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*And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.*

(Shakespeare's As You Like It)

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1. Introduction

One of the main figures of the second generation of Romantic poets, John Keats (1795- 1821) lived a very short life and suffered from illnesses in his early years, though the bulk of literary works and ideas he produced is relatively remarkable, in particular his letters which give us glimpses of his thoughts about poetry, and of the concerns that occupied him about beauty, imagination and, the concept of negative capability. In his letters Keats shows his aptitude for original metaphors and insights into life, for example he likens human life to “a large Mansion of Many apartments” tow of which he can only describe as “the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). His observations and his tremendous spurt of imagination make his letters a required reading for any poet and critic as important and inspiring as his poems. Under the full impression of Shakespeare, White argues, Keats wrote many of his letters which address ‘negative capability’, ‘egotistical sublime’, and the ‘vale of soul-making’, and Shakespeare is oft-times mentioned or quoted (26). But the present thesis makes the concept of negative capability the focus of study by attempting to employ its definition by Keats and apply it on three of Shakespeare’s tragic characters, namely Othello, King Lear and Hamlet.

It must be noted that the phrase of negative capability is used briefly in a letter to his brothers, George and Thomas, on 21 December 1817 to characterize the capacity of the greatest writers (particularly Shakespeare) to follow a vision of artistic beauty as opposed to philosophical certainty and pursuit of fact and reason, which is crystalized in Shakespeare as “a Man of Achievement” who is “capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 277). Although this phrase is never again repeated in his letters, it can be claimed that his letters elaborate on the concept. It actually invites thinkers to be capable of being in ‘uncertainties, mysteries and doubts’ which ultimately helps the mind retain an openness that borders on disinterestedness and self-annihilation. In this way the poet can identify every particular passion which he compares to wine and “the poet by one cup should know the source of any particular wine without getting intoxicated” (qtd. In Bate 45). Shakespeare, in Keats’s opinion, represents such a sober poet who can taste hogsheds of wine and identify its source. Keats also discusses the significance of pains which are necessary “to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul (*The Complete Poetical Works* 370). Keats finds such a world of pains necessary for the sake of intelligence to be educated in order to maintain an

openness to a realm vaster than their self. King Lear is the prominent archetype of a character who goes from the sublime to the ridiculous to gain the necessary knowledge to grasp the truth, thus he arises with a new sense of identification and sympathy to nature and human being.

Despite the high-profile that negative capability and its subsequent implications maintain in his letters, the virtually incredible diverse usage of the term may be a bit too far from what Keats meant nearly two hundred years ago, but it validates its ongoing life and repetition when taken into broad consideration. Although Keats does relate the concept of negative capability to Shakespeare the playwright, not to his characters, it does not appear far from logical to also trace it to the three major tragic characters of concern as they undergo noteworthy changes throughout the story, especially once they start being estranged and labelled as outsiders. The present thesis attempts to employ its ongoing vigor to take a step further ahead of the merely theoretical implications of negative capability and apply it on three of Shakespeare's oft-discussed characters, namely Othello, King Lear and Hamlet. I attempt to cling to Keats's train of thoughts regarding negative capability and relate it to the mentioned characters. The hypothesis is that negative capability is not only an artistic quality but also a human experience. The concept of negative capability has been surprisingly unexplored in literary criticism and aesthetics. The book *Keats and Negative Capability* (2009) by Li Ou is the first book-length study of this central concept. It clarifies the meaning of the term and gives an anatomy of its key components and a full account of the history of this idea. The writer singles out *King Lear* for a detailed analysis which cogently illuminates both the play itself and Keats's imaginative relationship to it, however there are still points left unnoticed about it which will be covered in the relevant chapter. Hamlet and Othello are two other characters susceptible to negative capability argumentation. It is hypothesized that the three characters, who are at last partially marginalized and cast out and treated like outsiders, do not equally benefit from negative capability and every outsider is not potential for negative capability. Othello rarely experiences negative capability as he remains in ignorance forever and finally commits the capital sin; King Lear gradually descends into madness which progressively bestows a vision to his metaphorical blindness towards the truth of human interactions; Hamlet shows budding signs of negative capability when he promises the ghost to "wipe away all trivial fond records, / All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past" (I. vi. 106-7), as his actions and reactions represent a flow of controversial ideas which cannot strike a mind used to the banal course of life, but a mind which is progressive and susceptible to

modification, change and improvement. To sum up, the present thesis attempts to scrutinize the outsider position associated with the three characters, their rhetoric and speeches and the progress of negative capability transforming, improving or leaving no impression on them.

2. Keatsian Negative Capability

John Keats (1795- 1821) is one of the main figures of the second generation of Romantic poets. He lived a very short life and suffered from illnesses from his early years, though the bulk of literary works and ideas he produced is relatively remarkable, in particular his letters which give a broad view of his mindset. His poems were not generally well received by his contemporary critics, a convincing reason of which could be that Keats always professed an unwavering love of beauty and pleasure accompanied by his detachment from the excitement and turmoil stirred by the French revolution which defined a large part of the mental horizon of possible meanings in the 18th and 19th century English culture. Least concerned with the social issues of life, Keats is said to hold the distinction of being the most romantic of romantics, with his poems being composed for the sake of poetry and pleasure, being no palpable propaganda for the propagation of certain objectives. In contrast to many of his major English poets such as Wordsworth and Shelly, Keats kept away from revolutionary goings-on and ran a life demanding the beauty of nature and proneness to it. His disengagement from the political issues streaming through many of the 18th and 19th century scholars can be implicitly marked out in his suggestion of negative capability which invites thinkers to be capable of being in ‘uncertainties, mysteries and doubts’ and not to involve personal feelings in poetry. Yet 18th and 19th centuries are largely noticeable for revolutionary discourses suggestive of commitment to revolutionizing the world, either the outer or inner world. Although most of the Romantic poets came under the influence of French revolution, Keats stayed the ardent lover of sensual imagery and firmly trusted that “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” (Endymion 1). Running along the same venues, Stopford Brooke remarks that:

The ideas that awoke the youthful passion of Wordsworth, of Coleridge, that stirred the wrath of Scott, that worked like yeast in Byron and brought forth new matter, that Shelley re clothed and made into a prophecy of the future the excitement, the turmoil, the life and death struggle which gathered round the Revolution were ignored and unrepresented by Keats... in Keats the ideas of the Revolution have disappeared. He has, in spite of a few passages and till quite the end of his career, no vital interest in the present, none in man as a whole, none in the political movement of human thought, none in the future of mankind, none in liberty, equality, or fraternity, no interest in anything but beauty (197-8).

Yet Keats’s correspondence, as Jon Mee writes in the introduction of *Selected Letters*, is also “a lively record of the responses of a particularly sensitive individual to the events and ideas of his

contemporary world” and threads of London life “are woven into the dazzling tapestry of the letters”, subsequently he is not simply “an outside observer” (xiii). His letters do insinuate the ongoing affairs of his social life, but there is also a sense of sensitivity and seclusion in his words. However, Keats’s genius began to arise from the ashes of the late 18th and early 19th century’s revolutionary ideology and drew increasingly close attention in the ensuing years. With regard to the poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (1819), Matthew Arnold acclaims that the passage describing the little town “is Greek, as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus; it is composed with the eye on the object, a radiancy and light clearness being added” (378). Rather prophetically, Keats foresees the posthumous rise of his reputation in a letter dated October 14, 1818 to his brothers: “I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 330).

Like every prior generation, the semi-secluded Keats resided so heavily in Shakespeare’s enormous impact that he kept a bust of the Bard beside him to have it spark his creativity. In a letter to Benjamin Robert Haydon, dated 10 May 1817, Keats writes:

I remember your saying that you had notions of a good Genius presiding over you. I have of late had the same thought, for things which I do half at Random are afterwards confirmed by my judgment in a dozen features of Propriety. Is it too daring to fancy Shakespeare this Presider? (*The Complete Poetical Works* 260)

R. S. White remarks on Keats’s perceptiveness on Shakespeare and the very representation of Shakespeare’s face acting “as a kind of talisman for the young poet” (15). Yet the talisman seems to have been so progressive an attitude that changed “in line with his deepening scrutiny of the moral content of poetry itself” (17). Under the full impression of Shakespeare, White argues, Keats wrote many of his letters which address ‘negative capability’, ‘egotistical sublime’, and the ‘vale of soul-making’, and Shakespeare is oft-times mentioned or quoted (26). In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats on February 14, 1819, he touches upon overall submission to external impressions to make a soul. Keats takes recourse to ‘homely’ comparisons to make his ideas about soul-making more palpable. He calls the world “a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read” and the human heart “the horn Book used in that School” and this is the “Child able to read, the Soul made from that School and its horn book” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 370). Accordingly the soul is created by the intellectual and schooling life accompanied by heart’s feelings, but he further complicates his reflections on the world of pains, some of which he had been inflicted with: “Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school

an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways”, and he conclusively relates “the Mind’s Bible” and “the Mind’s experience” to the Horn book (heart) from which “the Mind or Intelligence sucks its identity” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 370). That is the reason for the existence of various identities as the School (world) and the horn Book (human heart), varying in people, blend together to make a soul. However, this is the children attaining salvation because in them “the spark or intelligence returns to God without any identity”, in other terms they have no time to have their identity created or “altered by the heart-or seat of the human Passions” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 370). Jon Mee claims that Keats’s letters “have long been regarded as an extraordinary record of the creation of a soul” (*Selected Letters* xiii). Four months prior to putting his perceptions forth in this letter, Keats had proposed his genius phrase negative capability which forms a ‘Man of Achievement’ and it is implicitly in line with the vale of soul-making. Regarding the enormous impression Shakespeare had on Keats, the play *King Lear* is not far away from these conceptions as he starts facing a world of troubles, sinking into doubts and mystery and finally negating his self and seeing the truth, which can be meticulously detected in Lear’s rhetoric and soliloquies. Subject to some mischances and troubles, he goes from the sublime to the ridiculous; Keats seems to bear King Lear’s fate in mind when comparing the original nature of man to a “poor forked creature subject to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest, destined to hardships and disquietude of some kind or other” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 369). Unlike many Romantic poets, Keats does not believe in “the perfectibility of nature through idealistic philosophy of technological manipulation. Nature adversity is an essential component in his scheme of soul making” (Scott 160). Keats sets King Lear as the paradigm for the original man subject to ‘a World of Pains and troubles’ to school his intelligence.

The passage on negative capability is provoked by the ‘disquisition with Dilke’, on whose character Keats later comments in a letter to George and Georgian, on 24 September 1918 wherein he depreciates mere book knowledge and absolute conclusions:

Dilke was a man who cannot feel he has a personal identity unless he has made up his mind about everything. The only means of strengthening one’s intellect is to make up one’s about nothing- to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts, not a select party.... All the stubborn arguers you meet with are of the same brood. They never begin upon a subject they have not pre-resolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you, and if you have the point, still they think you wrong. Dilke will never come at a truth as long as he lives, because he is always trying at it. He is a Godwin Methodist. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 405)

His polemics against such trends of thought, Bradley argues, coincide “to a large extent with Wordsworth’s dislike of ‘a reasoning self-sufficing thing’, his depreciation of mere book-knowledge, and his praise of a wise passiveness” (*Oxford Lectures* 221). Rather earlier in his letter to George and Thomas Keats on December 22, 1817 Keats introduces this perception in the phrase of negative capability. Although this phrase is never again repeated in his letters, Jon Mee argues that the letters themselves represent a meta-embodiment of negative capability as his correspondence with Fanny Brawne reveals an unquiet mind and “the provisionality of the correspondence might be taken as a triumphant demonstration of negative capability, recording Keats’s ability to project himself into different roles and live in a state of creative uncertainty”, but these letters seem to express “a deep sense of insecurity, which frequently took the form of a desire to escape the fever and the fret of the life around him” (*Selected Letters* xxviii). Keats writes:

I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, upon various subjects; several things dove-tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously - I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason - Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 277)

Keats objects to the imposition of demands and preconceptions and drawing an absolutely fixed conclusion. The poet ought to be receptive to the external impressions and have the mind as a thoroughfare for all thoughts. In a state of negative capability, Jacob Wigod argues, the mind overpowers the body and is translated to all things and bodies and assumes countless new forms (389). Endeavoring to unite with the spirit of the text, Keats would “by temperament rather than by effort retain an openness of mind that borders on self-annihilation, a consequence of exercising ‘negative capability’” (White 195). There must be immersion in a work of genius by experiencing “things on the pulses with maximum intensity”, that is to “counteract the powerful effect of such feelings with the exercise of ‘disinterestedness’” (White 182). Earlier in the same letter of negative capability, Keats relatively sketches the significance of intensity: “The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 277). The execution of artistic intensity will evaporate the disagreeable and it becomes clear that “negative capability, with its

overpowering sense of beauty dispelling the ‘consecutive consideration’, does not imply sensuousness, but an intense aesthetic experience that embodies the actual human life that is full of ‘disagreeables’” (Ou *Introduction*) A work of art is true, Keats suggests, when it is the expression of disinterested perceptions of external impressions and it is all made possible through intensity which “brings these qualities together in immediate forcefulness, a concentratedness which is the product of the active relationship between the reader and the work releasing and making real a potential”, consequently any subject matter “is subservient to the immediate feeling excited” and even “the most unpleasant or disagreeable images lose their superficial ugliness” (White 177).

Through an exertion of negative capability, a poet should identify every particular passion, which he compares to wine:

If we compare the Passions to different tons and hogsheads of wine in a vast cellar - thus it is - the poet by one cup should know the source of any particular wine without getting intoxicated - this is the highest exertion of Power and the next step is to paint from memory of gone self-storm. (qtd. In Bate 45)

His final phrase, ‘the memory of gone self-storms’, is quite intertwined with negative capability, namely self-annihilation; in other words, the poet ought to be capable of sinking into disinterestedness and letting the mind travel through the ‘tons and hogsheads of passionate wine’ and with maximum intensity the passions should be approached, then the poet would write, as Wordsworth earlier had proposed, when in tranquility. The phrase ‘self-storm’ connotes chaos and disorder which should be ‘gone’ to leave further room for tranquility. In fact a negatively capable poet has a self which embraces human experience “to the point of eliciting the paradoxical soul-making power from pains and troubles” and by doing so he transcends “the egotistical sublime of one’s own suffering” (Ou *Introduction*). Prior to his letters stipulating his theories on self-annihilation, soul-making and negative capability, his long poem *Sleep and Poetry* had been created which suggests the nobility of agonies and pains: “And can I ever bid these joys farewell? / Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life, / Where I may find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts” (*The Complete Poetical Works* ll. 122-24). Bradley contends that “the highest beauty” is reached through “the poet’s pain” and the beauty has “pain in itself” or at least “appears in objects that are painful” (*Oxford Lectures* 231). The young poet believes “he must sacrifice self in order to win favor from the muse” (Ende 77). Transcending outward pains for a nobler and beautiful life

is comparatively personified in negative capability; once one is immersed in incertitude and mystery, he/she will contain unequivocally contrary ideas without irritably reaching after truth. The mystery will resolve both the dark side of things and its taste for the bright one. Pain and conflict cross the border of stereotypical meanings of misfortune, but without them “souls could not be made”, Bradley insists, “they are not therefore simply obstacles to the ideal. On the contrary, in this world it [the ideal] manifests itself most fully in and through them” (*Oxford Lectures* 232), because, Keats asserts in his letter to Benjamin Bailey on March 13, 1818, “scenery is fine- but human nature is finer- the sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English foot- the Eagle’s nest is finer, for the Mountaineer has looked into it”, then he goes on underlining the significance of action and passion versus dwindling and mere pleasure: “Homer is fine, Achilles is fine, Diomed is fine, Shakespeare is fine, Hamlet is fine, Lear is fine, but dwindled Englishmen are not fine (*The Complete Poetical Works* 291).

