



The Concept of John Keats's Negative Capability in Robert Frost's Poem, "Acquainted with the Night": A Case of Influence

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Abstract:

This paper examines the Romantic poet John Keats's concept of Negative Capability and centers its attention on the influence he had on the American poet Robert Frost. Both Keats and Frost are regarded as major influential poets in the literary canon. Hence, it became important to shed light on the two poets and put them under the same umbrella of poetic genius. So, by going through Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night", this paper strives to bring out his Negative Capability, explain his sense of uncertainty, and then uncover the annihilation of the self amidst the different settings he presents in his poems. This literary investigation, through formal analysis and close reading of some of Keats's letters, establishes a foundation for understanding his poetic criticism and links those views to Frost's poem. Other Keatsian terms such as "Disinterestedness" and "the camelion poet" will be explained as well as highlighted throughout the analysis. Finally, this study concludes that despite the dark despotism that might be sensed in Frost's poem, it is through his use of Keatsian Negative Capability that the poet is able to be in full embrace of life's mystery and uncertainties.

Keywords:

Poetry, Romanticism, John Keats, Robert Frost, Negative Capability, Transcendence, Disinterestedness, the camelion poet

INTRODUCTION:

There are many definitions associated with the word "poetry", and there is no better way of giving it a proper one than to quote one of America's most acclaimed poets Emily Dickinson. In a letter addressed to Thomas Wentworth Higginson on August 16, 1870, she wrote, "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?" (E. Dickinson, 1958 pp.472-473). One might even refer to the British Romantic poet William Wordsworth's definition of poetry as, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." (W. Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge, 1967, p.263) Indeed and throughout history, poetry secured a prominent throne in the literary field as one distinct form of writing. Coming from the ancient Greek word *poiesis*, meaning to create or to make, poetry has proven to be a dominant form of literary expression.

The only literary movement that celebrates the glory of poetry, feelings, imagination, sensibility, nature and individualism altogether is Romanticism. During that period, its established and emerging writers sought to escape everything that is artificial and conventional, and for that their main resort was nature. The romantic poets came to understand that the natural world is not just a place to shelter themselves from all that was fueled by the machinery of the industry. Besides, Romanticism stresses individual experiences for artistic creation with the sole purpose of developing the spiritual mind of its writers. Indeed, the Romantic poets presented their direct contempt and disgust of the new changes that were spreading all over the world. On account of those events, the Golden Age of poetry was born.

The choice of poetry as the backbone of this dissertation goes back to our attention on two poets whose poems are regarded as ingenious and substantial works of great significance. The first poet who specifically expresses his romantic ideals with a strong belief of the power of passion, beauty, the sublime and nature is John Keats (1795-1821). Keats saw writing poetry as an exalted calling as it served the young poet as a way of escaping reality and its indispositions. Despite losing his life to tuberculosis at the young age of twenty-five, Keats was able to surpass his contemporaries thanks to his flexibility and utter mastery of sensual imagery that ultimately reflected his themes of mortality versus immortality, transcendentalism, the contemplation of Beauty and escapism. On a different note, the spring of 1819 was Keats's most productive time. He produced many odes including "Ode to Melancholy", "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn". He is known for his complex style of writing and the use of ambiguous diction that is mostly associated with Greek mythology. He also experimented with different types of poetry such as the ballad poem of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", the Miltonic epic of "Hyperion" and his last extended narrative "Lamia".

Along with George Gordon Byron (also known as Lord Byron) and Percy

Bysshe Shelley, Keats represented the second generation of the Romantics. This generation though seemingly sharing the same periodic background with the first generation of William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Blake, still had its own individual literary pursuits. Indeed, the three young poets were rebelling against their predecessors whom they described as conservative. Nevertheless, they kept the basic tenets of Romanticism in their poems but with an added innovative touch to them.

