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SELF PORTRAIT in COLOR:
COLORS in JOHN LAWRENCE ASHBERRY'S POEMS.

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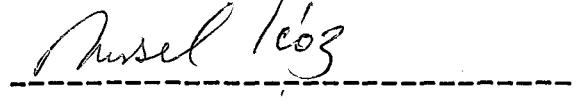
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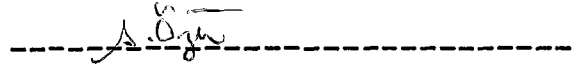
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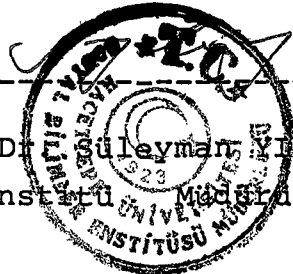
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ÖZET

Çağdaş Amerikan şiiri, sanatın diğer bütün dallarında olduğu gibi, özellikle 20. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında Dünya Savaşları neticesinde karmaşık ve anlamsızlaşan dünyamızda bireyin kendini tanıma, gerçekleştirme ve yabancılaştığı evrenle uzlaşma sürecinin ve yöntemlerinin aracı-sı olmuştur. 1940'lardan itibaren şiirin gelenekçi yaklaşımlardan uzaklaşmasıyla birlikte, Charles Olson'un Post-Modernist görüşleri doğrultusundaki yeni şiir çağdaş gerçek anlayışları çerçevesinde, yani, evrendeki gerçek olgusu gibi sınırsız, belirsiz ve anlaşılmaz olmuştur.

Aynı yıllardan itibaren Amerikan ve Dünya şiirinde etkisi görülmeye başlanan John Lawrence Ashbery (1927-) çoğu kez şiirinin anlaşılmazlığı, belirsizliği ve zorluğu nedeniyle okuyucusu ve eleştirmenleri tarafından haksız yorumlara hedef olmuştur. Halbuki, Ashbery'nin anlaşılır olması, gerçeğin kendisi gibi geniş bir perspektiften görülmesine bağlıdır. Şiirinde kendi görüşü doğrultusundaki gerçeğin bir modelini veren Ashbery'nin şiiri, en az o gerçeği arayış kadar zordur; gerçek, anlık ve dönüşümsel görüntüler verir, bu nedenle Ashbery şiiri de bu görünüm-dedir. Şair, okuyucudan mutlak bir katılım ve araştırmacılık bekler.

Bu tezin içeriğinde, Ashbery'nin şiirine yaklaşım metodu olarak "renkler" kullanılmıştır. Bir hipotez olarak "sanatçının renklerle aslında benliğinin portresini" resimlediği varsayılmış, bulgularla bu kanıtlanmıştır. Buna göre beyaz, siyah, kırmızı, sarı, yeşil, gri ve kurşuni

haricindeki renklerin portreye canlılık ve estetik bir perspektif getirmek amacıyla kullanılmasına karşın anılan bu renklerin "benlik (self)" kavramını verdiği ortaya atılmıştır. "Yeşil" sıradan yaşantı içinde hücrelerine kapanmış fiziksel bedeni; "Gri" bu bedeni saran hücre duvarlarını simgeler. Sıradan insandan şaire dönüşüm bu yarı geçirgen ve bir bölümü evrene açılan duvardan gerçekleşir. Şair günlük yaşantısının nesnelere çeşitli yöntemlerle ve kendisindeki enerji ile harekete geçirerek gri duvarı "Kurşuni", sonsuz genişleyebilir bir döngüye dönüştürebilir ki bu da duvardaki evrene açılan bölümle eşdeğerdir. Nesneler döngüsü, şair benliğin yarattığı "Kırmızı" çekirdeğe doğru çekilir ve yoğun gerçek birimleri, çekirdek kırmızılığını beyaza bırakarak solarken gelişmiş güzel anlamsızlıklarını mutlak gerçeğin birimleri olarak yitirir, gerçeğin anlık görüntüleri olarak evrene dağılırlar. "Beyaz" bütün renklerin bileşkesi, evrensel gerçeğin ve esas benlik olarak "ruh (soul)"un kendisidir. Belirsizlik bilgeliğe, karmaşa gerçeğe dönüşmüştür. "Mavi" evrensel gerçek küresinin çeperi olup sanatçının izleyicisiyle bütünleştiği ifade eğrisidir ki bu da sanatın biçimlenmiş şeklidir. İzleyici bir tek bu biçimi algıladığı için, sanatçı genellikle anlaşıl mazdır. Anlamak için sanatçının geçirdiği evrelerin hepsi tersine takip edilerek izleyicinin sanatçı benlikteki kendi izdüşümünü algılaması şarttır. Diğer taraftan "Siyah" evrenin beyaza dönüşemediği, dış dünyanın bilinçaltının etkisinden kurtulamadığı ve benlikte bir denge oluşturamadığı zaman ortaya çıkar, sonucu üretkensizliktir.

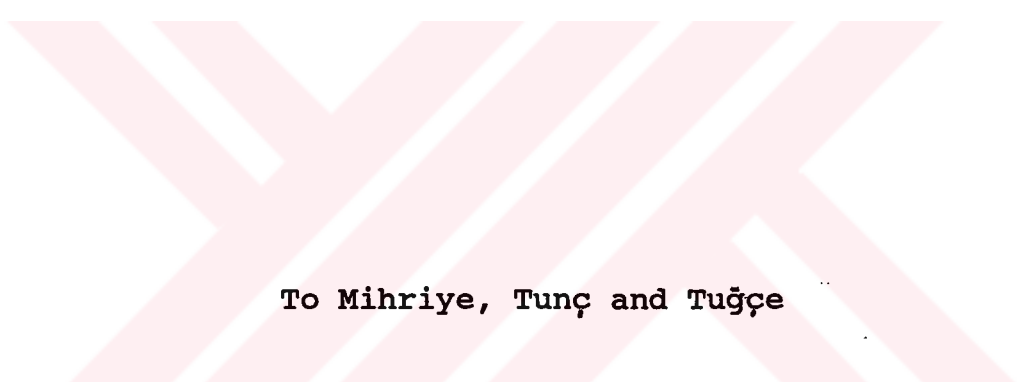
ABSTRACT

After the two World Wars, Contemporary American poetry, especially in the second half of the 20th century, has become a means for the individual who seeks self realization and self actualization in a meaningless and chaotic universe in which he feels himself alienated.

John Lawrence Ashbery (1927-) whose influences have been felt in the poetry scene both in the U.S.A and the world, has often been criticized by his readers and critics because of his incomprehensible obscurity. However, Ashbery is comprehensible only by an evaluation of his poetry from a wide scope. His poetry which is a model for reality is at least as difficult as reality; yet, it gives visions of momentary and transformational reality and expects readers' participation, concentration and research.

Within the context of this dissertation, colors have been used as a method to clarify the "self" in Ashbery's poems. "A Self Portrait of the Artist in Color" has been presumed as a hypothesis and verified by evidences. Likewise, all colors except for white, black, red, blue, green, gray and silver have been used to vivify and to create the aesthetical perspective of the "portrait"; whereas, the mentioned colors do suggest the concept of the "self" according to Ashbery. "Green" suggests the physical body confined within its cell in the routine of the day; "gray" is the cell wall surrounding the body. Transmutation from the ordinary man to the poet is actualized through a

part of this wall which opens to the universe. The poet activates the objects of his routine physical life by various methods. Especially by the mental energy he possesses, he transforms the gray wall into an infinitely expandable "silver" carousel which is equal to the wall opening to the universe. The carousel of objects is then attracted by the "red" poetic core and the red core gradually fades into whiteness. Random meaninglessness of objects is purified as concentrated units of truth which are expelled towards the periphery of the universe by being momentary glimpses of reality. "White" is the total sum of all colors, and it is the real character of the "soul" as the essential self and universal truth. Obscurity and chaos have been transformed into wisdom and reality. "Blue" is the periphery of the sphere of universal reality and it is the curve on which the artist is integrated with his beholder; it is the art in form. The beholder perceives only this form so the artist is usually not understood. To understand him the beholder of the art object should reverse the steps of creation, trace it back to find his own reflection in the artistic (poetic) core. On the other hand "black" appears when the universe can not transform itself into white, when the unconscious dominates the physical world. Since no balance and integrity in the self is established, the outcome is sterility. Yet, there is always the possibility of transforming black into white.



To Mihriye, Tun and Tuęe

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INTRODUCTION

In the 20th century, myriads of poets have contributed each in their own way to the development of contemporary American poetry , which through their many efforts can now be labelled as truly a poetry of "variety".

Often, individual efforts have been included within certain schools or trends in poetry. This has been necessary from the view point of critics and audiences, because grouping eliminates the obscurities involved in defining a poet individually. However, except for a few, almost every contemporary American poet has tried to avoid being evaluated within a sharply defined group. Such a choice has either been the outcome of the poet's desire to be personally appreciated and celebrated as a revolutionary contributor who would re-shape the visage of American poetry; or because the poet shared a common denominator in his earlier years with the ideologies of the schools but then as he developed his personal voice he moved away from these schools. Such liberations mark the importance of free will and choice as well as the need of personal articulation in a universe which has been, since the beginning of the century, grotesquely becoming alien, hostile and chaotic to the needs and demands of its inhabitants.

The complex, multi-layered and multi-directional development of American poetry in the second half of our

century owes this development to the two world wars, the impacts and after-effects of which have been of a nightmarish brutality and terror disrupting the established order and system of the American society. Darwinism, the new physics and the psychology of Freud which changed man's view of himself, together with economic collapse and social and political upheaval, were even more effective than the wars. Yet, all those changes, threatening though they were to modern man's sense of security, traditional identity and self-esteem, helped produce a period of innovation and brilliant achievement in literature and in the arts. Responsive to their constantly changing environment, arts produced a number of intense revolutionary movements, all displaying a tendency towards fragmentation and a counter-impulse toward some kind of or pattern of coherence in the midst of confusion and violent change. Inevitably, therefore a need to discover substitutes of the outmoded system was necessary.

Between the wars, order and system were not created by means of art; the artist was the person who observed what autonomously formed itself, neither could he impose order upon reality though he tried. T.S Eliot and Ezra Pound's quests and dedication to order and traditionalism were seen in this period. By the end of the Second World War, however, dedication to the recreation of an old order or quest for a new order were no longer valid because order hadn't brought

forth a desired universe. It had consumed itself by its own rules. It was no longer an ideal to cling to but an enemy which had to be fought against because it seemed to have brought destruction and bloodshed. The system neither brought security nor protection. The world wars had proved that it had irrevocably collapsed and any efforts for the establishing of a new system seemed in vain. The freedom of the individual from the system and his ineffective functioning in an orderless universe was at hand. Once again the interest shifted from the needs of a society to the needs of the individual who tried to relate himself to an alien universe. In Malkoff's (1973:3) words,

Contemporary American poetry can be understood as a series of attempts to interpret the relation of man's inner world to the perceptual universe: The effort to expunge the subjective ego and concentrate on the object perceived ,...

The individual, like the artist, began to seek a formula for reconciling his inner world with the outer with which he had lost ties. The outer world was to be perceived through a filtration of the inner world; and the outcome was "a new realism", a new outlook to reality itself. The poem entitled "from The New Realism" by John Ashbery reads

There was calm rapture in the way she spoke
 Perhaps I would get over the way the joke
 Always turned against me, in the end.
 The bars had been removed from all the windows
 There was something quiet in the way the
 light entered her trousseau.
 Wine fished out of the sea- they hadn't known
 We were coming relaxed forever

We stood off the land because if you get too far
 From a perfume you can squeeze the life out of it
 One seal came into view and then the others
 Yellow in the vast sun.
 A watchdog performed and they triumphed
 The day was bleak-ice had replaced air
 The sigh of the children to former music
 Supplanting the mutts yelps.
 This was as far as she would go
 A tavern with plants.
 Dynamite out over the horizon
 And a sequel, and a racket.
 Dolphins repelling the sand.
 Squads of bulldozers
 Wrecked the site, and she died laughing
 Because only once does prosperity let you get away
 On your doorstep she used to explain
 How if the returning merchants in the morning
 hitched the rim of the van
 In the evening one must be very quick to give
 them the slip
 The judge knocked. The zinnias
 Had never looked better-red, yellow and blue
 They were, and the forget-me-nots and dahlias
 At least sixty different varieties
 As the shade went up
 And the ambulance came crashing through the dust
 Of the new day, the moon and the sun and the stars,
 And the iceberg slowly sank
 In the volcano and the sea ran far away
 Yellow over the hot sand green, as the green
 trees. (Ashbery 1985:46).

A thorough reading of the poem would suggest almost
 nothing logical, and the bewildered reader asks such
 questions as: Why there was "calm rapture in the way she
 spoke"? Why he would "perhaps get over the way the joke ?",
 or why "the joke always turned against him, in the end"?
 Which "bars" from which "windows had been removed"?; Which
 "light enters her trousseau"?; Is "wine fished out of the
 sea"?, or did "wine fish something out of the sea"?; Why
 should "life be necessarily squeezed out of a perfume if one
 gets too far from it"?; What is the function of the question

"there is a seal"?; What is "yellow in the vast sun"?; "The seal and the other"?. Such questions can be asked to each line innumerable times or if fullstops are thought to signify individual sentences; if the ideas could be clearly separated, and if a logical correlation between ideas, objects; emotional changes and perceptual observations could be put into account in the usual manner, the questions needing answers would be multiplied infinitely... and yet no logical answer, no possible meaning and no attributed inner consistency could be found in terms of a traditional or even modernist understanding of life and poetry.

The poem "from The New Realism" needs to be explained otherwise. The poet, John Lawrence Ashbery, who wrote the poem in 1950's after a long period of extreme depression and inactivity, got the idea of writing such a poem after having attended a John Cage concert of "Music of Changes" with a fellow poet Frank O' Hara. Cage started experimenting with chance music in the late 1930's. His works are labelled by their indeterminate length, and chance operations. In an interview, Ashbery says of the music,

It was a series of dissonant chords, mostly loud, with irregular rhythm. It went on for over an hour and seemed infinitely extendable. I felt profoundly refreshed after hearing that. I started shortly afterwards. I felt that I could be as singular in my art as Cage was in his. (Bellamy, 1984:15).

Like Cage's music, Ashbery's poems reject the laws of

perspective logic, and narration in favour of randomness and discontinuity.

I. JOHN ASHBERRY: MAN and POET

Robert Richman labels Ashbery as "Our Most Important Living Poet" (1982:62) and in the same essay adds that "John Ashbery will come to dominate the last third of the [20th] century as Yeats dominated the first". Richman also claims in Harold Bloom's words that "[Ashbery] and Elizabeth Bishop are our two living contemporaries who should be beyond all critical dispute". He includes at the same time what Helen Mc Neil, a British critic writing in the Times Literary Supplement, has said: "since the death of Robert Lowell, the title of most important American poet has been an offer to John Ashbery. And moreover, Richman points out that even the government of the United States commissioned Ashbery to write a poem for the bicentennial."

Another adjective, apart from the "most important", which has been attributed to Ashbery is the "most difficult" used by a considerable number of his critics. Helen Vendler says, "It is impossible to say what an Ashbery poem is 'about'." (1983:51). Robert Richman shares similar views about Ashbery's famous "difficulty" "[which] according to Richman 'has not seemed to pose an obstacle to his acclaim.'" (1985:83). Fred Moramarco on the other hand,

defines Ashbery as "avant-garde, obscure, abstract, and one of our two or three best." (1975:21). Stephen Stepanchev, "Ashbery is a very difficult and perhaps impossible poet." (1974:16); Paul Zweig: "I read each new book by Ashbery with the same puzzlement and fascination." (1974:18); Lawrence Lieberman: "I've lived with John Ashbery's 'Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror' as with a favorite mistress for the past nine months." (1977:25); James Fenton:....."John Ashbery's conventional blame-words have turned surreptitiously into praise; banal, prosaic, trivial, diffused, opaque, meaningless-the list is infinite....After all there were times during my reading of his selected poems when I actually thought I was going to burst into tears of boredom." (1987:41)

Almost all of his critics state that Ashbery is difficult, meaningless, obscure, boring but still fascinating and one of the two or three best. Each critic approaches an Ashbery poem with some precaution and deliberate manoeuvre in order to bring into the poetry a possible meaning that can be understood by the readers.

Their efforts of classifying Ashbery are multitudinous. Words, punctuation, syntax, technique and language are some of the approaches. However, in this thesis, the hints of meaning expressed through colors will be the main issue.

John Ashbery was born in Rochester, New York, in 1927.

He was educated at Deerfield Academy, Harvard, and Columbia, where he specialized in English Literature. He started publishing his poetry in 1953 with Turandot and Other Poems, he continued with Some Trees (Yale Series of Younger Poets, 1956) which brought Ashbery immediate fame and recognition. In this book his ability to write in various poetic forms and his inclination for creating odd juxtapositions of words and images are striking; The Poems (1961) is composed of long prose poems written in the stream of consciousness technique and they are almost the best concrete sources for exhibiting Ashbery's philosophy; The Tennis Court Oath (1962) is considered as one of his most difficult works where his ambiguity is over-amplified by his use of collages; Rivers And Mountains (1966) is a widely praised book where his poetic talents are united into a powerful composition focusing mainly on the theme of "change", the creative process of art and the content of poetry; Selected Poems (1967); Three Madrigals (1968), Sunrise in Suburbia (1968), Fragment (1969), Evening in The Country (1970), The Double Dream of Spring (1970) were the following volumes of poetry in which he approached the world as a stranger sometimes in the role of explorer and sometimes as a pilgrim, almost always as someone bewildered. The New Spirit (1970), Three Poems (1972) in which are contained his collection of philosophical poetry. Ashbery explains his philosophy in "The System" which is his most cited work ; The Vermont Notebook (1975); The Serious Doll (1975); Self

Portrait in a Convex Mirror (Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, 1975) which is his most celebrated book and the title poem is an outstanding contemporary masterpiece. It is based on Francesco Parmagiannino-an Italian Renaissance artist-who has drawn a distorted image of himself that has become a favourite subject for Ashbery since it gives a distorted and subjective view of reality. Houseboat Days (1977) is where Ashbery goes for musicality expressed in confused logic and syntax. "Litany" in As We Know (1981), consisted of two columns of verse which represent simultaneous but independent monologues; Shadow Train (1982) is the embodiment of lyric measures; A Wave (Lenore Marshall/Nation Poetry Prize, 1984) marks a high level of accomplishment; and finally, April Galleons (1988) remarks a long, productive and successful career which started, the poet explains,

I began writing poetry, as I suppose most poets do, not really thinking my work would be published. Hoping, but -not really- confident that- my work would ever be read by anyone. Therefore, my first book of poems was made up largely of work which I had felt might never have an audience other than myself. (Bellamy 1984:11).

In time, he not only had a wide range of audience but also, achieved fame as a significant contemporary American Poet and is now being evaluated as the precursor to the "Generation of 2000" (Heyen 1984), the generation of poetry

which seems to need a few decades to decipher itself.

In an interview Ashbery has said that his early poems were imitations of "W.H.Auden, Wallace Stevens to a certain extent, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and various others" (Bellamy 1984:11), as of, in some later cases, Walt Whitman "by his easy going lines and their celebratory character " (Bellamy 1984:18) and Gertrude Stein. Such influences popped in-and-out, during and after his going to France as a Fulbright student. After having spent some ten years there, and not having been able to understand the language spoken in the street for a long time, Ashbery became alert and receptive to the voices and sounds around him and gradually attained his personal voice. What he overheard in the streets.... moved him very much" (Bellamy 1984:12). This was a period of introspection which made him go more deeply into himself.

Upon his return to America, as if he were a foreigner, Ashbery could observe "the American scene, landscape, the funny way [the Americans] lived." The complexity of Ashbery poems literally began in that period. Ashbery continues the interview saying,

I tried all kinds of experiments-breaking up phrases,isolating words - much like a painter who became infatuated with a certain color, puts a stroke of it on the canvas, and will stand back and see how he feels about it.(Bellamy 1984:13).

Having been out of the American language for ten years, experimentation was necessary and inevitable for Ashbery. This period was a transition into a poetic formation, both languagewise and technique-wise. Perhaps, experimentation with new modes of expression, and therefore a continuously changing and seemingly unstable character of Ashbery poems is where his critics talk in common. As Ashbery puts it;

Many of these poems are very annoying to people because of their disjunct quality, their apparent privacy, but this was not my intention. I didn't think there were going to be any readers and therefore I wasn't trying to annoy them. (Bellamy 1984:13).

In his early years, Ashbery wrote only for himself because he thought he "was doomed to be his chief reader" (Bellamy 1984:13). However, since his poetic character was formed on such grounds which brought him his fame, he continued writing in the same way. Ashbery, by his natural immediacy, spontaneity and randomness, has touched at the very heart of what Charles Olson and "the Black Mountain" poets like Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan and Denise Levertov have stressed as "open" or "organic form" also called, "projective verse" or the "poem as process". Included in the same trend were the "San Francisco Renaissance" poets, the "Beat poets", and the "New York School". Such schools were derivations from the Imagist - Objectivist tradition of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams and emerged in the 1950's and continued well into the 1960's and 1970's when they

became dominant in an avant-gardist fashion. Those schools

....respond[ed] to the limits of industrialism and high technology often by a marked spiritual advance or deference, an embracing of the primal energies of a tribal or communal spirit, side by side with the most stubborn sort of American individualism. (Strand 1969:18).

