coincides with a fundamental theme in art, which is mimesis. What is sought by negative capability is a sort of mimetic purity which renders the poet a medium who reflects the world as it is.

However in mimetic representation, figuratively speaking, language is a kind of "pharmakon" which means that it can be both the poison and the cure depending on how it is employed by the poet. We witness this ambivalent aspect of language more keenly in Williams' poems as he pushes the limits of negative capability and poetry towards pure presentation. For example in "The Attic Which is Desire" the attempt at pure representation reaches the point where the word-sign is almost replaced by a picture of the soda sign itself. The visual quality of the poem is enhanced which reifies the Imagist or Objectivist label of William's early poetry in particular.

Such poetry highlights the relation between poetry and painting. With the technological advances it can be said that the interactions between different arts and disciplines have also increased, enabling different art forms to be influential on each other. This development can also be attributed to the fact that mimetic tendencies to depict the world as it is still persist and as technology and interaction between art forms increase, multiple ways and methods to depict the world also emerge. Especially because of this tendency, we can say that language acts as a "pharmakon". It tells the name of the thing, bringing the thing to the disposal of the reader, but on the other hand it never gives the thing itself. (a poem by definition can never

give the literal hanging soda sign to the reader). However, here negative capability proves to be a valuable road sign in mimetic representation.

Williams' attempt, in many of his poems, to show the world as it is, independent and free, by withdrawing the self/subject from the poem is perhaps the key example of negative capability. Williams pushed negative capability to its limits which resulted in unique examples of poetry. What this discussion further indicates is that different art forms, when they mingle with or become influential on poetry, can help poetry see its own limits and perhaps more importantly allow the creation of fresh and innovative poetry.

It can be said that in the chapter on Berryman it was the notion of ambiguity and the creation of different versions of the self without really abandoning it that coincided with the concept of negative capability. In this respect the camelion poet of negative capability was the key tenet. Berryman achieved a unique type of negative capability by creating so many versions of Henry and perhaps of himself that after a certain point it was impossible to pinpoint a coherent identity that could be assigned as the poet's. Yet this is not simple impersonality but the camelion poet at his/her best. Ironically Berryman does not refrain from openly challenging modernist views of impersonality in poetry:

> Ah—it's personality—it's Henry. He thought up all these things over all the years. The reason I call it one poem is the result of my strong disagreement with Eliot's line—the impersonality of poetry, an idea which he got partly from Keats (a letter) and partly from Goethe (again a letter). I'm very much against that; it seems to me on the contrary that poetry comes out of personality. ("Excerpts from Interviews with John Berryman")

Although at first glance it seems like Berryman is against impersonality what he has in mind is something different and essentially coincides with negative capability. What he means is that because Henry is a person, "it's personality". He claims that "He (Henry) thought up all these things" and disassociates himself from Henry, like he did in many other instances when he declared he was not Henry. Thus he admits that he has created a mask for himself. We have discussed in depth the symbiotic relation between Berryman and Henry. Even before

The Dream Songs he employed in his own poetry impersonality's most prominent and determining feature, the use of a persona which Yeats and many modernists called the mask, as a technique in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* Yet *The Dream Songs* is different from *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet.* As Robert Hahn comments:

> What is begun in *Bradstreet,* the argument goes, is completed *in The Dream Songs*. As Robert Philips puts it, 'it was through Berryman's later development of *the personae* of Berryman/Henry/Mr.Bones that the poet was able to let go,' and certainly this was the poet's intention: the development *of personae* and a letting go, a transcendence of self through the creation of an expansive autobiographical drama. (118)