The second selected figure for this paper is the quintessential American poet Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963). With his poems, he was able to proclaim himself as a remarkable figure in the literary canon. His poetry is a mirror-like reflection of New England's rural life; from snowy woods, to family farms, to an ocean beach and high mountains, he embraces the natural world with the utmost value. Although his interest in nature could be juxtaposed with a revived legacy of the Romantic principles, Frost's proclivity to use non-customary forms, metaphors and simple language is what helped construct the substratum of the new poetic genre of pastoral poetry. His early work includes his first collection of poetry entitled "A Boy's Will" that was published in England in 1913. Poems such as "The Tuft of Flower", "Mowing" and "My Butterfly" became so widely celebrated that it soon gained Frost the praise of the American Modernist poet Ezra Pound. In his "Literary Essays", Pound writes:

Mr Frost is an honest writer, writing from himself, from his own knowledge and emotion; not simply picking up the manner which magazines are accepting at the moment, and applying it to topics in vogue. He is quite consciously and definitely putting New England rural life into verse. He is not using themes that anybody could have cribbed out of Ovid. (E. Pound, 1968, p. 384)

Frost's creative life coincided with the rise of Modernism, and many modernists writers –among them Pound and T. S. Eliot– had few attempts to make him join their circle, yet they were all futile. Contrariwise, Frost expressed his desire to be faithful to the traditional verse form, meter and rhyme which he nevertheless upgraded to his liking. Indeed, the poet showed a strong discontent towards the modernists' abandonment of regular structures on the one hand and their adoption of free verse as their main poetical tool on the other. In an online lecture for Gresham College, Professor Belinda Jack explains Frost's tendencies to focus on the form of his poems as he "accepts uncertainties and instabilities of reality but he believed that we can prevail over temporal limitations by the imposition of form." (B. Jack, 2017) Frost managed to refrain from customizing his poems in order to fit the new literary change brought upon him by Modernism.

John Keats is featured as a central poet in this paper not only for his immense poetic talent but also because of his intriguing concept of Negative Capability. Ultimately, this investigation opts to, firstly, inspect the basic characteristics of John Keats's concept of Negative Capability and, secondly, uncover the positive Romantic influence on Frost by Keats. On that note, one might then address the readers to some

essential questions in hopes of sketching out the final answers by the end of this paper: How does Robert Frost manage to implement the notions of Negative Capability in his poem? To what extent does he possess the notions of this concept? Does he provide any constructive answers to his ambiguous situations? And finally, does his philosophy of poetry and uncertainty go back to Keatsian roots?

Although there has been much research on Keats's Negative Capability and his poetry, few researchers have taken the poetry of Robert Frost and studied it through the lenses of Keats's own concept. Having selected four of Frost's poems, "The Road Not Taken", "Home Burial", "Fire and Ice" and "Mending Wall", Dr. Sanyar Sattar wrote an article discussing the notions of 'conflict' and 'choice' in regards to the poet's dilemma of choosing between what is right and wrong. Sattar argues that Frost is in a constant psychological and conflicting loop of seeking resolutions. He finally concludes that Frost "asserts the positive capability of negative knowledge through an oxymoronic correspondence between the contradictions of life that are impossible to avoid." (S. Sattar, 2012, p.4)

In most cases, the concept of Negative Capability is solely related to Keats and his poetry. For this particular reason, this paper is written as an attempt to present his poems from a freshly new perspective focusing primarily on the poet's use of Negative Capability in his poetic endeavors to showcase how one can be at peace with life's unresolved uncertainties. Consequently, the first part of this paper covers primarily the theoretical background as it follows an identification of Keats's theory in relation to its origins and some of its main characteristics. It also contains some basic definitions of the literary tools such as "Disinterestedness" and the role of identity. The second part, on the other hand, explores one of the poems of Robert Frost, "Acquainted with the Night" while using the lenses of Keats's concept as the main analytical tool. This part, thus, demonstrates both the internal and external psychological identification the poet undergoes in his creative process. The analysis will highlight how the poem develops in relation to Keatsian Negative Capability.