The Bomb in 1945 marked the beginning of new post-modern "tastes" while it ended the modernist tradition. Ashbery sets the situation in "The System" as ,

The system was breaking down. The one who had alone past so many happenings and events began to feel backing up along the primal vein that led to his center ... if left to gather, [would] explode the center to the extremities of life, the suburbs through which one makes one's way to where the country is. (1985:123).

II. ASHBERY'S POETICS as the CONTINUATION of POST-MODERNIST HERITAGE:

Charles Olson, who used the term "Post-Modernist" first, states the characteristics of post modern poetry in his famous essay "Projective Verse".

Olson points out that if the poet works in "open", stanza or what can also be called "Composition by Field", as opposed to "inherited stanza,...what is the "old" base of the "non projective" (Olson 1973:148), he will learn "the kinetics", "the principle" and "the process" of poetry. As for the kinetics, Olson (1973a:148) defines the poem as,

....energy transferred where the poet got it, by way of the poem itself to, all over the way over to the reader. Then the poem itself must....be a high energy construct and an energy discharge.

Ashbery calls this energy which binds the poet and the reader by means of the poem to the object perceived from which the energy is released as "the primeval energy from... the cosmic welter of attractions" (1985:126). "Field Composition" then is the poet's expansive perceptiveness in a chaotic universe in which an abundance of energy sources can be found. The poet is now freed of subject limitations.

"The Principle" as Olson suggests is

the law ... (which is) the reason why a projective verse can come into being. It is this: Form is never more than an extension of content. (1973a:148).

Here, Olson does not mention formlessness rigidly, but he believes that it is the content which shapes the form. In the "Ivory Tower" in The Shadow Train, Ashbery says,

A porch built on pilings, far out over the beach. Then it doesn't matter that the deaths come in the wrong order. All has been so easily written about. And you find the right order after all: play, the streets, shopping, time flying. (1985:285).

"A porch" (the closed verse), is "far out" in the distant past. Then, Ashbery suggests that anything "in the wrong order" doesn't matter because the poet is freed of a rigid form and he eventually has found "the right order

after all". It is the form as natural as the continuity of time and it is shaped by the content. "The process" for Olson is

....how the principle can be made so to shape the energies that the form is accomplished. And I think it can be boiled down to one statement: One perception must immediately and directly lead to a further perception (1973a:147).

"The process" is the process of the mind, as reflected in the poem, in a "stream of consciousness" or "free association" technique, both being techniques of breaking away from the traditional methods of reasoning and logic. Ashbery's "Vermont Notebook" can be given as a marvellous example of the use of this technique. It is a single poem volume of the same name. Here, any page at random, justifies Olson's third theory of "the process".

i Murder, incest, arson, rape, grand larceny, extortion, forgery, impersonating an officer, resisting arrest, loitering, soliciting of a controlled substance, drunken driving, reckless endangerment, slander, mental cruelty, non-assistance of person in danger, perfury, embezzlement, sodomy, child abuse, cruelty to animals, bootlegging, adultery, bigamy, bearing false witness. (1975a:17).

At this point, formlessness becomes a new form, and all the socially discarded negative energies are accumulated within a free associational texture, in which one perception immediately leads to another perception which all boil down to one statement: We still do survive! As Ashbery declares

in "Clepsydra",

..... But the condition of those moments of timeless elasticity and blindness was being joined secretly so that their paths would cross again and be separated only to join again in a final assumption (1985:65)

"Projective Verse" or "Open Form" aims at eliminating the subjective ego of the poet which is nothing but a voice echoing in an "impersonal nature". Olson states in "Proprioception" (1958): "Wash the ego out, in its own 'bath'" and adds that the experience of the universe "does not feel literally identical with our own physical or mortal self" which "keeps us so damn busy (like eating, sleeping, urinating, dying there, by deterioration of sd 'functions' of sd 'organs') (1973b:183). Olson brings forth an alternative

Which they call the SOUL, the intermediary, the intervening thing, the interruptor, the resistor. The self (1973b:184).

He adds that "The 'soul' then is equally 'physical'. It is the "self" but not clearly the subjective ego. The self, the poet impersonal-talks from a "home" says Olson "implicit in physical being" and is issued from "the depth" in that physical being. The "depth" being the unconscious, the true identity which is "the abstract, primitive character of the real. "Unconscious" is the universe flowing-in, inside" (1973b:187). Therefore for Olson, the soul is the universe possessed within; it is at the same time the solid

alternative for the body and the ego and it is identical with the real which is as broad, abstract and unattainable as the universe.

Reality therefore is contingent, [though] inconsistent, changing and uninterpretable (Perkins 1987:492) but "organically one". Therefore the glimpses of dissimilar aspects are the embodiment of reality. In the perpetuation of time, each present moment is the reality incarnate which leaves its place to another aspect of the real by becoming unreal for the next present moment. Consequently, the imagined persona without any autobiographical value is the voice within the projective verse which is identical to time, universe and reality and like them (and like John Cage's "Music of Changes") it is never-ending and full of possibilities of capturing aspects of reality framed in the present moment. The soul then is the new self which generates the "form as proceeding" or "organic form" from within the "depths of the physical being" -the unconscious- which articulates itself mostly through "dreams" as Olson puts (1973b:183) it.

Without Olson's theories neither Ashbery nor the generation after the 1950's could be understood. Ashbery's theories seem to be in perfect reconciliation with those of Olson's.

On being asked about the continuous change of the

subject from "I" to "You", and "them" to "us" Ashbery answers thus,

I'm afraid I have no sense of my own identity
(Kostelanetz 1982:79).

and adds in another interview;

My biography doesn't come into my poetry very much. This is something which many readers find disturbing, since they expect poets to write about their lives, their suffering, their history. My own autobiography has never interested me very much. Whenever I try to think about it, I seem to draw a complete blank. There is the title of a Japanese film by Ozu, "I was born, but That's how I feel about it. (Bellamy 1984:10).

As can be observed, the subjective ego or the physical or mortal self as Olson puts it, has got no significance for Ashbery. Moreover, he shares similar feelings with Olson towards it:

Sometimes the idea of going to the bathroom makes me sick. I feel ashamed for myself and everybody on this planet. If only something could be done about it. But it can't. So we have to go on doing it because we can't stop eating or drinking. We could stop thinking about it so much however and then maybe the shame of defecation and urination might gradually go away. (1975a:41).

Therefore the physical self as expressed in "Clepsydra" is,

...only a transparent diagram, of manners and private words with the certainty of being about to fall. (1985:68).

However, as the poem unfolds, Ashbery brings forth another alternative for the physical self, the lines read;

In this way any direction taken was the right one,
 Leading first to you, and through you to
 Myself that is beyond you and which is the
 Same thing as space,

What is meant is that this distant
 Image of you....
moving in the shadow of
 Your single and twin existence.....
 (1985:68-70).

The second self is the soul which is also as concrete as the physical self but which doesn't bother about satisfying the ego. It is the same "thing as space" and if "space" denotes the "field" of Olson, it is also identical with the "universe", the "real" and the "unconscious" which is "deep in the interior of the jungle". "The jungle" within the physical "you" suggesting as Olson determined "the contingent, inconsistent, changing and uninterpretable [and yet] organically one" nature of the unconscious identical with reality. Ashbery reckons,

... each moment of utterance is the true one;
 likewise none are true (1985:63).

Ashbery's "organic form" like that of Olson's or of Cage's music goes on forever like the continuity of life and is open to all kinds of possibilities. "All kinds of things are possible in the widening angle of/The day...!" (1985:67) remarks Ashbery. Open verse then opens new horizons by

making the poet indulge and penetrate into himself. This procedure is articulated by means of "memory", "dreams" and "imagination" through which "the energy" in the object perceived is set into "motion" and is linked with the energy within "My perennial voyage, into new memories" says Ashbery is "continuing but everbeginning" (1985:73). In the same poem he expresses that "motion" or "action" can't be perceived via sense perceptions but only perceived via soul.

It is like a recording of your mind, as if you had
put down every thought as you hear it inside
(Bellamy 1984:19).

He writes;

The train is still sitting in the station.
you only dreamed it was in motion (1985:76).

So, the static "physical world" and its objects are
"activated" in the unconscious. It is the instant of
creation, "an energy discharge" or it is

The charity of the hard moments as they are
doled out,
For this is action, this not being sure, this
careless
Preparing (1985:88).

The "action" captured is "an energy discharge" of
Olson's and "energy made visible" as Jackson Pollock and his
"Action Painting"⁽¹⁾ suggest. So far Ashbery can be put
under the Imagist-Obejectivist-Projectivist trend started by
Ezra Pound, continued by William Carlos Williams and

synthesized by Charles Olson. Derived from them but gaining acceleration and a complex momentum, Ashbery's Complex system of "reality" needs be magnified here.

III. REALITY for ASHBERY:

As discussed, reality for Ashbery is a state of flux which changes from moment to moment. He states as a general point of view that

- a) they would argue that details, no matter how complete, can give no adequate idea of the whole
- b) because the details can too easily become fetishes, i.e., ... with no notion of the whole of which they were a part. (1985:133).

Ashbery credits the idea that "any detail is a microcosm of the whole". So, "random selections" and "chance" play an active part in Ashbery's poetry as the momentary snapshots of the real in the flow of the flux.

In 1977 while being interviewed by Sue Gangel, Ashbery was asked

Gangel: You have mentioned that you write to escape reality. Do you think you might also want manage your reality too?

Ashbery: Well, I think may be both, at the sametime. I don't know what my life is, what I want to be escaping from. I want to move to some other space, I guess, when I write, which perhaps was where I had been but without being fully conscious of it. I want to move in and out of it, while I'm writing (Bellamy 1984:20).

The tension between the outer world of sense perceptions and the inner world of the unconscious is what makes Ashbery's concept of reality complex. He seems as if distracted between these two worlds. "How does it feel to be outside and inside at the same time" says Ashbery to point out the dilemma in which he is. This dilemma is due to the

Influence of psychoanalysis,...permitting a more or less, watery relationship with the unconscious mind, and everyday mind, and corollary devices of "dipping into" an almost completely associational stream... (Shapiro 1983:50).

Elusive glimpses of reality emerge at the intersection point of these worlds. That is, Ashbery is too abstract to be understood yet he is very concrete and specific, explanatory and evidencial. Such a contrast is because he uses his perceptions of the outer reality to solidify what is buried deep down himself. And this is not something unexpected from a poet who regards the universe as "one".

Consequently, since Ashbery is quite aware that reality is too broad an issue and of an abstract character and that only glimpses of it may be captured instantaneously, then his main indulgence is with why it can't be known.

The psychic formation of the unconscious counter balances the "angst" in the outer world, which is reinvented, imitated and transformed into art which has a soul-making power. Ashbery says, "I write mainly for 'escapism', but I insist that we need all the escapism we

can get and even that isn't going to be enough" (Bellamy 1984:13-14) . The outer world of the physical body is too discomfoting. Then the poet escapes into the unknown world of the unconscious mind, which is articulated with the objects of the outer.

Terms like "night rainbows", "Wine fished out of the sea", "Blue cornflakes in a white bowl", "Fern-clogged waiting room" and "The mood was still/Gray tolerance" begin to emerge very often. After all what the poet is doing is "To absorb life through the pores/For the life around you is dead"(Ashbery 1985:93) and he is bringing forth a new alternative for the life that he expresses his feelings as "Puaagh.Vomit.Puaaaaagh. More Vomit" (Ashbery 1985:72). The alternative is a macrocosm identical with reality and which weighs what is in or out, equally composing a new dimension in realism. This is "new realism" mentioned earlier in the title poem. It is also called "the Other Tradition" (Ashbery 1977:3) which is a kind of fictitious reality that develops parallel to the classic truths of the daily life. It is a "new realism" by which unrelated happenings form a kind of sequence of fantastic reflections. It is life as reanimated from within. It is the effort of the poet to expose the chaos which stands as the only reality that can be grasped. Disordered, fragmented, frustrating, distorted, dicursive, meditative, free-associational, formwise open, random, anti-climactic and experimental all which are also

the characteristics of John Ashbery's poetry. In "What is Poetry", he writes how a poem should be in a very simple way which is not expected from him,

The medieval town, with frieze
Of boy scouts from Nagoya? The snow

That came when we wanted it to snow
Beautiful images? Trying to avoid

Ideas, as in this poem? But we
Go back to them as to a wife. leaving

The mistress we desire? Now they
Will have to believe it

As we believe it. In school
All the thought got combed out:

What was left was like a field.
Shut your eyes, and you can feel it for miles
around.

Now open them on a thin vertical path.
It might give us-what?-some flowers soon?
(1985:236).

Imagination can take the poet anywhere even to a "medieval town", "Nagoya" in Honshu, Japan and "boy scouts" there seem to be the subject at once. "The Snow"- the inspiration-"came when we wanted it to snow?" and it gave birth to "beautiful images" created at random, The poet tries to "avoid/Ideas, as in this poem" because ideas are shaped by the physical world, whereas it is the soul which activates imagination, and in this case memory. However, man is so conditioned by the needs and teachings of the physical world that he can't submit himself completely to the process

of imagination. Now, Ashbery is offering a new possibility; "to believe" what is given "as we (himself) believe(s)"; to accept the new aesthetic perspective as it is. "In school" "an order in proper" thought "is given, now the poet is confronted with a "field" of chances and possibilities; there is an air of freedom. This freedom, which the poet experiences will eventually "give...some flowers soon", which is a "gain" in Olson's terms "to remove the false opposition of 'Conscious' [to the] unconscious...(which has) a home (of) Depth implicit in the physical being " (Olson 1973:184). New Realism, then, means a freedom of juxtaposing the elements of the physical world through the filtration of the unconscious.

From the subjective experience, Ashbery gives the universal experience of all man. The unconscious mind for Ashbery is very important in understanding reality. It is not personal but rather it is universal or collective as stated by Carl Jung. Ashbery renames the Jungian "collective unconscious" as, the "primeval energy" which leads one to a better understanding of the true nature of reality. Through this energy, the poet is not himself anymore but a universal man in search of truth. The unconscious mind for Ashbery is an inner potential of images symbols, fears and drives. It is a rich source to which the artist may refer or in which he may sort out random sparks of instigation for his art. Although it is possessed within, its depth and remoteness

and therefore unknown texture make the artist confront desired or undesired motives. Whatever he confronts with is a reflection of his self imprisonment and it is to be taken into the sunshine. Therefore the repressed motif which comes out from the darkness of the unconscious, is an attempt for self-knowledge or self -actualization. From darkness of the unconscious mind , innermost feelings emerge and give expression to what have been repressed so far.

You are looking down into a bottomless well or some kind of deep pool that is very dark with the reflected light so far in the distance it seems like a distant planet; and you see only your ownface. (Ashbery 1975a:61).

"The secret place" or "the bottomless well" for Ashbery is the unconscious mind eternally attempting to find an expression for the self through the endless strife of catching a slice of reality in the chaotic world of the artist. The unconscious rejects all the pre-established norms of aesthetics and logic; it creates a new notion of aesthetics.

IV. ASHBERY'S AESTHETICS

Artists try to solve the problem of communicating their sense of reality to their readers in different ways, that is why they have been grouped under different trends or schools. Ashbery shares common points in his concept of

reality with a multiplicity of contemporary schools and trends in poetry. However, it is his technique of giving his vision that makes him unique. His technique in a complex derivation which has found a personal articulation. Malkoff (in his book Contemporary American Writing (1973:47) states that

it is clear that Ashbery's intention is not to show that he can write intelligible verse in spite of the obstacles of the pattern. His disjointed images and syntax have the effect of producing planes of reality that seem to impinge on one another but never coincide. Probably what attracted Ashbery to odder verse forms was not the challenge of making them work, but rather the perception that they did in spite of themselves communicate a sense of reality after analogous to that communicated by abstract or cubist art.

And Malkoff continues thus,

Ashbery is interested in showing us what is there not in terms of intellectual systems but in terms of textures, patterns, rhythms... The refusal to accept consecutive time and space, the insistence on experiencing the world from a perspective that has no center and is therefore a contradiction in terms, is itself a comment on the nature of reality. (1973:48).

In any poem of John Ashbery, as soon as one begins to read the poem, one senses that the poet makes use of all the elements that make up a poem in a very unusual way including the words, the rhythmic composition of words like imagery, sound and interplay of concepts, the shift in persona, the change in time and place, broken syntax and free style.

Ashbery's aesthetics can be labelled as a continuous disruption of the logic and sense which a traditionally oriented mind expects from a poem. By continuously frustrating the demands of the reader, Ashbery aims at reader participation or response to the new aesthetic perception.

While reading an Ashbery poem, the reader is continually confronted with obscurities of meaning. He feels perplexed among many familiar objects, which yet seem highly alien and remote. All of a sudden he can understand the meaning of a few lines and continues with the hope that he may finally grasp the whole meaning which the poet intended to give, but soon he yields to another mass of incomprehensible objects and images. Momentary understandings of such few lines are like "whispers out of time" (Ashbery 1985:204), coming from a distance and illuminating the confusion the reader is in.

There are many Ashbery poems, in which are some lines that seem not to have been completed at all

Drawing out conversations in the lobby more than you
care
And each gift returns home to the bearen idly, at
suppertime
Odd that he noticed you diminished in this case,
but with any
The true present conserves the hoofprint in the dust
(Ashbery 1982;16)

The blanks or incomplete parts suggests a sort of black-out during which the poet has lost consciousness. Different opinions focus on the issue of form from different perspectives. Ashbery himself says,

The apotheosis never attracted you, only those few moments in the next-to-last act where everything suddenly becomes momentarily clear, to sink again into semi-obscurity before the final blaze. (1972:94)

Perloff suggests in relation to the same lines:

Again and again we come accross stories that "become startligly clear for a moment, as though a change in wind had suddenly enabled us to hear a conversation that was taking place some distance away (Lehman 1980:82).

Perloff explains the issue as a "dream sequence" in which one doesn't necessarily have to find any logic. She defines Ashbery's poetry as having a dream-like quality, a reality which shuttles between waking and dreaming states. She also argues that an Ashbery poem has an "out-in-out" dream sequence. Therefore, there is obviously going to be clarities and obscurities or even missing parts in the poem. In order to support her argument, Perloff gives the above quotation which is composed of Ashbery's ideas concerning Gertrude Stein's Stanzas. The original chapter reads;

Stanzas in Meditation gives one the feeling of time passing of things happening, of a "plot", though it would be difficult to say precisely what is going on. Sometimes the story has the logic of a dream... at other times it becomes startlingly clear for a moment... (Lehman 1980:72).

and Perloff also points out that,

Ashbery's Dream Song unfolds a series of palpable, arresting images that seem to arrive out of nowhere, creating moments of stark confrontation and illumination (Lehman 1980:72).

"Confrontation and illumination" is momentary. "This momentary clarity ... is consistently dispelled, leaving the reader waiting anxiously for the next installment" (Lehman 1980:72) as Perloff suggests. So the texture of an Ashbery poem is created out of objects of the physical world, which are reshaped by the unconscious into a new texture. That is why every word is startlingly comprehensible but because it refers to an unconscious reality, it is at the same time incomprehensible which creates the major problem for an Ashbery reader. The poet is then the maker of an aesthetical beauty which is uncommon and nontraditional - whose references cannot be found within the text but should be sought outside the text. Or in simpler terms, the poet enjoys "a bizarre melange" of the outer with that of the inner experiences to give his audience another perspective of his "new realism".

If an earlier quotation should be repeated, Ashbery though seeming to stress that he writes with escapist purposes, after being asked about "Take a journey", replies, "Yeah, but also realize, more, where I am", (Bellamy 1984:20). It is obvious that Ashbery is and must always be

aware of the fact that he has to live in a physical world. Evidently, the thesis will concentrate on both worlds, accepting them as being the two aspects of "one" entity, comprising the "self" for Ashbery. What the ordinary reader perceives as reality, as twin to the self, will be reshaped in terms of Ashbery's understanding of them from within. We will find many familiar objects in Ashbery's fabulation, yet we will be perplexed to see that yet they are not the same objects (that we accept them to be). The thesis purports to concentrate on his use of colors as mirrors to his universe to which the traditionally oriented mind is alien.

Like objects, colors too will both stand for themselves as we perceive them in our daily life, and they will also reflect "the unconscious" identical to "the self" and "the universe" as a "self portrait of the artist in color". It is color which offers an interpretation, acting as an annex, on a guiding directory for decoding the endless ciphers of endless messages, at least in the poems, where colors are suggested. Such an interpretation is possible because even a post modernist repeats the same issues in the representation of personal overtones. Ashbery says in "The System" in Three Poems

This cosmic welter of attractions was coming to stand for the real thing, which has to be colorless and featureless if it is to be the true reflection of the primeval energy from which it issued forth...(1985:126).

Being a member of the literary traditions that include the French Symbolists, Surrealists and Dadaists on the one hand and Charles Olson on the other, and influenced much more by the theory and practice of American Abstract Expressionist painters, John Ashbery believes that man lives in a chaotic universe; in a world of random transformations which has no definite configuration. This world of chaos defies any shape or color. The artist may not need to obey any set of rules but it is his duty to find a way out, to give shape and color to this chaotic universe. When regarded on a universal plane, chaos embodies everything it is "the true nature of reality" and the poet is the man who has reached this awareness by his observations of random selections from that "undefinable organicism", the chaos, from which he can capture glimpses of immediate reality that flicker as colorful shoots.

Yet so blind are we to the true nature of reality at any given moment that this chaos-bathed, it is true, in the iridescent hues of the rainbow...
(Ashbery 1985:126).