Although what Hahn says about the development of Berryman holds water, Berryman's intention in *The Dream Songs* – as claimed by Hahn - is very much debatable. First of all the persona Berryman created is not a common persona we find in literature such as Alfred Prufrock, Don Juan or any other distinct character. As we have said Henry is and is not Berryman simultaneously and this renders Berryman a camelion poet in *The Dream Songs*. Henry is so many things, even contradictory things at times that it is almost impossible to pin down Henry as a fixed character. This feature aligns with negative capability on two grounds. The first is that as negative capability requires the poet to be able to dwell in uncertainties without reaching after fact or reason, and Henry enables Berryman to assume exactly this stance. The reader can see that there is no reaching after fact or reason either for Henry or Berryman, because (discussed earlier in detail) Henry is so volatile and even contradictory, never assuming a fixed position. The second is the idea of the camelion poet manifested by a multitude of Henries in *The Dream Songs*. For negative capability, the camelion poet changes shape or if we stick to the analogy, the camelion changes its color but never stops being a camelion. This is the case with Berryman in *The Dream Songs,* perhaps rendering a far better example to the analogy of the camelion than Keats himself did.

Moreover, the comment: "a transcendence of self through the creation of an expansive autobiographical drama" is also debatable for two reasons. First, despite the fact that the camelion poet takes new shapes with successive Henries, we never see a real transcendence; we are always somehow connected to Berryman. Berryman and Henry never achieve a state of transcendence, a larger than life attitude that for instance we say we witness in Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and in certain sections of Wordsworth's *The Prelude.* Secondly if the aim is "an expansive autobiographical drama" how is a persona truly distinct from Berryman possible? If Berryman has transcended his self, then how is it an autobiography?

What Berryman tried was something unique and it opened up a fresh way of assessing the poet-persona relation. With him the idea of the camelion poet took a new form. We can say rather that the camelion poet of negative capability has found a distinct voice. Perhaps before Berryman, simpler categorizations were possible. A poet could create new characters whom he/she proposed as totally independent creations (such as in dramatic monologues and plays) or assumed an objective position on the subject he/she wrote about. At the opposite pole of this position resided the lyric poet who expressed his feelings and ideas freely. Berryman mixed these and achieved an ingenuous blend which led the way for many other poets after him. I believe that a good example of this kind of poetry is the "Elliptical Poets".

In a relatively recent essay Stephen Burt comes up with a term to define a new type of poetry or rather a group of poets at the end of 20th and beginning of 21st century. He calls them the "Elliptical Poets". Even though the label "elliptical" is not new and was used in the mid-twentieth century, the novel way Burt uses it to specify certain poets and poetry is fresh.

> Elliptical Poets are always hinting, punning, or swerving away from a never-quite-unfolded backstory; they are easier to process in parts than in wholes. They believe provisionally in identities (in one or more "I" per poem), but they suspect the Is they invoke: they admire disjunction and confrontation, but they know how little can go a long way. Ellipticists seek authority of the rebellious; they want to challenge their readers, violate decorum, surprise or explode assumptions about what belongs in a poem, or what matters in life, and to do so while meeting traditional lyric goals. Their

> favorite attitudes are desperately extravagant, or tough-guy terse, or defiantly childish: they don't believe in, or seek, a judicious tone. (41)

All of the individual elements that Burt talks about more or less find their equivalents in Berryman's *The Dream Songs.* Most of them, such as the occasional childish manner, rebellious attitude, puns, hinting rather than telling, the importance given to parts than the whole and finally the provisional belief in identities and their multiple utilization through the "I" in poems, were already discussed in the analysis of *The Dream Songs.*

Burt is well aware of the connection as well and proposes Mark Levine – one of the poets he calls elliptical - as Berryman's legatee. The poem that Burt quotes from Levine speaks for itself:

> I am Henri, mouth full of soda crackers.
> I live in Toulouse, which is a piece of cardboard.
> Summers the Mayor paints it blue, we fish in it.
> Winters we skate on it. Children are always
> drowning or falling through cracks. Parents are distraught
> but get over it. It's easy to replace a child.
> Like my parent's child, Henri. (1-7)