1-Negative Capability:

1.1. Definition and Criticism:

Despite the fact that John Keats died prior to fully examining the aesthetics of Negative Capability, a considerable amount of his letters written to his friends and family helped reveal important aspects and viewpoints of Negative Capability. Before investigating the ways in which the concept metamorphoses over time, one must first take the original letter addressed to Keats's brothers and explore its content in order to fully be able to grasp its initial terms.

The term "Negative Capability" was first phrased by the British Romantic poet John Keats in one of his letters to his brothers George and Thomas Keats in the winter of 1817. In the letter, he notes:

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once 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 a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.(J.Keats, 1965, pp.193-194)

After a frustrating debate with his friend Charles Wentworth Dilke, something "dovetailed" Keats's mind; the idea is Negative Capability; a quality that marks out Shakespeare of all artists. He defines it as a state of passive openness or acceptance that goes beyond human experiences. So, as the men of the Enlightenment sought to illuminate mysteries and enigmas through the use of fact and reason of the time, the Romantics, more specifically Keats, reveled in mysteries as he detested the idea of roaming around carrying the heavy burden of rational thought. He expresses his complete refusal to settle for anything linked to reason and rational thinking and thus renders irrelevant anything that is associated with them.

On another note, Keats believes in both beauty for beauty's sake and the power of imagination as a means to lose the self in the natural world. In a letter to his friend Benjamin Bailey, Keats expresses the necessity of imagination as an important component in the creative poetic process. On imagination, he writes:

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination – What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth – whether it existed before or not – for I have the same idea of all our passions as of Love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty.(J.Keats, 1965,p.184)

Keats's opinion is indivisible from imagination. Negative Capability can be glossed as the required tool that enables artists to be in an imaginatively open and receptive state of mind. This openness reflects the ability to abandon rational and systematic thinking in the face of a world of uncertainties. Thought and absolute knowledge, on the other hand, only lead to reasoned judgment and that in itself is strongly rejected by Keats. In short, the imagination Keats expounds on in this letter is the one that permits the poet to transcend the mundane experiences of the world. This transcendence, nevertheless, exists only on the level of the human mind as it is purely psychological. This is regarded with the utmost importance by Keats as a necessary component that enables the poet to detach himself from his own identity.

Further comments on the matter are exposed in the same letter as Keats continues to express his complete refusal to settle for anything linked to reason. By giving an example of John Milton's epic poem "Paradise Lost", he says:

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream – he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning...O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! (J.Keats,

1965.,pp.184-185)

The second part of the quote is often viewed as a very assertive and perhaps naïve statement. The ultimate truth, according to Keats, cannot be achieved and comprehended through "consequitive reasoning". Instead, he holds the truth in the hands of powerful emotions and imagination. Moreover, in a review for The Virginia Quarterly Magazine, the American poet Galway Kinnell defines Negative Capability as "a certain shapelessness of personality, a peculiar power to obliterate himself and flow into some other being and speak it from within." (G. Kinnell, 2005, p.221). The notions of this statement are traced back to the essence of Negative Capability when the poetic truth is associated with the poet's ability to lose himself throughout the process. Moreover, the objective of the concept requires a high scale of intensity that needs to be fulfilled through life experiences; however, this experience ought not to be ordinary but rather psychological as Keats argues.

After reading his friend Bailey's "An Essay on the moral principle" (1817), Keats discovered interesting notions on the ideas of 'sensation' and 'beauty' by the Scottish philosopher Francis Hutcheson. Though his writing falls under the cape of Enlightenment studies, Hutcheson's philosophy still underlines significant aspects on human nature, the moral sense, benevolence and most importantly aesthetics that were significantly studied and examined by the thinkers and artists of the Romantic Age. In his "An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue" (1725), Hutcheson affirms that beauty is perceived by conceptual features acting upon one's inner senses. So, there would be an abstract perception of beauty on the condition that the presence of those inner senses is fulfilled (F.Hutcheson,1725,p.39). He goes further and argues that beauty is passively triggered and discerned by interoception or internal sensation that could either be conscious or unconscious. He also believes it instinctively identifies itself once its perceiver forges an aesthetic appreciation that is based on feelings or sensations with natural objects thus illuminating Keats's "O for a life of Sensation rather than of Thoughts". Hence, it becomes clear that Negative Capability is associated with the psychological side of human life as well as the process of aesthetic experience that transgress all boundaries of the ordinary and in which both artistic beauty and poetic truth are aimed at.