The poet, too inferior to the nature of reality, can only behold glimpses of it without really understanding that he has captured some because the cosmic entity called "reality" cannot be perceived fully "at a given moment". To perceive it wholly, one should be at least as large as the entity itself.

As reality changes from one moment to the next, the

poet gives the reader a slice of reality he has had for a moment, ordered and colorful.

Each hour has its color and forever gives place
leaving less than yon bird of itself a trace.
(Ashbery 1985:109).

In the above poem the elusive quality of reality is symbolized through a bird image in order to emphasize the elusiveness of Ashbery's concept of reality. David Perkins points out in his A History of Modern Poetry that,

...For both (Wallace) Stevens and Ashbery, the imagination creates, destroys, and immediately creates another vision of reality, but that in Ashbery the process is enormously speeded up.
(Perkins 1987:620).

So, to freeze reality as if it is a snapshot is impossible because once it is thought to have been frozen, it has already transformed itself into a new dimension. Thus what remains at hand is a vision, or an imagination of reality. So the problem is how to frame such a fleeting moment in poetry.

"At a given moment", Ashbery says, "the formlessness of the whole shone through the colored masses" (1985:127). The catchword here is "mass" which is "ugly as sin". The task of the poet is an endless, hopeless and absurd task of objectifying the true nature of reality among "the colored masses". So his world turns out to be a personal madhouse in which he remains perplexed and confused amid colors as

stated in "Darlene's Hospital". The poem starts:

The hospital: it wasn't her idea
That the colors should slide muddy from the brush
And spew their random evocations everywhere,
(Ashbery 1985:316).

But still he lives in that madhouse; he lives because he needs self-realization and self-expression. At this point, Ashbery deviates from traditional symbolism. He continuously selects the surrealist mode to explain his concept of reality.

You discovered that there was a fork in the road, so first you followed what seemed to be the less promising...Then you returned to investigate the more tangled way...And in so doing you began to realize that the two branches were joined together again, farther ahead; that this place of joining was indeed the end, and it was the very place you set out from, whose intolerable mixture of reality and fantasy had started you on the road which has now come full circle. (Ashbery 1985:149).

Where reality starts and fantasy ends or where reality ends and fantasy starts is hard to tell so it's the artist's duty to make concrete this elusive character of reality; to name a rapid transformational becoming. Ashbery writes

And it is no longer a nameless thing, but something colorful and full of interest, a chronicle play of our lives. (1985:151).

Every moment has a different glimpse of reality which finds articulation in a different color and colors give definition to a chaotic universe. Reality, like Newton's

disk which bears colors but which becomes completely colorless and white when rotated fast, turns out to be the artist's concern. He tries to stop its acceleration for a moment and capture glimpses of its reality which have now shone through beautiful colors, just for a very short period of time. Or, his task is, as Ashbery puts it

Casting colored paddles..just to abolish confusion...
that were the truth, although each tapered into the
the distant surrounding night. (1985:64-65).

The colors give definition to a chaotic universe which is ambiguous. Colors are slice of reality within an instant of time. Each moment has a different glimpse of reality which finds articulation in a different color. Once the artist is able to grasp a glimpse of reality for a moment, he has it now like a color photo to show his reader.

Now you have my passport
With its color photo in it, to be sweet with you
As the time allow...(Ashbery 1985:291).

Once the moment is grasped as "the slice of reality" by the poet, it enables the artist to break away from the imprisonment of his self and become "one" with "all". Once inspiration comes, creativity is spontaneous and is freed of all norms and selectivity. Inspiration is a spontaneous overflow of a total sum of feelings and emotions that gush out disregarding the artist's will. Like the brush of the painter, the pen of the poet spurts random, informal, and even irrelevant sparks of a multi-aesthetical beauty, the

outcome is an orgy in the form of a colorful world in which the artist has broken the chains of the prison he has been in and in which he has achieved self-knowledge or self-actualization.



NOTES

(1) For "Action Painting" see p. 38



I. COLORS: HOW, WHEN and WHERE: "it came again, the color, always a color"

Before attempting an analysis of colors as they appear in Ashbery's poetry, it is necessary to clarify "how", "when" and "where" colors emerge in Ashbery's poems. While the latter two suggest the concept of time and place consequetively, explication of the prior, "how", seems to be a highly complex derivation of movements, trends or schools in arts that emerged in the 20th century.

I.1.HOW: THE INFLUENCES of MOVEMENTS on ASHBERRY'S USE of COLORS:

The definition of action in the context of the "Action Painters" with whom Ashbery is identified, is not that which is found in the outer world but rather, in the innerworld: Action is an emotional truth which finds an outlet from within to without through the medium of the poet. Or it is as Fred Moramarco (1976:438) states:

Just as action painters were calling our attention to the basic materials of their art-paint, color, canvas-and seeing the latter as a field of action, poets began calling our attention (in New York during the late 1940's and early 50's) to the basic materials of theirs- words interacting with one another to fill the white space of a page and create autonomous worlds.

"Action" in this sense is the major drive for the painters

known as "Action painters" who have sought a personal freedom of choice of colors without any ulterior motive or purpose. Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), an American artist aroused interest with his ways of applying paint which he derived from a technique he learned in France: "tachism", or as might be explained as "the concentration on the mark or blot left by the brush" (Gombrich 1972:478) enabled Pollock to get relieved of the conventional methods of painting which he found limiting

Pollock had been captivated by surrealism but he gradually discarded the weird images that had haunted his paintings for exercises in abstract art. (Gombrich 1972:478).

He would spread his canvas on the floor and drip, pour or throw his paint on it to form surprising configurations.

(1)
This is exactly the situation in "Darlene's Hospital"

where "the colors... slide muddy from the brush / And spew their random evocations everywhere" (Ashbery 1984:31).

Ashbery refers a lot to Pollock paintings in his instinctive and free use of colors and in the general abstract form of his poetry. He refers (1985:313) to a famous Pollock painting, "The Blue Poles" when he writes,

I inch and only sometimes as far as the twisted pole gone in spare colors.

The term "inch" refers to a certain "movement" or "action" which the artist observes as creating action on the

canvas only after colors have been used at random. That is to say, in this chaotic and meaningless universe, even what seems to have been used at random, has a meaning in its own context and conveys a truth and an instant of truth of some sort: rather an innertruth which finds expression in solid shapes and colors. Eventhough colors seem to be used at random, in Pollock's terms, the main objective of "Action Painting" is to discipline the artistic self by means of an aesthetic which is to "Control the flow of paint" (Lamm 1984:377). The artist cannot depart from universal truth which he possesses within; but in "Action Painting" he projects it to without by "random evocations". Like Pollock, Ashbery too, believes that random selections are glimpses of universal truth which cannot be grasped on a macrocosmic but on a microcosmic level. This technique also eliminates pre-established norms in arts and frees the artist. Similarly even if the artist thinks that he's getting nowhere, he is indeed exploring the inner depths of his own personality. It is because, instinctively he has expressed the voice within as naturally and truly as he could which he couldn't have done by any other means.

Yet now a wonder would shoot up, all one color (Ashbery 1985:42).

The "wonder" from within emerges to the level of consciousness "all one color" first. The artist then, decodes the secrets of his inner self. What he has done is

to "steal" from within the rich sources of his inner world which he names as "holly":

Here the mysteries
And the color of holly are embezzled
(Ashbery 1985:52)

"Action Painting" therefore is to activate the "potential energy" which Ashbery calls the "primeval energy" and which is identical with creative energy in the artist Pollock refers to the same energy in his explication of the theory and the function of "Action Painting" as

...energy made visible. (Lamm 1984:377).

Colors are the means of both Pollock and Ashbery's "Abstract Expressionism" which decodes the secrets of the inner self.

"Abstraction" comes from the difficulty of expressing "the energy". It is for Ashbery,

Around your shoulders
A shawl the color of the spectrum
Like that marvellous thing you haven't learned yet
(1985: 78-79).

The poetic self is wrapped by this colorful "shawl" whose nature hasn't been "learned yet", for it is like the nature of "reality" which is impossible to learn.

The influence of Pollock's "Action Painting" or "Abstract Expressionism" is observed clearly in the

following poem. (Ashbery 1966:9). The poem starts,

As I sit;looking out of a window of the building
 I wish I did not have to write the instruction
 manual on the uses of a new metal.
 I look down into the street and see people, each
 walking with an inner peace,
 And envy them- they are so far away from me!
 Not one of them has to worry about getting out this
 manual on shedule.
 And, as my way is, I begin to dream, resting my
 elbows on the desk and leaning out of the window
 a little,
 Of dim Guadalajara! City of rose-colored flowers!
 City I wanted most to see, and most did not see, in
 Mexico!
 But I fancy I see, under the press of having to
 write the instruction manual,
 Your public square, city, with its elaborate little
 bandstand!
 The band is playing Scheherazade by Rimsky-
 Korsakov.

"Action Painting" for Ashbery here is born out of inaction, sterility and boredom. It is a method of escapism from the routine tasks of daily life. The poet is bored of his task of writing an "instruction manual on the uses of a new metal". His inertia promises nothing but sterility. Through the process of "dreaming" or rather daydreaming, the energy within is gradually activated. The energy within finds outlets through channels of different colors and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade". His dreamt setting is much more different than his conscious world. The setting is lighted and the colors enlivened. Morbidity leaves its place to action, dullness to joy, sterility to the free flow of energy. The poem (2) developes,

Around stand the flower girls, handing out rose- and lemon-colored flowers.

Each attractive in her rose-and-blue striped dress (Oh! such shades of rose and blue",

And nearby is the little white boot where women in green serve you green and yellow fruit.

The couples are parading; everyone is in a holiday mood.

First, leading the parade, is a dapper fellow Clorhed in deep blue. On his head sits a white hat And he wears a mustache, which has been trimmed for the occasion.

His dear one, his wife is young and pretty; her shawl is rose, pink, and white.

Her slippers are patent leather, in the American fashion,

It is a magnificent and amazing world, eventhough, it is not the real picture of Guadalajara which is really in Mexico. As the rather simple poem unfolds, colors emerge, explode and transform into new ones. The energy and action are there from the "flower girls, handing out rose and lemon-colored flowers" to the "public library, painted shades of pale green and beige". There is liveliness, motion and generation. There are colors, there is music, there is love, there is vitality. Yet there is no real setting, no mention of time but just action.

But the poet has to return to the boring task of completing his "instruction manual". The non-setting, timelessness and action together with colors and energy, they all yield to a memory of the dreamt knowledge of impossibility of sustaining the ecstatic moment.

How limited, But how complete withal, has been our experience of Guadalajara!
We have seen young love, married love, and the love of

an aged mother for her son.
 We have heard the music, tasted the drinks, and looked
 at colored houses
 What more is there to do, except stay? And that we can
 not do.
 And as a last breeze freshens the top of the weathered
 old tower, I turn my gaze
 Back to the instruction manual which has made me dream
 of Guadalajara.

A poem like "The Instruction Manual" covers much of
 understandable data. There is nothing illogical about "rose
 colored flowers", "green and yellow fruit", "white hat",
 "gray tile", "houses of pink and white" and "man dressed in
 brown and gray". These colors all have direct referents in
 the daily life. However, when one recalls the introductory
 part together with the conclusion, Ashbery attributes no
 terms related to colors but "city of rose-colored flowers",
 and "colored houses". These two are directly related to the
 development: one preparing for the colorful world, and the
 other giving it a last remembrance. Right after the
 introductory lines, one feels as if energetically sliding
 into a bizarre yet familiar world.

The question of whether Ashbery has really written
 about an actual city or not emerges at this point. His
 description may easily refer to any setting. Jonathan Holden
 in his "Syntax and Poetry of J.A." explicates the poem while
 clarifying Ashbery's "Abstract Expressionarism". Holden
 says, Ashbery's

...aesthetic is founded -(on) the assumption that a
 work of art can present to us a gestalt which is

recognizable without reference to a specific context, which can be general yet feel specific (Holden 1980:30).

Guadalajara seems to be a definite setting, but it can be anywhere; one feels in a definite time, yet there is no suggestion of time. The preconditioned reader always seeks for an "objective correlative", he usually finds none. For instance in "The Way They Took"

The green bars on you grew soberer
As I petted the lock, a crank
In my specially built shoes.
(Ashbery 1956:66).

The keyword in this quotation is "green". Unless it is solved, no logical attribution can be made to the lines. Why "The green bars on you grew soberer"? What is the correlation between the "lock" (hair) and the "crank" and why "in (the) especially built shoes"? But if "nostalgia of the childhood" is attributed to the meaning of "green" than everything gets clear. The poet with this nostalgia pets his hair; his hand is like a crank and he reaches an awareness in his shoes, especially built to carry his body which is getting older. His sobriety is due to his understanding that he is no longer young. Nostalgia forms bars which imprison him in the present. A nostalgia of the past creates an awareness of the present, haunts and freezes the poet by leaving him alone with his mechanical strokes and his feeling the (probably baldening forehead) hair. His actions are paralyzed and the present cannot be lived; neither any

joy can be gotten out of it.

With the solution of the word "green" the meaning of seemingly meaningless lines are possibly decoded. "Green in this case is an "abstract symbol" which has no "relation to objects of experience or phenomena of nature" as stated by the following definition of "Abstract Symbolism" which

... makes use of arbitrary forms which bear no relation to objects of experience or phenomena of nature, but which are entirely absolute.
(Read 1954:168).

Ashbery's difficulty arises mainly because of his use of abstract symbolism, with which the need for an "objective correlative" leaves its place for a "subjective correlative". It is essential for the reader to look into the poem, rather than to look at it to discover an emotional depth which has been hinted by seemingly unrelated ideas. Therefore, like surrealist painting, Ashbery's poetry is a reflection of an inner reality: a surreality which can only be expressed by abstract symbolism.

The term, surrealism, emerged between the two world wars in 1924. It aimed at creating true reality as it is possessed in the unconscious. Surrealism owes much to Sigmund Freud who has shown that when the awakening thoughts are cast off, the child and the savage within emerge. For this reason Surrealists;

...hankered after mental states in which
what is deep down in our minds come to the
surface. (Gombrich 1972:471).

Ashbery finds outlets from the encircling physicality
via dreams (even day-dreams), imagination, free association,
and memory (though having a negative impact) which are
techniques of poetic expression

Other dreams came and left while the bank
Of colored verbs and adjectives was shrinking
from the light (Ashbery 1985:169).

The "colored verbs and adjectives" shrink when the "light"
comes, the colors are activated during the night-especially
when one is dreaming-when the unconscious gains its
momentum. It is during the dream the repressed self is set
free. The repressed self says,

... He: "I'll stay
As long as the night allows". This was one of
those night rainbows
In negative color.
(Ashbery 1985:184).

But it's amusing to note that, for Ashbery, there can
be also "negative colors": Colors as if reflected from a
negative film stripe. It is true that reality finds
articulation as instances of light, but when one craves for
them, night, darkness and dream can also be grounds for them
to appear. In the latter case, "negative color" suggests a
slice of reality attained unconsciously in a dreaming state.

"Thought associations" (free associations) play their

role in the emergence of colors:

Thought-associations that until now came
So easily, appear no more or rarely. Their
Colorings are less intense,
(Ashbery 1985:202).

"Imagination" has an equal importance in the appearance
of colors, as reflected in the following quotation:

A ship
Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor
(Ashbery 1985:202).

"The harbor" is the receptiveness of the poet who isn't
ready to understand and to comprehend all new experiences,
what's yet to come from an imaginative experience. But the
first distinctive quality of such an experience is its being
colorful.

"Memory" on the other hand is a faculty which enlivens
and multiplies what has been experienced as real in the
past. It carries what has been beforehand into today's
existence. However, the liveliness of the colors then has
faded now because in time they begin to lose their impact
only to be stimuli for today. They are not real for today
but are the echoes of a past,

The disquiting muses again: what are "leftovers"?
...whose authority
Speaks out for the accumulation of age and faded
colors
To the center of today.
(Ashbery 1985:218).

Thus Ashbery writes:

Ready to ensure in principle the kind of moment we
 had
 When young, to undo the colored past and extract
 Whatever good may come out of it now.
 (Ashbery 1985:64)

Memory functions as a mechanism which filters vivid and colorful remembrances of the past. It reenlivens them in the present and therefore puts forward brilliant alternatives for the present boredom expressed in the following lines. Memory, through color, conjugates past and present.

Yet, memory through colors can bring to the present a nostalgia for the good days in the past. "The good old days", in the following quotation "pollutes" the present, by shaking the poet out of his complacency in a morbid, and lifeless present setting: it disturbs him, and an agony overpowers his contentment with the present making him magnetized by the power of his childhood memories.

Pray that in just one bubble the color
 Will cover the whole surface sheen,
 Polluting remembrance, the house where I was born
 (Ashbery 1987:30).

By the resonance of "memory" with "nostalgia" as seen in the above and in the quotation yet to come, a liveliness in colors can be observed.

The old house guards its memories, the birds
 Stream over colored snow in summer
 Or back into the magic rising sun in winter.
 (Ashbery 1956:40).

The amazing juxtaposition of "colored snow" and "summer" and "magic rising sun" and "winter" are evidence enough to show that Ashbery's reality is different from the reality of daily life. To have observed colored snow in summer is astonishing yet the reader accepts it as naturally as the magic rising sun in winter.

But the freedom that the poet enables us the readers to participate in an acceptance of colored snow is not exasperating at all; on the contrary, it is relieving, and forcing the boundaries of all kinds of preconceived ideas.

Therefore,

The artist, whether poet or mystic or painter does not seek a symbol for what is clear to the understanding and capable of discursive exposition; He realizes that life, especially the mental life exists on two planes, one definite and visible in outline and detail the other - perhaps the greater part of life - submerged, vague, indeterminate. A human being drifts through time like an iceberg, only partly floating above the level of the consciousness. (Read 1954:167-168).

It is the aim of the surrealist artist to define the undefinable unconscious world. To define the unconscious world the poet has to use symbolism. Symbolism becomes "concrete" when the artist uses such preconceived imagery as woman symbolizing fertility, beauty; snake symbolizing sin, lust, temptation; red symbolizing love, or passion. However, it is the "abstract" symbolism which is used by the

Surrealists, and by Ashbery. Colors, similarly, are the projections of an inner world expressed as visual perceptions of the outer world. They turn out to be subjective symbols which have parallels in the outer world, correlated with the subjective inner world.

On the other hand, colors are also used in their "denotative" meanings as in the following example:

The drinks are dispensed from a large glass
crock by a lady in dark blue. (Ashbery 1956:16).

"The drinks" can be "dispensed from a large glass crock" and "by a lady" but why "in dark blue"? The mind hopelessly seeks for a correlation (a symbol, an image maybe) between the color and what it stands for. Holden (1980:31) says,

In an Ashbery poem... "the scene" upon which
"feeling" is projected is no longer a set of images
which can be located within the verse frame.

and he continues,

In an Ashbery poem, the context to which the
"coloring" can be applied are, like the images in a
conventional mirror, outside the frame, and, like
the images in a convex mirror, they have an
unlimited range of references.

Similarly colors may refer, like the images in a mirror, to anything and everything outside their frame of reality. By this way, no logical attribution can be sought in the use of color. They are not "about" something within

the framework of poetry and they can not cohere in one "image" within the poem. Therefore "darkblue" in the above quotation "connotes" nothing about the "lady". "A lady in dark blue" is not a "concrete symbol" in that it does not accord with a preconceived image. "Dark blue" cannot be an "abstract symbol" because "a lady in dark blue may be possible to come accross with any time. Consequently, "dark blue" is a "denotative" color used for mere representation to produce a visual impact.

As Ashbery says,

My poetry is full of scenic passages, but I seem to hear them before I see them. I don't consciously set out to paint a picture... I had thought for many years that I was not a very visual person as a writer. (Bellamy 1984:17).

"Paint[ing] a picture" is not a "conscious" and deliberate intention for Ashbery: however, the poet's painterly aspect in relation to the "New York School" cannot be disregarded. In his college years, Ashbery gave up painting which he had been sustaining since his adolescence and began writing poetry never to think that painting would then turn out to be a major issue in his poetry, and would spare him a place among the "New York School of Poetry"⁽³⁾. After all the artist is a man who paints within the framework of aesthetics and who produces solid patterns of visual beauty. As Herbert Read has put it in his The Meaning of Art. (1954:169).

Many critics, too occupied with the symbolic content of paintings ... do not stop to consider their aesthetic merits ... Thereby such critics reveal their limitations, for, if for a moment they would forget about the symbolism, they would discover ... an endless charm in the color and texture of actual painting.

In this respect what Herbert Read suggests as art is that which is to be enjoyed visually. Likewise, Ashbery often uses colors just to give a visual impact (eventhough not the concern of the thesis) to form a texture like that of an Abstract Expressionist painting. Such colors as gold, bronze, purple, orange, pink, velvet and brown and others except for white, black, green, gray, red, silver and blue are clearly used for different purposes. While the second group defines the "self portrait" of the "artist", the first group enriches the texture. As Ashbery (1956:28) says,

Yet I cannot escape the picture
Of my small self in that bank of flowers:

"The bank of flowers" suggests the first group of colors enriching the "self portrait". In the following quotation from Vermont Notebook (Ashbery 1975 a : 15) that richness is seen as an orgy of colors, which seem to encompass "gray" belonging to the second group.

Grey, ocher, mauve, gentian, tabac, beige, greige,
bulf, taupe, mastic, fawn, havane, verdigris, smoke,
amber, russet, outremer.

The "self" here is portrayed amid a colorful world.