G. M. Mathews maintains that Keats’s intellect corresponds well with “his large imagination and versatile temperament” and his mind itself has “much of that ‘negative capability’ which he marked on as a large part of Shakespeare’s greatness”; besides Keats would rather “walk in mystery than in false things” and he prefers “the broken fragments of truth to the imposing completeness of a delusion” (345). In another letter, Keats sheds further light on the sense of negative capability when playing down the momentary effect of “praise or blame” on the man “whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a sever critic on his own works” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 324). It may sound easy in the first place not to be drawn to praise or blame, but in practice the man should keep a remarkable distance from his egotistical passions and desires to remain in doubts and mystery without making definite efforts to draw an absolute conclusion. At the center is a receptive poet remaining negative about any sort of conclusion and resists clinging at certitude and closure because human experience and passions fill up hogsheads of wine which is to be tasted by the memory of gone self-storm. In other words “to be negatively capable is to be open to the actual vastness and complexity of experience” and more notably “one cannot possess this openness unless one can abandon the comfortable enclosure of doctrinaire knowledge”, which is persistently guarding the self, “for a more truthful view of the world which is necessarily more disturbing or even agonizing for the self” (Ou 2). King Lear is exemplary of a character enduring negating his closed self and opening his eyes to a vaster realm after being cast out and marginalized. He achieves a more truthful view of his whereabouts which are really agonizing for

the self. Marginalized by his feigned madness, Hamlet gradually abandons his comfortable enclosure of domestic security and stands open to a hesitating mind and a capacity for change and an aversion of forming stress-free resolutions.

But Keats also yearns after knowledge. On April 24, 1818 he tells Taylor that he is proposing to “travel over the North this summer”, but there is only one fact preventing him: “I know nothing- I have read nothing- and I mean to follow Solomon’s directions, ‘Get learning- get understanding.’ I find earlier days are gone by- I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 298). In another letter to Reynolds on May 3, 1818, he passes some epigrammatic remarks on knowledge and wisdom: “in fine, as Byron says, ‘Knowledge is sorrow’; and I go on to say that “Sorrow is wisdom”- and further for aught we can know for certainty ‘Wisdom is folly’” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). King Lear and Hamlet, two characters of concern in this dissertation, sink relatively into sorrow from which they gain the knowledge necessary to see the truth. Less than one month later in May, exalting the virtues of knowledge, he writes to Reynolds and affirms that he is thankful for “not having given away my medical Books” and that “Every department of Knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). It must be noted that Keats seems to be sometimes bent on admiration for “Miltonic approach” and book knowledge. Douglas Bush writes: “As artist he fluctuates- and is aware of his fluctuations- between belief in the poetic efficacy of a wise passiveness, and belief in the active pursuit of rational knowledge and philosophy” (qtd. In Drabble 714). Yet Keats would not do without speculation and mystery; although “An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people”, he does not hesitate to suggest that “it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). Despite his celebration of knowledge, mystery is allocated a remarkably recurring place in his letters.

A true poet of negative capability disregards self-interest and opens his poetry to a realm vaster than self. Ou emphasizes that “disinterestedness has run under the current of negative capability all the way through” (*Introduction*). In another letter to Reynolds on May 3, 1818, Keats contrives the metaphor of ‘the chamber of maiden thought’ and the ‘burden of mystery’ which together put forward much the same idea as that of negative capability:

I compare human life to a large Mansion of Many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me- The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think- We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle within us- we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there forever in delight. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300)

In the same passage Keats brings up the matter of tremendous effect of sharpening “one’s vision into the heart and nature of Man” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300); that is to say, as it does to Shakespeare, maintaining an open mind and a capacity for change and an aversion of forming comfortable resolutions (Wigod 384). Along these lines, as outsiders in their sometime glory land, Hamlet and King Lear gradually attain such negative capacity to transcend their self and obtain a truthful view. Exposed to a world of pains and troubles, their intelligence is schooled and they, especially King Lear as a monarch, disregard their self-interest and maintain an openness to a realm vaster than their self. On February 19, 1818 Keats writes a letter to J. H. Reynolds and expresses negative capability by means of a pair of antithetical figures, namely the flower functioning as the giver and the bee as the receiver:

Let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at. But let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive; budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every noble insect that favours us with a visit - Sap will be given us for meat, and dew for drink. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 288)

In the same passage he reveals that he was led to such thoughts “by the beauty of the morning operating on a sense of Idleness” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 288), which is closely associated with his poem known as “What the Thrush Said”:

O Thou whose face hath felt the Winter’s wind,
Whose eye has seen the snow-clouds hung in mist,
And the black elm tops ’mong the freezing stars,
To thee the spring will be a harvest-time.
O thou, whose only book has been the light
Of supreme darkness which thou feddest on
Night after night when Phœbus was away,
To thee the Spring shall be a triple morn.
O fret not after knowledge- I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth.

O fret not after knowledge- I have none,
And yet the Evening listens. He who saddens
At the thought of idleness cannot be idle,
And he's awake who thinks himself asleep. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 43)

This unrhymed sonnet is actually concerned with “the development of creativity out of unconscious experience” (Leavitt 83). It correspondingly lends itself to the idea of negative capability; the paradox of ‘light of supreme darkness’ is resolved when considering the light as the true knowledge emitted from the supreme darkness representing nature. Closely annihilated in the external impressions and fretting not after knowledge, the thrush- metaphorically representing the poet- makes a soul since he depreciates mere book knowledge and absolute conclusions and just ‘feds on night after night’ without clinging at knowledge but at intense experience. Therefore, if the auditor ‘saddens at the thought of idleness’, there is an act of reflection beckoning consciousness, consequently he who even ‘thinks himself asleep’ is awake. In fact the poet “interjects a bit of consciousness into the unconscious by implying that one who wills the self to sleep commits a conscious act” (Leavitt 84). Attached to the idea of negative capability, the given lines, as discussed earlier in White’s words, correlate with self-annihilation as a consequence of exercising negative capability. In other terms, if one even conceives of himself as asleep is actually awake, then probably he should sink into mystery and doubt to reach after the truth. By the same token his seminal poem “Ode to a Nightingale” concludes: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music: Do I wake or sleep?” (*The Complete Poetical Works* ll 79- 80). But he is probably awake because ‘he’s awake who thinks himself asleep’ and the poet is not assured enough whether the nightingale’s world is dream or reality.

The implication of negative capability emerges relatively in a pithy and thought-provoking lyric poem by Emily Dickinson who favors a Nobody as a luxury being incomprehensible to a dreary Somebody:

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us -don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog! (206-7)

The point made by the poet is that a ‘somebody’ is a pompous and boastful frog croaking its own self-importance, wallowing in its self-made bog. Instead she celebrates ‘nobodies’ who eschew announcing their presence for fear of banishment from their haven.

Seemingly what Keats never ceases to stress on is his reluctance to irritably reach after truth. He emphasizes in a letter to Benjamin Bailey on March 13, 1818 that “I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is proveable.... I shall never be a reasoner, because I care not to be in the right, when retired from bickering and in a proper philosophical temper.” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 291). It reveals another key element of negative capability, namely the ability to be neutral and to embrace unequivocally contrary ideas:

What a happy thing it would be if we could settle our thoughts and make our minds up on any matter in five minutes, and remain content- that is, build a sort of mental cottage of feelings, quiet and pleasant- to have a sort of Philosophical back-garden, and cheerful holiday-keeping front one- but alas! this never can be: for as the material cottager knows there are such places as France and Italy, and the Andes and burning mountains, so the spiritual Cottager has knowledge of the terra semi-incognita of things unearthly, and cannot for his life keep in the check-rein- or I should stop here quiet and comfortable in my theory of nettles. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 294)

Picking on a giant like Wordsworth whose reputation had already been solidified, Keats remarks on the poetical character which reaches its climax in a distinguishable and fairly daring distinction from ‘the Wordsworthian or egotistical Sublime’, which describes his version of Wordsworth’s distinctive genius possessing “imaginative self-obsession, a ‘devouring egotism’, in contradistinction to Shakespeare, ‘who was the least of an egoist that it was possible to be’” (“Egotistical Sublime”). Keats writes to Richard Woodhouse on October 27, 1818 about the nature of poetical character and chameleon poet:

it is not itself- it has no self - It is everything and nothing- It has no character- it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated- It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things, any more than from its taste for the bright one, because they both end in speculation. A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence, because he has no Identity- he is continually in for and filling some other body. The Sun- the Moon- the Sea, and men and women, who are creatures of impulse, are poetical, and have about them an unchangeable attribute; the poet has none, no identity- he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God’s creatures.- If then he has no self. (*The Complete Poetical Works* 336-7)

The chameleon poet relishes his moment of contradictory ideas since he/she is receptive to both 'light' and 'shade', 'foul' and 'fair', 'low' and 'high' because at the core of negative capability resides receptive openness pertaining to the "mind's ability to contain discordant or even contradictory ideas, and the embrace of experiential life and artistic intensity" (Ou *Introduction*). A man of achievement is a chameleon poet with no fixed self but "metamorphic identities, which furnish him with constant sympathetic identifications with nature or human beings alike" (Ou *Introduction*). King Lear is a remarkable character who, after losing his prestigious social rank, drowns into a sea of sorrows and arises with a new sense of identification and sympathy to nature and human being. No wonder then Shakespeare is deemed as exemplary of a chameleon poet. His greatness is hinted at by Jespersen under his discussion of Shakespeare's competency at employing a great number of words for a good number of various characters: "The greatness of Shakespeare's mind is...that he wrote about so great a variety of subjects and touched upon so many human facts and relations that he needed this number of words [20000 words] in his writings" (244). To Keats's expectations, such a versatile writer surely possesses negative capability within which Shakespeare the poet opens his leaves like a flower and will give us 'sap' for meat and 'dew' for drink.

Despite the high-profile that negative capability and its subsequent implications maintain in his letters, the virtually "dazzling diverse usage of the term may be a bit too far from what Keats meant almost two hundred years ago", but it validates its ongoing life and repetition (Ou *Introduction*). The present thesis attempts to employ its ongoing vigor to take a step further ahead of mere theoretically stipulated implications of negative capability and apply it on three of Shakespeare's oft-discussed characters, namely Othello, King Lear and Hamlet. I attempt to cling to Keats's train of thoughts regarding negative capability and relate it to the mentioned characters. Keats actually traces down this quality to Shakespeare himself, but it does not appear far from logical to also trace it to major tragic characters as they undergo noteworthy changes throughout the story, especially once they start being estranged and labelled as outsiders.

3. Othello's Character Criticism

Othello, the eloquent and physically powerful general, holds elevated status and respect in the Venetian government for his valuable skill as a soldier and leader which makes him a seemingly integral member of the Venetian civic society. Furthermore, he is trustworthy enough to be put in full martial and political command of Cyprus. Beside his dexterity with sword, his exotic quality with words draw especially those, such as Desdemona and Brabantio, who consider him as their social and civic peer. Unanimous among a good number of critics, character criticism of Othello is far from simple terms or commentary because as Edward Berry argues "Othello is neither Everyman nor an inhuman savage" (318), so it would not serve justice to the criticism of a character who is "not only richly complicated but individualized and set apart from Venetian society in almost every respect- in his blackness, his past, his bearing, and, above all, his language, with its unusual rhythms, grandeur, and exoticism" (Berry 316). In simple terms, Othello's characterization is a hard nut to crack since it does not give in to a stereotypical depiction. Even his Moorish qualities are not stereotypically presented throughout the play; Iago calls him a "credulous fool" (IV. i. 54), but he also alludes to him in his soliloquy: "The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so" (I. iii. 442-3). Having received the urgent news from the Duke, Cassio wraps up the urgent message requiring his instant appearance before the Duke in respectful terms: "The Duke does greet you, general / And he requires your haste-post-haste appearance, / Even on the instant" (I. ii. 42-4). At some time Othello is trusted to the full extent and holds great reverence for his exemplary military abilities, though this is not the whole story.

Given that the problem of character depicted by Othello's downfall before Iago's machinations is not unanimously handled by analysts of the character, among whose older tradition resides the idea that "Othello is the victim of Iago and remains pretty much the 'Noble Moor' throughout" and that he is "guilty only of being too innocent or foolish or simple or trusting or of losing his usual self-control" (Heilman, *Magic in the Web* 137). Jane Adamson claims that "Othello's Moorishness, far from being a special and separable issue, matters only in so far as it is part of a much larger and deeper one [...] the 'fated' and the 'free' aspect of the self" (7-8). Remarkably sympathetic to Othello, Bradley is actually an inspiring critic to idealize Othello and justify his defects as those of every individual to such a great extent that Shakespeare would have laughed if anyone had told him "no Englishman would have acted like the Moor, and had congratulated him

on the accuracy of his racial psychology” (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 187). Bradley does not disregard Othello’s race as a matter of no account but “in regard to the essentials of his character it is not important [...] And he is not merely a romantic figure; his own nature is romantic [...] Othello is the greatest poet of them all” (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 187-8). Not so sympathetic to Othello, F.R. Leavis critiques the version of Othello elaborated by Bradley since it “is the undoing of the noble Moor by the devilish cunning of Iago” so Othello is “a nearly faultless hero whose strength and virtue are turned against him” and this is “to sentimentalize Shakespeare’s tragedy and to displace its center” (Leavis 260). He argues that Othello “has been well provided by nature to meet all the trials a life of action has exposed him to”, but after marrying the Venetian girl with whom he is madly in love, the trials “facing him now are of a different order” (Leavis 265). With that given, Leavis barely touches upon the particulars of race or culture and orients his argument to deeper scrutiny of ‘egotism’, ‘self-centeredness’, ‘self-pride’ and especially ‘self-dramatization’ which is “an essential element in Othello’s make-up, and remains so at the very end. It is, at the best, the impressive manifestation of a noble egotism” (Leavis 265). Even Othello’s jealousy is reasoned in the same vein of discussion: “Othello’s self-idealization, his promptness to jealousy and his blindness are shown in their essential relation [...] Self-pride becomes stupidity, ferocious stupidity, an insane and self-deceiving passion” (Leavis 270). These critics treat Othello’s flaws as universal.

According to the other main approach through character, Othello “is not the ‘noble Moor’ at all but has serious defects of character which cause his downfall-defects such as habitual flight from reality and as pride” (Heilman, *Magic in the Web* 137). In sharp contrast to Bradley, S. L. Bethell treats Othello as no poet since he is “rude in his speech...he has some imagination if he invents the handkerchief story, and a strong visual imagination helps to plague him in his jealousy; but there is nothing especially ‘poetic’ about him” (31). He proposes no noble savage being produced out of the play, but a Moor who is destined to eternal damnation so “good will triumph and order be restored” (46) by having Cassio rule in Cyprus. For Albert Gerard Othello is fundamentally savage: “Othello’s negroid physiognomy is simply the emblem of a difference that reaches down to the deepest levels of personality.... Othello is, in actual fact, what Iago says he is, a ‘barbarian’” (13). He also strongly suggests that “Othello’s fundamental barbarousness becomes clear when we consider his religious beliefs. His superficial acceptance of Christianity should not blind us to his fundamental paganism” (13). Gerard draws a fairly general conclusion about the nature of the

play being the tragedy of “deception, self-deception, unjustified jealousy and criminal revenge” for which a hero like Othello is required (14). Othello’s basic element in character, Gerard contends, resides in his “lack of intellectual power” (14). For such critics civilization and religion look superficial compared to the deeper implications of the play which reside on the innate savagery of the Moor.

There is also an approach showing a more persuasive receptivity to Othello’s Moorishness. Eldred Jones suggests that Shakespeare seems to have outdone his contemporaries by granting “humanization” to “a type character who for most part of his contemporaries has only decorative or a crude moral significance [...] He transformed the Moor with all his unfavourable associations into the hero of one of his most moving tragedies” (109). He strongly emphasizes that Elizabethans were never totally unaware and ignorant of Africans. G. K. Hunter does not dismiss the theatrical innovations that Shakespeare introduces in *Othello* as regards the blackness of Othello by giving him “a royal origin, a Christian baptism, a romantic bravura of manner and, most important of all, an orotund magnificence of diction”, yet Shakespeare did not “change his colour, and so produced a daring theatrical novelty- a black hero for a white community” (31). Further on the same topic he suggests that Shakespeare deliberately kept Othello’s color as he counted on some positive reaction provoked from the audience, even so he obviously wanted no dismissal of Othello as a stereotype nigger (32).

