

**Absence, and Loss in Mark Strand's *Blizzard of One***

الفقدان والغياب في مجموعة مارك ستراند الشعرية (عاصفة من واحدة)

Lect. Dr. Hussein K. Ch. Alaskari

College of Arts \ Translation Dept- Mustansiriyah University

م.د. حسين كاظم جلاب

الجامعة المستنصرية / كلية الاداب / قسم الترجمة

Email: [husseinalaskari@gmail.com](mailto:husseinalaskari@gmail.com)

**المستخلص :**

لا شك في أن مجموعة مارك ستراند الشعرية الموسومة (عاصفة من واحدة) والمنشورة في 1998 تحمل هموم الشاعر وانشغاله بثيمة الغياب والفقدان هذه الثيمة التي شغلت ألباب الشعراء في النصف الثاني من القرن العشرين. غالباً ما يستخدم الشاعر سياقات سيريالية والحنين إلى الماضي في وصف ثيمة الغياب والفقدان. يناقش هذا البحث توظيف الشاعر لثيمة الفقدان والغياب في المجموعة الشعرية (عاصفة من واحدة) وتتوصل الى الخلاصة بأن الإحساس بالغياب هي سمة طاغية على شعر مارك ستراند.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** ستراند, الفقدان, الغياب, (عاصفة من واحدة), سيريالية.

**Abstract**

The Pulitzer Prize winner collection *Blizzard of One* (1998) by the American-Canadian poet Mark Strand (1934 - 2014) voices Strand's preoccupation with themes of loss and absence. This is usually accomplished through nostalgic setting and surreal imagery. This paper discusses the use of such themes like loss and absence in the selected poems from the collection *Blizzard of One*. The paper concludes that the awareness of absence is one remarkable feature of Strand's poetry.

**Keywords:** Strand, loss, absence, *Blizzard of On*, surrealism.

## Introduction

Starting with a short biographical sketch of the poet is both important and relevant since much of the subject matter of the collection pertains to the poet's background. Mark Strand was born in Canada in 1934 and then relocated to the United States with his family at when he was four years old. Even though he was supposed to be a pianist writing literature was a fascination for Strand and short writing poetry writing become the center for his interest. Ultimately Strand was awarded with the degree of Master Fine Arts in the workshop for writer at the University of Iowa. He has written nine books of poetry, including publishing of *Blizzard of One* in 1998, in addition to illustrated children's books (Britannica.com)

Changing his home country and moving with his family to another one, coupled with his personal endeavor to pursue the career of writing are two biographical facts that have affected Strand's interest in themes of loss and absence.

Mark Strand's poetry and fiction are about the every-day life which makes it applicable to everybody. Or as he put it in an interview "What do you write about?" Then I'll say, 'My poems really aren't about anything but themselves.' (Vine, 1977, p. 133). Even though his poems are simple, they can be read in different ways. The poetry's humorous tone is a byproduct of his beliefs about life and death.

Strand the poet attributed most of his appeal to the keen eye as a reader. The development of a poet, he believes, comes largely from his possession of a sense of criticism. Strand indicates that:

It is hard for me to separate my development as a reader of poems from my career as a poet. If my readings have any acuity or sensitivity, it is probably because I have paid close attention to how my own poems worked, and to which ways and to what extent I might improve them. (Strand M. , 2001, p. 41)

Themes of negativity, absence and loss are the poet's main preoccupation through many of the collections prior to *Blizzard of One*. Much of his poetry deals with the transience and the idea of the transitory nature of existence. David Kirby believes that in Strands poems there is a slow movement from darkness into enlightenment (Kirby, 1990, p. 32). His outlook which seems dark and dismal gives hope that it is only a passage towards light. As it is the case with the poetic tradition going through a dark tunnel does not entail a perpetual descent, but rather a new road towards a way out. This is the case in many collections; *Blizzard of One* is no exception. Strand puts it "In some ways, poets give voice to the world. It's through poetry that life itself speaks. What it

has to say may not always be pleasant, but that's the way it goes" (Strand M. , 2001, p. 41)

Strand's poetry seems like a one long poem, consistent and tied together in themes, style and setting. But it is unfair to consider the poems in every new collection as a continuance of the previous. In many cases (as in *Blizzard of One* ) Strand is incarnated from the previous poet. The collection is both new and a rerun of the old themes and motifs employed by strand. It is asserted that "*Blizzard of One* then becomes both a capstone to Strand's career and a new movement forward" (Nicosia, 2007). It is by no means, however, one can regard it as a continuation or an episode. The importance of *Blizzard of One* lies in Strand's attempts at deviating from the previous line he has been taking.