Moreover, the richness of this world is unlimited; and almost every color is given as loyal to its actual hue via the world of perceptions. They are as anybody perceives them to be visually. Here are some examples:

The scissors, this season, old newspaper
The brown suit (Ashbery 1962:51).

The scene is of a collage and the color is "brown", the color of a suit.

I want a pair of orange pants and a pair
Of orange and white shoes to go with them (Ashbery 1975a:55).

"Orange" is used to vivify the scene and it accomponies the color "white".

... Men were carrying very heavy things-dark purple,
Like flowers. (Ashbery 1962:68).

"Heavy things" likened to "dark purple flowers" portray a
(4)
Post-Impressionistic picture. In order to understand the painterly aspect of Ashbery, it will be useful to explicate his relation to painting and its influences on him.

Ashbery's indulgence with colors is often attributed to his being bound to the "New York School of Poetry" with which he thinks himself not participating. During an interview, Ashbery was asked,

VOA: Many critics have placed you in New York School of poets. What does the New York School mean to you?

Ashbery: Well, it refers to me and some of my friends. The term first appeared in an article written by John Bernard Myers who was the director of an art gallery in New York which published our first pamphlets of poetry. I'm speaking of myself, Kenneth Koch, Frank O'Hara, Barbara Guest, and James Schuyler. And I think that Myers thought that poetry, if it were lumped together under that title, would find an audience. This was at the time when the New York School of painters was very much talked about. And I guess it seemed logical to him that there should also be a New York School of poets. Except for the fact that we were all friends, I don't think it means very much since we all write differently. What we have in common, I think, is a tendency to experiment, to use language in a more experimental, less rational way than is customary, even in poetry. Although again, this would not apply, say, to James Schuyler, whose work is actually much closer to poets such as Elizabeth Bishop or even Robert Lowell. So I'm just saying that to point out that I don't really believe that the title, New York School, means too much. But on the other hand people like to have labels and nobody ever likes the one that they are stuck with. So perhaps it means more than I'm giving it credit for. (Kostelanetz 1982:269).

Ashbery does somehow avoid affinity with the New York School of poets. Karl Malkoff questions the actual existence of such a school in poetry, because the poets who have been thought of as establishing the school have shown differences of sensibility. However, such efforts have been concluded in; as Malkoff (1973 :22) states,

As far as general aesthetic principles are concerned; as far as their attitudes toward open poetry and tight forms, free verse and strict meter, the New York Poets, if we become convinced they really exist, are squarely in the Imagist-Objectivist - Projectivist tradition.

Maybe a more concentrated intersection point among these poets is, as Malkoff points out writing about James

Schuyler, their representing a "separate sensibility" and that sensibility being primarily of "art". As Schuyler puts it:

John Ashbery, Barbara Quest, Frank O'Hara, myself (Schuyler), have been or are among the poets regularly on the staff of Art News. In New York the art world is a painter's world; writers and musicians are in the boat, but they don't steer.

Harold Rosenberg's Action Painting article is as much a statement for what is best about a lot of poetry as it is for New York painting. (Malkoff 1973:22).

These poets, together with Ashbery, were influenced by such painters as Willem De Kooning, Marcell Duchamp and Jackson Pollock. It was not that they imitated them, but they found out that painting and poetry were both conveying aesthetics in a concentrated form. But in the case of "Abstract Expressionism", the form was not limited by the content which finds expansive expression rather outside of the boundries of form.

The expression as reflected on the canvas, or on paper, needs materials to blossom into aesthetics which would direct the reader to the evidences of the transmitted knowledge expressive of a polarized reality: a macrocosm which cannot be ultimately known. Ashbery explains this (1985:53) as,

The colored balls were like distant lights on the plaque horizon
There was room for but one ball.

The artist draws a single ball. It is for the reader to discover the multitudinous others. But again, these forms find aspiration through colors. The painter by brushstrokes, and the poet by words of colors, as Ashbery (1985:331) says,

What is restored ...
Is a new, separate life of its own:
A new color...

imitating it but giving it a new dimension of aesthetics. Thus Ashbery continues (1985:331),

Unquestioning, Acidly sweet. Must we pick up
the pieces
But what are the pieces, if not separate
puzzles themselves,

This is the "New Realism" that Ashbery has learned from painting. Reality is too broad, and its fragments embody reality,

Each moment
of utterance is the true one, likewise none are true,
(Ashbery 1985:63).

Writes Ashbery in *Clepsydra* to explicate it. But the fragments are equally confusing, and the feeling felt from having been exposed to them is "sweet" but "Acidly sweet": a feeling of satisfaction due to having accomplished a task is there, but still it burns within as if nothing has ever been accomplished so far. "The Painter" (Ashbery 1985:20) has a similar theme: the painter's struggle with his subject and

his awareness of impossibility of giving it an expression as the embodiment of truth. The painter wishes his subject to articulate itself on the canvas. This is the idea that art should be autonomous.

Sitting between the sea and the buildings
He enjoyed painting the seas portrait.
But just as children imagine a prayer
Is merely silence, he expected his subject
To rush up the sand, and, seizing a brush,
Plaster its own portrait on the canvas.

The painter, however, is always forced by the public to a concrete presentation of his art by means of his brush, which is "a means to an end".

So there was never any paint on his canvas
Until the people who lived in the buildings
Put him to work: "Try using the brush
As a means to an end. Select, for a portrait,
Something less angry and large, and more subject
To a painter's moods, or, perhaps, to a prayer."

Yet, the more he is indulged in his art with the idea of capturing an exact likeness, the more he is frustrated because no art can ultimately do it. Reality is unknowable, too abstract, too elusive and therefore it is impossible to express it by any concrete means. With this notion in mind, the painter decides to paint an expressionistic portrait of his wife.

How could he explain to them his prayer
That nature, not art, might usurp the canvas?
He chooses his wife for a new subject,
Making her vast, like ruined buildings,
As if, forgetting itself, the portrait

Had expressed itself without a brush

Still unable to find the proper means, but freed of conventional modes of representational art, the painter experiences unrestricted approaches which are insufficient in themselves too. Finally he simply "dipped his brush/ In the sea", creating art as genuine and original as can be. A direct parallelism between the soul and the outer world is established.

Slightly encouraged, he dipped his brush
In the sea, murmuring a heartfelt prayer:
"My soul, when I paint this next portrait
Let it be you who wrecks the canvas."
The news spread like wildfire through the buildings:
He had gone back to the sea for his subject.

But to paint the sea, with the sea water means nothing after all; he paints a non-representational painting. He goes to the very nature of his source, paints nature and finds that the physical nature and man's souls are one, which is the direct reflection of the soul, the innermost self that a romantic awareness. So, the painter actually does not compose a picture of the landscape, but rather his own portrait. The artist however does not know how to use this new material of artistic expression: "his prayer". So, it is a creation and a non-creation at the same time.

Imagine a painter crucified by his subject!
Too exhausted even to lift his brush,
He provoked some artists leaning from the buildings
to malicious mirth: "We haven't a prayer
Now, of putting ourselves on canvas,
Or getting the sea to sit for a portrait!"

The new art, or "The New Realism", is the "self-portrait" of the artist, which transmits the understanding of the new dimension of reality. As the subject "fades out" gradually, the artistic creation is purified of all conventional perceptions: "the soul" and "the canvas" remain identical returning to complete "whiteness".

Others declared it a self-portrait.
 Finally all indications of a subject
 Began to fade, leaving the canvas
 Perfectly white. He put down the brush.
 At once a howl, that was also a prayer,
 Arose from the overcrowded buildings.

The analogy between "the soul" and "the canvas" both being "white" is derived from the idea that "reality is colorless" and "white" is a medium on which colors can be applied. Ashbery thus says,

There are only value judgments of truth exposed one
 after another like colored slides on the white wall
 that is the naked soul. (Ashbery 1985:136).

Therefore, the non-representation is the true nature of reality, and it is a new kind of art to suit the new concept of reality.

They tossed him, the portrait, from the tallest of
 the buildings;
 And the sea devoured the canvas and the brush
 As though his subject had decided to remain a
 prayer.

To create art, and therefore to articulate, the painter has

to use colors, as Ashbery does. Ashbery is by all means a painterly poet.

Ashbery's New Realism is a complex derivation from "Abstract Expressionism" and "Impressionism" as well.

th
Impressionists of the late 19 century, saw themselves as the ultimate realists whose main concern was the perception of optical sensations of light and color.... In nature, form and space were implied by infinitely varied intensities of color and light. (Lamm 1984:295).

Impressionism, as revealed in this definition, has an affinity with Ashbery's concern with creating visual textures. What "light" means for the Impressionists, is nothing for Ashbery but the "energy" he tries to capture. Like them, Ashbery tries to freeze the moment and its energy by visually presenting it. But, unlike Impressionists, he also aims at portraying his inner scope by coming closer to "Post-Impressionists" who reacted to the purely visual emphasis of Impressionism. For instance Paul Cezanne's,

...art lay somewhere between representation and abstraction an intellectualized approach to applying paint to canvas. For Cezanne the whole purpose of painting was to express the emotion that the forms and colors of the natural world evoked in the artist. (Lamm 1984:299).

Thus Ashbery (1985; 238) says,

All of our lives is a rebus
Of little wooden animals painted shy
Terrific colors, magnificent and horrible
Close together

The term "rebus" stands for

Representation of a syllable word or phrase by pictures or symbols whose name sound like the intended syllable or words. The picture of an eye followed by one of a tin can is a rebus for "I can"⁵

If syllables, words and phrases are means for the articulation of emotions, and if like Cezanne, Ashbery's intention is to express "the emotion that the forms and colors of the natural world evoked in the artist", his reader becomes bewildered whether it is a "representation" or an "abstraction" of either the outer or the inner world. However, in the example of "I can", it is both an abstraction of an emotion which shows the "ability" and a representation of "eye" and "can". Ashbery points out that entire life shuttles between such an "abstraction and a representation" so his "little wooden animals" can always be "painted shy" in "Terrific colors, magnificent and horrible/ Close together". Similarly, his readers, should not be overwhelmed by the task of seeking for only representational meanings, but should seek for abstract emotional dimensions as well in what seems plain representational.

The colors are reflections of the poet's inner "bizarria" which changes according to a multiplicity of inner and outer stimuli. If the poet has felt the necessity of using the color blue unconsciously, it is due to the fact

that an inner truth which is impossible to express by any other means, finds an outlet and becomes concrete on his paper in this particular color. This inner meaning is a derivation of a complex inner pattern which therefore needs a thorough analysis to be explicated. On the other hand, like a painter, Ashbery also conveys an aesthetical texture by his use of colors. Colors, in this respect, create a visual texture and they stand for themselves as well as for an inner meaning conveyed. There is no definite dividing line between these two usages because John Ashbery continuously shuttles between the perceptive outer world and the world of inner transformations. However, it is essential to depict the intersection point of these two worlds for only after such an explanation, it will be valid to indulge within an inner world of "bizarria" which finds meaning through colors as changing aspects of the "self".

The poet's inner bizzaria often changes by

...thousand of mermaids
 Expecting orders, but the once-weary enchanter
 Kept them at bay, and nothing was performed that
 day,
 For a few moments some thing that should never be
 forgotten
 And being stuck with the different colors everything
 Was as a result... of it. (Ashbery 1987:68).

The "Bay" and "harbor" as in "A ship/Flying unknown colors has entered the harbor" (Ashbery 1985:202), are two favorite Ashbery metaphors as his "landscapes" and "horizons", used to represent a suitable setting for poetic creation.

But one morning you get up and the vermillion-
 colored messenger is there, bigger than life at
 window
 I take my leave of you; now I fly away.
 (Ashbery 1985:40).

Inspirations given by "mermaids", "messengers",
 "muses", "runts" and "dwarfs" almost always appear colorful.
 The psychic experience finds outlets through these objects
 which are but different aspects of the poetic self who seems
 to need their help whenever his creativity declines. They
 almost always appear as immobile, helpless, inactive and
 detached.

The runt crying in the pile of colored
 Snapshots offal in the wind.
 (Ashbery 1985:70).

There is reason for such a distance between Ashbery,
 the man of the magical poetic world and Ashbery, the
 ordinary man of daily life; unless an integration between
 the inner and outer worlds is established, the outcome is
 inertia, regardless of a bombardment of colors from within
 to without. In the case of such an integration, the inner
 potential of creativity is activated as an energy relieved
 and dispersed towards the periphery of the universal sphere
 of reality akin to the expansive self⁽⁶⁾. Thus the poet claims
 that,

Like a rainstorm, ...the braided colors
 Wash over me and are no help. (Ashbery 1985:165).

The tension between the poet's inner world and the outer world is everpresent. If this tension is broken, the outcome is non-creativity "Unusual Precations" focuses on this theme.

We, we children, why our lives are circumscribed
circumferential
Close, too close to the center, we are haunted by
perimeters
And our lives seem to go in and out, in and out all
the time. (Ashbery 1982:35).

The dynamism of the shuttling activity "in and out all the time" is the endless effort from the view point of the poet to find reconciliation between the two worlds or to attain a truer picture of reality which never satisfies.

He sees the pictures on the walls.
A sample of the truth only.
But one never has enough.
The truth doesn't satisfy.
(Ashbery 1975c:12).

Ashbery (1987:18) even combines them into a single phenomenon, when he says "You'll know the underground stream that has never stood still is the surface".

The poet, knowing that reality is unattainable, sustains his tiresome and absurd task of seeking it at the intersection point of the inner and outer worlds. At this intersection point, there is always "a mountain", "a lighthouse" or "the light/from the lighthouse that protects as it pushes us away" (Ashbery 1985:43) or "a tower" which

emerges as a symbolical monument erected in the memory of unattainability which now is only a memory. But still, "on the earth a many-colored tower of longing rises" (Ashbery 1985:222). To explicate "a many-colored tower" or mountain", the poet's famous "These Lacustrine Cities" (Ashbery 1977:9) may well be considered. The poem starts;

These lacustrine cities grew out of loathing
 Into something forgetful although angry with history
 They are the product of an idea: that man is
 horrible for instance,
 Though this is only one example.
 They emerged until a tower
 Controlled the sky, and with artifice dipped back
 Into the past for swans and tapering branches
 Burning, until all that hate was transformed into
 useless love.

Ashbery's "fable land" landscape may be interpreted as a form of "unreal city"⁽⁷⁾ erected in a lake in the prehistoric period. A haunted city, domineering and disturbing the present which is just an awareness but not the full reality since reality rapidly transforms itself into the past by becoming unreal for the present moment. "Lacustrine city" has been a substitute for the discontent with the present where man and his doings are perceived to be horrible. Recalling nostalgia which is a kind of escapism, and transforming the present into the ghost-like past of history, the repressed past intersects with the present moment.

Until the control mechanism⁽⁸⁾ (the tower) balances

them both, the disgust of the present is alternated with the nostalgia of the past. "The tower" also counter balances hatred with love, the impact of the latter having been decreased into uselessness.

Then you are left with an idea of yourself
And the feeling of ascending emptiness of the
the afternoon
Which must be charged to the embarrassment of others
Who fly by you like beacons.

After having disposed of discomfoting unbalance, the poet is left alone with a feeling of emptiness and with an awareness of succession of afternoons projecting towards a future; dragging him with them into an infinity of confusions.

The night is a sentinel,
Much of your time has been occupied by creative games
Until now, but we have all-inclusive plans for you.
We had thought, for instance, of sending you to the
middle of the desert.
To a violent sea, or of having the closeness of the
others be air
To you, pressing you back into a startled dream
As sea-breezes greet a child's face,
But the past is already here, and you are nursing
some private project.

The task of the poet here is to create, with the night keeping watch. The game of creativity has no boundries. Once it is set free, "the desert" (inertia) uproars like "a violent sea" (creativity). The long efforts to accord with people leaves its place to a rebirth as the face is washed away from the impurities of horrible life leaving the poet an innocent child.

The past is a catalyst, which activates creativity
(private project) at present.

The worst is not over, yet I know
You will be happy here. Because of the logic
Of your situation, which is something no climate can
outsmart
Tender and insouciant by turns, you see
You have built a mountain of something
Thoughtfully pouring all your energy into this
single monument,
Whose wind is desire starching a petal,
Whose disappointment broke into a rainbow of tears.

The worst is, the poet has to create the "lacustrine city" (the fable) which has enabled him creativity over and over again. It is a difficult and demanding task, because, though ghost-like and unreal happiness is found in this land. But the reality is, the poet has created a mountain of concrete work, erected (like the extreme poetic lacustrine city out of the past) in the present out of energy. The mountain, this monument of exhausting effort presents rewards of beauty, and dissapointment (tears) out of dissatisfaction which is felt like a vain chase after the rainbow. "A rainbow of tears" is the expression of the anguish that the poet attains after hard work and too much suffering. However, with the rainbow symbol Ashbery automatically creates a resonance between the rainbow, and its hues. "The monument of something" finds expression through the "rainbow" and its colors. Here, colors suggest what is elusive, undefinable, abstract or that which has no equivalent in the world of everyday reality whose objects

have metamorphosed into the bizzarria. When the poet enters, and therefore, captures an instant within the intersection point of the inner and outer worlds; his control mechanism (the tower or the lighthouse) illuminates the darkness by piercing it via means of a solid light in the presence of which a color equal to the impact or definition of the unexplainable moment emerges as white, black, red, blue, green, gray and silver.

I.2. WHERE : THE LANDSCAPE

The poet is a story teller: Especially for Ashbery, his stories take place in a nowhere land which is the mind or imagination, a setting or a source for creative energy. This nowhere land is a "wonderland" where one falls "...stepping with Alice... into a reality bizzarre yet familiar." (Carroll 1974:16). Or as Marjorie Perloff (1981:70) states in "Fragments of a Buried life : John Ashbery's Dream Song's", the setting is,

Like Dorothy in The Wizard of Oz, stepping over rainbow into the technicolor country of munchkins, (where) the protagonist finds himself in a strange new world in which events unfold without any logic.

Perloff's diagnosis of "the rainbow" and "the technicolor" are to the point: The setting forms itself automatically; always richly colored and it is beyond understanding. However, the setting as a stage for creation

is accepted likewise as one accept a fable. Once it has been set, it transforms into a new setting and is never static. Perloff (1987:70) calls this the moment of "metamorphosis" or "genesis" which is the "source of the poet's life-force" when his images that seem to arrive out of nowhere, create images of stark confrontation and illumination". This is exactly the moment when Ashbery's tower emerges casting light onto an unknown nowhere land, to enliven the escaping color which has newly started to undergo such a metamorphosis. Colors appear, polarize, metamorphose and disappear as long as the light permits. They do appear in a non-setting, rather in the human soul, as Ashbery (1985:62) says,

Yes, they are alive and can have those colors,
But I, in my soul, am alive too

The colorful setting then shifts from the mind to the soul of the artist. It is still a nowhere land since it is everywhere and all time.

I.3. WHEN : TIME

Time is also as obscure as setting for Ashbery. Time is continuously passing without interruption. Maybe, the only point he can be sure about time is that it is a flux. The strong bond between "time" and "fable" is also obvious in the following quotation:

Fables that time invents
To explain its passing (Moramarco 1975:22).

Time gives untrue explications or reasons for its transitoriness and its excuses are lies. Ashbery accepts the fables of time by saying "the magic world really does exist... (and) the familiar interior which has always been there is impossible..." (1972:30) to escape. The magical world within finds expression through color, as if it is a fable, one has never heard of, told by a distant persona "whisper(ing) out of time" (Ashbery 1985:204). There is almost no indication of a setting and of time during which the action unfolds itself: thus, time and setting are both left to the imagination of the reader. Only the action is given. The relationship between time and color is similar to that of time and fable: indefinite as it is, colors too, are inventing fables for their absence or telling lies for excuses.

It's true the refreshing absence of color
Produces an effect like that of time.
(Ashbery 1978:10).

Ashbery seems as if he is uncomfortable with the presence of colors only temporarily. But he always goes back to them as to his favorite, as the poet himself puts it:

It came again, the color, always a color.
(Ashbery 1985:316).

The impatience is the revolt of the poet in the face of the obscurity of his setting, of his time and of his colors. It is the perpetual task to define the undefinable. His escapism is a defence mechanism against this difficult task. Therefore the absence of color is refreshing as the absence of time. Yet, colors keep on coming, continuously disturbing the poet, forcing him to find new modes of self expression, to compose his verse as it is reflected from his "familiar interior". If it were not for colors, how would "Alice in Wonderland" be? Would it be at all? Whether he likes it or not, the poet is obliged to consider and give a chance to the voice from within. Since, life is a process of soul making and self actualization, "the soul establishes itself" (Ashbery 1985:188) and the poet's task is to let it free to reflect its articulation on his lines where he solidifies its different and changing aspects. The poet is always confronted with the necessity of expressing himself and colors are his means. Besides, Ashbery says:

Nobody asked you justify whatever
That colors are that simple...(Ashbery 1987:50).

The poet does not feel the obligation of proving anything by means of colors. It is the reader who feels this obligation, for he needs a pattern to be able to understand Ashbery, or any other pattern for that matter.

The colors stand for themselves, and they are at the same time, extended metaphors expressing the changing inner

modes of the self. They reflect a subjective yet a universal inner reality since in Ashbery's point of view, the inner reality is to be taken as equal to objective reality. Yet, this picture of the universal reality which is a combination of subjective and objective truth is not at all clear or devoid of complexities. As Ashbery points out in, "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror" that "Realism in this portrait /No longer produces an objective truth, but a bizarria", (1985:193) therefore the "colors are that simple": "a bizarria". The bizarria is of what he makes of the truth: "a bizarria"; a kind of "distortion [which] does not create/ A feeling of disharmony" because

... The forms retain
A strong measure of "ideal beauty"
(Ashbery 1985:193).