With the above quick delineation of critics’ standpoints towards the character of Othello, there remains contention regarding how alienated or integrated Othello is in the white society of Venice, and how exotic- and most often poetic- his rhetoric sounds in relation to the dominant class higher than his, namely the Duke and senators, and to the dominated class lower than his, namely his ensign and officials. Othello’s adroit manipulation of rhetorical skills has undoubtedly been capturing remarkable attention for his gift of poetic comparison, imagery and symbolism. Heilman argues that “there is something in Othello’s own rhetoric...which can simultaneously support conflicting impressions of his personality”, given that “the frequent exoticism of the images...suggests largeness and freedom of spirit, and it is at first easy to forget that self-deception, limitedness of feeling and egotism may also inhabit this verbal expansiveness” (*Magic in the Web* 137-38). Rich in respect and trust for his troops and the people around him, Othello’s initial speech portrays a sophisticated and logical language, for example when Iago warns him of

Brabantio's power and influence twice that of any citizen, he calmly responds: "My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (I. ii. 21-2), or his profound reverence for the Duke and senators, addressing them as "Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors, / My very noble and approved good masters and peaceful personality" (I. iii. 91-2), accompanied by declaring his abiding love for Desdemona:

Vouch with me, heaven, I therefore beg it not
To please the palate of my appetite,
Nor to comply with heat the young affects
In me defunct and proper satisfaction,
But to be free and bounteous to her mind. (I. iii. 296-300)

Contrastingly, from act 4 onwards his unfortunate submission to Iago's manipulating tricks mark a turning point in his speech and personality becoming crude and impulsive: "How shall I murder him [Cassio]" (IV. i. 188-9). More drastically he addresses his beloved Desdemona in unfair and unprecedented terms: "Let her rot and perish and be damned tonight, for she shall not live" (IV. i. 200-1), or "I will chop her into messes! Cuckold me?" (IV. i. 219). Impulsive because he makes a hasty decision to murder Cassio and chop Desdemona without bothering to inquire about the assessment of the evidence Iago produces. More thought-provoking is his comparison of Desdemona with a sort of witch who "will sing the savageness out of a bear!" (IV. i. 208). Now Desdemona is displacing Othello because she can presumably precipitate savagery in a wild animal, therefore she is unfairly alienated from his world. As the play continues she becomes "an outsider in a way most of them are not" as she is living in a "military world" and her attempts to reconcile Othello with Cassio indicate the clash of "the domestic and courtly society to which she is accustomed" (Novy 105). The beloved turns into a seducer who "might lie by an emperor's side and command him tasks" (IV. i. 203-4).

3.1. Blackness and Moorishness

Moorishness and blackness are two basic elements which never cease to conjure up Africa and bring up the question of how familiar Elizabethan dramatists could have been with peoples of Africa. It is worthy of notice that during the second half of the sixteenth century, foreign trade burgeoned in England and as new lands were discovered, “scientific and popular writers recorded the facts about them, and supplemented the gaps in their information with old classical legends and, sometimes, with the products of their own imagination” and this was “the process by which knowledge of Africa grew in England” (Jones Vii). With the new continent emerging, the dramatists could not have been slow to perceive the worth of such a source of spectacle, plot, character and imagery. Elizabethans also encountered Moors and blacks from time to time, as “there were so many Negroes in England by 1601 that Queen Elizabeth issued an order for their transportation out of the realm” (Jones Viii). John Leo Africanus was a Berber Andalusi diplomat and author best known for his *The History and Description of Africa* which was translated by John Pory and soon received an authoritative status on the history and geography of the interior of Africa (Jones Vii). George Puttenham, Robert Green, and Ben Johnson cite this work by name, while John Webster and Shakespeare display signs of having touched upon it (Jones Viii). However, it does not necessarily mean the dramatists put in precisely accurate representations of actual types on the stage. It goes without saying that their characters were blended with imagination compounded out of fact. In the same vein Coleridge casts doubt on the possibility of Shakespeare’s ignorance of African Moors: “Can we imagine him [Shakespeare] so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro plead royal birth, at a time, too, when negros were not known except as slaves?”, and more importantly “No doubt Desdemona saw Othello's visage in his mind... [yet] it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro” (Notes on Othello).

Arthur L. Little argues in his article “An Essence That’s Not Seen” that from the late sixteenth century through the middle of the seventeenth century, one finds “the otherness of the black persona increasingly transformed into a truth.... More than signifying a different identity, blackness throughout the seventeenth century came to represent a lost identity” (311). Stephen Greenblatt writes in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* that Othello’s identity “depends on a constant performance [...] of his ‘story’, a loss of his own origins, an embrace and perpetual

reiteration of the norms of another culture” (245). His so-called lost origins may emerge out in his exotic tales of monstrous races and “The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Grew beneath their shoulders” (I. iii. 167-8). Othello wittingly “charms by reiterating his origins even as he [...] embraces the dominant values of Venetian culture” (Newman 48-9). Immersed in a white community, Othello is never easily integrated into the Venetian society. The black Othello is welcomed to the white Venetian society, but not well integrated, probably because he is firstly revered and honored due to the brave military services he has performed in warfare. It is, however, the presence or absence “of Othello’s blackness that shapes the emotional, psychological, and intellectual center of the play” (L. Little 311). It is noteworthy that no other work by Shakespeare ever touches upon the matter and representation of Arab sensibility so much as the tragedy of Othello. The hero is a Moor, not simply in an Arab context but in Europe which subconsciously could evoke “all the complex confrontations of Self / Other in a content of power struggle” (Ghazoul 1).

In Shakespeare’s plays the term Moor “primarily evoked blackness” while the religious connotation “usually faded into apparent insignificance” (De Grazia & Wells 157). In the course of play never is the issue of religion, in generality, and Islam, in specificity, brought up and it is merely blackness and moorishness which remarkably effect characters and their subsequent speeches and interactions. It could be so because Elizabethan and Jacobean writers “would occasionally suggest an affinity between Protestantism and Islam” as England tried “to establish trading connections with Morocco and other Islamic territories”, even though the Turks “were regarded as cruel and blood thirsty [...] they were also covertly admired” (De Grazia & Wells 159). However, blackness is not welcomed by characters, Othello himself included, in the play and there are numerous references disparaging it, many of which are mordantly uttered by Iago. The opening of the play is marked by the expression of scorn towards Othello in Iago’s first dialogue with Roderigo when Iago is rebuking Othello’s decision about Cassio’s lieutenantship and his ensignship which is the lowest ranking commissioned officer: “By debtor and creditor. This countercafter, / He, in good time, must his lieutenant be, / And I, God bless the mark, his Moorship’s ancient” (I. i. 33-5). His Moorship suggests a racial sarcastic slur by analogy with the title ‘His Worship’. Dexterously orchestrating the same conversation with Roderigo, Iago kindles his hatred of Othello for having robbed him of Desdemona’s heart and hastens his backlash against him: “Your heart is burst. You have lost half your soul. / Even now, now, very now, an old black

ram / Is tuppung your white ewe. Arise, arise, / Awake the snorting citizens with the bell / Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you. / Arise, I say” (I. i. 96-101). Roderigo must arise or the devil, suggestive of Othello’s blackness, will breed devil offspring. In act three in his soliloquy Iago admits Othello’s gullibility due to his simon-pure heart, though he cannot help calling him Moor: “The Moor is of a free and open nature / That thinks men honest that but seem to be so, / And will as tenderly be led by th’ nose / As asses are” (I. iii. 442-5). A few lines earlier he declares his intense hatred from Othello, not only for passing him over for a promotion, but he suspects Othello has hooked up with his wife, Emilia: “I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad, that ’twixt my sheets / ’Has done my office. I know not if ’t be true, / But I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety (429-33). Not knowing if the rumor’s true, Iago has already committed himself to dismantling Othello’s marital life and subsequently his whole life.

The Moor of a white society, Othello himself does not always seem ignorant of the sharp distinction laid down between him and the white members of the society. After Iago’s insinuations about Cassio and Desdemona start taking over Othello, he calls negative attention to both his race and age: “Haply, for I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have, or for I am declined / Into the vale of years- yet that’s not much / She’s gone, I am abused” (III. iii. 303-7). A few lines later, Othello’s suspicion nearly reaches the apex when comparing Desdemona’s reputation to his black face: “Her name, that was as fresh / As Dian’s visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face” (III. iii. 441-3). He has already progressed from belief in his conjugal happiness to belief in abandonment. Even his gracious beloved Desdemona addresses Othello as “the Moor my lord” (I. iii. 218) while professing her ardent love for him before the Senate. Categorizing the explicit denotations of black and its suggestive opposite quality within the play, Doris Adler states that black is firstly used as “a color designation for the darkest hue” (248). It can be inferred from some expressions and speeches uttered by characters who show high respect to Othello, the most conspicuous of which is the concise assuring words of the Duke who testifies Othello’s virtue and inner goodness before Brabantio: “If virtue no delighted beauty lack, / Your son-in-law is far more fair than black” (I. iii. 330-1). The Duke’s compliments attempt to cleanse away the presumed negative discourses ensuing every black skin from Othello’s blackness. He, however, cannot help referring to his blackness. The other denotations of black are relatively suggestive of negative view towards blackness and Moorishness, namely “designation of a negro”, “a brunette [which suggest] black and witty”, “the soil of filth or grime” and “morally foul” (248-

9). The unrefined voluptuousness of the black stereotypical image is represented by “the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor” (I. i. 141) who is persistently associated with bestial implications by the recurring use of animals and blackness. In his conversation with Brabantio, Roderigo employs animal imagery in order to depict Othello as an African horse: “you’ll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse. You’ll have your nephews neigh to you. You’ll have coursers for cousins and gennets for germans” (I. i. 124-7). Brabantio must arise “or else the devil will make a grandsire” and begrime his household (I. i. 100). Adler writes that “the blackness of the devil and the blackness of Othello” and the “unnatural union of evil with good”, and more remarkably the union “of the African with European” can be made identical in the simple substitution of devil with man.

It should be noted that the play leads to no psychological determinism regarding crude savagery represented by Othello. Despite the fact that he is black and has gone through a variety of unprecedented adventures and dangers, it should not cloud judgement on his frenzied and hasty moves and take extremely negative approach in Othello’s character analysis. With that said, his blackness does not merely represent a mark of physical alienation but a kind of symbol to which every character, himself included, relatively should respond. Enraged by Iago’s malign machinations rising to climax in the third act, Othello invokes *black* vengeance to arise “from the hollow hell” (III, iii, 597). In the last act when entering with a candle at Desdemona’s soon-to-be deathbed, Othello resists shedding her blood or scar her skin because it is whiter “than snow, / And smooth as monumental alabaster” (IV. ii. 4-5); but “she must die, else she’ll betray more men” (IV. ii. 6). However, he cannot help being moved by her *white* skin and “balmy breath” which “dost almost persuade” him to spare her life (IV. ii. 17), but he can quench the “flaming minister [candle]” to shun seeing her white skin, so “Put out the light [candle], and then put out the light [her life]” (IV. ii. 7). Traditionally light is linked with “goodness, life, knowledge, truth, fame and hope” and darkness with “evil, death, ignorance, falsehood, oblivion, and despair” (Ferber 112). Hence putting out the light which is supposed to enlighten the path, both physically and mentally, suggests the arrival of darkness which has been hovering over his head since the implantation of Iago’s machinations. In the third act Othello invokes the ‘black vengeance’ and here he cannot resist Desdemona’s white skin which has lighting qualities like ‘alabaster’ and may dissuade him from killing her, so the light symbolically referring to knowledge and truth should be put out as there is no need of it because he sounds judicially fair enough to pass the verdict and execute it.

Hesitating for a short while, he implicitly confesses that by quenching the candle he “can again thy former light restore” (IV. ii. 11), but if he repents on murdering her, he does not know “where is that Promethean heat / That can thy light relume” (IV. ii. 12-13). He is too egotistical to step out of the loop of goings-on and be in uncertainties and doubts so as to grasp the light of truth. With that said, he is determined to serve the suppositious justice, though he sheds ‘cruel tears’ which are not potent enough to prolong his irritable reaching after judiciary verdict passed by himself.

3.2. Othello's Self-dramatization

As discussed in Keats's 24 September letter to George and Georgian, Dilks never comes at a truth because he lives by irritably reaching after truth and making up his mind about everything. Similarly Othello, the esteemed general in Cyprus, never sees the truth as long as he hastily and irritably reaches after the conclusion made up by Iago, because his "self-centeredness does not mean self-knowledge" but "the impressive manifestation of a noble egotism" (Leavis 265). His lack of self-knowledge actually humiliates him and his self-idealization is shown as "blindness" and the nobility as the "disguise of an obtuse and brutal egotism" along with his self-pride becoming "stupidity" highlighting "an insane and self-deceiving passion" (Leavis 270). At the climax of the play, Othello is firmly clinging at his heroic self-dramatization, reassuring the Othello of "big wars / That makes ambition virtue!" (III. iii. 401-2). He places himself in his vindictive tenacity by means of grandiloquent and heroic metaphors which foreground an inextinguishable and flowing vengeance:

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er keeps retiring ebb but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont,
Even so my bloody thoughts with violent pace
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up. (III. iii. 514-21)

Due to his egotistical sublime or devouring egotism mentioned in Keats's chapter, Othello barely keeps distance from his egotistical passions as he cannot abandon the comfortable enclosure of his self-made image. Though his sublime egotism has already won him Desdemona and convinced her to choose the suitor most alien to her. It is as if "this time the white witch had charmed herself out of the leaden casket into the golden one where the proud, rhetoric-drunk African, knowing no rules beyond self-respect, can discover her" (Fiedler 141). In his conversation with Iago, Othello shows ultimate signs of self-assurance, feeling absolutely relieved of Brabantio's complaints because "I fetch my life and being / From men of royal siege, and my demerits / May speak unbonneted to as proud a fortune / As this that I have reached" (I. ii. 24-7). Othello holds a position to himself not less prestigious than that of Desdemona, so he finds it easy to boast that if he did not love Desdemona, he would never have his freedom "put into circumscription and confine"

even for the sea's worth (I. ii. 30). Terrel I. Tebbetts approaches the character of Othello from a Jungian psychological perspective, declaring of the play that it is "self-consciously theatrical" and that it actually compels readers not because it is a "textbook of theatrical conventions" or "a convincing casebook on sexual repressions", but because "it gives psychological depth to the theater" and the greatness of the play resides in its "awareness of the pageants that human beings create to keep themselves and others in false gaze". He also contends that Othello's ego responds by "projecting dimly perceived anima/animus and shadow onto others" (qtd. In Hopkins 47-8), which precipitates his grandiloquence before the Senate: "My parts, my title, and my perfect soul / Shall manifest me rightly. Is it they?" (I, ii, 36-7).

Othello's last speech undermines an expression of "universal human weakness" which is in fact "an escape from reality and a self-dramatizing aesthetic attitude" (Fike 18). In his last speech Othello uses third person: "Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely, but too well. / Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, / Perplexed in the extreme. Of one whose hand, / Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (V. ii. 403-408). Fike interprets the third person use as "psychic distance between his civilized self and the part of him that killed his wife", however the two analogies "correspond to his former lack of self-awareness and his present self-realization" (18).

