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# Who is it that writes? Poetry and the plural self

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**Who is it that writes? Poetry and the plural self**

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**Master of Social Science**

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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the works of several prominent poets that span over three centuries, through various histories and cultures. These poets have attempted to reconsider reified or ossified concepts of 'self' either consciously or unconsciously and have, thereby, created innovative ways of expressing received notions of subjectivity and of 'self'. Several things have stood out in this research as a result of tackling the thesis question. The Writer (writ large) is situated in a physiological, geographical, weathered place where wind, stone, falling, sitting, smiling, howling, bleeding have always been, and will always be, the basic stuff of poetry. The notion of a fixed, empirical self is an anachronism based on cultural constructs and milieus, whereas the Writer / poet is in fact a differentiated being who accesses a range of selves derived from arenas such as a Lacanian 'second self' ; physiology; cultural structuring; or a host of other prevaricating factors including historical and political forces. The Writer, in short, is not always who we think we see, know or experience and is not always that singular individual at every moment or location in time. Finally, this impermanent, plural, 'malleable' writer / self is situated in specific contexts and remains in a constant tension or negotiation with the ubiquitous symbols of world-time. The 'new' in the writer's works is made possible through how the Writer attempts to make sense of their experience and in the creative ways they articulate those experiences and symbols. Each poet has approached the notion of the 'I' in such similar, yet variegated, ways that an inter-textual analysis is invited and therefore the exegesis is delivered in a syncretised format rather than in sections.

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## **Who is it that writes? Poetry and the Plural Self**

## Exegesis

This essay explores questions of the locus of subjectivity in writing primarily drawing on the works and lives of three recent poets: Arthur Rimbaud, Fernando Pessoa and Bob Dylan. The selection of these three poets is not arbitrary but based on research around their works, lives and relationships with their eras. All three of these writers are rooted in the rubric of the so named modern era, in its politics, psychology and social fabric. All three poets address in one way or another key themes of the modern man: the problems of subjectivity, science, reason, nation and identity. The tools they use are embedded within the tarp of their poetry; they include instruments of construction and deconstruction (derangement) and reconstruction. An example of the latter of these tools is aptly illustrated by Dylan's mode of reinvention, a process of revisitation, for example in his album *Highway 61 Revisited*.<sup>1</sup>

This essay will view the poet/self as (1) fluid or in a state of becoming, (2) located in the corporeal, in time and space, as a part of and deriving from, the fabric of context and, finally (3) pluralistic or multifarious (4) as authentic or 'true' to self. The three poets under consideration are immersed in the myth (and history) of their own nations, some a little more than others, and attempt to make sense of that immersion via their poetry and mythmaking. Lynda McNeil's comprehensive exegesis on the 'Mythic mode as symbolic discourse' explores the '... role of the self in the creation of meaning, the interaction between the self and world in the creation of meaning, and the nature of reality-as-understood.'<sup>2</sup> Some 'markers', if you will, of the poet in relation to her work that I have found along the way of my own explorations revolve around some of McNeil's contentions. One of these is that what one says/writes, in particular as the artist/poet, is at once rooted in an experiential, historical physiological reality made up of pain, emotions, quotidian experience, the landscape – physical, political, cultural. At the same time, none of this can be said to be 'true' in a reified sense of that word or to convey any 'objective' truthfulness as the artist-subject is constantly engaged in an ever changing discourse on the subject in the now with its desires, interpretations and losses. At the risk of 'thematizing' each of the poet's works and lives, there does appear to be a synchrony of events, writings, meanings and clusters of phrasings/words that indicate, if nothing else, a certain sense of cohesion amongst

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, M. (2006). *The Bob Dylan Encyclopaedia*. New York: Continuum. 'Highway 61 Revisited meant exactly that: it was revolutionary and new, but it was also, had we heeded it, a clear signal that Dylan had revisited the world of the blues. ... Many bluesmen had been there before him, all recording versions of a blues called "Highway 61" ... It is, though, above all, a blues that exemplifies the shared, fluid, communal nature of blues composition'. p 318.