If "ideal beauty" is "universal reality" which is identical with the "self" (in Olson's terms), then any "form" expressed as " a bizarria" is harmonious with the "ideal beauty", "universal reality" or the "self" as reflected in colorful snapshots captured at random at an instant. Tracing the colors in Ashbery poems will eventually lead one to the poet's definition of the "self" in the "universe".

II . C O L O R S

II.1. WHITE : UNIVERSAL SPHERE "Light and shade, is like
coming out of coma that
is white"

Receptive to the tones of light and shade in Nature, Ashbery changes them into metaphors of white and black; two being opposite, yet continuously equivocating into each other as day yields into night and night transfers into day. The continuous shift learned from the Impressionists is to capture optical sensations of light and color. Like them, the world is as if not a matter in space but it -like its objects- is perceived as agents for the absorption and reflection of light. There are no sharp edges and no lines in nature where form and space are implied by infinitely varied intensities of color and light. Impressionism as if developed through innovations, in time acquired the new aesthetics which aimed;

to see and capture the wondrous glories
of nature and reveal in the evanescent
effects of sunlight.
(Lamm 1984:297).

Speed is very important for the Impressionists. Making natural light explode on canvas has necessitated the quick brush strokes that captured a momentary impression of reflected light; a reflection that changed from minute to

minute.

Post-impressionism on the other hand is a reaction to the highly visual emphasis of Impressionism. Its art lies between representation and abstraction, an intellectualized approach to applying paint on canvas.

Ashbery's use of white is a synthesis of these two trends. He, like the Impressionists is amazed to freeze the evanescent light and combine it with Jackson Pollock's "Action Painting" which is very akin to the Impressionists' efforts of the energy in the form of light and of competing with the speed of light; and in the Post-Impressionistic mode he adds to it yet another dimension by expressing the emotion which the natural world evoked in him. Yet, unlike many Impressionists and Post-Impressionists, he does not avoid black, on the contrary, he sees it as a negative energy, alternating with white, the light. He writes in "Vermont Notebook",

Some days hell seems very near. As this on-again off-again type day, Fickle sunshine one moment and deep ugly black clouds the next... and merely standing still you felt trapped in a sliding scale of a whole universe of Judgments positive and negative. Doubtfull possibilities... until a boy detached himself from the uninteresting landscape and came over and tapped on the window RESTORING the sense of life's wholeness. (Ashbery 1975 a:91).

The tension between the positive and negative forces, white and black, and procreation and inertia, counterbalance

each other. Ashbery accepts both as having equal impacts and they restore "the sense of life's wholeness"; "wholeness" suggesting a macrocosmic panorama of the entire universe.

Here, Olson's concept of the universe, identical to "the self" or "the soul" should be recalled. While the physical body is trapped within the "uninteresting landscape", "a body" quite instinctively "detaches himself" from the physical, natural world, and grasps the universe, as the soul becomes one with it and truth on a macrocosmic level.

The key word, then, is once again the human soul as mirroring the universe; and as Ashbery (1970 b:136) says,

White wall, that is the human soul...
That definitely transforms the ordinary
clay of the soul into an object of beauty

The analogy is between "the white wall" as a screen on which colors find expression and the soul. The soul is white, it is identical with the universe and reality, therefore "white" is the color of ultimate truth. To recall a previous analogy between truth and Newton's disk, white is not a color, but light, which is composed from the hues of the rainbow, each pertaining to a different undertone of reality. However, Ashbery's task is not to transmit the knowledge of what is real or unreal; it is to blend each of those undertones within the limits of aesthetics and to paint the picture of himself or of the universe on the

perfectly white screen of the soul or on "... the canvas [which is] perfectly white" (Ashbery 1975 c:55) or on "... the white pages " (Ashbery 1962:28). The page for the poet, and the canvas of the painter become distended as much to enframe the entire universe. So, white is a suitable medium for self expression of the poet by means of colors. Ashbery (1977:237) states that,

Light and Shade, is like coming out of
A Coma that is white.

On the white of the soul, the poet starts his creative process. But each time he intends to start, he is perplexed, because white is both the essence and the ultimate point the artist can reach. Yet, the poet has to recreate what has been everpresent as reality. Similarly, the doubt is whether to do nothing -which is inaction and psychological death for the artist- or to recreate aspects of reality. This hesitation is a "white coma", and the artistic creation is absurd in the sense that the artist can accomplish nothing and reach nowhere. Every start is a new painful attempt and the poet is like Sisyphus who has to undergo the same agonizing procedures. Ashbery (1962:38) says,

Don't ask me to go there again
The white is too painful
Better forget it
The sleeping river spoke to the awake land.

"The sleeping river" is the poet within a spiritual

inertia and morbidity who experiences and who needs an instigator to activate his morbid emotions. "The awake Land" however, is the emotional potential which is supposed to be the instigator.

Emotion is the medium of poetic articulation which is unstained and blank. In "A White Paper", the inarticulate poet "crashes the papers" (1962:32), and the emotions become the judge, evaluating the poet's task. If the poem is inarticulate and therefore insufficient itself, it becomes the embodiment of an emotionless vacuum in which self expression is impossible. If the poem as a ground for poetic expression can't be sufficient enough, the poem as a creation annihilates itself, leaving the place for the creation of another medium for emotional expression. The poem is continuous like life, or the universe; it is everywhere and it is nowhere; it is too broad yet, it is very specific: The poem is continuously written, conveying many emotional truths, however it continuously diminishes and becomes extinct once it has been written. The reason for such diminution is the fact that emotions can't be fully expressed, though it is the main task of the poet. The artist inevitably becomes the embodiment of subjects because expression has to be framed by a subject and it is this very point that Ashbery tries to avoid. Because, according to Ashbery, emotions and the human soul can't be expressed as subjects. They are there explicating themselves. They are

absolutes like "white" itself. What is more, the artist for Ashbery becomes an artist when he gets rid of subjects. Only then, he can compose poetry identical with the soul, the universe and the absolute reality, conveying emotional echoes. In "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror" (1975 c:55) he says,

Others declared it a self portrait
 Finally all indications of a subject began to fade,
 leaving the canvas
 Perfectly white.

Once a meaning is forcefully attributed to the painting together with the efforts of framing it within a subject, its colors begin to fade out and are washed away leaving it "perfectly white", because art, echoing universal truths, does not convey a specific meaning but should be accepted on a macrocosmic perspective as an absolute picture. This is a "self portrait" but which endures against physical perception, time and space. It is a "self-portrait" which is expressed by colors, which all contribute to its formation as their contribution helps the formation of white. In order to avoid the physical perception, Ashbery writes in "White Roses" (1985:36),

The worst side of it all
 The white sunlight on the polished floor
 ...
 But you will not listen ...
 ...
 But a blind man's cane poking however clumsily
 into the innermost corners of the house
 ...
 The new white flowers that are beginning to

shoot up about now

"White sunlight on the polished floor" hurts the eyes, but to see it as "a blind man" does, intuitively, and to understand its correlation with the universe will eventually cherish the moment with an energy in the soul bringing with itself an awareness of the macrocosmic reality and regenerating or recreating the soul. Ashbery points out this as a fact in "Worsening Situation" where he comments on the duty of his hand, the artist's hand, which "stands for life" but now alienated; and continues,

...True, there are occasions
For white uniforms and a special language
Kept secret from the others
...
Every day, all day. I've tried recreation
... lately
I've been looking at old-fashioned plaids fingering
Starched white collars, wondering whether
there's a way
To get them really white again
(Ashbery 1985:165).

"A special language" is a universal language conveying universal truth. The poet in "white uniform" is an agent transmitting such knowledge which can't be understood unless filtered through "the soul [which] establishes itself" (Ashbery 1985:188). The poet's only task is to attain continuously a universal picture of his soul which is perfectly white.

White is not a color, it is the light which enables the appearance of colors. So Ashbery (1985:126) takes white as:

stand(ing) for the real thing, which has to be colorless and featureless, if it is to be the true reflection of the primeval energy...

Consequently all possible denotations of white lead to its "standing for" reality, essential energy, the universe, the soul, the light, the day, regeneration, illumination, and a vacuum which embodies all and therefore conveys the most loyal picture of the original. The broadscope of "white" has to be reevaluated at this point so that no specific meaning is attributed to it. On the contrary, it is deliberately avoided. As David Shapiro puts it;

If meaning is, finally, "that to which the interpreter of a symbol either refers or believes himself to be referring, or believes the user to be referring" ... then Ashbery's "puzzle pictures" lead maddeningly into a labyrinth of possible denotations and possible lack of denotations. (Shapiro 1983:51).

Consequently, "white" can be summarized as "the soul" - the widest range of possibilities- embodying absolute reality.

II.2. BLACK:THE UNCONSCIOUS

"White light/...pierce the
darkness, skyward."

If white has "possible denotations", then "black", by being a force having a negative impact on white, has "possible lack of [such] denotations", as stated below.

There was no sign of light anywhere below
-all was a bright black void. (Ashbery 1962:71).

"Black void" suggests that black, like white, also denotes a macrocosmic vacuum which has the echoes of white light's "brightness". However, there is no "light anywhere below". So, black is the absence of light, but it also has the potential to become white. Such transformation is possible, as naturally as the day yields into night and vice versa, because white and black are nothing but the two aspects of the same entity : the soul. In Olson's terms, "below" is the "home, implicit physical being" or the "unconscious" which is "equal to the universe, in the character of the real, flowing in - inside"⁽⁹⁾. Blackness dominates the unconscious when the poet is entrapped by the physical reality which is too superficial. Ashbery (1985:118) says,

Yet each know he saw only aspects
...
..and in the blackness blacker still,
..caught in that trap.

The poet is usually tempted by the charms of the outer

world where he sees "only aspects" of reality but not the absolute reality itself so the self becomes identical with the explicit physical being, and the soul is incapable of regenerating itself. "This was the outside reality" remarks Ashbery (1985:124) and continues by emphasizing the bond between the two aspects of the soul as,

It seemed as though innumerable transparent tissues hovered around these two entities and joined them in some way.

The reason for such a change from light to dark, and white to black is also due to the moments of uncreativity stemming from the inability of accepting the universe as identical with the soul.

...as always in such cases, darkness has fallen and it would be impossible to find one's way back without getting lost. Is this a reason to stay where we are, on the false assumption that we are less lost right here, and thus to complete the cycle of inertia that we began wrongly supposing that it would lead to knowledge? (Ashbery 1985:134).

The outside reality does not lead one to absolute knowledge; moreover, it casts its "darkness" on the soul leaving the poet in a state of "inertia". The inertial state, however, does not always have negative effects on the poet. Quite the contrary, it leads the poet as much to creativity as the light itself. The following example illustrates its gift to the poet while emphasizing these two forces as equals as stated by Ashbery (1985:164);

The books, the papers...
 Kept in a white cardboard box somewhere, and all the
 lower
 Versions of cities flattened under the equalizing
 night.
 The summer demands and takes away too much,
 But night, the reversed, the reticent, gives more
 than it takes.

All the previously created material as "the books, the papers" are "kept in a white cardboard box somewhere". They are the products of the white soul resonating with universal truths. However, the "night" -the sheer blackness- has an "equalizing" power. If creativity, "demands and takes away too much" from the poet, inertia "gives more than it takes". So, black is a catalyst or an instigator which speeds up the creative process. After all, man is an element of the outer world and nobody can sustain a living in the inner world by continuously disregarding the needs and demands of the outer. And creativity is not continuous but rather continual. When Ashbery's years which he spent in France are recalled -the years of uncreativity and inertia- it will be clear why his career after those years has been speeded up in a continuous success. Uncreativity accumulates energy which is released when the appropriate time comes.

...the black man
 Replaced your headlights with fuel
 You seemed to grow from no place. And now, calmed
 down...
 You grow and grow (Ashbery 1985:253).

The time is after a period of uncreativity. "The black man" (presumably the black soul) comes and "replace your

headlights with fuel". The energy source in this case is blackness, which re-enlivens the positive energy cast as "light". The poet grows while he creates and becomes identical with both universes.

The constructive quality of black is re-emphasized in "Forties Flick" in a precise way.

Focus the tragic melancholy of the bright stare
 Into nowhere, a hole like the black holes in space
 (Ashbery 1985:266)

The poet, who is in a "melancholic" state is trying to find out an outlet, a transfiguration towards creativity which would set the poetic genius free. He is alone in the extreme blackness of the universe which extends to "nowhere" because of being "everywhere". Now, what the poet needs is an "energy discharge" which would help him transcend from the universe of the self. This transaction is actualized though "a hole like black holes in the sky". Thus the discussion leads to the coexistence of two universes -white and black- as Ashbery (1985:266) said, "The indoors with the outside becoming part of you." The identity of these two universes is highly Platonic⁽¹⁰⁾ in their essence. The only difference is that Ashbery's are monistic whereas Plato's dualistic. As Ashbery remarks in "Marchenbilder",

...This was one of those night rainbows
 In negative color. As we advance, it retreats: we
 see

We are now far into a cave, must be. (Ashbery 1985:184).

So, this world produces images as shadows of those in the ideal universe of light which explains the "night rainbows in negative color". The same idea is also hinted as "A mass of black doves". (Ashbery 1962:65). When the poet is in the right emotional mood and when he is integrated with himself, he normally perceives "white doves". But, since he is dominated by the black universe only, then the scene observed is negative in impact. The "white doves" become "A mass of black doves". The poetic morbidity due to not having found a suitable medium for the articulation of poetic emotions, shifts the canvas of the painter or the paper (soul) of the poet into blackness. The domination of pure black is like death. Unless the poet could counterbalance it with white, death-in-life prevails. He cannot write on a white piece of paper, because it (his soul) has been completely blackened in the quotation below.

Death that will not try to scream
Black beaches
That in why I sent you a black
Postcard (Ashbery 1962:38).

The integrity of the soul is essential for Ashbery and a life-time energy is spent on it for self-actualization. To understand the relationship of the self to the universe, and to embrace reality in its totality which can be filtered down to a single concept of reality is the ultimate task of

the poet. But this can be done by embracing a multiplicity of approaches to reality so that only glimpses of it could be captured at random. Besides, a perfect equilibrium should be created between white and black. Ashbery (1985:199) says,

Secrets of wash and finish that took a lifetime
To learn and are reduced to the status of
Black-and-white illustrations in a book where
colorplates
Are rare.

When reality is considered in its broadest sense, it appears that it is composed of two universes. So, the scope of reality is nothing but a black and white snapshot in the album where color photos "are rare".

The song is engulfed in an instant in blackness
Which must in turn flood the whole continent
With blackness.

says Ashbery (1985:247). Blackness engulfs and overdominates everything and it yields into the overpowering quality of what has been created as art. As art takes over, reality becomes a notion of insignificant degree together with any details like colors, subjects or themes. Art speaks for itself. When reality is considered as absolute, the rest, minor details, do not contribute much to it, but they have their places in the album too.

Ashbery's art does not aim at defining reality. It is an expression of the soul which is identical with the universe, the reality. It is composed of two spheres : One

being white "the positive energy", and the other being black "the negative energy". Such two energy levels are in balance in the universe ⁽¹¹⁾ and in the soul, thus the self is also in equilibrium. Such equilibrium is explicated as a delicate balance between the subconscious and the universe; between the inner and the outer worlds, which are strongly tied to each other. It is the task of the artist to re-explore this harmony by integrating himself with the universe. This is the process of soul-making : it is the "soul establihing itself".

Art as a picture, is usually painted on a white canvas. However, there are times when it is painted on a black canvas. In the former, it presents an ultimate "bizarria", a distorted picture of reality, eventhough the audience has to undergo such complex poetic procedures of integrating himself with the universe and reality as the poet himself has already undergone. Such presentation of reality is the "New realism" discussed in the introduction : specifically fragmentary, discontinuous and random, but ultimately the most loyal picture of the aspects of reality itself. In the latter, again loyal images to reality are perceieved but due to the absence of light, they are reflected as the images in a negative film like that of a surrealist painting which is the embodiment of the subconscious. However, since these two spherical universes cannot be separated from each other, there is always a possibility of a light source as Ashbery

(1962:84) comments,

Half an hour later
Ronald recognized him.
Then suddenly saw a beam of intense, white light
A miniature searchlight of great brilliance,
Pierce the darkness, skyward.

Thus the poet's subconscious is illuminated by the
white light and the integration of the soul is established
which leads to self actualization.



II.3. RED : THE CORE

"A magma of interios"

After the analysis of the "soul" as the "universe" composed of "white" and "black" spheres, it is essential now to find out the center of the spheres.

Ashbery has pointed out, in an earlier quotation from "Unusual Precautions" (1985 :295) that,

... Why our lives are circumscribed,
circumferential;
Close, too close to the center, we are haunted by -
perimeters.
And our lives seem to go in and out, in and out all
the time.

In existence, there is a place for the self which is identical with the universe. The above quotation focuses on the amplification of the self from the center to the perimeter, i.e, the self is continuously attracted by the perimeter, which, as Ashbery calls, is the "visible core", the outer shell of the soul and the universe. It is the self having become concrete, interacting with the outer world. It is the self portrait expressed as an art object of beauty. It is what the ordinary reader perceives the artist's aesthetics to be. However, as Ashbery (1985:202) suggests

... Each person
Has one big theory to explain the universe
But it does not tell the whole story
And in the end it is what is outside him
That matters.

The post modern art cannot be understood because the "visible core" of the art object is a complex derivation of the "invisible core", which is the artistic self that lies in the center of "white" and "black" spheres.

In his "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror" Ashbery concentrates on Francisco Parmagiannino, a famous Renaissance painter, who painted his self portrait on a half sphere. Since his material was not an ordinary, plane canvas, his portrait appeared in a distorted formation and presented a "bizarria" as "the right hand / Bigger than the head" (Ashbery 1985:188). According to the norms of traditional perspective, some might consider the painting errorsome. However, with the new aesthetics of "New Realism" it is not. The painter's self portrait is quite reflexive in portraying the self, the soul and the universe that the artist inhabits. The portrait was originally copied from a "convex mirror" (as a source of light and energy expressed in color white) and it does not present the perceiver, the reflection of the painter's bodily features but rather an inner truth, a surreality emitted from the "invisible artistic core" in the center of the universe and of the art object. Therefore the artist cannot be understood by an ordinary beholder. It is not the surface but the "core" which has to be understood first.

Parmagiannino's spheric universe seems as if

Self-propelled, blind, has no notion

Of itself. It is inertia that once
Acknowledged saps all activity

...
This is the negative side
(Ashbery 1985:196).

For Ashbery, the beholder, the spheric art object that he perceives looks "inertial" and the vitality (the "saps") has been as if sucked off. At this moment Ashbery understands that he has been confronted with the reflection of the black sphere in the form of bizarria as a visible core. He is also well aware of the fact that what he perceives as a bizarria is a surrealistic presentation of the soul of the artist. Now, it is the duty of the beholder to reactivate and reanimate the art object. As Ashbery (1985:196) says, the "positive side is / making you notice life and the stresses". So, the "positive side" is the complementary white sphere which can be activated by the "energy discharge" of the beholder. Ashbery, by relieving the energy within, also relieves the energy in the global universe that Parmagiannino had drawn. By this way he gradually elucidates the self portrait on the periphery of the visible core and comes to grips with another self in the core of the sphere. This second self appears while the black sphere slowly yields into light, refracted and focused at the center by means of the energy discharge of the beholder. The universal sphere is enlightened thus becoming a white sphere.

.... On the surface of it
There seems no special reason why that light
Should be focused by love

(Ashbery 1985:198).

Similarly, the expanded quality of the self is "boil(ed) down to one / Uniform substance, a magma of interiors" (Ashbery 1985:193) as a "white precipitate" (Ashbery 1985:197). So, the real self for Ashbery is in the white sphere and it is positive in impact. It is the "invisible core" or "invisible light" (Ashbery 1970b :38) which is the essence of the soul and the universe.

Ashbery's spheres, like other heavenly bodies then, have crusts and cores. What is more, they possess energy, gain momentum, are object to time (or rather timelessness), have centrifugal force and gravitational force. Ashbery writes in "The System" (1985:149) that

One must move very fast in order to stay in the same place, as the Red Queen said, the reason being that once you have decided there is no alternative to remaining motionless, you must still learn to cope with the onrushing tide of time.

Like a heavenly body, Ashbery spheres of universe conveying absolute truth have momentum due to their fast movement. "Fast" here, signifies the fast-changing quality of reality. Therefore in order to cope with its character, the self, who is in the center, must "move very fast in order to stay in the" center. That speed enables the self to pertain to the sphere and preserve its place relatively motionless as a gravitational force as a "magma of interiors". The self, once settled at the invisible core, also "cope(s) with the

unrushing tide of time" and again is not the object of time by existing eternally in the relative time of the sphere. "The Red Queen", the female subject is symbolical of a regenerative force -red in color- and almost akin to the often used and exhausted "wise old men" in literature. But, Ashbery refreshes it by attributing a female quality.

The magnetic force of the self in the center or the gravitational force which holds the universe as a uniform entity is the main concern of this chapter. It is the center of the self, the universe and the soul. But there are times, especially the times of inertia, when the "invisible core" is diffused and polarized towards the periphery and reflected as the "visible core". This is due to the centrifugal force which emerges out of the rapid movement of the sphere whereas the core, due to disintegration, cannot preserve its original position. The opposite of this movement starts when the poet attains integrity and self-actualization:

There was a slow rejoining of his
Original position, the maelstrom

....