In addition to exploring Keats's entanglement with Romantic aesthetics, Li Ou revises commonly held views of the poet's commitment to certain key tenets of Negative Capability in her book "Keats and Negative Capability". In an abundantly clear way, Ou says:

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. (L.Ou.2009, p.8)

Keats's understanding of Negative Capability is mostly existential as his philosophy

predicates itself on an intense mental strength as well as a full consciousness that transcend mere conception.

1.2. Disinterestedness:

The term "Disinterestedness" was echoed by William Hazlitt in his work "An Essay on The Principle of Human Action and 'Disinterestedness'". The work had an important influence on Keats for he later used the term himself in his future writings. In his book, Hazlitt mentions one aspect in which he links imagination and disinterestedness through the grounds of the human consciousness. One's interests can only be achieved through imagination. Therefore, imagination according to Keats is the decisive agent in the disinterestedness of the mind. The term thus coincides with impartiality and open-mindedness. Any subjective judgment towards the subject matter, on the other hand, would infringe the principles of Negative Capability and ultimately lead the poet astray from identifying with his objects. So, the ability to react and respond to imaginative situations despite the presence of a strong sense of disagreement with the ideas expressed is indeed a proof of the notion of disinterestedness. The concept indicates neither a lack of interest nor a strict judicial impartiality, but rather the capacity to embrace different viewpoints other than one's own.

John Keats stands by the belief that poets could write poetry that is mysterious and enigmatic. He later touched on the same idea calling Wordsworth an egoist and praised the "unobtrusive" Shakespeare for successfully creating a boundary between his personal views and his characters (J.Keats.1965, p.86). What Keats coined as the "egotistical sublime" is analogous to his opinion on Negative Capability(J.Keats, 1965,p.386). This Wordsworthian egoism is basically a glorification of nature and its beauty. It suggests an up-close and personal interpretation of the poet's self-based experience in relation to his work. In other words, the poetic identification with objects has to solely be seen in connection with the poet; the observer and the experiencer. Keats then grounds his criticism on the basis that poetic egoism is essentially linked to subjectivity, which therefore contrasts with the disinterestedness of Negative Capability, as the latter seeks to strip the artist off of any remaining traces of individualized subjectiveness. Therefore, Negative Capability in its emphasis on poetic disinterestedness follows a conceptual approach that is at odds with Wordsworth and his overwhelming egoism in its denial of artistic self-centeredness.

Keats then believes poetry should be utterly excluded from the poet's intentions and personal opinions and that is mainly through the creation of an imaginative universe; a universe that is made specifically for the readers to dwell in and hence generate their own individual judgment and critical decisions. Lastly, Keats links the term "Disinterestedness" with one's capacity to react to imaginative settings and respond to their powers. The disinterestedness of Negative Capability is never an open-ended passivity, nor an end in itself; it is rather a predetermined condition of an intense imaginative concentration.