*Blizzard of One is written in a time when Americans are no more reading poetry as Strand claims (201).* Nevertheless, he states that his poetry is resorted to in times of high stress (Strand, p.200). Poetry is a safeguard of human beings from ennui, and tedium. It is

ultimately a metaphor for something unknown [and for] making the unknown visible... Without poetry, we would have either silence or banality, the former leaving us to our own inadequate devices for experiencing illumination, the latter cheapening with generalization what we wished to have for ourselves alone, turning our experience into impoverishment, our sense of selves into embarrassment [11:41].

*Themes of absence, loss and negation have always been there in Strand's poems but in the Blizzard of One* he continues to explore them shedding new light on those themes. The collection is called "the summation of Strand's work of a lifetime." ("Biography of Mark Strand" ). But in contrast to the poems in the other collections this one transforms the themes that reappear throughout Strand's poetry. It is life the culmination of his journey throughout the world. The whole collection can be viewed as a journey in which a persona other than the poet is leading the readers in disturbing, inferno-like world. Absence and loss is felt in most of the poems. "As in Strand's earlier books, most notably *Dark Harbor* (1993), there is an atmosphere of changing light and weather that reflect changing perceptions and emotion" (Hilbert, p. 8).

The subject matter of the *Blizzard of One* is not one solid unit but "The poems in [*Blizzard of One*] are missing their subjects" (Manguso, 1999, p. 12). Nicosia indicates

the presence of familiar Strand themes of dispersion, loss and absence, he contends that "... the primary modes of many poems here are sadness and loss...." (Nicosia, 2007, p. 124)

Absence and loss are two motifs generated in the very first poem in the collection called "Untitled." The poem is about an absent title suggestive of absence and loss in the rest of the collection. Ironically, the poem is about loss and purposelessness in which the title is itself absent. Absence is about everything in the poem and the couple's story is only mentioned to highlight the main theme of absence.

In the poem that starts in the middle of an argument, the speaking voice asks, "... Where / Is she now? And where is that boy who stood for hours / Outside her house? ..." (Strand M. , 1998., p. 3)<sup>1</sup> there is an apparent failure to identify people, referring to the beloved as "So-and-So."

The other absent thing which Strand directs our attention to is the poem-in-the-poem, which is evoked by "this one". The last four lines show a traditional turn of event which Strand's persona utters in addition to the paradox that opens this volume:

The lavender turns to ash. The clouds disappear.  
Where Is she now? And where is that boy who stood for hours  
Outside her house, learning too late that something is always  
About to happen just at the moment it serves no purpose at all?

(P.3 lines 9-12)

It can be seen clearly that the images included within the above lines such as the lavender light and shade of the pines, are mentioned to evoke the memory, setting the stage for reading an absent poem the readers can never witness. The significance of color also adds to the theme of absence in this poem. The lavender and purple indicate absence of light since these are dark colors; hence the poet creates an atmosphere for writing the poem.

---

<sup>1</sup> - All references to Mark Strand's poems from *Blizzard of One* are from this edition of the book: Strand, Mark. *A Blizzard of One*. New York, NY: Alfred A Knopf, 1998.

The reader is left with no choice but to suppose that the speaker and the boy who is standing outside the beloved's house are one and the same. The 'Untitled' poem may refer to "the Adorable-One" a poem that is slipped into the pocket of the boy, the couple, or even the poem that speaks about them. However, a very close reading of the poem tells us that it is actually more about the absent poem than the present girl. The poet starts with recounting a past event and then brings us to the present with "but now" (line.4) an attempt to recover the loss of something. It is stated that "As the speaker turns to say "But now," he tries to resurrect something lost within himself, his listener, his poem, and directly is struck by the ineffectuality of the attempt" (Nicosia, 2007, p. 112).