The tulips grew redder. (Ashbery 1962:53).

The reverse of the centrifugal force, the gravitational force, sucks the polarized self into the center, to its "original position" as a "maelstrom", and "the tulips grew redder"; which signifies that, once the poet has attained

integrity of the soul, and therefore has reincarnated truth in himself, "the faded colors" (Ashbery 1977:218) of the ordinary life begin to be enlivened.

The invisible core which is the total sum of polarized selves in the universe is some entity beyond the self, the soul and the universe. It is far more superior to them, because it is composed of them. In fact, it is the "artistic core" that boils within as a magma of interiors. It is man's destiny to live on the perimeter -or "a boiling crater" in the "form of everything that is beautiful for us" (Ashbery 1970b :38)- within the black sphere, whereas, it is the artist's privilege or power to descend into the "magma of interiors".

The artistic core, as discussed above has a sucking and absorbing quality and is always denoted with red color.

Permeation, ventilation, occlusion.
Red sandstone cliffs reaching higher than the sky
(Ashbery 1975a:37).

"Permeation" (penetrating into the center), "ventilation" (refreshing, regenerating), and "occlusion" (holding by absorbtion) are the characteristics of "Red sandstone cliffs"-symbolising the artist's grandiosity.

Flowers sucked in - stone rhinunculus
amaryllis - red
(Ashbery 1962:29).

and,

Customers absorbed, mist getting redder
(Ashbery 1962:87).

and,

The box, red, funny going underground

....
Automatically taking the things in, that had not been
spoiled, sordid (Ashbery 1962:43).

In the last quotation another characteristic of the "artistic core" is present. It preserves as it sucks in and absorbs. The core is then as if a "box" in which every emotion and perception is enclosed. They mingle with the artistic essence and help it to develop both itself and aesthetics. The artistic core is then a wandering soul which shuttles between the central box and the perimeter and collects all kinds of data; it takes the accumulated data together to develop into experience and self integration. It reshapes the data through the process of aesthetic filtration and creates. The following quotation deals with the theme.

It was me here. Though. And whether this
Be rebus or me now, the way the grass is planted-
Red stretching far out to the horizon-
Surely prevails now. I shall return in the dark and
be seen,

Be led to my own room by well-intentioned hands,
Placed in a box with a lid whose underside is dark
So as to grow, and shall grow
Taller than plumes out on the ocean,

Grazing historically. And shall see
The end of much learning, and other things
Out of control and it ends too soon, before hanging up.

So, laying his cheek against the dresser's wooden one,
 He died making up stories, the ones
 Not every child wanted to listen to.
 And for a while it seemed that the road back
 Was a track bombarded by stubble like a snow
 (Ashbery 1985:286).

The poetic core takes a journey towards the periphery by "Red stretching far out to the horizon". The self is disintegrated as the "me" and the "rebus" - a representation of the self. The self in the quest, collecting data, takes the risk of disintegrating and inertia because it has evacuated its residence, the center. However, this is the only procedure which leads to creation. The "me" or the "rebus"..."surely prevails now" says Ashbery; the victory is at hand. The self returns to the box at the core in the dark because it is still disintegrated and the dark sphere overpowers the light one. The growth begins at the "end of much learning" and even "other things / Out of control" can be seen because the self or egocentricity leaves its place to the "core" which sucks in all the polarized selves in the universe together with the data like a whirlpool. Thus creation begins. The artistic creation is not understood by everybody, yet the soul has established itself; and the universe remains blank as if a field after the harvest. The darkness leaves its place to the white snow, enlightening the universe with its whiteness.

The core's dynamicism is also presented in the following lines:

Beside the reddish sunsets of the hollow vase
As gently it starts to deepen and slowly to increase.
(Ashbery 1985:113).

"The hollow vase" is like "the empty box" in which the core resides. "The reddish sunset" shows the precipitation of the universe to fill in the "hollow vase". As the core forms itself by "start(ing) to deepen", the soul established itself "slowly" begins "to increase" and grows as twins to the universe.

Red, then, is the "artistic core" which is found at the center of the white universal sphere during the creation. It is also found polarized in the center of the black sphere during inertia. It traces the entire universe, harvests data, forms a maelstrom and becomes redder by fast action and takes its place in the center by becoming the essence of the universe. It rejects all personal pronouns and becomes an emblem for ideal truth and beauty which is shaped within the aesthetics of "New Realism".

II.4. BLUE: THE PERIPHERY

"How blue objects protrude
out of the potential".

Creation is possible for Ashbery when anything in the universe is sucked in within the artistic core and the "selves" polarized are concentrated in the center for self integration. Only after this, gravitational force is counterbalanced by a centrifugal force which is identical with "self-expression". By the latter, the concentrated, centralized and processed data is projected unevenly towards the perimeter of the universe where, say, a painting like that of Parmagianino's appears: usually misunderstood or almost always never understood at all. This is due to the fact that the beholder of this "bizarria" needs to undergo such artistic procedures which the artist himself has undergone but the beholder can not. The difficulty of an Ashbery poem is due to this fact. The poem is not an imitation of expected and known data but rather it is the consequence of a subjective universe wich is a bizarre combination of inner and outer worlds. In "No Way of Knowing", Ashbery (1975c:55) comments as,

And then? Colors and names of colors,
The knowledge of you and a certain color had?
...
It is both the surface and the accidents
Scarring that surface, yet it too only contains
As a book of Sweden only contains the pages of that
book.
... No one can get in or out.
These are parts of the same body

In this poem, Ashbery gives his readers a hint of the knowledge of "colors" which will lead the self to attain the knowledge of his philosophy. However, this knowledge cannot be attained by the knowledge of classical symbolism. On the contrary one has to undergo the same poetic excursions as the poet himself has done.

Lawrence Lieberman proposes a way, in his Unassigned Frequencies. "Unassigned Frequencies: Whispers out of time" (1977:4-5) as an indulgence in the dream-life (an unconscious approach) which decodes the ciphers by the "act of seeing objects and events in the world as if through different -through amazingly novel other- eyes: The brilliantly varied other life of surfaces has been wonderfully revified"; Lieberman also points out that ,

Poet and painter, reader and writer, encounter and another by a succession of surprises. Two satellites, they travel in separate and distinct orbits, taking snatched glimpses of the same core - or globe- of reality, like two moons circling a planet.

Lieberman's diagnoses of "orbits", "core" and "globe -of reality" are right, however, he intends to separate those of the artist's with the universe encompassing everything so that there is no distinction between the artist's and the audience's universe. The following extract demonstrates how the poet's universe becomes the universe of the audience. After having read Ashbery's "Self Portrait in a Convex

Mirror", Lieberman comments thus:

Poet and painter, reader and writer, encounter one author by a succession of surprises. Two satellites, they travel in separate and distinct orbits, taking snatched glimpses of the same core -or globe- of reality, like two moons circling a planet. They interrupt each other's go-by, intermittently; first the one then the other taking the lead, initiating the surprise. When the interaction between them has run its course, the reader will find himself plunged into trance. He is the dumbfounded witness in Ashbery's remarkable snowfall metaphor.

I, too, am that witness, that reader. The drama envisioned by this emblematic picture closely duplicates the stage of my own allurements in reading Ashbery's poem:

(1) I learned to read and re-read slowly enough for the vision to relaxedly sink into my waiting sleep-centers. The dream guides me into avoiding a premature frontal engagement with the poem's visionary architecture. I pause and pause, holding my full commitment to the poem in obedience for months, waiting for the poem to come back to me from inside my own shadow-life.

(2) Before I recognize the presence of snowfall covering the whole landscape before me -which occurred in my absence-the last few "specks and sparkles" of snow are falling. The end traces the register upon my full waking consciousness and shock me into a revelation of my own absent witnessing, rendered possible by a necessary obliqueness in my readership.

(3) Now I can hardly believe how massive the poem's impact has been, my conscious response lagging far behind the ravishment of my dream-life. The poem has worked upon me, devastatingly, by way of my sleeping being. The abrupt change in myself as reader-human sweeps over me.

The knowledge can be attained by penetrating into the universal core and being swept to the universal perimeter and only then evaluating the surface. Unless, this is done,

and the universe is thought of as separate for each self, there is no understanding between the artist and the audience. The surface then, is important -in this case as a concave mirror- reflecting and diverging the core towards the perimeter. Art is the image perceived on the convex perimeter of the outer surface. If the artist's and the perceiver's universes were composed of "separate and distinct orbits", there would be no understanding of the knowledge transmitted. So, unlike Lieberman's words of an "encounter one another by a succession of surprises", each of the universes being one, coexist under perpetual encounters. But the artist being more privileged and self integrated, lives within the boundries of the universe, whereas the beholder is continuously swept towards the perimeter and lives on the surface. He observes the surface of art but is not aware of the fact that what he sees is the reflection of the core. As Ashbery says, "It is both the surface and the accidents / Scarring that surface..."; wrong understanding of the knowledge scarrs the surface, ruins the core of art, Because "...it too only contains / As a book of Sweeden only contains, the pages of that book". What is perceived and appreciated as art on a superficial level is the perception and appreciation of the "cover" of a book, without evaluating the "pages". The form is nothing but an extension of the content. Then the form is alien, because there is no integration between the artistic self and the self of the audience. This is detachment, and this creates

the main problem of Ashbery's art. As Ashbery says, "No one can get in or out./ These are parts of the same body" sharing the uniqueness of the universe, and that of art.

In order to show that the surface is nothing but a reflection of the core, Ashbery (1985;242) says

... Among
 ... The most massive secretions of the human spirit...
 beyond the iron spikes of the fence,
 Mixing red with blue.

Art is shown as "among the most massive secretions of the human spirit". Human spirit is "the self" which appears "beyond the iron spikes of the fence"; the surface as the perimeter; or the surface where "red" is mixed with "blue"; The core with the surface. Blue is the surface.

In "Definition of Blue", Ashbery comments on the oblique character of the "surface" as,

..that erosion (which) produces a kind of dust or
 exaggerated pumice
 Which fills space and transforms it, becoming a
 medium
 In which it is possible to recognize oneself.
 (1970b:53).

"dust" or "pumice" (a volcanic glass) represent the "erosion" of a volcano by means of ejection of the core to form the crust. "They fill the space and transform the space" into a new appearance, like the changing aspects of art, through which "it is possible to recognize oneself".

"The space" then is identical with the "surface" or the "crust" as a "blue surrounding" as he comments in the same poem. In "Poem in Three Parts; 2. Courage" (Ashbery 1975c;23), it is given as "the blue vault of heaven" to justify that it is arched in formation and sacred in essence. In "Voyage in the Blue" the emphasis is again on the curved formation of the surface.

Distant corner is rounded, everything
 Is not to be made new again. We shall be inhabited
 In the old way, as ideal things came to us,
 Yet in the having we shall be growing, rising above
 it
 Into an admixture of deep blue enameled sky and
 bristly gold stars (Ashbery 1975c:25)

The "Distant corner", the periphery "is rounded" as the "deep blue" enameled sky surrounds the universe. Nothing is "to be made again" because there is nothing new in the universe; nothing can be created destroyed, but like energy, everything is preserved in its "ideal" form. But by the knowledge of the universe, the self develops, "grows", "rises" above itself, leaving the traces of selfhood behind and reaching a status identical with the ideal and the universe.

If nothing can be created because of being already found in the universe, then as Asbery (1975c;48) says,

Turns out you did not need all that training
 To do art - that it was even better not to have it.
 Look at
 The Impressionists - some of 'em had it, too, but
 preferred to forget it.

In vast canvases by turns riotous
 And indigent in color, from which only the notion of
 space is lacking.

Art in the "ideal forms" is found in the universe, so art is not made but it is ever present. Similarly, there is no need for artistic "training", because the self who has undertaken the task of being an artist, is born into an ideal universe where ideal forms are present. All he has to do is to understand that his "self" is identical with the universe and to set all the objects of the universe free such as "leaf, tree, stone; optional (fern, frog, skunk);/ And then stone, tree, leaf; then another optional- "(Ashbery 1975c;48). Ashbery preaches for "naturalism" in art like the Impressionists, who unknowingly tried to capture the changing effects of light and shade and who disregarded any plots, themes, and subjects. Like an Impressionistic painting, art should not convey a "notion of space" too, because space is already found in the universe and defies any portrayal. Space is the periphery, encompassing everything and it is the total sum of everything.

Consequently, Ashbery's universe is in a state of flux in which everything created and yet to be created are everpresent. Blue is the color of the periphery, on which objects find expression. They are sucked in by the core and jetted towards the periphery where they emerge substantial.

How blue objects protruded out of the
 Potential, dying and recoiling, returning as you

meet them
 Touching forever, water lifted out of the sea
 (Ashbery 1970b:45).

says Ashbery in "Rural Objects". "The potential" is the core, from which objects are juttred out "dying and recoiling" (retreating and fading out in the core) and once again "returning" to the self in the core. Like "water lifted out of the sea", objects return to thier source to regenerate the core: "The soul establishes itself".

Here are some demonstrative examples of the use of blue: Blue is a mirror which reflects the core emitting light,

The blue mirror came to light, (Ashbery 1985:38)

or,

...but this degrading of being forced out and around without thinking about it was only a shadow in the mind... so that at present we have a density of blue twilight at high noon. (Ashbery 1985:63).

"Being forced out of" the sphere and becoming alien to one's sphere is impossible and it is unreal, but "being forced out of" the core and projected at the periphery is real. Its evidence is shown by the "blue twilight".

All sweetly stood up
 the sea
 To me like blue cornflakes in a white bowl.
 (Ashbery 1985:63)

This quotation seems like an "Expressionistic" picture but

it has echoes of Ashbery's philosophy. "White bowl" is the universal sphere of reality whereas "blue cornflakes" by taking its shape, form a concentric periphery.

To be the razor - how would you like to be
The razor, blue with ire
That presses me? This is the wrong way, backward
manners. (Ashbery 1985:68).

The periphery seems to be a curved steel "razor", which "presses" the self in anger. With anger, art can not be reflected. What Ashbery hints is that, it can be accomplished only with "love". If anger presses the self into the core, it is not art: It "is the wrong way". The backward movement can be actualized only with love.

II.5. GREEN : THE CELL "GREEN brings unhappiness -
le verte porte malheur".

At an earlier quotation, green has been determined as having nostalgic echoes of the past and a growing sobriety of the present condition. However, a detailed analysis shows that nostalgia is only one of the natural attributes of this complex color.

Paul Auster (1976:14) states in his article that,

Although he [Ashbery]... begins with the world of perceived objects, perception itself is problematical for him, and he is never able to rely on the empirical certitudes that nearly all our poets seem to take for granted

Since reality, for Ashbery, is elusive, things are never what they seem to be; they can not be separated from one another, or isolated into component parts, but overlap, intersect and finally merge into an enormous and constantly changing whole. Ashbery becomes a poet of loss and nostalgia because nothing exists forever. He expresses his feelings with the following lines:

You who were directionless, and thought it would
solve everything if you found one,
What do you make of this? Just because a thing is
immortal
Is that any reason to worship it? Death, after all,
is immortal.
.....
And the river pursues its lonely course
With the sky and the trees cast up from the
landscape
For green brings unhappiness - le vert porte

malheur. (Ashbery 1985:115).

"Death" is the only constant and unchanging concept as far as he sees; but the individual in quest for permanency and stability in a chaotic universe, desperately seeks and loses what were at hand a minute ago and reaches an awareness, with a sense of nostalgia, that only death has remained the reality. Ashbery also emphasizes the eternal loneliness of man, who like a river, "pursues its lonely course" in life - in the barren "landscape". He, then, sums up his idea with a seemingly irrelevant line which goes "For green brings unhappiness - le vert porte malheur". The line suggests "unhappiness" together with "loneliness" in life. The main cause for such pessimism is due to the fact that the individual is driven with the preparedness to an acceptance of the physical reality as an easy way out for the "knowledge of the whole [which] is impossible or at least so impractical as to be rarely or never feasible "as Ashbery (1985:13) puts it. He stresses three methods for reaching such knowledge:

reason, sense, or a knowing combination of both, the last seems the least like a winner, the second problematic; only the first has some slim chance of succeeding through sheer perversity, which is possibly the only way to succeed at all (Ashbery 1985:133).

The second method, "sense", is problematic for Ashbery as Mr. Auster puts it. It is problematic because in this

case the physical world of sensory data becomes a fake alternative dominated by time. The world of sense impressions becomes an alternative for the universe and the self. Since, the real self (or soul) for Ashbery is identical with the universe and reality, the physical self, which is too limited in achieving an awareness of the universal knowledge, creates undesired expectations in the individual. Among them are unhappiness and loneliness together with the exposition to the passing time. Ashbery (1985:132) says,

... we must all face up death some day, and put our faith in some superior power which will carry us beyond into a region of light and timelessness.

Here, the "superior power" is not God of any sort because Ashbery is post-religious. He believes that man is imperfect because of his faith in the physical world and its needs⁽¹²⁾. The problem of living in the physical world and following its requirements is what Ashbery hates and he shares this feeling with Olson. Death remains the only solution to such a problem and that it would eventually lead the soul to "light" and "timelessness". Ashbery's efforts of being relieved of the physical world do not suggest suicidal messages; otherwise he would be too escapist a poet. On the contrary, Ashbery has put down the problem and he tries to grapple with the reality of the physical world which surrounds him and which he cannot reject. Quite the contrary, he accepts it but he has brought fourth another

thesis as a compensation for it. The thesis is the human "soul" which he labels as the "self", discussed in the previous chapter.

The green color emerges in Ashbery's poetry whenever there is an implication of the physical world or the world of sensory data or sense perceptions. The keyword which accords with this world is the "time" which is implicitly given. He mentions the young age in the following quotation:

He (the youth) is dead. Green and yellow
handkerchiefs cover him (Ashbery 1962:43).

The young age is subject to the destructive effects of time and it is transitory. What is lost can not be restored. It is also given as,

I remember as a child reading about some bombs
That had been placed on a tram.
They were green and in a cone-shaped pile
To look like a fir tree
.....
The green shall not pierce your tippling sanctity
(Ashbery 1985:37-38).

The "pile" of "green bombs" and their shapewise resemblance to a "fir tree" is an optical illusion that the child has just created. However, this illusion is evidence enough to show how simply and easily objects can be perceived from different perspectives as he expresses in Three Poems: "The phenomena have not changed / But a new way of being seen convinces they have" (Ashbery 1985:9) to express how fast

objective reality can shift into another objective reality. Years later, the mature poet recalls his childhood memories of "pile of bombs" and the "fir tree". He expresses his distrust in green color which will not let the mind to falter because "as he traced the green paths to and fro" (Ashbery 1956:42) all through his lifetime, Ashbery had learned not to depend on his sense perceptions. He also wandered on "the green streets though parallel run / Far from each other" (Ashbery 1962:29) showing that although there are parallelisms which can be pointed out as never-changing constant truths in the world of objects, it is too difficult to accumulate them as dependable sources for universal knowledge.

Charles Molesworth in his "This Leaving-Out Business" in The Fierce Embrace defines Ashbery's "main concern" as the theme of individuation, the reemergence of a new self out of the old; a transcendent self which can go beyond the limitations of the physical body. He also takes a quotation from Ashbery's Tree Poems which goes like

Are you sad about something today?... Certainly the whiff of nostalgia in the air is more than a hint... It [the initiative to use memory] has been replaced by a strange kind of happiness within the limitations... One gets the narrowness into one's seeing, which also seems an inducement to moving forward into what one has already caught a glimpse of and which quickly becomes vision. (Molesworth 1972:172-173).

Sadness or unhappiness is an outcome of living in a

physical world which is a function of time. "Nostalgia" is there because of the transitory quality and elusiveness of the material world which brings forth "limitations". One gets trapped within his environment and if one lives with a hope that the perceived objects around will be forever, then unhappiness will prevail because as Ashbery puts it, "what one has already caught a glimpse of... quickly becomes vision". The limitations of the body, or its entrapment within the physical world is hinted by the following quotation.

And many stiff little weeds that grew beside the
kidney-shaped lake
A wooden cage painted green (Ashbery 1962:29).

The individual, "the kidney-shaped lake" is imprisoned by "many stiff little weeds" which form "a wooden cage painted green".

Once the individual is trapped within the limitations of his daily life, there is almost no possibility of creation or reenlivening of the present as the quotation suggests:

The magnolia petals flatten and fall off one after
the other onto the half-frozen mud of the ground
Were only a few spears of sickly green have managed
to lift their heads (Ashbery 1985:151).

Contrary to classical symbolism, Ashbery does not use green to denote regeneration of any sort. What is more he uses

green to stress is a negative capability; he uses adjectives as "sickly green" or "portentuous green" as in the following lines.

But to be again settling down in a torn silk
parachute onto layers of dry half-rotted leaves loam
and anonymous rock outcropping, with there and here
a portentous green - does it make much sense to you?
(Ashbery 1975a:67).

Here the landscape is too barren with its "dry half-rotted leaves", "loam" and "anonymous rocks", to hint no possibility of regeneration. On the contrary it is the omen of a bad event. In another poem when Ashbery (1962:53) writes,

Green thorns flushed in from New England coasts and
swamps
All kinds of things
To make you think. Oh heart
You need these things...