<sup>2</sup> McNeil, L.D. (1992). *Recreating the World/Word: The Mythic Mode as Symbolic Discourse*. Albany: State University of New York Press. p. 3.

these writers around the notion of the subject. As with all subjects being or becoming in this world, these three artists experience a historical/physiological/mythologising presence. It is, at the same time, this very historical presence, even their own historical presence, that all of these poets challenge and question so intensely in their work, not in some philosophical way but rather through their experience of living in the everyday world. Dylan is Dylan and already is not, as he is Robert Zimmerman and we can certainly discern a ‘Dylanesque’ work as distinct from Rimbaudian as if the stamp / signature of Dylan is on the work / line / piece. As we shall see, it is not as simple as this, as many of Dylan’s lines are also ‘stolen’ from previous works.

It is said that many poets choose every word excruciatingly carefully. It is true also that words choose poets<sup>3</sup>. Rimbaud would write, in a letter to his friend Georges Izambard in 1871, that ‘... one has to be born a poet. This is not all my fault. It is wrong to say: I think. One ought to say: people think me. ... I is someone else. It is too bad for the wood which finds itself a violin ...’<sup>4</sup>

Lacan, referring to Freud’s ‘discovery’, would frame the question: ‘Is what thinks in my place, then, another I? ... In fact, there is no confusion on this point: what Freud’s research led us to was not a few more or less curious cases of split personality’<sup>5</sup> [or heteronyms!]. The tension between conscious irruptions and the unconscious is one of ‘Wo es war, soll Ich werden’ (Where It was, so I must Be). I must come to the place ‘where that was’ of ‘reconciliation’, reintegration and harmonisation:<sup>6</sup>

The radical heteronomy that Freud’s discovery shows gaping within man can never again be covered over without whatever is used to hide it being profoundly dishonest.

Who, then is this other to whom I am more attached than to myself, since, at the heart of my assent to my own identity it is still he who agitates me?

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<sup>3</sup> Rilke, R. M. (1942) *Sonnets to Orpheus*. Rilke would claim that his Sonnets to Orpheus ‘... entrusted themselves to me, the most enigmatic dictation I have ever held through and achieved: the whole first part was written down in a single breathless act of obedience, between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of February without one word being doubtful or having to be changed.’p.7. Also see Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (Eds) (2003) *Fernando Pessoa: A Century Pessoa*. In a letter to Adolf Casais Monteiro in 1935 Pessoa would claim that he wrote ‘... thirty odd poems in one go, in a kind of trance whose nature I cannot define.’ He then wrote another six poems under his own name of Pessoa. Zbigniew Kotowicz in his book *Fernando Pessoa: Voices of a Nomadic Soul* would counter Pessoa’s claim and outline that he did not do what he said he did. Bob Dylan would make a slightly similar claim of his song *Hard Rain* ‘The words came fast, very fast. It was a song of terror. Line after line after line , trying to capture the feeling of nothingness’ Hinton, B. (2006). *Bob Dylan Complete Discography*. NY: Universe Publishing. p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Fowlie, W. (Ed.) (1966). *Rimbaud: Complete works, Selected Letters*. p. 303.

<sup>5</sup> Lacan, J. (1977). *Ecrits: A selection*. London: Routledge Classics. Translated by Alan Sheridan. Chapter 5. The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud. P. 189.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*.

...

If I have said that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other (with a capital O), it is in order to indicate the beyond in which the recognition of desire is bound up with the desire for recognition.

In other words this other is the Other that even my lie invokes as a guarantor of the truth in which it subsists.<sup>7</sup>

The complexity of poesis arises from the fact that poets themselves are complex in their ‘radical heteronomy’: as Freud and then Lacan suggest this radical heteronomy is true for all beings. In the citation given above Rimbaud says he is ‘someone else’. Who is this mysterious other? Michael Hamburger suggests that for Rimbaud:

Not only his own ‘empirical self,’ but human identity in general, had become so dubious as to be freely interchangeable: “To every being several other lives seemed to me to be due. This gentleman doesn’t know what he is doing: he is an angel. This family is a brood of dogs. ...”<sup>8</sup>

Hamburger traces the demise of what he refers to as the ‘empirical self’ over the course of the rise of modern poetry starting with poets like Mallarmé, Leopardi and Baudelaire<sup>9</sup>. He suggests that this shift away from the notion of an ‘empirical self’ had pre-Symbolist antecedents, but was further developed through the Symbolists with Rimbaud anticipating some of the modern movements such as Dadaism and Surrealism.<sup>10</sup>

It is possible that this process of ‘modernisation’ has been the same through history whenever archaic views of self or personhood were no longer adequate to resolve the tensions between past and contemporary understandings and knowledge. Karl Popper suggests that the term

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Hamburger, M. (1969). *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960's*. London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46. Hamburger makes the case that the early moderns took the plunge into the ‘abyss’ of nothingness, obviously prompting the nihilism of Nietzsche (clearly the zeitgeist) so as to ‘... find something new, [and this] demanded the abandonment of that “empirical self” ...’ It was left to Rimbaud to ‘... record what happens to the ‘empirical self’ when it is systematically destroyed so as to make it a vehicle, a “drunken vessel”, for poetry.’