Even in his last speech before stabbing himself he does not relinquish dramatizing his desired self and describes how he once smote a Turk who had beaten a Venetian: "Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk / Beat a Venetian and traduced the state, / I took by the throat the circumcised dog, / And smote him" (V. ii. 414-17). A prevalent sign of Othello's alienation is echoed in other characters who over and over avoid his name; Othello is most of the time addressed all through the play by 'general', 'lord' and 'the Moor'. Throughout the play, Othello's naming "keeps an audience subtly conscious of the impossibility of Othello's complete assimilation and gives to his numerous self-references [...] a special weight" (Berry 322). When attending the Senate, Othello is called 'the valiant Moor' by one of the senators and only the Duke, who needs Othello to cope with the crisis in Cyprus, immediately greets Othello, saying "Valiant Othello, we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman" (I. iii. 53-4). In the ensuing conversation, Othello presents an overall vivid picture of his life time and boasts that such life events have bewitched Desdemona and that she bade him if he had a friend that loved her, he should teach him

how tell stories, while at the beginning of the same conversation he admits “rude am I in my speech” (I. iii. 96), but he is presumptuous in grandiloquent rhetoric and ornaments his adventures so competently that the Duke seems mesmerized by them. Roderigo, in the first act, warns Brabantio of his daughter’s “gross revolt” which is “tying her duty, beauty, wit, and fortunes / In an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere” (i. 150-2). Though out of jealousy and spite, his words can foreground an inevitable part of Othello’s mannerism, namely his extravagant self-dramatization and egotism.

In some moments Othello is treated as an integrated insider at some time, in particular in the time of crisis in Cyprus, hence he tries to “feel or behave in some ways similar to those who are insiders” and does not evoke “threatening stereotypes at some moments” and appears just human (Novy 155). But in Othello’s case, feeling and behaving similar to the insiders are often taken to extreme. In his speech before the Senate he confesses the vices of his blood, representing his consciousness of color alienation from the Venetian white society. To be integrated in the Venetian community, Othello shapes a self “to which he aspires” and “behind this aspiration, however, lies anxiety” of the convert struggling to prepare the ground for his integration in the white community. Iago exploits such insecurity in Othello to commence his downfall. To fit in the white society, he does not even eschew degrading his own race and the like. In the fight between Cassio and Montano, Othello tells them off and at any cost attempts to cleanse their savagery away from their originality: “Are we turned Turks? And to ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites? (II. iii. 182-3). He unabashedly likens these drunkards to Turks and instantaneously reminds them of their Christianity civilization: “For Christian shame, put by this barbarous brawl” (184). He degrades Turks to set a binary opposition with Christians, hence savagery versus civilization.

3.3. Othello's Lack of Negative Capability

As a storyteller in the Senate, Othello is in total command of speech, exercising “such dominion over shifters as to transform I into his own proper name” (Calderwood, “Speech and Self” 294) and he wittingly employs words and meanings to his own advantage which imply “the capitalist of self” relates to “the capitalist of speech”, thus there is “his meanings rolling on in sounding diction and sentences of sustained syntactic complexity” (Calderwood, “Speech and Self” 294). Othello’s speech at the Senate in act one scene 3 never ceases to amaze us as he barely straightforwardly aggrandizes himself because “Rude am I in my speech, / And little blessed with the soft phrase of peace” (96-7), and “I do confess the vices of my blood” (144), and he seems hardly familiar with the world apart from fighting; since he was seven years old until “nine moons wasted” (99) - that is nine months ago- his hands have used “their dearest action in the tented field” (100), but ironically speaking, he does not hesitate to deliver a grandiloquent speech “in speaking for myself” (104) and “I will a round unvarnished tale deliver / Of my whole course of love. What drugs, what / charms” (106-8). Wittingly conscious of his upcoming words, he has already foregrounded his forthcoming speech by retaining persistently the sustained syntactic complexity and tantalizing the audience for a short while by wrapping up his initial speech in words promising to tell the “conjunction” and “mighty magic” employed in winning Desdemona (109). Othello ultimately reveals, contrary to his confession of speaking incompetence, his gift of gab: “She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished / That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked / me” (187-189). Calderwood pertains to his mastery in speech and argues that “because of the recursiveness of his story” and more importantly because “he is a voice telling about himself telling about himself, his possession of the I is reaffirmed within his own story” (“Speech and Self” 294-5). By the end of his narration, the audience looks persuaded about Desdemona’s decision as the Duke tells Brabantio that “I think this tale would win my daughter too” (“Speech and Self” 197). His language is resonant and replete with images which refute the “stereotype of the inarticulate barbarian” (Novy 95), although Iago interprets his language as a means to evade “them with a bombast circumstance” to sidestep many issues with a lot of military talk (I. i. 14). Really stuffed with epithets of war, as Iago rightly mentions, Othello sounds so self-centered that “everyone else is distanced as he or she” (Calderwood, “Speech and Self” 294). Othello holds such a monopoly over his grandiloquent words that the first reaction from the Senate is approving him of winning her hand.

Apart from rare cases, Othello barely keeps distance from his egotistical passions and desires to remain in doubts and mystery, which marks the very foundation of negative capability. In act 3 scene 3 Othello strongly requests hard proof for Desdemona's alleged disloyalty because "to be once in doubt / Is to be resolved" (210-11), so as self-confidently as ever he likens himself to a goat "When I shall turn the business of my soul / To such exsufflicate and blowed surmises" (212-13). Ironically speaking, he claims "I'll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove, / And on the proof there is no more but this" (221-2), but, as Arthur Kirsch states, "this speech is the immediate prelude to his fall, as well as the prediction of it, for once he accepts the epistemology of 'normal' Venetian eyesight, he is doomed" (*The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic heroes* 64). Othello, however, never actually sees the truth let alone concrete evidence. He does doubt, but not his own conclusion; he doubts "where virtue is" and the eyes that chose him (217). He never comes at a truth because he irritably reaches after truth. He, as mentioned in Keats's chapter, hardly sharpens his vision into the heart and nature of man. Keats's statement about the mind being a thoroughfare is the only means of strengthening one's intellect, which appears deficient in Othello. Negative capability could pave the path towards reaching after the truth, with which Othello comes in grips rather late. Therefore, Iago effortlessly "does things with Othello and Desdemona in the sense of doing things to them" (Berger 3), accordingly they are more than just victims but also his accomplices because the words with which Iago "poisons their greedy ears are words he appropriates from their mouth" (Berger 3).

The tragedy of Othello, Kirsch infers, is ultimately the representation of Othello's failure in loving his own body and "it is the despairing self-hatred that spawns the suicidal destructiveness of his jealousy" (*The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic heroes* 68). Othello, explicitly or implicitly, refers to his color as a disgraceful mark: "Her name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face" (III. iii. 441-3), or when calling forth vengeance, he says: "Arise, black vengeance, from the hollow hell" (III, iii, 597). Yet on the contrary Desdemona's white skin is a deterring element in unleashing his vengeance, "Yet I'll not shed her blood, / Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow, / And smooth as monumental alabaster" (IV. ii. 3-5). For a while it is likely that he will curb his obsession and forbear from murdering her, but he does not benefit from negative capability to doubt his own judicial decision. Heilman states that Othello has "the least reflective capacity of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes" (*Magic in the Web* 152). Othello places himself on "a pinnacle of assurance" (*Magic in the Web* Heilman 154) and blinds

himself to the nature of his misdeeds once he takes up the role of a priest, witness and judge in a hearing: “Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin, / For to deny each article with oath / Cannot remove nor choke the strong conception / That I do groan withal” (V. ii. 67-70), and ultimately he passes the verdict: “Thou art to die” (70). Actually it is through the judicial review of a case that the truth is revealed, but Othello is the absolute jury and judge who irritably draws conclusion.

The made-up self to which Othello aspires is not easy to break from and fall into doubts and mystery, and it pursues him nearly to his ultimate downfall. Thus it could be argued that Othello has two self-contradictory self-images haunting him all through the play; one image is the black Moor, to which Othello himself admits, and the honorable general, for which Othello struggles. Incited by the sight of dead Desdemona, Othello claims he has made his way “through more impediments” twenty times more terrifying than the weapon (V. ii. 314-15), but a few lines later he condemns himself to a burning hell: “O cursed, cursed slave! / Whip me, ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight! / Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulfur, / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!” (327-31). His immediate reaction to the murder, Berry argues, reflects the divided image produced by him as a consequence of alienation in a white community, then “he is either doomed like all great men or destroyed by his own blackness” (330). It, however, should be noted that his racial alienation does not merely result in the hostility or estrangement from the Venetian community but he also accepts such a definition, representative of “his incapacity to break free of this mental construct” and becoming “a double victim of the early colonial imagination” which insinuates alienation “to others and himself” (Berry 331). Trapped in vacillation over estrangement from the white society, Othello cannot be expected to relieve himself of self-dramatization and egotism without much effort. With that said, the interplay of insider and outsider is far from simple and “the complexity of Othello’s outsider position as a foreigner who is admired contributes to the sympathy that many viewers have given Othello” even as they are appalled by his shocking final murder of Desdemona (Novy 88).

Lack of soliloquies in Othello’s rhetoric is perceptible, compared to Hamlet and King Lear. Soliloquies reveal the way characters wrestle with their private thoughts and pressure by which characters may perceive and start to suspect their own flaws and even villains, who are “the manipulators of the plot and commentators on the action”, often deliver their “self-revelatory statements of invention” (838). Iago presents remarkably prolonged soliloquies which could

promise the success of his vicious machinations because he, no matter for what intention, holds the key element of negative capability, namely the ability to be neutral and open to the whereabouts. The third scene of act 1 ends with Iago's lengthy soliloquy through which his private and frank intentions are reported: "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse. / For I mine own gained knowledge should profane / If I would time expend with such a snipe / But for my sport and profit" (426-29). He even relates his reason of hatred of the Moor to no absolute conclusion because "it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office" (430-1), yet he does not know for sure but "I, for mere suspicion in that kind, / Will do as if for surety" (432-3). In act 2 scene 3 Iago is relishing his satisfaction because it has been so easy to abuse Cassio and Roderigo to further his malign machinations, while disclosing his developing plans in his soliloquy: "If I can fasten but one cup upon him [Cassio], / With that which he hath drunk tonight already, / He'll be as full of quarrel and offense / As my young mistress' dog" (49-53). From time to time Iago steps out of the events and looks shrewdly into probable variables and choices to manipulate the scenario. The phrase negative capability almost just addresses a vision higher than the dull and mundane perspective and engages a kind of self-annihilation, thus it should correlate with self-annihilation and soul-making which do not seem very compatible with tragic villains, though even the burgeoning phase of staying in neutrality and self-distancing could grant a broader perspective of the events to the onlooker, being Iago in the play. Watching Cassio, Rodrigo and three other Cyprus gentlemen drinking themselves to intoxication, Iago wittingly keeps away from drunkenness to maneuver Cassio and the "sick fool", Roderigo, into a bloody fight (52).

In the opening of act 4 Iago continues his insinuations when providing more evidence against Desdemona. Othello's suspicion has already been aroused and the last strike to cast the master of language into a series of incoherent cries and babblings is Iago's mere word "lie" which Othello takes to mean "with her". Iago does not linger in saying "With her- on her- what you will" (42), after which Othello's drastic shift from verse into prosaic fragmental utterances should be noted. He is no longer total command of speech but commanded by speech: "Lie with her? Lie on her? We say 'lie on her' when they belie her! Lie with her- that's fulsome" (43-4). He cannot pull himself together and, ironically as he earlier claimed, demand reasonable proof but he just relies on a missing handkerchief to suspect those eyes having chosen him in the first place, "Handkerchief- confessions- handkerchief!" (45). His disconnected words endure till he falls into a trance: "It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips. Is't possible? Confess!

Handkerchief! - Oh, devil" (49-52). His trembling words parallel with his shaking physical body. His seizure "consists of an obliteration of consciousness and a consequent deterioration of reflective man to that state which Hamlet called bestial oblivion" (Calderwood, "Speech and Self" 298). His obliteration of consciousness, however, does not seem compatible with Keatsian self-annihilation which is supposed to comprise a consequence of negative capability and subsequently come at truth, but his trance stems from the contradiction between his own made-up judgement about the faithful Desdemona and the devilish Desdemona. Othello exaggerates in comparing her tears to crocodile breeder: "If that the earth could teem with woman's tears, / Each drop she falls would prove a crocodile" (274-5). Othello is actually, in Emily Dickinson's implications, wallowing in his self-made bog like a pompous and boastful frog croaking its own self-importance. Heilman contends that Othello does not have the flexibility of mind to weigh up the events which is easily detected in his fewer soliloquy lines than Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, hence less intelligence, introspectiveness and "inner life to lay bare" (*Magic in the Web* 146).

Historically speaking, "a wide spectrum of work has identified" processes of English identity formation "through the negation of other 'outsiders', whether they belonged to far-away lands such as various 'Indians' and 'Moors', or lived in closer proximity" (De Grazia 151), and it is expected that Shakespeare was subject to racist and colonialist discourses of his time, but by making the black Othello's hero and by making Desdemona fall in love with him, which is violation of her society's norms in choosing and supporting a Moorish outsider, Shakespeare sets forth "a contestatory relation to the hegemonic ideologies of race and gender in early Modern England" (Newman 58). Othello, however, is a hero "within the terms of a white elitist male ethos and he suffers the generic punishment of tragedy" (Newman 58). Yet Shakespeare depicts a black hero in a particular historical moment and context wherein blacks are usually allowed roles of villains and despicable status. Finally the negotiable approaches taken towards character criticism of Othello leave no doubt about Shakespeare's genius in pouring appropriate words and thoughts into the mouth and mind of a black Moor attempting in vain to fit an alien society.

4. King Lear: Romantically Admired

Around 1960 *King Lear* regained “its ascendancy in critical esteem” as the main tradition of criticism “up to the 1950s had interpreted the play as concerned with Lear’s pilgrimage to redemption” but in the 1960s “the play became Shakespeare’s bleakest and most despairing vision of suffering” (Foakes 3-4). Yet, the redemption side of the play is not so easily discarded because there are enough clues in the play to lead our interpretation more or less towards the idea of redemption and human’s suffering along with the insights gained after the sea of sorrows strike man’s life. A known poet who was enormously impressed by the given assumption is John Keats on whom the play’s enormous influence lies “behind many of his meditations on poetic creativity and upon human suffering” (White 169). For Keats, *King Lear* represents a lifelong journey through our own inwardness during a very short span of time. The play, in his recognition, is marked by “action, energy and spontaneous outbursts rather than introspection or sustained reflectiveness” (White 186). *King Lear* undergoes a radically progressive conflict between his outwardness and inwardness which gradually turn his overriding self-assurance into a sublime vision of human despair: “Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal” (II. iv. 114-5).

King Lear disposes of his kingdom by giving bequests to two of his daughters based on their flattery, bringing tragic consequences for all, while he actually wishes to “shake all care and business from” his age “conferring them on younger strengths” (I. i. 42-3). Subsequent to the tragic consequences, Lear gradually descends into madness which progressively bestows a vision to his metaphorical blindness towards the truth of human interactions some of which were shrouded under flattery and deceit employed by his older daughters. Besides that, Lear’s judgement is clouded by his self-centeredness which, after being expelled by his daughters, is gradually replaced by self-annihilation, which is a consequence of exercising negative capability. Dividing his kingdom between Regan and Goneril, Lear is warned of the ensuing consequences when Kent berates Lear for his hasty and gullible decision:

Think’st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power to flattery bows? To plainness honor’s bound
When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state,
And in thy best consideration check
This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment,
Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least,

Nor are those empty-hearted whose low sound
Reverbs no hollowness (I. i. 164-173).

However, he foolishly divides his kingdom and disowns Cordelia due to his lack of sight for which he has to pay a huge penalty. He is totally blind to Cordelia's true love and her sisters' empty-hearted flattery, despite Kent's bold insistence on his reconsideration of forsaking Cordelia: "See better, Lear; and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye" (I. i. 180-81), but Kent ought to "come not between the dragon and his wrath" (I. i. 136). So his eyes seemingly must see through dreadful occurrences and he should sink relatively into sorrow to gain the necessary knowledge to grasp the truth, thus he arises with a new sense of identification and sympathy to nature and human being, which is meant to be elaborated on within the pages to come.