The most important quality of the objective reality is that it makes the individual think of the past memories he has lost which the heart needed to nourish on. However, memories create melancholy and therefore they bring forth regrets and unhappiness together with spiritual discomfort and agony. Objects of the outside world are as if sharp thorns which ruin the human heart, continuously wounding and torturing it. The interesting point here is that Ashbery believes that one can not deny the existence of the physical world; one has to learn to cope with it and live within it, like a fish living in an aquarium, as the following lines

suggest:

And you know at last the condition of weightlessness and everything it implies: for the future, the present and most of all for the past into which you sleep helplessly, no longer prevented by the grid of everyday language, remaining in suspension that green aquarium light which is your new element, compelled to re-enact the same scene in the old park, with snow on the ground and the waiting look on the faces of the nearest buildings, some distance away. (Ashbery 1985:142).

The quotation is overweighed with time and the force it exerts on the physical self. To rip off the physical crust and to transcend its limitation into a timeless vacuum, remains a wish fulfilment. However, the individual, like a fish which needs water, can not sustain his life in a medium devoid of physicality. "The green aquarium light" therefore is a counterforce for transcendent light⁽¹³⁾ - the white light that embraces the universe. So, green, the physical reality, is a step to transcendence and penetration into universal reality. Ashbery expresses such transcendence as,

It is certain you will rise from the bench a new person,... and when the light of the street floods over you it will have become real at last, all traces of doubt will have been pulverized by the unflux of light slowly mounting to bury those crass seamarks of egocentricity and warped self-esteem you were able to navigate by but which you no longer need (Ashbery 1985:142).

The transcendence beyond the limits of "egocentricity" and "self-esteem" becoming "a new person" is what John Koethe prefers to call as the "metaphysical subject" in "The

Metaphysical Subject of John Ashbery's Poetry" (Lehman 1980:92). Koethe points out that the "metaphysical subject"-seems

to inhabit a durationless "now", existing in a condition of "drifting... toward a surface which can never be approached, / Never pierced through into the timeless energy of a present" (Lehman 1980:92-93).

In this quotation which Koethe has borrowed from "Wet Casements" (Ashbery 1977:28) presents a true diagnosis of a "metaphysical self" which is mentioned as the "universal self" or "the soul" in the chapter dedicated to "white color" in this dissertation. What Koethe has diagnosed as faulty comes from fact that this self "seems to inhabit a durationless 'now', existing [also] in a condition "of drifting...toward a surface" which "can" be "approached" and "can" be "pierced through into the timeless energy of a present". As it is explained in the chapter about "blue", the "universal self" can reach the periphery.

The other self - the physical self- which Koethe calls a Cartesian conception of the self, [according to which] the self is an object in the world among other objects, is a substance or thing; and part of the world of substantial things. Koethe proceeds by Hume's critique of the Cartesian conception, which is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions like pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations which succeed each other with an

irreconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement. According to Hume's conception, there is literally no such thing as the self, but perceptions⁽¹⁴⁾. It is this "self" which cannot approach the periphery, neither can it "pierce through into the timeless energy of a present". Since it is the total sum of all sensations it can be thought of non existing (Ashbery does not share this idea). The physical self exists but it is directed, shaped and driven by the perceptive world.

The physical body is captivated within the impotency of the present time, because it can not leave his "cell" and set free. It is an element of time and conditioned by it. The past leaves its place to the present and the expectation of a future is never justified because the body is entrapped in a perpetual present denoted as the "green deep south" in the following lines.

Nevertheless because of tomorrow's shade future
The lad intends to file with the green deep south.
(Ashbery 1985:72).

Today is "tomorrow's shade" which never comes. The past has already yielded into today; so the child lives in the present.

Consequently, the green world of sense perceptions forms a cell around the physical body which can undergo a kind of metamorphosis at privileged moments. Ashbery

(1977:9) says,

... How are we to inhabit
This space from which the fourth wall is invariably
missing,
As in a stage-set or dollhouse, except by staying as
we are,
In lost profile, facing the stars.

The individual seems hopeless being confined within a "space" whose "fourth wall" is missing. The missing wall is an outlet from the physical world. And it is through this missing wall the self is metamorphosed into "soul" and expand toward "the stars". When the missing wall becomes clear, the metamorphosis occurs. Then Ashbery writes,

"If the room / cell becomes the confines of the
light / energy of the wind, the open wall points to
the future beyond the self - to no mind or one mind.
(Lehman 1980:100).

The self is metamorphosed into "light / energy of the mind" and transcends the present and itself and becomes a "no mind" or reaches a universal texture by becoming "one mind". At this moment the "new self" or the "soul" can embody truth. For the "cell" Ashbery comments,

The poet, like a prisoner fascinated by the
appearance of the wall of his cell, remains
transfixed by the spectacle before his eyes.
(Perloff 1981:72).

What Ashbery mentions as "the poet" is no one but the poet who is imprisoned within the boundries of his physical self - the "cell". He is "fascinated" with what he sees -in

the universe surrounding him- through the semipermeable walls, but he cannot act. That is why "green brings unhappiness". Unhappiness is due to a knowledge that the universe embodies universal truth but the individual cannot transcend the walls of his physical self. The unhappiness becomes a happiness when the missing fourth wall is seen and the freedom of the universal experience is bestowed upon the individual.



II.6. GRAY : THE WALL "... the gray oblivion you had
been ...in all your life..."

Earlier in the thesis, in the section entitled "Ashbey's Aesthetics" the " obscurities of meaning" in his poetry was dealt with. An unfamiliar persona echoing "whispers out of time"; seemingly "incomplete lines" leaving the reader unsatisfied; "blank spaces which need to be filled in for the sake of a coherent meaning"; "everything suddenly become[ing] momentarily clear, to sink again into semi-obscurity before the final blaze"; and as Perloff suggests (Lehman 1980:72)

Ashbery's Dream Song unfolds a series of palpable, arresting images that seem to arrive out of nowhere, creating moments of stark confrontation and illumination.

Here another observation of Perloff's is to be inserted. She resembles Ashbery's poetry to a stage (from which the fourth wall is missing) whose

... curtain does not open on one side, allowing us to see if only for a moment, before the gesture of disclosure is suspended Occasionally, the curtain does flutter for a moment.... But it is not enough. (Lehman 1980:78).

The reason why so much space is reserved to Ms.Perloff's opinions in this thesis is because she is considered a major Ashbery expert.However, while she has taken the issue from the view point of the reader, the main

concern from now on will be from the view point of the poet whose "self" is under discussion here. The dream sequence is beyond the interest of this thesis.

The analysis of the color "gray" will be started by accepting Perloff's diagnosis of "a curtain" to represent Ashbery's poetry?. Instances of "momentary clarity" and a "continuous obscurity" -not a complete darkness- are also accepted as descriptions of Ashbery's reality. If Perloff's "stage" is considered to be the "cell" (refer to previous chapter-green), then her "curtain" becomes the missing "fourth wall" of the cell. The hypothesis here is that "gray" denotes the "wall" of the physical body - the "cell". Ashbery writes:

I am only a transparent diagram (Ashbery 1985:68)

If "I" is the "cell" then the walls should be transparent. If the cell wall is transparent it can also be depressing too, because of both imprisoning and letting the individual to see through. It enables both enslavement and freedom.

- no transparency
Has ever hardened us before
To long piers of silence... (Ashbery 1985:53)

Being "transparent" therefore does not mean being "permeable". It may show the universe around but it may not let the soul out as the lines read

Or, he hides bodies
 Stone night,
 Pleasant city, gray
 hides (Ashbery 1985:72)

"He" here can be defined in difficulty. But if a parallelism is drawn, both "he" and "gray" hide. They both hide "bodies" - the physical self- and they are both like a "stone" and the hidden body is in night - in darkness. Therefore "he" is the physical self -the cell- which imprisons itself by a transparent wall. So, the cell wall is "gray". Transparency of the cell wall is hinted in the following quotation too.

Dotted rhythms of colors as they fade to the color
 A gray agate, translucent and firm (Ashbery
 1970b:46).

The cell wall is hard as quartz, it is "translucent" through which the colors disperse into the universe seem to have faded. The wall enables a vision, but rather and obscure one. Since the poet confined within the cell can not see clearly, the reader helplessly seeks for clarity in the poem. A detailed description of the wall is given in "And I'd Love You to Be in It".

Playing alone, I found the wall.
 One side was gray, the other an indelible gray.
 The two sides were separated by a third,
 Or spirit wall, a coarser gray. (Ashbery 1985:268)

The eternal loneliness of the self within the limits of the cell wall is emphasized by the phrase "Playing alone". The self, through experience finds out that there is a wall

which limits, and has two sides in different shades of the color gray. They are the outer and inner surfaces on a single wall. Yet there is a second wall which is the "spirit wall". It is through the "spirit wall" the transcendence, metamorphosis or clarity (from the view point of the reader) are actualized. Thus the poem proceeds:

I wanted to put it [the wall] behind me
 By walking beside it until it ended.
 This was never done. Meanwhile
 I stayed near the wall, touching the two ends.
 (Ashbery 1985:268).

With the awareness of a physical imprisonment, transcendence can not happen, therefore the poet has to stay within the wall. This is interesting since the shape of the cell, as it suggests, should be spheric or circular because any point on the perimeter of a circle forms the two ends of a curved line. Therefore the cell is not a rectangular prism but spheric because it is the microcosm of the universal sphere - the soul. It is also a rectangular prism (from the view point of the reader) from which the "fourth wall is missing"; a stage, for the reader and the poet. The poet there becomes the actor performing on the stage.

The definition of the cell as being "dimensionless" and at the same time, its size reaching to relative dimensions suggests that the cell wall may both contract, enveloping the physical self, and expand, becoming identical with the universal sphere. In the latter, there is no transcendence.

What happens is that the wall permits a much more universal phenomena. The following quotation suggests the variability of the cell as a function of its wall.

In this dimensionless area a single step can be leagues or inches; a flame of a match can seem like an explosion on the sun or it can make no dent in the matte-gray, uniform night. (Ashbery 1985:158)

The cell wall, as suggested, also serves as a convex lens through the magnification of which "a flame of a match can seem like an explosion on the sun". However, even such an energy like that of "an explosion on the sun" cannot break "the matte-gray" wall. The individual is imprisoned within, unless he or she finds the "spirit wall" or the "missing fourth wall".

The wall casts a shadow within the cell, too. So, the main difference between the microcosmic cell and the macrocosmic universal sphere is that the prior is dark while the latter is illuminated with a light (white) of knowledge. The following quotation refers to this fact.

Only this world is not as light as the other one;
It is made gray with shadows like cob webs that
deepen as the memory of the film begins to fade.
(Ashbery 1985:160).

In the above quotation, the darkness which prevails and the "filmsy" quality denoting the transparency of the wall is implied. So the reason why an Ashbery poem has unfinished statements, empty spaces and obscurity is that unless a

momentary freedom of the self through the spirit wall is actualized and the self is metamorphosed into the soul. The poet himself, confined within his cell, does not have a clear vision of the universe. The wall, because of its semipermeable quality, allows the poet to observe the universe as if from behind a curtain, clear at some parts, opaque at some others and in many parts as Ashbery says,

... The wall
Was chipped and tornished in places,
Polished in places (Ashbery 1985:268).

The self can sometimes see through, clearly and sometimes partially. Or, sometimes it cannot see anything. With this the poet reflects his vision of the universe likewise : sometimes clear, sometimes partially obscure and sometimes, no vision at all.

So, the gray wall is an obstacle, a barrier between the universe and the self and the poet is bound to obey it by all means. His obeidence is sometimes expressed in sarcastic overtones as "...The mood was still / Gray tolerance" (Ashbery 1985:233). Ashbery also uses irony to comment on his obligatory enslavement due to the wall. He says, "No use standing there like a gray stone toga" (Ashbery 1985:245). "Toga" suggests freedom whereas he is completely surrounded by the wall as a prisoner. His irony may, at times, shift into desolation

... replunging you and your world into the gray

oblivion you had been floundering in all your life... (Ashbery 1985:144).

It seems that there is almost no hope of breaking through the state of "gray oblivion" within the limits of the wall. However, the "gray wall" which surrounds like "gray hills", as Ashbery suggests in the following example, can be transcended as hinted before.

The decision in his life
Soul elsewhere
The gray hills
Out there on the road darkness
....there is a cure (Ashbery 1962:65).

The "soul" appears as having already transcended the walls like "gray hills". The "road" to freedom, on the other hand is dark. Yet, Ashbery sees "a cure" which is the

light [that] bounced off the ends
Of small gray waves to tell
Them in the observatory
About the great drama that was being won. (Ashbery 1985:51).

"Them in the observatory" signifies nothing but the poet observing the universe through the translucent walls of his cell. The filmy but blocking quality of the walls is as if melted into "gray waves" by the force of the "light" which shows the way out and illuminates the dark road. "Gray waves" also suggests regeneration as hinted by the regenerative force of water. The moment of regeneration "metamorphosis" or "transcendence" is expressed by Ashbery as,

The surge upward through the grade-school positioning and bursting into soft gray blooms (Ashbery 1985:119).

The "upward surge" is when the physical self is metamorphosed into the soul. Meanwhile it is worth noting that the cell wall has become softer; its hard crust has melted "into soft gray blooms". The physical body melts into the soul. The existence of the physical self in the cell continues.

... so a swallow perpetuated
In dove-gray dusk can be both the end and the
exaltation of a new
Beginning, yet forever remain itself, (Ashbery
1985:294).

Like "a swallow which is perpetuated" in confinement within its cage, the physical self cannot avoid its fate of imprisonment within its cell; it is doomed "forever" to "remain itself". However, it shifts into another entity -the soul- akin to the universe and dispersed into a region as wide as reality.

Impatient as we were for all of them to join us,
The land had not risen into view: gulls had swept
the gray steel towers away (Ashbery 1985:114).

The soul is "impatient" to embrace "reality" which can be attained only after the difficult task of breaking through the wall. There is no sign of "the gray steel towers" of the cell wall. The soul is freed of the crust of the cell leaving the body there. The separation of the soul from the

body through the "spirit wall" is inevitable : it is the soul which can embody reality.



II.7 SILVER : THE CAROUSEL of the PHENOMENAL WORLD

"the whole thing
overflows like
a silver."

In "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror", Ashbery discusses the problem of the self doomed to live in the physical world. The following citation is when the poet is stuck with a perceptual and superficial observation of Parmigianino, the artist's self portrait on a wooden ball.

.....the painter's
Reflected face, in which we linger, receiving
Dreams and inspirations on an unassigned
Frequency, but the hues turned metallic,
The curves and edges are not so rich. Each person
Has one big theory to explain the universe
But it does not tell the whole story
And in the end it is what is outside him
That matters, to him and especially to us
Who have been given to help whatever
In decoding our own man-size quotient...
(Ashbery 1985:202).

This is the moment when transcendence has completed its duration during which "it was (as if) all a dream". And once again, the self has to accept the world of sense perceptions in which it is inhabited as an inevitable consequence of the transcendent moment. Now, "it is what is outside him/ That matters". In the perceptive phenomenal world "the hues turned metallic/The curves and edges are not so rich" as they were before. "Our own man-size quotient" -the soul identical with the universe and reality- is once more left to remain unknown. The poet has to accept his original state from which there seems no absolute escape.

Silver, as a "metallic hue" suggests the physical self in a state of uncertainty and concealment. It is a state "of not knowing" as expressed in the following quotation:

... and in the context of not knowing is a fluidity that flashes like silver (Ashbery 1985:320).

As to remember an early utterance of Ashbery's, it is worthwhile to note that "landscape" and "physical environment" are not static, but they are continuously in a state of flux and "fluidity": transforming, becoming and metamorphosing, yielding into each other. Such transfiguration is revealed by the poet through the following lines:

I feel the carousel starting slowly
And going faster and faster: desk, papers, books,
Photographs of friends, the window and the trees
Merging into one neutral band that surrounds
Me on all sides, everywhere I look. (Ashbery
1985:191)

Like a merry-go-round, the world of sense perceptions gains acceleration "faster and faster". From the "desk, papers, books, photographs of friends" the self is slowly thrust outward through "the window" to "the trees" and is out; out there in the universe to become the soul. It is obvious that the scene is the procedure of poetic creation when the following lines are recalled.

And I can not explain the action of leveling,
Why it should all boil down to one

Uniform substance, a magma of interiors.
(Ashbery 1985:191).

The self which is surrounded by "one neutral band" (gray) of revolving physical objects breaks through and transforms into the soul which attracts the physical self.

My guide in these matters is your self,
Firm, oblique, accepting everything with the same
Wraith of a smile, and as time speeds up...
... I can know only the straight way out,
The distance way between us. (Ashbery 1985:191).

The transcendence has now been completed and the poet has found the invisible wall (the window) to pass through the cell wall. However, the poet, sometimes can not attain knowledge and self actualization. Everything can be static, the world around might come to a full stop, leaving the poet in an inert position. Such inertia is due to "not knowing" how to activate and accelerate the world of physicality which triggers the creative process. Ashbery continues,

... long ago
This strewn evidence meant something,
The small accidents and pleasures
Of the day as moved gracelessly on,
... Impossible now
To restore those properties in the silver blur that
is
The record of what you accomplished by sitting down
"With great art to copy what you saw in the glass"
So as to perfect and rule out the extraneous
Forever. In the circle of your intentions certain
spars
Remain that perpetuate the enchantment of self with
self (Ashbery 1984:192).

To see the action in the phenomenal world, or to activate it

by means of their potential energy is the poet's first step in attaining universal knowledge, after which "the enchantment of self (body) with self (soul)" can be accomplished which means self integration or self-actualization. For Ashbery, there are privileged moments of such integration and yet there are times when he

can plug into poetry whenever I want to, and it will come out much the same way at any given time. I do not do it that often. It is like that television set over there. I do not watch television much, but occasionally I turn it on and, sure enough, something is going on, and that is that for that moment (Bellamy 1984:19).

To resonate with the energy of objects is enough for Ashbery to attain universal knowledge and to embrace the soul. During an interview Ashbery points out;

Ashbery: I do not know what my life is, what I want to be escaping from. I want to move to some other space, I guess, when I write... I want to move in and out of it...
Gangel: take a journey?
Ashbery: Yeah, but also realize, more, where I am. (Bellamy 1984:20).

Here Ashbery clearly states his desire to break away from his cell for "another space" but he is also aware that he should "realize, more" where he is. Confined within a phenomenal world of sense perceptions, if the poet can not activate and enliven it by means of realizing his energy, he is more captivated within such a world, which appears as "a silver blur" when a former quotation is recalled. Their visions are still recorded in the mind but their "hues

turned metallic" and "the curves and edges are not so rich".
The poet does not know what to do with them and he is

Acting kind of contented in a silvery wind
From who knows where. (Ashbery 1962:22).

The objects of the phenomenal world create uncertainty, and "no way of knowing". The poet cannot judge what to do with the material at hand. He feels as trapped among them as he says,

Why the court, trapped in a silver storm, is dying
The days are short, brittle. (Ashbery 1956:30)

The gathered material slowly loses momentum and acceleration. The feeling of entrapment overweighs. An awareness of time becomes dominant and the self is as if "dying" and everything is coming to a stand still. Ashbery explains the slowing rhythm of the "carousel" of the phenomenal world analogues to a train slowing down.

A whistle blew shrilly
The slow evening
silver note (Ashbery 1962:93).

While "silver" suggests a decline of understanding and knowledge of the images of the phenomenal world which propel around the poet, it also suggests the media between the physical body and the soul. If the poet is able to concentrate his energy on embracing the soul, the uncertainty principle leaves its place to certainty.

While the messacre yet continues with a terrific
thin energy
A silver blaze calms the darkness (Ashbery 1985:44)

Or, sometimes the poet attains self integrity without
knowing how he has managed it. It is the silver which shows
the way.

Pulling tugging us along with them, by means of
streamers.
Golden and silver confetti...
But are not quite certain that we want to go - the
dock is so sunny and warm
The magestic ship will pull up anchor who knows
where? (Ashbery 1985:74).

However, he will be sucked into the poetic core (red) which
will radiate toward the perimeter of the universe (white)
and his work of art will emerge on the perimeter (blue).

To start such a poetic "journey" or "transcendence",
the poet first sees through the "transparent" wall (gray)
and then

...luster
on luster, transparency floated onto the topmost
layer
Until the whole thing overflows like a silver
Wedding cake or christmas tree, in a cascade of
tears (Ashbery 1985:210).

Transcendence, therefore is nothing but the expansion of the
cell wall which can be streched parallel to the soul. It is
the silver (phenomenal world) which has created a translike
state by revolving with a high speed. And the result is, the
poet "in a cascade of tears". At last he has achieved self

integrity and attained a vision of reality.

In "Vermont Notebook", Ashbery gives a message to his readers and especially to his critics who claim that the poet is enigmatic. The message is given through "silver".

The silver-painted flagpole in its concrete base surrounded by portulacas, the flag itself straining strong breeze, are sign posts toward an infinity of wavering susceptible variables, if one but knew how to read them aright (Ashbery 1975a:61).

"The silver-painted flagpole" reminds one of a Jackson Pollock painting of the same name. By such an analogy, Ashbery hints "Action Painting" suggest the "energy made visible" and "Abstract Expressionism", suggesting "to seek a meaning" outside of "the context". These are the signs which are to be followed. One has to undergo such a process of poetic creation as Ashbery has done in order to understand his poetry, because in an "infinity of wavering susceptible variables" there are "silver-painted flagpole(s)" in their "concrete base", in Ashbery's poetry.. It is for the reader "to read them aright" and in this dissertation "colors" have been "sign posts".

NOTES

(1) For "Darlene's Hospital" see p.32

(2) The ongoing lines read :

And she carries a fan, for she is modest, and does
not want the crowd to see her face too often.
But everybody is so busy with his wife or loved one
I doubt they would notice the mustachioed man's
wife.