‘modernism’ is nothing but a ‘historicist’ fashion<sup>11</sup> and the philosopher Bruno Latour claims that we have never been modern:

At the very moment when the failure of the twin Enlightenments of Marxism seemed to have explained everything, at the very moment when the failure of their total explanation leads post-moderns to founder in the despair of self-criticism, we discover that the explanations had not yet begun, and that this has always been the case; that we have never been modern, or critical; that there has never been a yesteryear or an Old Regime ...; that we have never left the old anthropological matrix behind, and that it could not have been otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

Bradbury and McFarlane find a kind of crossover between the terms ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’:

... many twentieth – century artists have rejected the label [of modernism] and the associated aesthetics, the modes of abstraction, discontinuity, and shock. And it can well be argued that the twentieth-century artistic tradition is made up, not of one essential strand, but of two – roughly antithetical, though meeting from time to time. ... the ‘moderns’ and the ‘contemporaries’.<sup>13</sup>

In a sense, whilst the critical term modernism has been utilised to categorise a certain era or phase or school of thought or art, it can also refer to things that are different from a previous era or, as Bradbury and McFarlane suggest: the term modern can also connote what is contemporary. Josipovici puts it this way, ‘... Modernism is not only something which happened in Paris or Vienna in 1900; it is there, with its problems and possibilities, whenever and wherever an artist sits down to work.’<sup>14</sup> Furthermore:

To understand [modernism’s] implications, however we need to see it as a result of and reaction to a crisis of authority which affected every sphere of activity in Western Europe and America – political, philosophical, scientific and artistic. At the artistic level this was a crisis of confidence in the authority

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<sup>11</sup> Popper, K. (1981). *The Rationality of Scientific Revolutions*. in Hacking, I. (Ed) (1981). *Scientific Revolutions*. NY: Oxford University Press. Octavio Paz, writing about Pessoa, would agree when he suggests that ‘As is always the case, the classification does not correspond to the reality.’ In Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (2003) *Fernando Pessoa: A Centenary Pessoa*. Manchester: Carcanet Books. p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been Modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Trans. Catherine Porter. p. 47

<sup>13</sup> Bradbury, M. & McFarlane, J. (Eds.) (1976) *Modernism: 1890 – 1930*. Middlesex: Penguin Books. p. 24

<sup>14</sup> Josipovici, G. (1987). *The lessons of Modernism: and other essays*. London: Macmillan. p. xv

of the author or creator. Where the Romantic poet had been convinced of the truth and value of what he had to say, his modern counterpart could only see the absurdity of such a posture.<sup>15</sup>

The shift away from the notion of a singular or empirical self was augmented on the breakdown of any guarantee that such a self either exists or, at least, that notion needed to be conceptually challenged. According to Hamburger the need for such a shift was heightened amongst the Symbolists: that those poets were amongst the earliest to recognise the need to challenge, radically, the view of the constructed 'empirical' self of former times.<sup>16</sup> For example, Rimbaud declares that '... the poet is truly the thief of fire. He is responsible for humanity, even the animals. ... let us ask the poet for the new – ideas and forms.'<sup>17</sup> In short, those poets entered into a sort of 'freefall', a letting go of all that was before, but it seemed to be up to certain artists to initiate that freefall. Of course some of Rimbaud's innovations cost him his reputation amongst the established poets of his day. As Robb puts it 'Some of Rimbaud's innovations looked suspiciously like mistakes.' or 'It seemed that, for these literary bureaucrats, the function of poetry was not to change the nature of reality, but to keep up the steady flow of gossip and dinner invitations.'<sup>18</sup>