On studying Keats's concept and his poetry, James T. Kelly further explores the term "Disinterestedness". He says:

Disinterestedness—not uninterest, but rather a passionate, yet non-transformative interest—works its definition out much in terms of the poet's notion of negative capability. The disinterested mind is one that focuses the greatest attention on an object while limiting the mind's own associative constrictions' (J.T.Kelly, 1994, p.6)

It is then a preliminary to the actual poetic identification with the objects that permit the poet to merge himself with his aesthetic role without a shadow of thought about anything else. Keats expresses that, "very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of Mind" (J.Keats, 1965, p.79)

The reason William Hazlitt's criticism is featured in this paper is mainly because some of his ideas were expressed in both the letters and poems of John Keats and whose thoughts of the concept of Negative Capability explicitly reflect Hazlitt's criticism especially his idea that the poet's identity goes back to his belief in the changeable nature of imagination. Indeed, Hazlitt's viewpoint constitutes that the human mind is naturally disinterested. Hence, the notion of disinterestedness functions as a tool that distributes a flow of fresh and true ideas that would eventually reinforce the role and identity of the poet.

1.3. The Chameleon Poet: On Identity:

On October 27, 1818, Keats wrote a letter to his friend Richard Woodhouse contemplating his view on the "Poetical Character". He says:

It is not itself—it has no self—it is everything 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 [chameleon] Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation.[J. Keats, op.cit., pp.386-387)

Keats occasionally came to realize that a poet is in a constant identity crisis. He then took it upon him as a chance to celebrate the loss of his poetic identity. In Keats's sense, the word 'character' should not be taken in its literal definition. He instead locates his character through the elusion of identity and consciousness. This psychological identification is basically an orientation of the self in regards to a person or an object. Keats explains that it could either be conscious or unconscious whereby an individual models certain feelings after those attributed to an object that has been in itself incorporated as a mental image. Hence, he started engaging with his surroundings with that being people or objects while considering the absence of identity in his poetic endeavors as the sole poetical achievement.

The precise choice of the word 'camelion' by Keats is associated with the animal's physiological attributes to constantly change color and adapt itself in response to different situations. 'The Chameleon Poet' is then a term used to describe a poet who does not have an identity and whose self is endowed with the ability to change accordingly. Keats describes this poetic development as "everything and nothing" in its paradoxical nature, this statement is used intentionally to express changeability and progress. He then depicts the "Chameleon poet" as a disinterested and most notably in a constant state of self-annihilation. Consequently, he emphasizes the ability to engage in a world of uncertainties while being invulnerable to any systematic or scientific explanation. What is called for, then, is an imaginative or rather spiritual openness and receptivity towards any subject matter.

Most importantly, Keats is known to have owned and read the English philosopher John Locke's work "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding". In chapter 27 entitled "Of Identity and Diversity", Locke argues that personal identity (or the self) is nothing but a mere, "Psychological continuity"; it is unchanged and untouched by time and is stored in memory (consciousness) and not "on the substance" of the human body and soul. An identity for Locke is thus an individual entity that is self-affective and persisting in itself over the course of time. To him, "The core essence of the self is its consciousness of itself as a thinking intelligent being; that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself."(J.Locke and P. H. Nidditch, 1979, p.470)

Keats came to view identity as a component independent from subjectivity. Keats's hypothesis did not consider the self as unaltered; he rather sees personal experiences as one key point to its development in which it consequently matures and evolves throughout. In other words, it is through its communion with nature that this self evolves and improves. That is the aesthetic of what truly makes a poet. Additionally, the romantic poet imagines poetry in all of its utmost simplicity as an escape from the limitations of identity by experiencing a world of suffering and hardship. The process is viewed as creative and substantial rather than subversive. It is then a matter of being positively receptive as well as assertive of one's experiences.

Overall, Keats credits impartiality in his poetic celebration of the mysterious as he accentuates the importance of distinguishing an artist from his work by insisting on objectivity in all art. It is thus impersonal and unprovoked by the identity of its artist. The loss of the poet's identity ultimately leads him to be open to face life's uncertain moments of doubt and confusion with ease and repose.