P. B. Shelley claims that *King Lear* "may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world" (519). The play is definitely a hard nut to crack and does not easily lend itself to a single-layered interpretation and critical perspectives. Charles Lamb takes into account Lear's greatness not in "corporeal dimension" but in "intellectual" which is "the explosions of his passion" similar to "storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom" of the sea and "all its vast riches" (9). He goes on underlining Lear's "power of reasoning" which is "immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life" and the fact that Lear exerts his reasoning power "at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind" (9). In other terms, the egotistical and arrogant king must give up his grandeur to lowness so as to elevate his reasoning power from the ordinary to the sublime, which represent some basic humanitarian values, including sympathetic identifications with nature and human beings. The whole play, Heilman believes, acts values and each deed is meant to be a value judgement (*Magic in the Web* 153). He further argues that the play is "an immensely inclusive anthropology" which remarkably gets at the "problem of man from every side and in every aspect to give it the fullest and most variegated possible expression in differentiable and yet collaborating strands of poetic and dramatic structure" (*Magic in the Web* 177). Yet bearing in mind the fitness of Shakespeare's tragedies for stage representation, Lamb prefers to experience the play in the study rather than the stage because "to see Lear acted, to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters on a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting" (9). Likewise, Hazlitt "was typical of the Romantics in preferring to read *King Lear*" (Hiscock & Hopkins 36). Evidently romantics hardly

ceased to gravitate to the vehement potency of active and creative imagination to vividly picture the stage in mind rather than see visually on the stage.

The Romantic poets place imagination in an elevated position, as they do not see it as a kind of fancy faculty of human to merely conceive images and words, but it constitutes reality and enjoys creative power, being forthrightly stated by Samuel Coleridge when making a distinction between imagination and fancy. He considers fancy as “a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space” while it is “blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will” and fancy must receive “all its materials ready made from the law of association” (*Biographia Literaria* 202). At the other pole resides imagination- divided as primary and secondary- forming the base of many romantic writings. The primary imagination is held to be “the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM”, while the secondary imagination echoes the primary one but it also “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify” (*Biographia Literaria* 202). To sum it up, the secondary not only gives shape to the world but builds new worlds, subsequently a romantic poet would be able or even sometimes prefer to build the theatrical stage in his dramatic mind.

With that said, as a fervent admirer of *King Lear*, John Keats remarks on Lear’s soul-making development in his letters, one of which was written to his brothers on January 23, 1818, after he read the play again and felt “a little change” in his “intellect” and he could not “bear to be uninterested or unemployed” because “nothing is finer for the purposes of great productions than a very gradual ripening of the intellectual powers” (*The Complete Poetical Work* 282). He then admits that a sort of inspiration “appeared to demand the prologue of a sonnet” called “On Sitting Down to King Lear Once Again”, in which he implicitly concentrates on the necessity of conflict with impending mortality and clash with passiveness to ripen intellect; precisely the journey that King Lear bears to school himself (*The Complete Poetical Work* 282). Tolerating unmitigated suffering and submission to a world of pains, King Lear “schools the soul towards a modified, more integrated knowledge of human limitations and human potential” (White 193). There are also theories counter to Lear’s journey towards sublimity. Wilson Knight argues that Lear is “incongruously geared to a puerile intellect” and his “senses prove his idealized love-figments false” and throughout the play “greatness is linked to puerility” (183). From a fairly different

perspective, William Hazlitt draws a comparison between Lear's mind and a tall ship "driven about by the winds, buffeted by the furious waves" but it still "rides above the storm, having its anchor fixed in the bottom of the sea" (118-19). To delve into the meticulous details of such tall ship buffeted by the rough sea of pains and regrets, we must be mindful of the quality of mind and "its adaptability, persistence, and reasonableness" (Jorgensen 44). The present study strives to reveal the quality of Lear's mind which helps him grope his way toward the truth. Jorgensen also finds King Lear as "the most impressive depiction of a hero thinking his way toward self-discovery" (44). If not totally fitting a romantic hero, King Lear still represents some main features of the literary archetype of a romantic hero. Northrop Frye notes that a romantic hero is "placed outside the structure of civilization and therefore represents the force of physical nature, amoral or ruthless, yet with a sense of power, and often leadership, that society has impoverished itself by rejecting" (119). Next to that, King Lear promptly realizes his alienation and isolation from his sometime vast kingdom, so he regrets for his actions which lead him to self-criticism, introspection and philanthropy. Shortly after King Lear settles down with Goneril, she rebukes him for his knights' rowdiness and demands he dismiss half of them. The initial sparks of wider perspective and enlightenment appear in his words:

Does any here know me? This not Lear.
Does Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are letrhargied – Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so.
Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I. iv. 231-36)

Yet King Lear has the breadth of vision to admit his unfairness to Cordelia when he notices how ugly "didst thou in Cordelia show" (I. iv. 279), and he made such a big deal out of Cordelia's petty flaw and how it bent him out of shape. Aware of the slackening of respect from Goneril, he leaves for Regan's home, hoping Regan will welcome him and his followers with hospitality, but to his disappointment Regan and Cornwall refuse to see him and they eventually reduce the number of his servants to none:

What need you five and twenty, ten, or five
To follow in a house where twice so many
Have a command to tend you? (II. iv. 301-3)

Enraged and heartbroken, he rushes out into a harsh storm, invoking heavens to "give me that patience, patience I need" (II. iv. 313). His urgent reactions and begging patience can actually

dissuade readers from considering him as a palpable example of stupidity and senility. On the contrary, he has “high intelligence and greatness of spirit completely outside the definition of such a term as dotard” (Schoff 162). King Lear is principally potential for taking the severely rigorous journey elevating him from self-conceit to empathizing with nature and human misery.

In the opening scene, Lear gives us a fairly unsatisfactory explanation for requesting the love pronouncements:

Which of you shall we say doth love us most
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge? (I. i. 56-8)

Lear’s love contest for her daughters to gain reassurance about their loyal love to him may seem ridiculous and wrong but it cannot be totally unmotivated and bereft of any reason; Lear is probably “seeking some reassurance of identity” and “nothing could be further from his mind than the labyrinthine complexity of self-exploration” (Jorgensen 95). So that Cordelia’s nothing to her father’s generous offer of “a third more opulent” share than her sisters’ enrages him and devastates his reassurance. It, however, does not take him a long time to come to grips with Cordelia’s nothing as the true enlightening love against her sisters’ serious devastation inflicting on Lear. In like manner Jorgenson states that as long as “Lear’s autocratic ego demands protestation of total devotion and as long as he sees love as bound to worldly possessions,” Lear can barely obtain “Cordelia’s kind love and the reliable assurance about his own worth” (99). Furthermore, nothing far exceeds a literal word denoting something empty or of no value, but “a kind of vortex that draws the ordered world of King Lear downward, reducing Lear to nakedness and madness and Gloucester to blindness” (Calderwood, “Creative Uncreation” 6-7). Rising from nakedness and madness, King Lear must undergo a long-suffering journey to prompt negative capability to rise above the egotistical sublime of his suffering.

4.1. King Lear: An Outsider and Nothing

In *King Lear*, the most obvious insider / outsider contrast is not “between people of different ethnicities or religions, but between people in the same family” (Novy121). The play represents apparent insiders becoming outsiders, relatively because of their own pride and stubbornness, such as Lear, or gullibility and negligence such as Gloucester and Kent. Lear’s outsider position fluctuates in the play, yet he is depicted as a potential outsider who is susceptible to marginalization due to his senility and dividing his kingdom between his daughters. But Cordelia, apparently an outsider onstage, is “an insider to the play’s value system” (Novy 142), since her sympathy is not confined to her family members but embraces every living creature, at least according to her language: “Mine enemy’s dog, / Though he had bit me, should have stood that night / Against my fire” (IV. vii. 42-4). Soon an outsider, dismissing Lear commences the stark self-discovery process that he is destined to undergo and reach the truth unseen for so long due to the stubborn pride veiling his eyes. Discovering the self inevitably demands an openness of mind that borders on self-annihilation. Subsequently he must totally overlook his kingly sanity so as to look into his own self. Disappointed with Goneril, he sets out for Regan with his attendants and the Fool who poses a simple but witty statement: “The reason why the seven stars are not more than seven is a pretty reason” (I. v. 34-6). But Lear’s response is mundane: “Because they are not eight” (I. v. 37), to which the Fool gives a quick repartee: “Yes, indeed. Thou wouldst make a good Fool” (I. v. 38). However, Lear is still so immersed in his own kingly integrity that he cannot stand it anymore and claims he may go mad in a little while: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! / Keep me in temper. I would not be mad” (I. v. 45-6). In the previous scene Goneril rebukes Lear for his knights’ rowdiness and demands he dismiss half of them. Lear’s dawning recognition of his severe situation and the impotency of his former regality manifest the false notion he has always retained about his formidable role as a father and a king:

I would learn that, for, by the marks of
Sovereignty
Knowledge, and reason, I should be false persuaded
I had daughter. (238-41)

With his agony starting, Lear’s sympathies are aroused and broadened for the nature and sufferings of other people and “he suddenly realizes that all men are one in pain” (Wolsford 265), and one must empathize with them:

Take physic, pomp.
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (III. iv. 38-41)

In order to attain “this simplicity and directness of communication with other men”, Dillon states, “all that seemed to be self must be discarded” (131). Similarly Kent and Edgar must abandon their courtly ranks and take on self-effacing roles to discover what it means to be a common man. They must first “disintegrate the old self before they can achieve unity both within and among themselves” (Dillon 131). The same can be said of Gloucester, whose blindness parallels Lear’s madness:

That I am wretched
Makes thee the happier. Heavens, deal so still:
Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man,
That slaves your ordinance, that will not see
Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly.
So distribution should undo excess,
And each man have enough. (IV. ii. 75-81)

Cast away, Gloucester similarly gains some flashes of insight into the world and the unjust distribution of resources among people. However, this is King Lear whose mind soars to previously unattainable heights of insight to see the truth about himself once his wits begin to leave him and as “they are wholly gone, he begins to have spasmodic flashes of insight” into seeing “the truth about the world” (Wolsford 266). Yet he must become an outsider to benefit from negative capability. Lear’s outsider situation is complex because he himself leaves his daughters after they return his generosity with ingratitude and ruthlessness and he quickens his banishment by taking recourse to the storm and ultimately to nature, following which comes his madness as “an intellectual phenomenon” to express “a failure of understanding before the extraordinarily complex situation” (Heilman, *This Great stage* 173-4). His madness has been viewed “as a means of achieving moral or spiritual enlightenment in a world where self-seeking individualism might otherwise prevail”, yet it is Lear who “reaches a moral understanding of life which supersedes that recognized by all other characters” (Salkeld 18). The process of his insanity being as a struggle for truth, Lear unwantedly becomes an outsider and sets off on a severely burdensome but fairly transformative and soul-making progression which ultimately leaves him enlightened but soon dead.

However far before going on the transformative journey, Lear is an insider and privy to every meticulous detail of kingdom. He recklessly rejects Cordelia's frank reply to his love contest intended to gain reassurance about his daughters' loyal love to him and her nothing enrages him and devastates his reassurance, for which he probably feigns indifference to her prospective husband and tells her suitors:

Will you, with those infirmities she owes,
Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dowered with our curse and strangered with our
Oath,
Take her or leave her? (I. i. 231-35)

Her nothing arouses his impetuous conclusion that "nothing will come of nothing" (I. i. 99), but Cordelia has evidently fathomed "the inadequacy and unreliability of ordinary language in describing the reality that is beyond it" and the fact that speech and discourse are "the externalization and objectification of feeling" (Han 250), so words have no substance but forms of expression. Lear regrettably acts on the premise that what his daughters say "will be true by virtue of their saying it" and he will never treat "the words as signs that are true or false to the degree that they correspond to an extraverbal reality", rather he treats them "as substances, as entities, which carry their own truth" (Burckhardt 239). Therefore, Cordelia truly forebears from pouring her feelings into words:

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less (I. i. 100-2)

Speech and discourse belong to the articulation process which lead us astray from nothing "as the source of all beings" (Han 250). Such sort of nothing makes Cordelia an outsider in the king's eyes, but it also prepares the ground for the king's self-discovery. Though for the time being Lear is not mature enough to make the soul-making journey and he has nothing to do to vent his rage but to disown her: "Mend your speech a little, / Lest you may mar your fortunes" (I. i. 103-4). At this stage her speech stinks and has to be mended because he sees nothing but fake compliments to shower him. Yet by the final stage of his life, her voice "was ever soft, / Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman" (V. iii. 328-9). Her gentle voice is heard because he is listening to her from outside and within the egotistical sublime of his own suffering, so he can hear her soft voice even if she is dead.

4.2. King Lear's Negative Capability

The initial signs of negative capability emerge in the striking questions Lear poses: "Does any here know me? Why, this is not Lear" (I. iv. 231), wherein his kingly grandeur collapses. Inviting first the Fool into the hovel, Lear shows a growing compassion for him and prays for "poor naked wretches" who have no roof over their "houseless heads and unfed sides." (III. iv. 32, 34), which is all evidence of "his conversion from a blind pride to an understanding of man's common humanity and of the superficiality of rank and power" (Burckhardt 247). Bordering on self-annihilation as a consequence of negative capability, Lear is retaining an openness of mind to unite with nature and human suffering:

Oh, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp.
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (III. iv. 37-41)

In Keats's words, Lear actually is painting from his "memory of gone self-storm" which enables him to let his mind travel through pains and troubles which make up human experience. This is the kind of tempest which "will not give me leave to ponder / On things would hurt me more" (III. iv. 28-9). With the storm of self being gone, Lear takes recourse to the storm of nature as it protects him from thoughts hurting him. Proudly keen-minded, Lear is initially blind to the moral identity of his daughters and fails to even suspect that Kent is his new follower, but once he starts asking the question "Who is it that can tell me who I am?", he sets off on a journey towards more sophisticated questions regarding the nature of human being. He asks the naked Edgar an erudite question indicating Lear's gradual awareness of underlying layers of human nature: "Is man no more than this? Consider him well. - Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume" (III. iv. 109-12). The majestic king ironically tears off his clothes to come closer to Edgar's state of the unaccommodated animal who is "no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal" (III. iv. 114-15). Though the poor and forked animal acts as a philosopher for him: "First let me talk with this philosopher" (III. iv. 162) and "I will keep still with my philosopher" (III. iv. 189). In scene six of the same act, in his madness Lear imagines that Goneril and Regan are on trial before a tribunal made up of Edgar, the Fool, Kent and himself, and he is swiftly followed by Edgar and the Fool for who are deeply respected as "most learned justice" and "sapient

sir” respectively. To our astonishment, two fools are held in considerable respect which “represents an extension of his newly acquired attitude of mind” (Muir & Wells 68). Beyond the new attitude, Lear is the man subject to a world of pains and troubles which school his intelligence and he starts a journey by which he transcends the egotistical sublime of his own suffering, so the Fool and Tom the beggar make up the judiciary authorities of arraignment. However, discontent with merely denouncing, Lear desires an investigation into the matter “which will weigh the evidence and judicially establish its findings” (Muir & Wells 68), but it does not work because Goneril escapes and he must give up to his last inquisitional words with Regan: “Then let them anatomize Regan. See what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?” (80-2). The arraignment is cut short by Gloucester’s news of the plot against Lear’s life and that Kent has to urgently take him to Cordelia in Dover.

Lear’s search for knowledge is left inconclusive here and postponed to the ensuing events and experiences, whereby his fuller expression of knowledge comes at later times. Prompted by Gloucester’s blindness, Lear indicates further development of his capacity of knowledge:

What, art mad? A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears. See how yon justice rails upon yon simple thief. Hark in thine ear: change places and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? Thou hast seen a farmer’s dog bark at a beggar? (IV. vi. 165-170).

Showing implicit respect for fools and madness, Lear conceives of madness a sort of vision whereby a man can see with no eyes. In some lines later, he asserts one of his most renowned and impressive statements: “When we are born, we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools” (200-1). Just the fools make sense while others remain senseless and dumb; just the fools may realize the real meaning of cry at the time of birth, because once one is born, they tread upon a world of pains which must be coped with to pave the way for soul-making. A. C. Bradley suggests that finally pity and terror may be blended with “a sense of law and beauty that we feel” no depression much despair but “a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom” (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 279). By the same token, Jorgenson deems Lear “one of the high points of Shakespeare’s interest and development of the tragic hero as thinker” and he is “the most impressive depiction of a hero thinking his way toward self-discovery” (44). King Lear is in desperate pursuit of self-discovery to realize “Who is it that can tell me who I am?” and

to fulfill such a goal he sinks relatively into sorrow from which he gains the knowledge necessary to see the truth.