Just as the similarities in language, the surreal elements and the freedom of imagination can be traced between Levine's poem and any selected Dream Song, the differences can also be pinpointed easily. It is clear that Berryman and his Henry have definitely been an influence on Levine. Travisano's comment reveals the similarity between Berryman and elliptical poetry: "Articulated under the weight of these fearful uncertainties, Berryman's *Dream Songs* are more remarkable for their elisions, emotional blockage, and ambiguity of reference than specific disclosures" (53). These traits, as shown in Burt's description, can also apply to describe elliptic poets. Burt also adds that there are "elliptical love poems that declare 'I am X, I am Y, I am Z', where X, Y, and Z are incompatible things" (42). This undoubtedly reminds us of Berryman, especially Dream Song 22 where Berryman/Henry assumes different guises with the generic statement "I am" this and "I am" that. Moreover, if we consider *The*

Dream Songs as a whole then we can say that each Dream Song is another x, y or z in the default equation of "I am" this and that. Elliptical poetry is a crucial link to show how the idea of negative capability persists and is carried over into the poetry of the 21st century. It is the claim of the Berryman chapter that this idea, represented by the generic formula "I am" is the heart and soul of negative capability and particularly the camelion poet as rendered by Berryman.

When we come to Strand, we are looking at negative capability in a very different way. Normally, the process of self-effacement or withholding the self is a crucial part of negative capability to assure the objectivity demanded by Keats. Strand utilizes the notion of self-effacement as process right in the poem, as part of the poem allowing an aesthetic appreciation of effacement.

Maio considers self-effacement as a mode of voice and he explains it by comparing it with other types of poetry: "Whereas poets of the confessional and persona modes propel themselves into their poems, the poem of the self-effacing mode selects a voice and technique intended to absent himself or herself from the poem" (180). Establishing aesthetic distance prevents the poem from becoming a direct expression of personal feelings. One of the main reasons why Strand employs this technique perhaps lies in his criticism of confessional poetry. "In confessional poetry, the self is terminal, physical, isolated, and depends heavily on specific information - the names of friends, doctors, stores, places, and the like. There is a grasping after concrete detail as a way of authenticating the self" (Strand, *The Weather of Words* 106). Strand does the exact opposite; he does not use the world to affirm his self but erases the self to show the world in the absence of the self which is the initial aim of negative capability. He says: "Deeply rooted in the ongoing romance of the self, the American poet could not possibly claim to represent anything more than his biographical existence. Even if he should care about history, it comes out like biography; it is valid only to the degree that it

inhabits him" (*The Weather of Words* 94). In Strand's negatively capable poetry both the idea of the camelion poet and the objective poet play almost equally important parts. It seems like Keats' idea of the camelion poet enables Strand to see himself from an objective stance and thus be able to efface that self.

Nicosia remark that "throughout his career, Strand reveals a single persona who sees himself as two versions of himself, as someone else, or as no one at all" is important for two reasons (15). It basically affirms Strand's negatively capable writing - what we have discussed in the Strand chapter in detail - by two fundamental tenets of negative capability. One of the two ways Strand's persona reveals itself is to be "someone else"; hence Nicosia confirms the idea of the camelion poet. The desire to be someone else clearly takes the poet away from the self, what he/she calls the daily self. The second way is to be "no one at all" which directly alludes to our discussion of self-effacement at the heart of negative capability. As readers, we witness the process of self-effacement turn the poem into an art object. Nicosia writes that "in one poem he literally erases the world. In others, he absents himself from the poem" (16). We see that negation and erasure is a creative act for Strand. Strand's unique type of negative capability relies on the techniques of writing under erasure and absent-presence.

How Strand sees the concept of the self is also significant. The post structuralist self is defined by Terry Eagleton in the following manner: "Not only my meaning, indeed, but *me*: since language is something I am made out of, rather than merely a conventional tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable, unified entity must also be a fiction. Not only can I never be fully present to you, but I can never be fully present to myself either" (112). It seems like Strand sees his own self and others pretty much in this way, which provides the ground for him to double, erase and observe himself in his poems because they are made up of language and do not signify a fixed identity.