The only means to reinforce one's knowledge is to be in peace with knowing nothing. One cannot feel the presence of the self unless they have made up their mind about everything. On February 18, 1818, he wrote to John Hamilton Reynolds, "Let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive – budding patiently under the eye of Apollo, and taking hints from every noble insect that favors us with a visit."(J. Keats, op.cit., pp.232-233). Such images and visions are what can be fitted

into a psychological and spiritual persona that rejects any hints of unwanted knowledge. This system is individual based in the sense that a person's interpretation is of a different scale from another. Being in uncertainty and doubt can indeed be unbearable. Craving answers and pursuing judicious conclusions can also be tempting; however, Keats's Negative Capability advises the contrary. He insists on building the ability to remain unbothered by the ambiguity of the universe, for it is beyond human comprehension.

From attending art exhibitions, watching tragedies, reading Hazlitt and Locke, writing theater reviews, to re-reading Shakespeare, Keats was indeed formulating his aesthetic speculations and it was ultimately manifested in his views on Negative Capability. Indeed, the truth of human experience is complex and in order to get ahead and understand it, one must first and foremost be open to loose ends and grey areas rather than taking the short path of fixed reasonable conclusions. That is John Keats's Negative Capability. It is a theory of complete openness. It normalizes being at peace with doubts and uncertainties and it attempts to give access to the realm of imagination to readers while granting them the privilege to experience their own personal journeying. This would consequently help them transcend into a state of mind where logic and reason are altogether unbidden. With that, Keats negotiates the transcendence of the self into a place full of sensations. Hence, in order to fully achieve Negative Capability, Keats argues that one must evoke certain cognitive states mainly that of disinterestedness and psychological identification with nature's objects.

2. Negative Capability in "Acquainted with the Night": A Nightly Encounter with Uncertainty:

"Acquainted with the Night" is a sonnet that is part of Frost's "West-Running Brook" collection published in 1928. The poem, written in first person point of view, recounts the speaker's journey in the night, and it vividly demonstrates the power of imagination to influence the traveler's sense of perception. The poem is written as follows:

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain—and back in rain.
I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet
When far away an interrupted cry
But not to call me back or say good-bye;
And further still at an unearthly height,
One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right.

I have been one acquainted with the night.

Came over houses from another street,

(R. Frost, 1964, p.324)

The poem opens with a direct delineation of the speaker's path in the middle of the night. S/he has, "Walked out in rain—and back in rain," and "outwalked the furthest city light," expressing a direct familiarity with the setting through the repetition of the words, "I have". S/he continues to reveal the road taken looking down, "The saddest city lane." this statement suggests that the night is associated with an enigmatic feeling of sadness. Questions might rise: is this sadness linked to the speaker? Or is it just a mere transient feeling felt on the spur of the moment? Frost, eventually, does not provide any answers whatsoever. The poet immediately starts with setting the right mood and imagery for the reader to dwell in while he assuredly holds himself aloof. He is able to do so by permitting his imagination to be in control of executing a labyrinth for human experience. This further emphasizes both the notion of remaining utterly objective through the process of poetic creation and the artist's disinterestedness in engaging himself with the reader's personal conception.

As s/he proceeds on his late night wanderings, s/he passes by the watchman and drops his/her eyes, "unwilling to explain," this could either reflect the poet's reluctance to follow any direction that would lead to the exploitation of factual or reasonable conclusions or his unwillingness to break the imaginative tie he has with the night. Yet, the American critic and essayist Morris Dickstein interprets this part of the poem as follows:

Frost [...] dismembers his city dwellers, wrenching feet, eyes, and voices away from their possessors. The effect is one of profound alienation, for these fragmentary people cannot speak to each other. The watchman, whose gaze the narrator avoids, is a body without a voice. (M. Dickstein, 2009, p.28)

The poet's speaker is entirely pushed off the edge of human contact as s/he is excluded from everyone else in the city. The speaker is an observer rather than a participant in whatever nocturnal ventures s/he might be part of. Dickstein, in other words, stresses his belief of Frost's alienation of the self on the one hand, and that of his characters on the other.