As discussed earlier, Keats believes that the poet ought to be capable of sinking into disinterestedness and letting the mind travel through the ‘tons and hogsheads of passionate wine in vast cellar’, which is all achieved by a negatively capable mind. In fact Keats changes “the figure of the poet with that of the self-effacing camelion” who relishes his moment of contradictory ideas (Ou ch. 2). The dramatic world of Lear is such a “vast cellar, composed of a multitude of characters” (Ou ch. 2) and King Lear must taste tons and hogsheads of wine to come to grips with the truth by exposing himself “to feel what wretches feel” (III. iv. 399) and drawing the conclusion that “unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal” (II. iv. 114-5). The apparent disparity between his initial elation and subsequent degradation make him wonder at first who he is and later, after going through “a shocking disparity between his self and the greater Other” (Ou ch. 2), he transcends his willful blindness and recognizes that “I am a man / More sinned against than sinning” (III. ii. 62-3); it is not his majesty to be sinned against but just a man banished from his homeland. Moving further into the world of pains, King Lear utters an unflattering declaration of his majesty that “I am the king himself” (IV. vi. 102-3), but soon follows a totally contrary assertion of his humanity once he brings up the deceit his two daughters practiced: “They flattered me like a dog and told me I had white hairs in my beard ere the black ones were there [...] they told me I was everything. 'Tis a lie. I am not ague-proof” (IV. vi. 115-17, 123-4). His self-perception vacillates between the extreme of his earlier majestic kingship and the ongoing recognition of his disastrous frailty, and “the world outside the self is turned upside down in his denial of any distinctions” (Ou ch. 2). Prior to his banishment and exposure to such heartbreaking pains, King Lear delineated distinctions between himself and his subjects and “when I do stare, see how the subject quakes” (IV. vi.128), but he pardons man’s life and “thou shalt not die” (IV. vi. 130), even for adultery. Obviously the marked distinctions between him and his subjects start to fade away with his self-centeredness being replaced by self-annihilation, which is a consequence of exercising negative capability. Then no wonder to find his replying to Gloucester’s request for kissing his hand so witty and thought-provoking: “Let me wipe it first. It smells of mortality” (IV. vi. 148). His deeper understanding of his whereabouts is well past the zenith in his dialogue with Gloucester:

If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes.
I know thee well enough. Thy name is Gloucester.
Thou must be patient. We came crying hither.
Thou know'st the first time that we smell the air
We wawl and cry. (IV. vi. 194-99)

Worthy of notice is his use of “we” which mingles him with every person, regardless of social class, who cries and screams when they are born “to this great stage of fools” (IV. vi. 201). Henceforth King Lear is truly lifting “himself from painful reality to an almost ecstatic state of freedom unrestrained by reason in either matter or form” (Owen ch. 2). He is breaking the fetters of kingly sophistication and inveighs against his own self and the absurdity of the world. Similar concepts are represented in Keats’s poem “On Sitting to Read King Lear Once Again” which proposes his implicit philosophy stating the necessity of pains and troubles to school one’s soul: “when I am consumed with the Fire, / Give me new Phoenix-wings to fly at my desire” (*The Complete Poetical Work* 13-14). Anxious to be purged through the phoenix-like burning, Keats demands new wings to fly after consumption in fire, in a manner similar to King Lear’s harsh process of transformation to attain self-discovery which must pass within self-annihilation and subsequently self-negation.

Believing that discomforts and agonies are to train the soul, Keats justifies their existence in his letters, which have already been discussed. In a letter to George and Georgiana Keats in 1819, he suggests a witty metaphor of the necessity of suffering to reach after perfectibility in nature: “Let the fish Philosophise the ice away from the Rivers in winter time, and they shall be at continual play in the tepid delight of summer” (*The Complete Poetical Work* 369). Comparably negative capability “might develop from something self-delighting into a comprehensive and painful sympathy” with the discomforts and suffering being “imposed from outside the identity” to mold and act as “agents for soul-making” (White 191-2). King Lear should philosophize away the kingly majesty to benefit the tepid delight of summer in the prison wherein he intends to demand forgiveness:

No, no, no, no. Come, let’s away to prison.
We two alone will sing like birds i’ th’ cage.
When thou dost ask me blessing, I’ll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. So we’ll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues

Talk of court news, and we'll talk with them too. (V. iii. 9-15)

Then the prison is preferable to him than the court. He realizes that his hand smells of mortality and that any unaccommodated man, regardless of any hereditary or acquisitive eminency, is no more but a poor, bare, forked animal. However earlier, King Lear attributes the cause of any lowness and misfortune to every daughter when talking to Kent about Edgar's distressing situation: "Now all the plagues that in the pendulous air / Hang fated o'er men's faults light on thy daughters!" (III. iv. 73-4). Although Kent stresses that Edgar has no daughters, Lear does not forbear from cursing all unkind daughters and sympathizing with discarded fathers, because he is still emotionally bounded by his own tremendously disturbing experience of banishment:

Death, traitor! Nothing could have subdued nature
To such a lowness but his unkind daughters.
Is it the fashion that discarded fathers
Should have thus little mercy on their flesh?
Judicious punishment! 'Twas this flesh begot
Those pelican daughters. (III. iv. 76-81)

Though it must take him a while to develop from self-delighting into a painful sympathy and subsequent understanding which elucidates the beauty of prison to the world outside the prison walls. Yet within the play there are implicit signs of a "see-saw movement of the tortured heart between defiance and self-pity" in which he is simultaneously caught and he throws himself "into the contentious storm, attempting to exorcize his internal pain by exposing himself to external suffering" whose exigencies momentarily "drive him out of his own mind and give him glimpses of the others outside his self" (O'Connor ch. 2), thus he addresses the Fool my boy: "Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?" (III. ii. 74). More importantly Lear gradually comes to grips with his apparent wane of wits: "My wits begin to turn" (III. ii. 73). Yet his wits are beginning to turn into maturity and sophistication not unpolished insanity. It is likewise Gloucester's vision to encounter his present literal loss of eyesight and his blindness which provoked him to banish Edgar:

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes.
I stumbled when I saw. Full oft 'tis seen,
Our means secure us and our mere defects
Prove our commodities. O dear son Edgar,
The food of thy abused father's wrath,
Might I but live to see thee in my touch,

I'd say I had eyes again! (IV. i. 19-25)

He laments the fool he has been toward his royal son. As long as he owns eyes, he does not appreciate and use them to see into the truth, but Gloucester does not seem to be showing as much progress in self-discovery as does King Lear as he finally attempts to commit suicide but King Lear ultimately dies of grief and probably happiness to reunite with Cordelia in the afterlife: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips. / Look there, look there" (V. iii. 374-5). It looks so because King Lear sets off on a self-negating journey which purges away his personal self and he gains new Phoenix-wings to fly by initially plunging his self into real human experience on whose very ground the way to truth is built. It may not sound far from true to claim that negative capability "is not only an artistic quality but also a human experience" (Owen ch. 2) for which one has to experience both the fair and the foul, light and darkness, inside and outside, and ultimately redemption. Foakes maintains that as Lear begins to attend to others, so "the Fool's role withers away" (195), and from act 4 onwards, we do not hear of the Fool anymore, because he has always been Lear's foil, but once Lear begins to sink into madness and expressing apparently foolish words, the Fool's role is no longer necessary. The Fool's brave prophecy about the ruin of England makes sense when considering the dramatization of Kent's banishment, Edgar's misfortunate nakedness and Lear's expulsion:

When priests are more in word than matter,
When brewers mar their malt with water,
When nobles are their tailors' tutors,
No heretics burned but wenches' suitors,
When every case in law is right,
No squire in debt nor no poor knight,
When slanders do not live in tongues,
Nor cutpurses come not to throngs,
When usurers tell their gold i' th' field,
And bawds and whores do churches build—
Then shall the realm of Albion
Come to great confusion. (III. iii. 88-99)

Thanks to his marginal status, the Fool investigates the goings-on and reveals them through his witty language. He dares call the king a fool after Lear asks him "Dost thou call me fool, boy?" (I. iv. 152), and he does not hesitate to tell the truth that "all thy other titles thou hast given away that / thou wast born with" (I. iv. 153-4). He speaks more daringly and rebukes splitting up the kingdom because he is now "an O without a figure" and the Fool assertively claims that "I am better than

thou art now. I am a Fool. Thou are nothing” (I. iv. 198-9). Lear is now zero from which he rises like a phoenix and passes through the foolishness stage. But when “the King’s wits begin to turn in earnest, passing beyond the range of mere folly, the Fool’s fooling pales by comparison” and after absorbing the Fool’s truths, he “begins to utter them himself” and the Fool becomes redundant (Calderwood, “Creative Uncreation” 9-10). In other terms, the Fool is an outsider within the court who wittingly tells the truths, although “truth’s a dog that must to kennel” and the Fool “must be whipped out” for deriding and berating the king (I. iv. 115-16). He then distinguishes between the bitter and sweet fool:

That lord that counseled thee
To give away thy land,
Come place him here by me.
Do thou for him stand.
The sweet and bitter fool
Will presently appear,
The one in motley here,
The other found out there. (I. iv. 144-151)

He daringly calls himself the sweet fool and Lear the bitter fool. It, however, must be underlined that the Fool is by default an outsider, so he holds safe side to himself. Banished and cast away, King Lear takes on an outsider function and enjoys a similar vision to investigate the truth unseen for so long, so the Fool’s presence gradually fades away because the King is crossing self-centeredness borders and entering “uncharted regions of mind where much madness is divinest sense” and the Fool has no business (Calderwood, “Creative Uncreation” 10). After substituting the Fool’s role, Lear’s rhetoric turns into wisdom and sophistication indicative of his negatively capable mind which enables him to succumb to truth which ought to pass through madness and foolishness. In fact the multilayered nothing which draws the ordered world of King Lear downward begins “Lear’s physical and spiritual odyssey” through “painful crises of identity” that he eventually “earns the ontological vision of nothing in which he not only makes use of nothing but also attains his true self and reunion with Cordelia” (Han 248). The given nothing ultimately leads the king towards negating his egotistical self and attaining the true self which is “the self that sees the objectified self from behind” (Han 252). Lear’s “who am I?” actually objectifies “I” and sees it from behind by distancing from the objectified self: “the true and living self is the ‘I’ which is now asking” (Han 252). Shedding the objectified self, Lear’s physical and spiritual odyssey starts its painful journey, which motivates him to struggle to

transcend his blindness which “is a wrong vision distorted by too much of the self” and “achieve true vision” by reaching beyond the limitations of his individuality (Dillon 129). Lear must cast off the name of the king and find the significance of his title inadequate, then he can discover what it means to be a man. In his dialogue with Cordelia after reunion in the French camp, he plainly admits he is “a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less” (IV. vii. 69-70), and he does not “remember these garments” and where he did “lodge last night” (76-7), however now “For as I am a man, I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia” (79-80). As a man, he can now recognize his child whom he at first rejected and wished “Better thou / Hadst not been born” (I. i. 269-70), but after experiencing the whole or at least spasmodic flashes of negative capability, he makes biting and tear-jerking remarks about Cordelia’s death: “Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, / And thou no breath at all?” (V. iii. 370-1).

5. Hamlet's Madness and Gradual Alienation

Set in the kingdom of Denmark, *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1602) dramatizes the revenge Prince Hamlet is called to wreak upon his uncle, Claudius, by his father's ghost. It is Shakespeare's longest play and ranked among the most powerful and influential tragedies in English literature. The play has been inspiring generations of writers- from John Keats and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to Charles Dickens and James Joyce- and still ranks among Shakespeare's most performed plays. However, the claims for *Hamlet* being the chief masterpiece of Shakespeare "pretty much died out by the 1950s while those for *King Lear* become commonplace only from the 1950s onwards" because critics either consciously or unconsciously reflect the mood of their time and the mood of the 1950s "was dominated by the expansion of nuclear arsenals and the fear of a war that might destroy the world" (Foakes 1). Hamlet's personality has continually been an enigma; no matter how critics approach him, no absolute truth ever emerges. Almost every literary theory and methodology, from New Criticism and Structuralism to Psychoanalysis and New Historicism, has been applied on the play, in particular on Hamlet's personality per se. Hamlet inexorably draws in the multilayered dimensions of a real living human and is susceptible to a large range of contradictory impressions and implications, which may vary by the passage of time, yet it is the play which is immune from time's scythe to mow because as Hamlet says: "You would pluck out the heart of my mystery" (III. ii. 395-6). Natalie Shainess rightly says that "the major clues to Hamlet's personality are revealed through his linguistic and cognitive styles" (400), but then she argues that Hamlet's continual efforts "to incite guilt in others are keys to his psychopathic, alienated and antisocial destructive treads" (400). This may be partially true, but Hamlet has made a promise to the ghost which has to be met. The present chapter attempts to address this issue which provokes Hamlet to irritably reach after the truth.

Hamlet never ceases to amaze us because our perceptions rely on what we apply to our investigation of the play, and it is not so easy to delve into the meticulous details of his personality. He is the consummate iconoclast who is in self-imposed exile from the society, while he is simultaneously the educated man and people's champion. He gradually loses every friend, but Horatio who loves him unconditionally. From one aspect he is dejected, depressed, brooding, and evidently manic, but also elated, enthusiastic, and energetic. He understands that he must cope with life on its own terms: "We defy augury. There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come

- the readiness is all” (V. ii. 233-37). Hamlet is concurrently an astute observer and participant of life who, through his imagery of decay, death and disease, informs the audience of the degradation depriving the Danish society of peace and order. His astuteness proves right in his very first soliloquies which lament the loss of the king and his wish for suicide which is forbidden by God:

Oh, that this too, too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God! (I. ii. 133-6)

It has been only two months that his father passed away, but his mental state seems to be falling into demise. To him life is like a garden that no one is taking care of, and that is growing wild:

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't, ah fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed. Things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. (I. ii. 137-40)

But what mainly obsesses him is his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle who is “no more like my father / Than I to Hercules” (I. ii. 157-8). Hamlet disdains his mother's mourning which lasted shorter than that of a beast: “a beast that wants discourse of reason / Would have mourned longer!” (I. ii. 154-55), but as for Gertrude, it took a short while “ere those shoes were old / With which she followed my poor father's body, / Like Niobe, all tears” (I. ii. 150-2), and she married “With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” (I. ii. 162). Hamlet perceptively detects the hasty marriage and cannot easily buy into the natural death of his father, which is instantly followed by his mother's marriage to his uncle and consequently his coronation.

Hamlet does bring up the theme of decay repeatedly to stress the degeneration caused by regicide. It becomes a strong theme weighing so heavily on his mind; in his talk with Polonius, Hamlet says: “For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion” (II. ii. 197-8), although Polonius obviously makes no sense of it. Continuing with the same image, Hamlet warns Polonius of letting her daughter walk in the sun because “conception is a blessing” (II. ii. 201-2), which is hardened by sarcasm targeting Polonius, from one aspect, as the father of a dog. Presenting his speech for the play to the actors, Hamlet makes use of decay and disease imagery to feature horror in the play:

Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus o'ersized with coagulate gore,
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandsire Priam seeks. (II. ii. 486-89)

The given lines brim over with images of horror and decay, representing a mind filled with unrest, disquietude, though with meanings, as Polonius partially understood: “Though this be madness, yet there is method in ’t” (II. ii. 222-3), and “How pregnant sometimes his replies are. A happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of” (II. ii. 226-29). However earlier in his conversation with Gertrude, Polonius has called him completely mad: “Mad’ call I it, for, to define true madness, / What is ’t but to be nothing else but mad?” (II. ii. 99-101). Polonius is also a master of rhetoric but he swears “I use no art at all” (II. ii. 104), meaning everything he says is spontaneous and his language is natural, but when reading Hamlet’s letter to her daughter, he shows off his dexterity in language to the queen by finding the phrase “the most beautified” faulty: “That’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase” (II. ii. 119). Both Hamlet and Polonius share the dramatist’s fascination with rhetoric, but “contrasted to the wit and improvisation of Hamlet, Polonius has a tedious, ponderous mind” (Wilds 140). It is clear in Hamlet’s repartees which make Polonius confess his answers are pregnant and there is a method in them. It is worthy of notice that madness in Renaissance drama is a conventional matter and it takes place “in a dramatic development which passes through the phases of contradiction, uncertainty and irrationality” (Salkeld 2). In comedy madness is resolved but in tragedy it perpetuates the crisis to death. In *Hamlet*, madness is invariably interpreted from different perspectives which concede to no absolute conclusion on its being real or feigned; besides “apparent madness in Renaissance drama differs little from what the audience is asked to accept as real madness” because they are both “allowed vox” in similar ways (Salkeld 7). In Shakespeare’s tragedies the common feature of “aesthetic readings” is that they “set out to find in madness moments of truth, flashes of moral insight or self-realization” and madness broadens and enriches “the rational framework of the plays” (Salkeld 17). This can be closely linked with the principal idea of negative capability which is an essential component in Hamlet’s scheme of sinking into doubts and mystery and discovering the truth.