Here come the boys! They are skipped and throwing
little things on the sidewalk

Which is made of gray tile. One of them, a little
older, has a toothpick in his teeth.

He is silenter than the rest, and affects not to
notice the pretty young girls in white.

But his friends notice them, and shout their jeers
at the laughing girls.

Yet soon all this will cease, with the deepening of
their years,

And love bring each to the parade grounds for
another reason.

But I have lost sight of the young fellow with the
tooth-pick.

Wait - there is he - on the other side of the
bandstand,

Secluded from his friends, in earnest talk with a
young girl

Of fourteen or fifteen. I try to hear what they are
saying

But it seems they are just mumbling something - shy
words of love, probably.

She is slightly taller than he, and looks quietly
down into his sincere eyes.

She is wearing white. The breeze ruffles her long
fine black hair against her olive cheek.

Obviously she is in love. The boy, the young boy
with the toothpick, he is in love too;

His eyes show it. Turning from this couple,
I see there is an intermission in the concert.

The paraders are resting and sipping drinks through
straws

(The drinks are dispensed from a large glass crock
by a lady in a dark blue),

And the musicians mingle among them, in their creamy
white uniforms and talk

About the weather, perhaps, or how their kids are
doing at school

Let us take this opportunity to tiptoe into one of the side streets.
 Here you may see one of those white houses with green trim
 That are so popular here. Look- I told you!
 It is cool and dim inside, but the pario is sunny.
 And old woman in gray sits there, fanning herself with a palm leaf fan.
 She welcomes us to her patio, and offers us a cooling drink.
 "My son is in Mexico City," she says. "He would welcome you too
 If he were here. But his job is with a bank there. Look, here is a photograph of him."
 And a dark-skinned lad with pearly teeth grins out at us from the worn leather frame.
 We thank her for her hospitality, for it is getting late
 And we must catch a view of the city, before we leave, from a good high place.
 That church tower will do - the faded pink one, there against the fierce blue of the sky. Slowly we enter.
 The caretaker, an old man dressed in brown and gray, ask us how long we have been in the city, and how we like it here.
 His daughter is scrubbing the steps - she nods to us as we pass into the tower.
 Soon we have reached the top, and the whole network of the city extends before us.
 There is the rich quarter, with its houses of pink and white, and its crumbling, leafy terraces.
 There is the poorer quarter, its homes a deep blue.
 There is the market, where men are selling hats and swatting flies
 And there is the public library, painted several shades of pale green and beige.
 Look! There is the square we just came from, with the promenaders.
 There are fewer of them, now that the heat of the day has increased,
 But the young boy and girl still lurk in the shadows of the bandstand.
 And there is the home of the little old lady -
 She is still sitting in the patio, fanning herself

(3) Refer to "New York School" on p.54

(4) Refer to "Post-Impressionism" on pp.60 and 74

(5) HASLEY, William D. (ed.)
 1973 MacMillian Contemporary Dictionary. New York: MacMillian Pub., Co.

- (6) Refer to color "blue" which deals with the polarization of coloss from within to without.
- (7) "Unreal City" is T.S.Eliot's phrasing in The Waste Land
- (8) The principle of "Equivalence" for Jung.
- (9) See introduction p.
- (10) The idea of this world being the shadow and a distorted image of the ideal world is the essence of Platonism, for which the cave stands for the shadow. (see "Allegory of the Cave" in Apology by Plato). For Plato, reality consisted of ideas and essences of all basic things that had their existence beyond the grasp of the human senses or even of the human mind. These ideas had no physical attributes, no material substance, but were the "pure form" for all things we see and in our earthly existence. One must bear in mind that these forms are not in-the-minds-of-people. Thus, when one imagines the perfect human being, we are not dealing with Plato's essences. The ideas had existence, they were unchanging, and they were the source, in that they gave form, of all material things. But the material thing, because it is allied with matter or flesh, is always a distorted or impure shadow of its essence. (Paraphrased from Lamm 1984:127).
- (11) Principle of "Equilibrium" for Jung.
- (12) Refer to introduction p.17
- (13) Refer to "tower" p.64
- (14) Paraphrased from "The Metaphysical Subject of John Ahbery's Poetry" (Lehman 1980:93-94).

CONCLUSION: SELF PORTRAIT in COLOR

From Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" to Ashbery's "Self Portrait in a Convex Mirror", the American poet has searched for a definition of his own identity in a world and culture to which the self has become alienated. Perhaps it was the modern world which enforced the poet more into a new self definition. The two World Wars, followed by the Korean and Vietnam wars, Kennedy assassinations together with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, anti-culture revolt and numberless similar social, economic or political issues led the self to secure a place and to requestion his task and position in such a chaotic existence.

In Ashbery's poems such catastrophic events do not take place but sharing the same restlessness and breathing the same air of revolt and non-conformism, he has found it necessary to focus on a definition of his poetic self. Tracing back and adopting Olson's theory of the self as a basis for his questionnaire, he at the same time studied Robert Creeley (Olson's student at the Black Mountain College) who defines the self in his work (1976:41) as,

I began to make self-portraits because working at night I had no other model. Thinks that the world is little. Weather walking, in rain. I used myself over and over again. Sees green. Passing people, goes forward, goes green, goes white. I would learn about myself... I put things where they belong. I return to reality.

Creeley's self is quite personal and it is passive. Moreover, his self is the victim of environmental forces, sustaining a life among them. However, it is worthwhile to extract his use of "green" and "white" which have similar echoes with Ashbery's "White Roses" cited earlier in this dissertation.

And the night ends and begins again
 Her face goes green, her eyes are green
 (Ashbery 1985:36).

For both poets "night", "green" and "white" are denominators. Yet, while Creeley is stuck with the solid reality of the physical self (green) with an inability of transcendence, Ashbery's is expansive. While that self for Creeley is the source and measure of poetic energies, Ashbery's physical self is activated by the energy in the environment (carousel-silver) and can become identical to the soul (white) which has the capacity to see glimpses of reality. The physical self captures reality for Creeley, but it is the soul which does it for Ashbery.

All Ashbery critics share the same opinion that Ashbery is an heir of William Carlos Williams whose idea about the self is expressed in the poem entitled "Spring and All":

The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe... In the composition, the artist does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix

the particular with the universality of his own personality... (only then he can) feel every form which he sees moving within himself. He must prove the truth of this by expression (Williams 1923:192-193).

For Williams, as for Ashbery, the objects of the world are in a state of flux (silver). In order to go beyond the limitations of the physical self, one must "raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe". What Williams emphasizes here is the "co-extension" or "togetherness of the body and the soul". So, Ashbery's transcendence, like that of Williams' embodies a state of unity between the body and the soul; a self-integration in other words. So, his transcendence does not mean to go completely beyond the physical. On the other hand, the body and the soul co-exist during the point when the united expansive self selects "the particular" as a glimpse of reality; freezes the flux of time and the particular and expresses this vision of reality verifying it by means of art. In fact, within this context, whatever is called as art is nothing but an evidence of the self because, the universal self is the embodiment of "every form which (the artist) sees moving within himself". As Williams states, the artist "has to prove the truth of this by expression". Ashbery's proof is by his use of colors which, when united, enliven the "Self Portrait of the Artist in Color". During an interview, the Voice of America asked Ashbery,

VOA: People have said that your writing is for you

and you understand it but no one else does. Do you have an audience in mind?

ASHBERY: Yes I do. I know what you are talking about and this is the way I have been characterized... I am not very much like the public image of myself. I am not aloof or communicating only something that is destined for someone else. (Kostelanetz 1982:267)

Ashbery definitely feels the obligation of communicating with his reader by giving "cross-sectional(s)" of his vision of truth by colors which are there for self-expression and for making the reader understand him. After all his expansive, universal self also encompasses his readers within "every form". In the above mentioned interview Ashbery's answer to a question is very interesting:

VOA: Are you difficult to yourself, do you think?

ASHBERY: No, I think I am pretty easy on myself. And I try to be on other people, too. And I am sorry that I have become celebrated as "The Difficult Poet", sorry mainly because I think that a lot of people are deferred from reading me by the....

VOA: The reputation?

ASHBERY: Yes, obviously there is difficulty, but what is the nature of it?... I think it is more a question of concentrating on the text that is there, which, of course, is very difficult to do. Concentration is the last thing any of us ever want to produce. But we have to, from time to time. I think that it requires an attentiveness... which is not something that all readers are prepared to bring to poetry.

.... I certainly try to write as simply as I can, under the circumstances... being my awareness of everything that is happening around me as I am writing, which crowds itself into the poetry. (Kostelanetz 1982:266-267).

Ashbery's "difficulty" according to Ashbery, can be overcome by "concentration" and "attentiveness"; that is, the poet is demanding the reader's response. The poet is

giving messages in his poetry to express himself clearly. This expression "boil(s) down to one/ Uniform substance" - which is poetry- accumulated from and filtered through "everything that is happening around". It is for the reader to concentrate on the text, to be attentive on the clues that the poet has left within seemingly nonsensical lines and to sort out common denominators leading to a better understanding of the poetic self. As Charles Altieri points out in Self and Sensibility in Contemporary American Poetry (1984:19)

The test for self-definition is the qualities of poetic speech one can produce as one's vehicle for expression and as one's bond to and audience.

What Altieri draws the attention to, is the need for a "poetic speech", or articulation, which serves as a "vehicle" for communicating "to an audience" his self-definition. Colors serve as a special "poetic speech": consistent, clear and direct, expressing the poetic self, and coloring a poetic universe. The main reason for the poet's efforts of clarifying a "Self Portrait" is due to a creation of resonance between himself and that of his reader. By this way, he secures a place, in his expansive self, for his reader. By this way he becomes a guide for the reader who has lost ties with his world. Altieri (1984:19) explains in the following lines,

In many respects Ashbery is for me the major poet of our minor age. He most fully articulates its basic

problems and transforms their terms into new possibilities of knowing and feeling ourselves in our world.

The poet who has deciphered the mysteries of his self has come to terms with a universe which was alien to him. Being identical with the universe, the poetic self attains a macrocosmic identity in which the reader preserves his microcosmic identity. So the reader is none other than a part of the poetic self; and the poet, therefore, can communicate a universal knowledge through the channels of shared data such as language, experience and perception. What is unshared is the technique of transcending beyond these and penetrating into the sphere of universal knowledge. Since it cannot be attained completely, the poet can expose only glimpses of such knowledge; glimpses which appear as colored exposures of a fragmented self. It is fragmented because it is identical with the nature of reality and of the universe. If there could be a possibility of giving reality in its totality, then, it could be given in its totality in poetry too. Reality is disjointed, fragmented and discontinuous as the self and as its representation in poetry. Therefore all the colors can not be seen together in an Ashbery poem. Ashbery on the other hand is a model for his reader, who can see the reflection of his self through the colored exposures the poet has vivified. Thus a communication is formed between the poet and the reader.

Since all Ashbery critics share the opinion that Ashbery is an heir of Wallace Stevens, his ideas can be given as reflections of his "master" Stevens. In his Opus Posthumous, Stevens' brilliant "Adagia" exposes a set of his ideas. The first is the interaction between the poetic identity and the reader, which goes as "The poet seems to confer his identity on the reader... the transference." (Morse 1982:158). This is what has already been discussed above: the poetic self, in its universality, embodies the self of the reader. Through such linkage, a communication is established between selves. The poet has to make his self portrait in order to be a macrocosmic model for the reader. To do this (which Stevens sees as being "problematic") the poet works like the painter "for a discussion of their own problems." (Morse 1982:160). The analogy which Stevens draws between the poet and the painter is that of self expression through the use of brush strokes of colors. "Own" in "own problems" in the above quotation refers to the self which is to be discussed by colors. The poet, after painting his self-portrait as a universal model becomes

Intermediary between people and the world in which they live and also, between people as between themselves; but not between people and some other world. (Morse 1982:162).

He becomes a unifying model by his universality. However, to what extent can the world that the poet creates seem alien;

and "bizarria" is another problem. By locating his reader within this world, he compromises the reader with the chaotic world around, to which the reader had become alien. The poet therefore reconciles the reader with his world.

Stevens also makes a hint at the dual nature of the self. According to him (Morse 1982:164), "The Subjects of one's poem's are the symbols of one's self or one of one's selves". Stevens, like Ashbery, believes that through explanation or expression, the character of the self is revealed. For them the poet does this by using abstract symbols which distinguish between the physical and the universal selves. Colors are abstract symbols for Ashbery that define the selves.

Since reality for Stevens "is a vacuum" (Morse 1982:168), its aspects can be given by abstraction therefore "The momentum of the mind is all toward abstraction" (Morse 1982:169). For Stevens, like Ashbery the poet is the one who seeks self-expression in abstraction to define his presence in a chaotic universe (vacuum). His poetry, which is his means for expression, therefore, is abstract and self reflexive. Similarly, the self can be defined only in abstract terms. The poet has many possible solutions of defining the self in abstraction. However, when the analogy between the poet and the painter is recalled, colors become the most suitable of those solutions. A Stevens poem, "Mr. Burnshaw and the Statue" has amazingly similar echoes of the

"self" and the significance of "colors" with those of Ashbery's. Stevens believes that there are "...two immense / Reflections whirling apart and wide away." for which

... the birds
of chaos are not always sad nor lost
In melancholy distances, you held
Each other moving in a chant...
(Morse 1982:50).

Here, as it is for Ashbery, there are two selves at a "distance" "moving" in "chaos". However, there is hope for giving meaning to chaos: the hope of self integration; the integration of the "body" with the soul (spirit for Stevens), which is a momentary experience when "chaos comes / To momentary calm" (Morse 1982:51). The moment of reunion of the selves is a privileged moment when,

Weaving ring in radiant ring and quickly, cling
Yourselves away and at a distance join
Your hands and cry again...
... like damsels captured by the sky,
Seized by that possible blue.
(Morse 1982:51).

Two selves, or "ring in radiant ring" embrace each other and become an integrated self embodying the universe. It is interesting at this point to note the word "radiant", which might be synonymous with Ashbery's silver. The "radiant ring" of outer and the larger of the two concentric circles (spheres for Ashbery) has gathered transmittance of radiance from the inner ring (of the physical body) which it encompasses. The expansive, integrated self is then "seized

by that possible blue, which is the periphery of the universal sphere for Ashbery. After the integration, the picture of the momentary glimpse of reality is reflected (as it is by Ashbery's Convex Mirror) to the periphery of the universal spirit, which is, as perceived by the audience, a solid work of art. Appearance of the color blue, in this context, denotes self expression materialized,

Until [when] the sharply-colored glass transforms
Itself into the speech of the spirit.
(Morse 1982:52).

"Sharply-colored glass" is nothing but Ashbery's "Convex Mirror" on which his "Self Portrait" is vivified. The "Convex Mirror" or the "sharply-colored glass" becomes the articulation of the "spirit" or "soul". They also become what

... is yourselves, when, at last, you are
yourselves,
Speaking and strutting broadly...
No longer of air but of the breathing earth.
(Morse 1982:52).

This moment is the moment of self-revelation. The portrait of the self is completed and it is no longer an airy and abstract entity but it is as solid as the "breathing earth". While the verb "is" in singular, "yourselves" is in plural: there are still two selves, but they "are" united as "one".

During the poetic process of self-definition and of composition, Stevens mentions two more colors in the same

poem: red and green, which appear right after the reunion has occurred.

... Be maidens formed

 Of the least appreciable shade of green
 And despicable shades of red, just seen
 And vaguely to be seen, a matinal red,
 A dewy flashing blanks away from fire,
 As if your gowns were woven of the light
 (Morse 1982:51).

The "maidens" (the selves) are "formed / Of the least appreciable shade of green" means that even a little glimpse of green (the body cell) has the capacity to give birth to a new self. Stevens, like Ashbery does not reject the physical world even though he feels himself confined. When Ashbery's use of red as a reference to the poetic core is recalled, the word "despicable" seems as if degrading the importance of that color. However, if phrases like "just seen and vaguely to be seen, a matinal red" are concentrated upon, Stevens' suggestion becomes clear: the poetic creation and will continually be seen in later composition, does not dominate and overpower the poem. On the contrary, it leaves its place to the poem which stands for itself as a new entity. This is because the poem is the embodiment of a vision of reality. "Reality is the spirit's true center". The poetic center, the core, yields its identity and submits itself to the sublime center of the spirit, when

A dewy flashing blanks away from fire,
 As if your gowns were woven of the light
 (Morse 1982:51).

Once again, every nation, knowledge and awareness yield and the self appears as dressed of "the light", which is equal to Ashbery's universal sphere identical with reality, and from which the poet can only capture instances of reality.

Ashbery's technique of explaining the self and his insistence on colors and similarly his will of painting "A Self Portrait in Color" are outcomes of a background which he cannot deny. He owes much to his predecessors as his followers will owe much to him. Yet, again, it is by the words of Wallace Stevens, that his indulgence in, insistence on and will of such a Self Portrait can be explained. Stevens comments on the issue as,

Poetry creates a fictitious existence on an exquisite plane. This definition must vary as the plane varies, an exquisite plane being merely illustrative. (Morse 1982:180).

"a fictitious existence" that "Poetry creates" is the self and "an exquisite plane" which is occupied by the self or selves are identical to them. They are planes for Stevens, and spheres for Ashbery. If their definition varies, the definition of the selves, also varies. Both the circular planes and spheres are "merely illustrative" of various aspects of the self. And finally, their illustration is by colors. Similarly, Ashbery's "Self Portrait" can be given as suggested in the ongoing lines.

Prior to anything that can be uttered for John Ashbery, one point needs to be clarified: He is a perfect scholar philosopher and more than them, an artist. He has done his research and come to a synthesis on the self. Tracing back, he has found in Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson and Robert Creeley, a quest for the self, which infact is as old an issue as the history of man. After having reached his own synthesis, Ashbery has sought possible modes of self-expression. From the Post-Impressionists to Surrealists; Action Painting of the Abstract Expressionists to Dadaists; from Abstract Symbolism to Olson's Open Verse and finally to New Realism, Ashbery experimented on techniques of self expression. Finally, as this dissertation suggests, he has reached a conclusion that colors could be used as freely as encompassing all the above stated techniques and trends, which are insufficient each but almost perfect when combined.

Ashbery's Self Portrait is represented through seven colors: Green, Gray, Silver, Red, White, Black, and Blue.

"Green" is the physical self confined within its cell, the body. It leads on ordinary and routine life in the world of objects. In this being, the poet is as ordinary as the man in the street, who feels entrapped within his physicality and his environment; especially within a metropolitan landscape. As the landscape surrounds the individual by not permitting a freedom for him, the self can

find no outlet to set itself free of his physical imprisonment. The difference between the ordinary man and the poet emerges at this point. While the former is surrounded by a concrete wall, the poet has the ability and power to see through his own wall. The wall which surrounds the physical self of the poet is "gray", transperant, semi-permeable, and has the capability of expansion. Such transformation from a rigid wall to a flexible one is due to an energy emitted by the poetic mind. It has the power to see the flux of life, the world not as being static but moving, spinning, turning around, changing rapidly and transforming in a fast pace. The vision of the world in action is also by means of dreams, day dreams, imagination and a free associational outlook upon objects. Through these, the energy in the mind resonates with the potential energy inherit in the world. With the fast movement -the action- the rigid cell wall dissolves and yields into a silver carousel-like blaze which becomes a substitute for the gray wall. "Silver" is the fourth missing wall, or the invisible wall, through the rapid evolution of which the entrapped self gradually expands. At this moment, the poet sees everything, however, disordered, at random and transforming as reality itself is. Anything related or unrelated, but all moving, becomes a united band which is the first vision of reality; because, for Ashbery, everything is a microcosm which is a part of reality, the

macrocosmic entity. It is this awareness that instigates the innermost poetic core, the magma of interiors. "Red" in color, the core creates a negative energy and sucks in the silver: The outward motion becomes the inward motion and the silver blaze formed of everything perceived "boils down into one substance". Now, what is at hand is a concentrated and complex form of reality. It is unknown and it cannot be deciphered. At this point, the core fades out into light, "white" in color, identical with reality itself. It is also the "soul", identical with universal reality. It is when uncertainty is substituted by knowledge, and chaos by reality. This is the moment of composition and therefore of self expression. The poet, in this phase, feels the insufficiency of the methods of expression. Therefore, Ashbery experiments on as many techniques as possible. Self expression finds its form by means of a mirror, which radiates, transmits and reflects "the knowledge of the real" toward the perimeter of the universal sphere of the soul. Because of this reason, what the poet presents as real, is not the picture of the real, but a "vision" of the real, which is articulated as a "blue" color. Whatever has been given as a vision, is the work of art, embodying the poet's selves, and will remain a vision if the perceiver of the art object evaluates it on a superficial level; but if he has the capacity of seeing into it, he definitely has seen his own reflection in the mirror which has found a place in the universality of reality, thus forming communication between

himself and the poet's self. "Black", on the other hand, signifies the universal sphere of the self, when that sphere could not be enlightened. The universe remains dark if the concentrated knowledge in the core cannot be reflected towards the perimeter. This is the moment of inertia, a moment during which articulation stops. The universe remains in void blackness. Since the poet could not achieve self integrity, neither him nor the reader can integrate with the poetry.

To conclude, Ashbery portrays the self in the act of composition which is his means of communication. Colors, contribute to the enlivening of a visual but abstract definition of the self for the reader who if he traces the colors which the poet has used, can be confronted with himself through the intermediacy of the poet. Thus, the poet is no longer difficult and enigmatic.

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