The creation of a well-fitting setting is the condition expected from Frost in order to exploit the tension of his poem. As the poem progresses and in the midst of being disoriented in the night's visual obscurity, the speaker's sense of incertitude is broken by the sound of someone's cry coming from another part of the city. New questions arise: what is the cry for? Is it a cry for help? Or is it a cry in response to overwhelming emotions such as of sadness or mental agony? Yet again, no answers

are provided and the reader is left with another sense of ambiguity to fill in the gaps on their own. Darkness slowly disseminates the streets and city lanes as the speaker continues walking. This darkness is usually associated with fear or evil; however, in this context, it can be paralleled with human suffering, despair and isolation. It is true that the word "dark" is not explicitly used in the poem; it is rather implied through the usage of the word "night" in the first and last line of the poem.

As far as the speaker of the poem is concerned, neither the name nor the gender is mentioned. The identity of the "I" is all that is provided in the poem. It is Frost's way of purposefully neglecting any personal details about the speaker so as the reader is able to easily identify with him/her. Nonetheless, what is known to the reader is the speaker's deep sense of absorption in ambivalence and obscurity. The poet, hence, refrains from getting subjectively involved in the poetic process which further emphasizes the artist's disinterestedness in engaging himself with the reader's personal conception.

Indeed, what makes the poem one of Frost's finest works is his presented layout of identity. This orientation of the self is viewed in terms of the speaker's identification with the night and its disposition. Just few lines into the poem, Frost manages to display his 'chameleon nature' as he keeps adapting himself to the changeability of the night. He accordingly depicts the isolation of the self in the midst of the night in which it sets the speaker's annihilation and ultimately tracks the reader's absorption in the process.

Though a lot of critics tend to associate "Acquainted with the Night" with the theme of loneliness and the lack of human interaction, it can still be argued that the poem goes beyond such themes. To fully elaborate, the speaker seems to take pleasure in being spiritually detached and reclusive. After all, he repeatedly kept emphasizing his familiarity with the night as well as with its connected emotions. Moreover, the use of the word, "acquainted" is of no coincidence; it is a state of being casually familiar with someone or something. With that being said, this unresponsive state of being alone with the night is not a quest for fact or truth and any attempt for introspection is regarded futile. The speaker is not in search for answers; the path s/he chose to take is predetermined by his/her already made acquaintance with the night. Indeed, this is the thing with the poetry of Robert Frost; it is what Elizabeth Isaacs reckons as his, "Deceptive simplicity" and "subtle mastery of metaphors"(E.Isaacs, 2012, p.79) that makes it easier for readers to impulsively draw conclusions of his poetry and consequently claim it to be undemanding and unchallenging, when in fact he is a poet of intense complexity and subtlety. It does take more than intermittent reading to fully understand Frost's poetic style. So, to be deceived by his simplicity is one thing, but to be deeply immersed in it is something completely different.

Reaching the fourth stanza, Frost writes, "But not to call me back or say good-bye;" this line specifically provides one explanation regarding the cry that was heard before.

The cry is eventually not addressed to the speaker and it is utterly unassociated with him. This accentuates their alienation as no one neither bids them goodbye nor asks them to come back and withdraw from their aimless wandering; notwithstanding, the speaker's detachment is later broken as s/he looks up at "an unearthly height," noticing "One luminary clock against the sky". The clock is in fact a metaphor for the moon which in itself symbolizes the cycle of nature guiding the speaker's sense of time throughout the night and its mysteries. Furthermore, the ending couplet is a highly essential part of the poem because the personified luminary moon, being one of the Earth's trusted timepieces, is supposed to guide the wanderer through the night, yet it directly declares its indifference and reluctance to help tell the speaker the exact time. What it says instead is, "the time was neither wrong nor right." This answer further highlights the notion of incertitude. So, instead of trying to figure out the meaning behind the moon's ambiguous statement, the speaker simply decides not to. His/her choice to remain negatively capable of being at ease with having no answers is enough for him/her to continue his/her journey in the night.