Decay and death filling Hamlet's rhetoric do make sense in the context of the play. Marcellus also sees that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (I. v. 100). Thus the audience catches a glimpse of the coming events which are still impending but foregrounded in the opening scenes.

Hamlet cannot digest Gertrude's credulity to comfortably accept the king's death. Though refused by Hamlet, her consolation sounds like an absurd justification for her husband's death:

Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted color off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not forever with thy vailèd lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity. (I. ii. 70-5)

Claudius subtly follows her justification because "Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet, / To give these mourning duties to your father" (I. ii. 90-2), but it ought to be recalled that "you must know your father lost a father, / That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound" (I. ii. 93-4), but preserving prolonged condolence is "impious stubbornness" and it is "unmanly grief" (I. ii. 98), as it is "a fault against the dead, a fault to nature" whose common theme is "death of fathers" (I. ii. 106, 107). Seeming aberrant and incessant, his anguish is not mitigated by such conventional wisdom which evidently attempts to solace him. Hamlet's witty repartee to her "Why seems it so particular with thee?" (I. ii. 78) attests that his grief is not "actions that a man might play" (I. ii. 87) and "Tis not alone my inky cloak" (I. ii. 80) and "the trappings and the suits of woe" are just a hint of his remorse (I. ii. 89). It goes without saying that his real and genuine grief is not fully fathomed which, along with his feigned madness, alienates him from the Danish society. Knowles argues that Hamlet's sense of alienated subjectivity which is "brought about by grief and sexual loathing is suspended in time from the moral imperatives of socially oriented action according to codes of honor and revenge" (1059). That is why the space of Denmark proves to be the worst prison "in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons" (II. ii. 264-6), one of which, as Knowles suggests, is language (1059). Knowles goes on proposing that "Words, words, words" (II. ii. 210) are Hamlet's jailers, and rhetoric his prison (1059). Such a firm and overcrowded prison does not easily yield to Hamlet's inner and genuine feelings, which are merely clad in the trappings and suits of woe. That could be one reason for Hamlet's wayward statements which are interpreted as signs of madness and melancholy. He, however, willingly admits that "I

am but mad north-north-west”, but at other times “When the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw” (II. ii. 402-3).

Deterring his inner thoughts, words are “slanders” which say “old men have gray beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams” in which he claims to believe but holds it “not honesty to have it thus set down” (II. ii. 214-18, 220). By suggesting that it is not for anyone’s good to have the truth set down, Hamlet implicitly states that words are susceptible to misuse and misunderstanding, so not everything should be written down. Likewise his woe could only be trapped in inky cloak and not publicly unraveled, yet he loathes actions that a man might play, meaning that he disapproves of hypocrisy and pretense. However, the more he investigates his father’s death, the more he moves towards marginalization and becoming alienated from the Danish court, but Hamlet does not fear alienation once he promises the ghost to set his commandments in the first place:

I’ll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmixed with baser matter. (I. vi. 106-11)

He washes his mind clean of all trivial facts and memories, namely the socially oriented actions which are expected to be in accordance with codes of conduct. The ghost’s commandment is prioritized in the book and volume of his brain, which demands his discretion and refusal to resign his private grief to the public world of stained value prisoned by rhetoric. Although he may not communicate meaningfully to others, it is meaningful to himself because his sincere woe, the result of which is the motivation of his ensuing actions, is latent for everyone but himself. His madness also goes on “in an atmosphere of whispers, suspicion, secrecy and confinement” and it is out of “the obscurity of Hamlet’s resentment that the threat of revenge is pressed against Claudius” (Salkeld 88). Madness is in fact part of the game he plays upon them, using his opportunity as a prince and a fool, the former an insider and the latter an outsider. He uses this dichotomy to “resist Claudius’s sovereignty, and to evade the revenge encounter at the same time” (Salkeld 92). Being on the safe side as an outsider, Hamlet makes his most forthright verbal attacks on the usurping king:

It is not very strange. For my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mouths at him while my father lived give twenty, forty, fifty, a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out. (II. ii. 386-91)

Or he derides Polonius's suggestion to cut one of the speeches short in the play: "It shall to the barber's, with your beard.- Prithee, say on. He's for a jig or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps" (II. ii. 524-26). When requested by his mother after the play, Hamlet ridicules Guildenstern's concern about the king's "retirement marvelous distempered" and shows contempt for the command of meeting the queen and king: "Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to the doctor. For, for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler" (III. ii. 327, 331-34). After killing Polonius, Hamlet grows more intrepid and fearless and calls Rosencrantz a sponge "that soaks up the king's countenance, his rewards, his authorities" and "such officers do the king best service" but the king "keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw, first mouthed to be last swallowed" and eventually "When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry again" (IV. ii. 15-21). In a dialogue with his mother, Hamlet declares that "I essentially am not in madness / But mad in craft" (III. iv. 209-10), but the queen interprets it as incredibly impossible: "if words be made of breath / And breath of life, I have no life to breathe / What thou hast said to me" (III. iv. 219-21), but Bradley embraces Hamlet's witty remark and believes that

He has put on an 'antic disposition' and established a reputation for lunacy, with the result that his mother has become deeply anxious about him, and with the further result that the King, who was formerly so entirely at ease regarding him that he wished him to stay on at Court, is now extremely uneasy and very desirous to discover the cause of his 'transformation.' (*Shakespearean Tragedy* 130)

But T.S. Eliot's explanation for his madness is fairly equivocal, taking it as neither simple feigning nor real madness. He puts this equivocality in the hand of Shakespeare: "the 'madness' of hamlet lay to Shakespeare's hand.... For Shakespeare it is less than madness and more than feigned" (93). Eliot says if Hamlet really wanted to feign madness, he should not have used so many puns and repeated phrases because they are not "part of a deliberate plan of dissimulation, but a form of emotional relief" (93). Eliot forthrightly dispraises the play for giving a piece of buffoonery: "In the character Hamlet it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he can find no outlet in action; in

the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which he cannot express in art” (93). He admits he cannot understand why Shakespeare attempted such a play:

We must simply admit that here Shakespeare tackled a problem which proved too much for him. Why he attempted it at all is an insoluble puzzle; under compulsion of what experience he attempted to express the inexpressibly horrible, we cannot ever know. (94)

Either feigned or real, Hamlet’s plan runs alone, asserting his sense of individualism. Terminologically speaking, the term defining individualism which was common among the Elizabethans would be “solitariness” which describes one’s “self-enclosed inwardness, his devotion to self at the expense of society, as well as physical isolation” (Dillon xi). Not completely confined in solitariness, Hamlet has a contemplative bent and does not mingle a lot with the wider human context so that he can observe the events more acutely.

Hamlet is imprisoned by rhetoric, the real enemy within. He is “self-policed by the inescapable guardians of rationalism and sin” and his only options are “loss of selfhood in real madness” and he must hide his mystery “within the conventions of love’s madness” (Knowles 1064). With that said, his alienation from the Danish court is likely to happen as he deviates from the code of conduct and killing Polonius exacerbates his status in the court. But Hamlet has promised the ghost to wipe away all trivial fond records and put his commandment within the book and volume of his brain. Then Hamlet, the former courtier, soldier, and scholar, seizes the chance to take on the role of an actor-manager to alter the actors’ dialogues to assume control of the play and finally evoke Claudius’s reactions to the death scene of the king in the play, because he has heard that guilty people watching a play have been so moved by the artistry of the scene that “they have proclaimed their malefactions”, so he “with most miraculous organ” will “have these players / Play something like the murder of my father / Before mine uncle” and he will “observe his looks” to “tent him to the quick” and finally to uncover the conscience of the king (II. ii. 261, 623-25). He also takes on “the philosopher roles of skeptic and stoic” (Knowles 1064), but the most evasive role is when Hamlet encounters Laertes in the graveyard and refers to himself as “This is I / Hamlet the Dane” (V. i. 271). Being an outsider, Hamlet is now attempting to strenuously regain his insider status in the court as the rightful king. This is the most proper and evasive role that Hamlet begins to take on because it “completely confounds social and private, past and present, illusion and authenticity, in its conformity with the world of public values where seeming cannot be differentiated from

being” (Knowles 1064). Only we as the audience can notice “the existential disjunction between subjective being and public self-presentation” (Knowles 1064). To return vigorously to the court, Hamlet needed to be alienated from the society in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons and break free from the public world of stained value prisoned by rhetoric. That is the reason why nobody would think “how ill all’s here about my heart” (V. ii. 226-7). He truly feels the confinement surrounding him and pressing hard on his heart.

5.1. Irritable Reaching After Truth and Negative Capability

In his letter composed on May 3, 1818 to John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats writes: “it is impossible to know how far knowledge will console us for the death of a friend, and the ill ‘that flesh is heir to’” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). Whoever the friend, Keats borrows the phrase “that flesh is heir to” from Hamlet’s “To be, or not to be” speech:

To die, to sleep-
No more - and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to (III. i. 68-71)

In the same letter Keats contrives the metaphor of the chamber of maiden thought and the burden of mystery and explains his recognition of the necessity of suffering in the world which is “full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness, and oppression” (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300). Both Keats and Hamlet “are driven to nervous speculation about the future, wondering whether the knowledge which is dawning on them will prove a consolation, or an intensification of immediate suffering” (White 112). Keats’s personal life provides his reflections on the world of pains which are to school an intelligence. Keats’s markings of his edition of *Hamlet* are fairly scanty, but it is clear that the play is profoundly important to him and he mentions it and quotes from it “more than any other” which develops “some of his most central and personal ideas” (White 110). In a letter on November 3, 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats relates Hamlet’s speech to the suffering involved in life itself:

Such is this World - and we live - you have surely in a continual struggle against the suffocation of accidents - we must bear (and my Spleen is mad at the thought thereof) the Proud Mans Contumely. (*Selected Letters* 48-9)

When Ketas mentions the play, it is usually “during a consideration of human affairs rather than aesthetic theories” which certifies his stance on “some borderline between art and life” (White 110). Comparatively speaking, Hamlet may not be exposed to a world of pains and troubles, but his intelligence seems prematurely more schooled and negative capability is nascent in Hamlet as he, after encountering the ghost and receiving the command, promises the ghost to wipe away all trivial fond records and put his commandment within the book and volume of his brain, which indicates his incipient inclination to disregard his self-interest and maintain an openness to a realm vaster than his self.

In his *The Western Canon* (1994), Harold Bloom highlights Shakespeare's splendor to surpass "all others in evidencing a psychology of mutability" and he claims that "he not only betters all rivals but originates the depiction of self-change on the basis of self-overhearing" (48). Through overhearing, characters can fall out of deception and more sagaciously see whatever happens around them. Shakespeare vastly expanded "the effect of self-overhearing upon his greater characters, and particularly upon their capacity to change" (48). Through self-overhearing, Shakespeare proves his intelligence by exposing some of his great characters to dramatic self-changes necessary to intensify or reform their worldviews. We all go around "talking to ourselves endlessly, overhearing what we say, then pondering and acting upon what we have learned" (Bloom 49), and Shakespeare adds to the function of imaginative writing, which is how to speak to others, by making characters reflect upon themselves and learn "how to speak to" themselves (Bloom 49). Self-overhearing could be more or less linked to the idea of negative capability, since listening to oneself and then pondering forms an inseparable step in negating one's closed self and opening eyes to a vaster realm. Bloom contends that Hamlet is the "leading self-overhearer in all literature" as he "addresses himself scarcely more than Falstaff" (49), but he does not clarify further on why Hamlet should represent the leading over-hearer. Though one reason for Hamlet's leadership in self-overhearing could be his sagacious soliloquies which outnumber those of other characters' in Shakespeare's plays. His soliloquies delve into the meticulous aspects of humanity and pose unprecedented questions in drama which have the potentiality to arouse one's curiosity and consciousness to overhear themselves. His extraordinary soliloquy in the fourth scene of act 4 impeaches the bestial oblivion of men who do no more but to sleep and feed: "What is a man / If his chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more" (35-7). Then he questions the God-given power of reason whose divine capacity is left unused:

Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused (39-42)

He is overhearing himself and inquiring of too much speculation which is "Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple" (IV. iv. 42), but he candidly confesses that:

I do not know
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"
Sith I have cause and will and strength and means

To do 't. Examples gross as earth exhort me. (46-9)

At the end of the soliloquy he comes to grips with his decision that “My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (69). Self-overhearing is obvious in these lines which reassure him to hasten the commandment within the book and volume of his brain. Apart from his soliloquies, his dialogues with other characters represent his great obsession with humanity and his role in the world. In his dialogue with Rosencrantz in the second scene of the second act, which produces witty rhetorical repartees between them, Hamlet examines the earth, “this goodly frame” (321) which seems “to me a sterile promontory” (322), and “this most excellent canopy, the air” (322-3) appears to him no other thing than “a foul and pestilent congregation of vapors” (326). He then describes human beings from several perspectives, each one adding to his elevation of them:

What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world. The paragon of animals. (327-31)

But this god-like human is essentially dust: “And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?” (332). However Hamlet makes humankind more impressive in apprehension than in action. Hamlet himself is more prone to apprehension and pondering than action, about which he chastises himself: “My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (IV. iv. 69). Coleridge relates Hamlet’s aversion to real action to the lack of balance between “the impressions from outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect” in Hamlet’s mind and the existence of “overbalance in the contemplative faculty” which makes man “the creature of mere meditation”, so he loses “his natural power of action” (*Coleridge’s Essays and Lectures* 136). In Hamlet the “equilibrium between the real and the imaginary worlds” are disturbed which means “his thoughts and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions” (*Coleridge’s Essays and Lectures* 137).

But Mansfield does not comply with Coleridge’s argument and believes that Hamlet is seeking justice which “in her grosser and finer form, is concerned with the finding of the truth” and the first half of the play is “a dual image of a search for truth, of a seeking of a certainty that would justify a violent act” (322). Hamlet searches the king’s mind “with the finest of intellectual probes” to find him either guilty or innocent (Mansfield 322). The other argumentation running against Hamlet’s impotency of punctual action relates his hesitation to a “high ethical motive” which

restrains him “from carrying into execution his promise to the Ghost” (McClure 15). Hamlet does pursue morality and he is constantly “arrested in his impulses to do the deed by a superior code of ethics” (McClure 16). His delay to fulfill the promise represents his strict adherence to ethical motives. Besides that, the religious characteristic is quite obvious in Hamlet’s course of action. His language shows evidences of the Divine Will against human volition: “There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (V. ii. 233-4) or his speech when refraining from suicide: “that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God!” (I. ii. 135-6). In his argument with Rosencrantz, Hamlet by implication casts doubts on the claim that the world’s grown honest: “Then is doomsday near” (II. ii. 257). Hamlet relinquishes his supreme opportunity to kill the king when he is kneeling in prayer because “And now I’ll do ’t. / And so he goes to heaven” (III. iii. 78-9), and this would be a great favor to this villain who “took my father grossly, full of bread, / With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May” (III. iii. 85-6). His father was basically with all his sins in full bloom, before he could repent for any of them and now “how his audit stands who knows save heaven?” and “’Tis heavy with him” (III. iii. 87, 89).