The opening poem serves as a door for entering the rest of the volume. Themes of heartbreak, absence, and frequent defeat as well as loss of meaning are all seen everywhere in this volume. The poem's final lines mentioned above put the reader face to face with a self-contradictory idea which states that purposelessness or meaninglessness are always a risk.

Moments of transcendence or clarity arrive unfortunately late, sometimes ridiculously very late. "Something is always / About to happen", he wrote, "just at the moment it serves no purpose at all". But they do arrive, diminished things though they may be.

The next poem "The Beach Hotel" is a poem about being trapped in a vacant place. The poet creates a creepy, haunted place leaving the reader in a state and mood of confusion and fear. The reader is invited by Strand (through the use of the pronoun "us") to be part of the dilemma he lives in being stranded in this empty place. Valerie Morrison argues that "The "we" forces us to identify with the persona and realize that in the reading of this poem, somehow, somewhere, we have entered into this creepy space along with the persona" (Morrison, 2008, p. 227). The poem starts with a sudden proclamation of loss: "Oh, look, the ship is sailing without us! And the wind / Is from the east, and the next ship leaves in a year" ( p.4, l.1-2). The persona lost yet another chance to get rescued from this horrendous place. The weight of loss is not very heavy on the person as he accepts the fate of being stranded for another year. The word 'another' indicates a repetition of loss. The ship which is mentioned in the lines above has sailed and the speaker is stuck in this place a hotel for another year, it is locale where: "the rain never stops, / Where the garden, green and shadow-filled, says, in the rarest / Of whispers, 'Beware of encroachment" (p.4, lines 3-5). Although the atmosphere is anything but pleasant, the persona seems undisturbed by the fact that he is being stranded. The hotel's garden is "green and shadow-filled" and whispers, "Beware of encroachment" (lines: 4-5), most likely in a gesture of inhospitality.

The poem gets more morbid when the poet describes a tour among the dead lying on unkempt beds with their "ashen pajamas". After all, on concluding "our" visit with them, "we" are not inspired to poetic heights, but instead "lie on the rumpled bed, watching / The ancient moonlight creep across the floor" (p. 4, l. 7-8). Absent here means light and the motive to look. The darkness that arrives in line nine is "uncalled-for," and instead of erasing the world to make way for a new creation, this darkness "[w]ill cover us" (10).

The poems' main theme is absence in its figurative connotation. The idea of being *there*, but not there enough, equals being absent, and as the persona utters in "The Beach Hotel": "there in the faded light discover the bones, / The dust, the bitter remains of someone who might have been / Had we not taken his place" (p.4, l. 11-13). We are here, but we have been absent from this place all through. The last line alone gives us an idea of absent. Like the bones of "bitter remains" of the dead who has never been, "we" also have not taken the place in the sense that the nonexistent dead whose remains are bitter is absent for us. In accepting his absence we are, involuntarily, taking his place in being absent.

In the third part "The Next Time" there are feelings of both loss and absence pervading the whole atmosphere of the poem. The strange thing about the treatment of absence is that it does not stand against the opposite which is presence, but rather the dichotomy goes like absence vs. being. The poem starts with a whirling twister of energy, with time is intertwined and intermixed; today is tomorrow in disguise. Strand writes: "Nobody sees it happening, but the architecture of our time / Is becoming the architecture of the next time" (7, lines 1-2). Morrison notices that the opening lines "has a sense of Yeats' spiraling gyres here, with one age replacing another, or lasting through, returning again" (Morrison, 2008). Moreover, the words "the next time" drive away the architecture into an abode that is not of this time, and so detaches the architecture from us.

The positive impression of the opening lines disappears and is outshone by more dismal next couple of lines. For the reader thinking that the wording proposes some lasting, positive development of art into another implies absence: "And the dazzle \Of light upon the waters is as nothing\ beside the changes Wrought therein, just as our waywardness means" (p. 7; lines 2-4). The reader can never deny the fact that these lines describe an irreversible destiny of all and everything that is death.

