

John Ashbery's Poetics of Indeterminacy: Reading *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* and *As We Know*

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Abstract :

John Ashbery was a prolific twentieth-century American poet who boasted of a celebrated literary career and left an indelible mark on American literature. Claiming to reflect life for what it truly is, the search for meaning in Ashbery's poetry has baffled critics and poetry enthusiasts alike for ages, and Ashbery has always basked in that confusion. He stands as an icon among the postmodern poets, and his unique brand of abstract lyric warrants a closer look at what makes the meaning intertwined in his lines so elusive. This paper seeks to explore Ashbery's motive behind his cryptic poetry by navigating through the titular poems of two of his famous collections of poetry, *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* and *As We Know*. The notion of "indeterminacy" as put forth by Paul Hoover will be used in the readings of these poems to understand Ashbery's poetic creations, and in turn, his view towards life.

Keywords: Postmodernism, poetry, indeterminacy, abstract lyric