The prime question in the Strand chapter was what happens when a poet tries to turn self-effacement into a creative act and put it on paper? The answer in Strand's case was that it revealed a new way of approaching negative capability. Strand's self-effacement through negation exposes another frontier of negative capability. To go one step further means to keep silent and not to write anything, to totally silence or annihilate the self.

At the end of the dissertation we return to the initial question which constitutes the fundamental idea behind negative capability: can the self really be erased or held back? Once more we remember Maio's dissenting comment that "no poet can actually efface himself or herself from the poem. Any poem is a direct manifestation of the poet's presence" (180). In a similar vein Carol Frost writes that "all poetry is autobiographical in its revelations of the motions of a mind makes. The hesitancies, detours, innuendoes, spirals of lies and truths, as a person remembers or invents, are as essentially personal as the facts of that person's life" (172). In a sense what Frost tells us is true; every thought, every action belongs to its owner and in a way reflects certain aspects of his or her life. It can be argued that anything a poet writes is subjective because the poet chooses that particular subject and he/she is the creator of the poem. But then, anything a poet writes becomes autobiographical and subjective. This would be an over-simplification and injustice to poetry rendering any discussion of voice in poetry or even categorization such as dramatic monologue, lyric poetry, confessional poetry futile. Clearly there is a difference between, let's say, a poet writing about his own childhood, creating a fictional character, assuming another personality or simply telling us about a sunset he has seen or imagined. Taking negative capability as a guide, it has been the aim of this dissertation to explore some of those differences, to point to certain innovative examples of poetry by three major American poets and to refute the wholesale claim that all poetry is autobiographical and subjective.

In this endeavor the role of negative capability has been pivotal. It sets the guidelines, the rules of the game to make us see how poets maintained or broke these “rules” in their poems. Ford writes of Keats’ "absorption in the aesthetic object that he was persuaded he had lost contact with his normal self and the world" (488). Keats saw this as self-effacement or withholding the self and becoming one with the object of focus. Keats was a romantic in every sense of the word. He imagined the camelion poet where some modern psychologist called it only self-projection.

The concept of negative capability still persists today in various forms because it touches something fundamental both in art – particularly in poetry - and human existence. As discussed earlier, in art, it can be considered part of the ongoing discussion about mimesis. The question of how to reflect nature goes hand in hand with the question of how to reflect the self. For instance Wallace Stevens’ famous poem “The Snowman” points to this dilemma: “One must have a mind of winter / To regard the frost and the boughs / Of the pine-trees crusted with snow” (Stevens 8). Michael Davidson sees this as the “conundrum for the modern poet”: “in order to represent winter adequately the poet must become winter – become snow man. In doing so, however, he loses the ability to distinguish and assess” (233). So if the poet becomes the thing he/she is writing about (emphatic imagination) then he/she loses the objective stance to see the object as it is. As discussed in this dissertation negative capability perhaps proposes an intermediate position and therefore it is still valuable.

On the other hand, Benton writes that "self-Abandonment to something larger than one's self, whether to God or Nature, including a loss of self-identity, has been described by several writers as an important romantic characteristic" (33). Referring to Keats’ comment upon seeing a sparrow, Ford writes that "the intensity of aesthetic bliss produces a momentary illusion of identification (empathy) between poet and bird" (480). But one can never be sure of the order of things and in contrast to what Ford says identification creates the bliss not the

other way around. Perhaps at the moment of happiness or bliss one forgets about his/her own ego/identity and becomes one with the thing which makes him/her happy. I believe one can always empathize with the psychological phenomenon that at many moments of great joy and pleasure one feels a similar feeling of selflessness or letting go. Yet perhaps it is not simply a romantic characteristic but the way most people are.

As long as poetry exists there will always be new poetic approaches, techniques and styles to push the limits of expression and Keats' negative capability and camelion poet represent one such crucial approach. It reappears in novel ways in the works of three well known modern American poets and perhaps it will continue to reappear because to push the limits of expression means to push the limits of artistic creativity. Velimir Khlebnikov's words once more remind us why negative capability is still of great value: "Is a poem not a flight from the I? … Without flight from the self there can be no room for progression" (95).

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