It is also notable that in the line "our sorrows do not turn into poems" (line 6) Strand has resorted to irony as he has used his sorrows to write poetry. Nevertheless, when the poet notes that "Desire has fled," he repeats the same idea of loss in the two poems discussed above. The sense of absence and loss continues through

Part I of the poem when the poet says “so many people we have loved have gone.” In the concluding lines of part I:

And no voice comes from outer space, from the folds  
Of dust and carpets of wind to tell us that this  
Is the way it was meant to happen, that if only we knew

How long the ruins would last we would never complain. (p. 7; lines 11–14)

That is to say the “absent voice,” as it were, that is we are acutely seeking is supposed to be something, but it never does. The speaker performs the task of saying what the absent voice should have said. The absence of the voice then is taken by the speaker himself. Strand questions the “outer space” to inform us that this is all there is to exist. It is noted that “It is the indeterminacy that causes Strand’s speaker so much woe” (Nicosia, 2007, p. 184).

The last lines of Part I, then, turns the absent voice into spoken words. By turning the speech into a command, the fact that the words are not uttered gets to be a compelling alarm of a threat. The most important thing of the speaker, then, is the act of speaking not what are the words: “[I]f only we knew /How long the ruins would last we would never complain.”(13-14)

In the next Part II of “The Next Time” the anecdote of the absent voice from outer space did stop in the previous part but continued is here. When this was accepted, the advice: “never complain” can be noted. Fundamentally, part II has some of characteristic Strandian insincere friskiness. “The great motels to the west are waiting”, here the presence of the place West is given as a hope to the complications of the place inside the poem, a healing treatment. In the West, everything is clear and with purpose to respond to the distressing tedium of the previous part. For the quest, there is a journey's end, in the West where "everything / Is tirelessly present – the mountains casting their long shadow / Over the valley where the wind sings its circular tune. / And trees respond with a dry clapping of leaves" (p.9, lines 33-36). However, The speaker\poet does begin this voyage, just visualizing the wind’s circular melody, and takes the time to watch the falling leaves and the blanket of snow that covers the ground.

In part II, the core of this poem, Strand’s issues a clear call for escapade. “Heading west recurs in the collection as a trope not so much of escape as of deliverance—west past the edge of the old, toward the realer subject, the truer destination. Presenting idyllic pictures of western motels, scenic front yards, and people "waving on the surface of warm lakes" (Morrison, 221). The poet calls the reader on an idyllic expedition: "The highway comes right to the door, so let’s \ Take off before the world out there burns up" (lines 21-22). Speaking as much to himself as to his readers, Strand attempts to whip up

some enthusiasm for his venture westward: "Life should be more \Than the body's weight working itself from room to room. \A turn through the forest will do us good, so will a spin\ Among the farms" (p.8, lines 22-25).

Subsequently, when Strand closes his poem, imagery is not used to persuade the reader to take the trip in due course; he is advising the reader how to go on the journey now. In other words, the journey has already been taken, and when we "think of the chickens strutting, / The cows swinging their udders, and flicking their tails at flies", we are going on the imaginative trip that Strand describes. After all, when "one can imagine prisms of summer light breaking against / The silent, haze-filled sleep of the farmer and his wife", (p.8, lines 21-28).

Part III starts or restarts where part I stopped: "It could have been another story, the one that was meant / Instead of the one that happened" (p.8, lines 29-30). In this Eliotan expression, Strand contradicts the idea set forth in the first part. Perhaps, he wants to say, another thing might have taken place, and things could have come out better. In this transformation, the word "meant" has been transformed from the previous usage. It can be said then that Part III is the epilogue of the poem, a reflection that binds this part with Part I. The central utterance in the previous part involved that voice from outer space that the Strand speaker sought to hear, "[T]his / is the way it was meant to happen" (line 14-15). That is, the manner it was meant to be in part I denoted the changelessness of destiny; here, *meant* denotes the speaker's desire to affect his reality regardless of fate.

When the persona bemoans the fact that "hoping to revise what has been false or rendered unreadable / Is not what we wanted", he laments that all he can do is the optimistic outlook to change the sore reality into something endurable. That is to say, the value of what he has done in part II is being considered here: "Believing that the intended story / Would have been like a day in the west when everything / Is tirelessly present . . . was overly / Simple no doubt, and short-sighted" (lines: 34-37). The persona may rebuke himself for formerly considering some lasting adventure where the mountains, wind, and trees all produce benefit in participating in the making and the upkeep of an impressive amorousness.