Hamlet’s language blended with religious concepts could be an inevitable reason for his hesitation and delay in taking the revenge. In like manner Hamlet frequently brings up the matter of grandeur mortality for which people strenuously strive. For example, in the graveyard with Horatio, Hamlet picks up a skull and contemplates it:

That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if 'twere Cain’s jawbone, that did the first murder! This might be the pate of a politician which this ass now o’erreaches, one that would circumvent God. (V. i. 78-81)

Then picking up more skulls and contemplating “by a process of rhetorical association” (Knowles 1048), Hamlet moves his imagination to Alexander, the type of imperial greatness: “Dost thou think Alexander looked o’ this fashion i’ th’ earth?” (V. i. 204-5). And then following Horatio’s “E’en so”, he leads his imagination to trace “the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bunghole?” (V. i. 210-11). Horatio instantly anticipates some form of refined word-play: “’Twere to consider too curiously, to consider so” (V. i. 212-13), emphasizing Hamlet’s profound meditation, but he fails to preempt Hamlet’s rhetorical skills, as he immediately returns to his contemplation of death and mortality:

“Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel?” (V. i. 216- 19).

Evidently his cast of mind expresses some form of personal pessimism, but it is depersonalized by “the external public modality of logic and rhetoric working through a commonplace” (Knowles 1048). In other terms, his personal pessimism and grief are represented through some commonly-known figures and things such as dust, earth, Alexander, and beer barrel, which once more highlight his dexterity in rhetoric. Philosophically speaking, Renaissance ontology “is closely linked to the philosophy of rhetoric whereby something like grief is understood in a specific, conventionalized way, which Hamlet reacts against” (Knowles 1048), but he has to yield to evade ultimate alienation and regain his insider status in the court as the rightful king, so in his encounter with Laertes he accentuates that “This is I / Hamlet the Dane” (V. i. 271). His so-called pessimism, however, in part “derives from his discovery of subjectivity” (Knowles 1048) and his determination to wipe away all trivial fond records results from his negative capability which disregards self-interest and maintains an openness to a realm vaster than his self.

A consequence of negative capability, self-annihilation is crystallized in Hamlet who washes his mind and hands clean of all trivial facts and memories, and disregards any action which is in accordance with codes of conduct if it debars his pursuit of truth, during which his negative capability, which invites him to be capable of being in ‘uncertainties, mysteries and doubts’, is strengthened. *Hamlet* as a whole ranks high “in the number of demands it makes on one’s Negative Capability” and the spectator or reader is involved in “an unusually large number of disquieting questions, some of which are answered relatively late in the play or not at all” (Tsur 777). The erudite and philosophical questions Hamlet poses represent his profound speculation on the nature of man which lead him towards self-awareness and introspectiveness developed not purely by the recent events but they are part of his nature which delights “in his own inwardness, cherishing his uncommunicated and unique self, valuing most highly those elements in his nature which are private” (Dillon 108). But Hamlet does not persistently hold himself aloof and engages with the public, even if he finds it difficult to commit himself to any public gesture, because “Denmark’s a prison” (II. ii. 262), but he soon acknowledges with full consciousness that the real prison is in the mind itself: “O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams” (II. ii. 273-5). Such a flow of controversial ideas cannot strike

a mind used to the banal course of life, but a mind which is progressive and susceptible to modification, change and improvement. The ghost reveals his trust on Hamlet's aptness to take the revenge, but he should not be duller "than the fat weed / That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf" whose torpid growth clings to the banks of the Lethe. He, however, must prove himself willing in avenging his father's murder.

It must be noted that Hamlet is the prince of Denmark, but he never cast his "nighted color off", instead he had sneaking suspicions about his father's death although everybody seems to have instantly accepted it. His grief goes much deeper than the outward manifestations and "the trappings and the suits of woe" suggest just a hint of his remorse (I. ii. 89). Hamlet's suspicion and uncertainty in the very beginning of the play foregrounds his restlessness in the ensuing events within the play, as Claudius openly mentions: "How is it that the clouds still hang on you?" (I. ii. 68). It goes without saying that when a son loses his father, he is duty-bound to mourn, but to mourn so long is effeminate and inappropriate, but he is initially grieving over his mother's hasty and incestuous marriage within a month "Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears / Had left the flushing in her gallèd eyes, / She married" (I. ii. 159-61), and Hamlet doubts this marriage is good or any benefit will come out of it: "It is not nor it cannot come to good" (I. ii. 163). His uncertainty about any beneficial outcome of the marriage and that "I must hold my tongue" (I. ii. 169) reveals his incipient preparation and potentiality to seek the truth by taking the severely rigorous journey of negative capability elevating him from obstinate mourning to posing sophisticated and erudite questions regarding the nature of human being, which can be defined in being honest to one's own self.

Instructing the players, Hamlet speaks well of being honest; he insists that players "be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" because exaggeration has no place in the theater, where the purpose is to represent reality like "the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure" (III. ii. 17-19, 23-26). John Keats also reveals his fervent admiration to human nature in his letter to Benjamin Bailey on March 13, 1818: "scenery is fine- but human nature is finer" (*The Complete Poetical Works* 291). He highly recommends sharpening "one's vision into the heart and nature of Man" (*The Complete Poetical Works* 300), which demands keeping a remarkable distance from one's egotistical passions and desires to

remain in doubts and mystery without making definite efforts to draw an absolute conclusion. Right after the play, Hamlet, penetrating the heart and nature of other characters, proves that he is capable of suspecting Guildenstern and Rosencrantz of working for Claudius, as they come to him attempting to discover the source of Hamlet's madness, but he by implication reveals that he is onto their real motive and challenges Guildenstern, saying: "Will you play upon this pipe?" but he avoids it, then Hamlet sarcastically discloses their pretense and hypocrisy of loving him when he says "it is as easy as lying" to play the pipe (III. ii. 380-81, 387). Having his vision sharpened into the heart and nature ultimately broadens and schools his intelligence which sees the unseen, so he can strongly claim:

You would play upon me. You would seem to know my stops. You would pluck out the heart of my mystery. You would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak? (III. ii. 394-99)

Because "do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, yet you cannot play upon me" (III. ii. 400-2). He is not effortlessly fooled or played upon like musical instruments because he yields to nature which represents reality: "Let me be cruel, not unnatural" (III. ii. 428). Hamlet's incipient preparation to seek the truth is obvious in the opening scenes as his grief is noticeably so particular and his mother and Claudius's aberrant and incessant words cannot mitigate his anguish. His courage to follow the ghost overrides Horatio's warnings about the ghost's probable temptation to take him to "the dreadful summit of the cliff" (I. iv. 78) which does not dismay him because he does not value his life any more: "I do not set my life in a pin's fee" (I. iv. 73). In such a tumultuous situation, he shows off his subtlety to recognize the possible danger on his own soul: "what can it do to that, / Being a thing immortal as itself?" (I. iv. 74-5), that is to say he realizes the value of soul and the mortality of body, so he is not so concerned about his life because he thinks his immortal soul will not be damaged by the ghost.

In his witty dialogue with the king about Polonius's corpse location, Hamlet employs his typical word-play to demonstrate his profound realization of man's ultimate end in this world; the fact that Polonius's corpse is now at supper for "a certain convocation of politic worms" chowing down on him (IV. iii. 23). He does not yet go easy on him and makes sarcastic remarks on the transience of sovereignty: "Your worm is your only emperor for diet" (IV. iii. 24). He then defamiliarizes our

perception of eating and feeding: “We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots” (IV. iii. 24-6), so as we come to dust “your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service - two dishes, but to one table” (IV. iii. 26-7). Though considered mad which builds a safe side for him, Hamlet does not rely on it and speaks his mind. His piercing rhetoric signifies his openness to the actual vastness and complexity of human’s experience and his courage to abandon the comfortable enclosure of doctrinaire knowledge.

Concurrently an astute observer and participant of life, Hamlet accomplishes an enhanced realization of every course of action by sinking into doubts and mystery without making definite efforts to draw an absolute conclusion until the truth is revealed. The developing negative capability enables him to keep a distance from the events encircling him and not to be fooled and misled by the flamboyance of the court. At the outset Hamlet reveals his incipient preparation and potentiality to seek the truth as the obstinate mourning of the court is elevated to particular mourning resulting in sophisticated and erudite questions regarding the nature of human being, which can be defined in being honest to one’s own self.

6. Conclusion

Despite the succinct definition of negative capability given by John Keats in his letter, it has such a high-profile which conveys subsequent implications. As elaborated prior to its application on the characters, negative capability is not simply an artistic quality but also a human experience which is perceived in the characters of concern. Othello, initially in total command of speech, wittingly employs words and meanings to his own advantage, but he barely keeps distance from his egotistical passions as he cannot abandon the comfortable enclosure of his self-made image. Othello holds a position to himself not less prestigious than that of Desdemona. Compared to Hamlet and King Lear, lack of soliloquies in Othello's rhetoric is distinctive, the significance of which is that soliloquies reveal the way characters wrestle with their private thoughts and pressure by which characters may perceive and start to suspect their own flaws and even villains, who are the schemers of the plot and commentators on the action, but Othello is so immersed in his self-idealization and heroic self-dramatization, particularly in the opening scenes, that he places himself on the zenith of assurance and blinds himself to the nature of his misdeeds. Yet it must be noted that as the Moor of a white society, Othello himself does not always seem ignorant of the sharp distinction laid down between him and the white members of the society, but he does not accede to his outside status and attempts to fit an alien society.

With that said, the process of negative capability hardly penetrates his self, so he is oblivious to perceive the truth, namely Desdemona's innocence and Iago's commitment to dismantle his marital life and subsequently his whole life. In other words, he does not benefit from negative capability to doubt his own judicial decision and curb his obsession and forbear from murdering her. Othello, as Heilman states, has "the least reflective capacity of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes" (152), and he appalls the audience by his shocking final murder of Desdemona. Contrary to Othello's inflexibility in embracing negative capability, King Lear, after expulsion, starts asking the question "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" and sets off on a journey by which he transcends the egotistical sublime of his own suffering. Lear's judgement is clouded by his self-centeredness which, after being expelled by his daughters, is gradually replaced by self-annihilation, which is a consequence of exercising negative capability. Lear's physical and spiritual odyssey motivates him to struggle to transcend his blindness which is a mistaken vision distorted by too much of the self and attain true vision by reaching beyond the restrictions of his individuality. King Lear undergoes a radically progressive conflict between his outwardness and inwardness which

gradually turn his overriding self-assurance into a sublime vision of human despair: “Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal” (II. iv. 114-5).

Tolerating unmitigated suffering and submission to a world of pains, King Lear, in Keats's words, schools the soul towards an improved, more cohesive knowledge of human confines and human potential. King Lear depicts one of the most progressive heroes created by Shakespeare who thinks his way toward self-discovery. He is progressive enough to substitute the Fool's role after which his rhetoric turns into wisdom and sophistication indicative of his negatively capable mind which enables him to succumb to truth which ought to pass through madness and foolishness. Lear becomes zero from which he rises like a phoenix and passes through the foolishness stage. In sharp contrast with Othello, Lear ultimately casts off the name of the king and finds the significance of his title inadequate, then he discovers what it means to be a man and he plainly admits he is “a very foolish fond old man, / Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less” (IV. vii. 69-70). After experiencing the whole or at least spasmodic flashes of negative capability, he comes to grips with his nothingness which eventually makes him earn “the ontological vision of nothing in which he not only makes use of nothing but also attains his true self and reunion with Cordelia” (Han 248). The given nothing ultimately leads the king towards negating his egotistical self and attaining the true self which is asking “who am I?” As an outsider, the king undergoes a long-suffering journey which prompts negative capability to raise him above the egotistical sublime of his suffering and he gains new Phoenix-wings to fly over self-centeredness and plunges his self into real human experience.

Compared to King Lear, Hamlet may not be exposed to a world of pains and troubles, but his intelligence seems prematurely more schooled and negative capability is nascent in him as he, after encountering the ghost and receiving the command, promises the ghost to wipe away all trivial fond records and put his commandment within the book and volume of his brain, which indicates his incipient inclination to disregard his self-interest and maintain an openness to a realm vaster than his self. Hamlet's incipient preparation to seek the truth is obvious in the opening scenes as his grief is noticeably so particular and his mother and Claudius's aberrant and incessant words cannot mitigate his anguish. His uncertainty about any beneficial outcome of the marriage reveals his incipient preparation and potentiality to seek the truth by taking the severely rigorous journey of negative capability elevating him from obstinate mourning to posing sophisticated and erudite

questions regarding the nature of human being, which can be defined in being honest to one's own self. To find out the truth, he seems to have had no other alternative but madness which alienates him from the Danish society. Being on the safe side as an outsider, Hamlet is rhetorically reckless and makes his most forthright verbal attacks on the usurping king and does not forebear from resisting Claudius's sovereignty. His piercing rhetoric signifies his openness to the actual vastness and complexity of human's experience and his courage to abandon the comfortable enclosure of doctrinaire knowledge. He is the consummate iconoclast who is in self-imposed exile from the society. He has a contemplative bent and does not mingle a lot with the wider human context so that he can observe the events more acutely.

Hamlet is concurrently an astute observer and participant of life who, through his imagery of decay, death and disease, informs the audience of the degradation depriving the Danish society of peace and order. Hamlet sets out to find in madness moments of truth, flashes of moral insight or self-realization, being the principal idea of negative capability which is an essential component in Hamlet's scheme of sinking into doubts and mystery and discovering the truth. A consequence of negative capability, self-annihilation is crystallized in Hamlet who washes his mind and hands clean of all trivial facts and memories, and disregards any action which is in accordance with codes of conduct if it debars his pursuit of truth, wherein negative capability, which invites him to be capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, is strengthened.

To come to the final point, the concept of negative capability maintains a high profile and subsequent implications develop from it, which were elaborated as far as possible in the present thesis. Summing up in pursuance of the discussion, I should like to concisely wrap up the principal argument of the thesis, exploring the high impression of marginalization which profoundly makes the major insider characters, namely Hamlet and King Lear, set off on a self-realization journey or accomplish an enhanced realization of every course of action by sinking into doubts and mystery without making definite efforts to draw an absolute conclusion until the truth is revealed, and the futile influence of negative capability on a Moorish outsider whose physical alienation is marked through other characters' words and he is trapped in vacillation over estrangement from the white society, confounding the interplay of insider and outsider position.

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Abstract

In one of his letters John Keats (1795- 1821) proposes the concept of negative capability which invites thinkers to be capable of being in ‘uncertainties, mysteries and doubts’ which ultimately helps the mind retain an openness that borders on disinterestedness and self-annihilation. In his opinion Shakespeare is a man of achievement who represents negative capability. The hypothesis is that negative capability is not only an artistic quality but also a human experience, so the present thesis makes the concept of negative capability the focus of study by attempting to employ its definition and apply it on three of Shakespeare’s tragic characters, namely Othello, King Lear and Hamlet, and the possible change in their rhetoric will be investigated.

Abstrakt

In einer seiner Briefe schlug John Keats (1795-1821) vor, das Konzept der negativen Fähigkeit, welches die Denker dazu einlädt, in "Unsicherheiten, Geheimnissen und Zweifel" zu sein, das letztlich hilft, dem Geist eine Offenheit beizubehalten, die auf Selbstlosigkeit und Selbsternichtung grenzt.

Seiner Meinung nach ist Shakespeare ein Mann des Erfolgs, der eine negative Fähigkeit darstellt.

Die Hypothese ist, dass eine negative Fähigkeit nicht nur eine künstlerische Qualität, sondern auch eine menschliche Erfahrung ist, so dass die vorliegende Arbeit das Konzept der negativen Fähigkeit zum Fokus dieser Untersuchung macht, durch den Versuch, die Definition zu verwenden und es auf drei, von Shakespeare tragische Charaktere, nämlich Othello, König Lear und Hamlet zu übertragen und die mögliche Veränderung der Rhetorik zu untersuchen.

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