Finally, despite the almost never-ending perpetuating cycle of uncertain resolutions, the poem then concludes with the exact same line Frost once opened the poem with, "I have been one acquainted with the night." this declaration reflects the speaker's ability to remain in the same psychological disposition he/she once started the poem with. Consequently, the reader is left in the night Frost created in the beginning of the poem with no resolution or revelation. With that being said, Frost's Negative capability is manifested when he self-consciously broadcasts uncertainties, despite the uneasiness of the atmosphere, with a tolerant distinguished tone. He is utterly immersed in the night of all times of the day mostly because it ushers his mundane feelings towards the unknown.

Many of Frost's poems are self-consciously programmed to create those controlled spaces in case those sealed personal emotions unexpectedly manifest themselves. This tension between certitude and incertitude in "Acquainted with the Night" is strongly felt in terms of the speaker's unsettled emotional equanimity. The poem itself calls for a formation of a needed space in which those untamed feelings of distress are elaborated, integrated and finally controlled. Thus, the only way to achieve those results is to be in a negatively capable state of mind where shadows of logic or reason are untraceable. Moreover, Frost, through the creation of a person responsible for narrating the events of the poem, was consciously able to remain impartial which makes it easier to detect the absence of his poetic identity from the premise of the poem. To sum up, it is with Keats's negative capability Frost manages to form a pact of peace and concord with the night's associated feelings of dubiety and uncertainty.

"Acquainted with the Night" is written in sonnet form. However and like other modernist poets, Frost did not follow the traditional style of sonnet writing. For instance, it is considered neither Shakespearean nor Petrarchan. On the contrary, it is written in the Italian terza rima sonnet form with an iambic pentameter. It creates a

steady rhythm just like the steady footsteps of the speaker as s/he continues his late night walk. This eventually makes the rhyme scheme of the whole sonnet as follows: ABA BCB CDC DED EE. Looking closer, Frost repeats the same rhyme found in the first and last line of each stanza. Words like, "night" and "light", "feet" and "street" keep his stanzas linked to one another; as a result, the poet is able to maintain the consistency and the flow of his ideas. The creation of this specific rhyme scheme has two purposes: firstly, to enhance the tone of the speaker and his/her sense of alienation and secondly, to keep the reader's attention drawn towards those rhyming lines. Certainly, this is quite unusual for a sonnet, yet Frost flawlessly manages to blend it all together.

CONCLUSION:

Before his death, John Keats asked his friends Leigh Hunt and Percy Bysshe Shelley to carve the following words into his gravestone: "Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water". This epitaph was written insinuating that Keats made no discernible impact on anyone. Just like writing on the surface of water makes no change, his poetry was of no difference. After his death, his reputation soon began to rise and his poems later received the acknowledgement and avowal they lacked during his lifetime. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" John Keats writes, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (John Keats, 1994, p.222). He wanted to depict poetry at its utmost beauty as he firmly held a strong belief in the power of the Romantic values.

John Keats once said, "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death." (J.Keats, op.cit. p.394) How right he was. On February 24, 1821, Keats died of tuberculosis and was buried at the Cemitero Acattolico in Italy, and "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (J.Keats, op.cit. p.219), he was able to beat death to immortality. Yet, his poetry is indeed not the only legacy he left behind. His Negative Capability is a riposte to the Enlightenment philosophy of the pursuit of knowledge by means of reason and logic. By contrast, Keats is delighted to embrace life's uncertain and mysterious ends with open arms. Incertitude, mystery, doubt, ambiguity and the unknown were all in Keats's mind. His belief in Negative Capability is interpreted in terms of the poet's ability to perceive them with passivity.

The Romantic poet's influence on Robert Frost is but an obvious testimony. Indeed, Frost followed the footsteps of his Romantic predecessor and became known for invoking the ancient mode of nature in most of his poems. He eventually was able to create this image of him as a 'Nature Poet' who triumphantly absorbed Romanticism into his poetry making him at the center of his poetic achievements. Full of Keatsian Negative Capability, the notions of doubt, uncertainty and obscurity are well-blended in Frost's poem.

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