Strand's speaker tries to mitigate his fall; there is a retrieval of the self after permitting his emotions to escape him. He convinces himself that everything end in absence, and hence his intended reality, would have been short-lived, although it could have been recalled in the face of destiny: "For soon the leaves, / Having gone black, would fall" (9-10). When he says, "the annulling snow / Would pillow the walk" (41-42), the pillow performs an adverse action, that is of smothering not cushioning.



Eventually, what will befall is going to be what has befallen. The process goes over and again: “we, with shovels in hand, would meet, / Bow, and scrape the sidewalk clean” (44-45). As if the poet wants to say that life continues despite loss.

The next poem, “*The Night, the Porch,*” is rather dim, or to put it in more literary term, mediational in tone. Strand uses allusion to experiences he had gone through without describing them in a straight line, instead he inspires the reader to fill in the gaps and reflect on the most suggestive images in more detail. This poem is much about contradictions and binaries. From the title itself onward the poet fills the poem with such paradoxes: There is “nothing,” and it must be something. A force yet ungraspable and invisible, the wind itself is an image of duality. Absence is found in presence and whenever absence is felt it is a presence.

The poem begins with a meditation on “nothing” as the absence of humanity’s communication with the natural world. With the progress of the poem, the language becomes more complicated. The poet resorts to meditation in the discussion of absence as perceived by humans through the use of “us”. In this poem is about the nature of life and the human spirit the poet sets the poem in action and leaves the greatest share of the poem unrelated to each other. The title starts from all the nights and porches of the globe, to create that one night and porch, only to find out that the poet never permits us to make the locale palpable or tangible. It is pointed out that “We are located within the absence of locale, pinpointed amidst universals” (Morrison, 2008, p. 21).

From the first lines of ‘*The Night, the Porch,*’ the poet starts to describe a state of mind in which the person outstares into the expanse of space, finding nothing. It is not going into nothing that he is afraid of, but rather this nothingness is final and infinite, an absence to which the antonym is not ‘presence’ but rather ‘being’. Unlike John Donne’s absence which is only a short sleep, here it is mysterious journey to the unknown “all of us will be swept into.” (p.10, L.2). Accepting is the only strategy available to confront absence here, just as one bares himself to “the wind.” The power that causes absence is bigger than any individual, and is an evidence that an “ungraspable,” a force in the world.

It is strange that the speaker adds an element of will of choice to the trees as they can decide whether to “sway or be still” like the day or night “can be what they wish”. But this actually is just to amplify the idea that humans’ existence serves no purpose and we are looking for nothing. That in hand Strand reflects on the dark destiny in “*The Night,*

The Porch.” He is strongly conscious of death, but no longer unnerved by that consciousness.

The speaker summons the idea of waiting. Human beings are looking for something that, when it appears is lost. Its presence is also its absence being in a very transient form of presence. The ephemeral nature of human presence is not making it any dear. The dichotomy of presence\absence is in the centermost of the poem and through looking for that, the poet ponders the idea of clarity of absence. This “thing” the persona is seeking, that they say all humanity is waiting for, is described as the sound of “a few leaves falling”. The sound is heard and with its arrival comes its end. The beginning is also the end. It may many “leaves” or just a leaf, “or less”. This thoughtful instant is one that many diverse readers will surely have different readings to.

The final lines of the poem “There is no end to what we can learn. The book out there / Tells us as much, and was never written with us in mind” (p. 10. L.10–11) remind the readers that the world was not solely created for humankind. We are only part of the whole, yet it was not written “with us in mind”. Initially, if the reader experiences are ephemeral and temporary, then at least they will be multiple, so they come with their many attendant lessons. Human meaningless presence is then compared to an absence of sorts the absence of meaning needs to clarification but rather justification. Humans are waiting for the conceivable rather than an explanatory note to their presence. That conceivable becomes available to them becomes palpable. It is not imaginable anymore but purely “real”.

Then, the last line “There is no end to what we can learn.” can be seen as "referral to and admonition against “the book.”. It does, after all, support Strand’s idea that, alternatively, like the tree, the day, and the night in the fourth line, they were “never written with us in mind”. In other words, humans should not elucidate answers from the day, the night, or the trees because those do not bother to provide them to us, they should also not look to the book.

The discussion of the next poem “A Piece of the Storm” is not without its complications since the poem itself *are* so brief but deep. Besides being the poem that gives the volume its title in its second line, this is a clear example of how the poet employs both absence and presence as dichotomy and not opposites. “A Piece of the Storm” takes place in a room, the speaker’s room, observing the tiniest of moments. He

witnesses a snowflake that melts on the arm of a chair: "From the shadow of domes in the city of domes, \ A snowflake, a blizzard of one, weightless, entered your room" (p.20, lines 1-2). The universe with all its energy and passion is literally summed in a single dense snowflake what Manguso calls "a small desperate detail that reveals the universe in its nearly imperceptible form" (Manguso, 1999, p. 83).

What is present here is the "blizzard of one", bringing with it the likelihood for many snowflakes implies a blizzard. Morrison believes that "Singular and multiple are equivalent in this room's space; in our imagination of this room we see the storm and just the piece of it" (Manguso, 1999, p. 239). The presence of that singular snowflake is not seen as fullness but as a lack of something more plentiful.

In line five, the speaker inform us that the flake's melting was actually nothing, "No more than a solemn waking / To brevity, to the lifting and falling away of attention, swiftly, / A time between times, a flowerless funeral" (p.20, lines 5-7). The lines permit us to honor the time between times, moving into a sanctified moment of memory, a perpetuity within a second, an everlasting time such as the weightless flake. The presence of the flake is the focal point here but it is still and silent presence, comparable to the readers' presence.

The absence is also indicative of a lack in motion in the poem which signifies a stillness of time and the briefness of existence. All is negation here until the end. Movement, twists and turns, paradoxes are absent, just the individual snowflake is present to indicate the symbolic insignificance of this storm.

There is a repetition of the phrase "No more" in lines 5 and 7 to point that this little snowflake matters no more, however, it also spurs the feeling that it is present no more. Strand provides a twist at the poem's finale, optimism for regeneration. These small words of hope come to comfort the reader that absence can also be a germ of regeneration and renewal. The melting snowflake's was an alarm of transience of existence no more. The poem contains a promise of a new time, a time when the snowflake will have renewed to fall again in the future :

"No more than that

Except for the feeling that this piece of the storm,

Which turned into nothing before your eyes, would come back,

That someone years hence, sitting as you are now, might say:

'It's time. The air is ready. The sky has an opening"

(20, lines 7-11)

The presence of the snowflake is a sudden and ephemeral one, as life happens to us with time always racing by, the disappearance of future at the instant of its advent. However, to predict the snowflake's coming back is to envisage a consequential world. Morrison notes that "In this fleeting image of something weightless and seemingly inconsequential, Strand presents our lives, our awareness of time in microcosm". He also adds that in the end "it is a poem of such kindness. The pronouns used, the "you," allow for a redemptive act on behalf of the reader" (Morrison, 2008, p. 232). The snowflake "turned into nothing before your eyes", and thus it is for "you" that this poem passes this memorial, or the funeral where there are no flowers.

Like a surreal painting the poet connects two divergent objects. The shadows the domes belong to each other, and the blizzard belongs to the snowflake even though they oppose each other. There is great juxtaposition in these two lines, yet the odd opposition of matter and value work together exceptionally well. The heavy weight of the snow is imminent, threatening the order of things, and nature is in control. But we are still asleep, and "a piece of the storm" will vanish until "the next time."

As stated by the final lines, the poet takes us in a journey towards the ending, a little death. This is the end of the snowflake. In this instant of melting away, of dissolving, a permanent kind of absence, the reader savors a mindfulness of transience, of the cycle of life: the meaning of living and dying and possibly being born again.

Absence is not integrated with presence in the final poem of the collection, "The View," as in the previous poem, but rather a detached fact. The final poem of the collection "The View" is about a lonely man voicing of the collection's last piece. The poem starts with "This is the place" and the readers recognize that they have reached to the final line. The poet uses a third person speaker as a way to distance himself from the reader. The poem is about a man sitting at a table, gazing out at the sunset. The reader is posed as a voyeur by Strand:

"This is the place. The chairs are white. The table shines.  
The person sitting there stares at the waxen glow.  
The wind moves the air around, repeatedly,  
As if to clear a space. 'A space for me,' he thinks.  
He's always been drawn to the weather of leavetaking" (P.50 lines 1-5)

In term of time, the poet ends *The Blizzard of One* with the present tense, giving us the feeling of progression through the past of the opening poem "Untitled." It is not our moment to witness; we observe the observer as he stares out to sea.

The weather of leavetaking calls to the mind a time of absence, the vacancy and silence. We see the man looks at the sun's leavetaking in the poem, raising his glass to the light as a sort of expression of his emotions. The analogy between the absence of the sun and the end of the poem is only so obvious. The reader is put in front of absence, as it were. The absence of the sun echoes so many absences in the poem, one of them, of course, is the absence of company and intimacy. To say the least the poet equates absence to the vanishing of the true self

Strand divides his poem into two sections. The images and thoughts become both clear and simple. A direct image is given to the reader, which is perceived from the eyes of the onlooker. Morrison contends that "although we still see it through this other person's eyes; the perception is not truly ours. We finally get a glimpse of the sublime, that moment at its point of vanishing, the spectral glimpse – not a time in between times or a meanwhile, but a sliver of an instant of beauty and its perception" (249).

In terms of colors, the white and red are the colors of light and blood respectively, they are gradually substituted by darker tones, till the instant is carried in "The violet sweep of it" (55, line 14). The absence of light due to sunset stands in sharp contrast with the presence of light in the beginning of the poem. The sunset creates the lasting beauty, since the sun was simply "the sun / Of no distinction" (55, lines 8-9). What makes this moment beautiful is the long clouds layer before the sun might be, a prism the sun can almost vanish through it, that simultaneously being present and absent, on the verge of being absented.

*The Blizzard of One* ends with a note of enduring presence as indicated by the word "last," signifying that Strand has captured the moment "as if that plain fact was enough and would last" (55, line 17). Presence is not like absence in being something to withstand. The poet points to something that will last even as uncertainty and doubt undermine it.

## Conclusion

Strand's poetry is nostalgic in tone that deals with themes frequent in postmodern poetry such as absence, loss, and meaninglessness. Strand's vision is anything but despairing. Quite the reverse, his poetry recognizes the limitations of life and the imagination even through it affirms them. Themes of loss and absence are pervasive in Strand's most important collection of poems. From the very opening poem of the collection the reader could conclude absence serves as a metaphor for the paradox and meaninglessness or purposelessness of the life he lived. The theme of absence whether in its actual or figurative connotation mirrors the idea of being there, but not there enough, equals being absent.

Absence versus presence is not always the right dichotomy but rather absence is the other side of being. The place and time are themselves both occasions to be absent and present as in the poem "Next Time." The best (and the only available) strategy to confront absence here is accepting. In the world which Strand describes, Man fights against giant and ungraspable powers.

Sometimes the idea of absence and loss is vague adding more burden over the reader as to what for the poet summons it in the first place. In many places Strand prefers a meaningful presence\ loss over a meaningless presence\ gain. Lack of enthusiasm and motivation is also equated to absence and insignificance. This stagnant state is Strand's idea of an absence he describes well in the poem "A piece of Storm." The snowflake is more present than the whole storm. Renewal and renovation is always equated with presence of being. Hope of renewal and regeneration is also expressed throughout absence.

## Bibliography

1. "Biography of Mark Strand" . (n.d.). Retrieved from pulitzer.org:  
<https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/mark-strand>
2. *Britannica.com*. (n.d.).
3. Hilbert, E. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype>
4. Kirby, D. (1990). *Mark Strand and the Poets Place in Contemporary Culture*. Boston: University of Missouri Press.
5. Manguso, S. (1999). "Where is that boy?" *Iowa Review*. Retrieved from pubs:  
<https://pubs.lib.uiowa.edu/iowareview/article/id/21074/download/pdf>.
6. Morrison, V. M. (2008). "The Labyrinth as Metaphor of Postmodern American Poetics,". *a dissertation submitted to* .
7. Nicosia, J. (2007). *Reading Mark Strand. England:* . London: Palgrave Macmillan. .
8. Strand, M. (1998.). *A Blizzard of One*. . New York: Alfred A Knopf.
9. Strand, M. (2001). *Weather of Words*. Boston: Knof.
10. Vine, R. (1977). " A Conversation with Mark Strand,". *Chicago Review*, 133.