If Geertz<sup>19</sup> is right in that we are constructed by culture, then it is true also that we construct culture. We create and at the same time are created. Perhaps it is in the nature of some to pull down, or deconstruct, the old edifice and who more apt to do so than the 'new guard' - typically the adolescents of the age. Nietzsche was a perfect and self appointed, exemplar of such an idea, and not only his own elders but whole previous millennia of generations suffered his philosophical onslaught. One of his more recent biographers, Curtis Cate, would claim that '... it would probably be hard to find in all of philosophical literature a more withering review of petty foibles and vanities of academic scholars.'<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche wrote to his friend Erwin Rohde that '... the 'regeneration' of the Germanic spirit called for nothing less than the destruction of the 'Lumpenkultur' of the present.'<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche declared himself, after Christ, Ecce Homo ... 'Listen to

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<sup>15</sup> Josipovici, G. (1987). *The lessons of Modernism: and other essays*. London: Macmillan. p.109

<sup>16</sup> Hamburger, M. (1969). *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960's*. London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd. p. 42.

<sup>17</sup> Fowle, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

<sup>18</sup> Robb, G. (2000). *Rimbaud*. London: Picador. p. 118 – 119.

<sup>19</sup> Geertz, C., (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. US: Basic Books: a Division of Harper Collins.

<sup>20</sup> Cate, C. (2002). *Friedrich Nietzsche: A Biography*.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 144.

me! I am the one who I am!’<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche declared also that his protégé Zarathustra ‘... does not just talk differently, he is different ...’ and he then quotes from his own book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that ‘You repay a teacher badly by remaining a pupil.’ He then subverts his own newly founded authority, in a way that Rimbaud, Pessoa and Dylan all would, by insisting that ‘Now I call upon you to lose me and to find yourselves; and only after you have all denied me will I want to return to you ...’.<sup>23</sup> All three of these poets would abdicate their ‘empirical’ self in different ways and according to their psycho-social makeup. All three represented a different aspect of the fluid self. Rimbaud, the mercenary, becomes the absconded self; Pessoa, the ‘man who never was’, becomes the self in abnegation; and Dylan, in search of a self in his album *Modern Times*, becomes the abreacted self.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps, with the personal freedoms, perceived and real, hard gained over millennia, for his ‘I’, the post Medieval Christian person or artist, unbound, could lay claim to any member of the previously culturally proscribed Trinitarian Godhood. Rimbaud could not, in his time, claim Christ-hood; Pessoa dabbled ever closer, as in the poem by his freewheeling heteronym de Campos, ‘Martial Ode’, where he assumed multiple sensationist points of view, including the victim and victimiser; however, it is not until we come to the re-inventing, post-modern artist Dylan that we begin to find, as permitted by Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, the ‘I am Christ’. Rimbaud can emulate Christ, be ‘Christ-like’ as it were: ‘I am not worthy to untie the laces of Jesus’ shoes; but O my grief! and O my torture! I too at eighteen years, seven months, bear a cross, a crown of thorns...’<sup>25</sup> He could bear the crown of thorns only *like* Christ. In the early days of the modern venture of the reconstitution of the self, Rimbaud had a sense that he was someone ‘other’ but as yet could not breach the amniotic sac of the long evolved notion of an empirical self. He knows he must discard this old shell and he does so through the mechanism of absconding, disappearing from the location of his early self, into the jungles of Java and Africa. The only way open to a Rimbaud was not to play with his other selves, as Pessoa and Dylan would have permission to do later in the modernist day, but to declare his self bankrupt, to wipe the slate clean. He could not be Christ; he could only point to the notion of having a similar ache as Christ. Rimbaud would, however, steal the fire that set Dylan free many years later and which

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<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, F. (2005) *Ecce Homo* in *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Ant-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols and other writings*, Eds. A. Ridley & J. Norman. UK: Cambridge University Press. p. 71. Nietzsche subtitled this book ‘How to become what you are’. In a similar vein Rimbaud would rewrite himself.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>24</sup> This is not to be understood in the psychoanalytic sense of the recovery of the traumatic moment, but more in the sense of a ‘spiritual’ anamnesis, where Dylan is constantly flowing to and from his original experience (non-experience) of spirituality, in particular his Jewishness.

<sup>25</sup> Fowlie, op. cit., p. 283.

Dylan would write about in his autobiography *Chronicles*.<sup>26</sup> Pessoa, in ‘Martial Ode’, could become Christ-like, still where ‘... a physical dread of meeting God makes me suddenly shut my eyes’, but his is ‘An absurd Christ atoning for all the crimes and all the acts of violence/ my cross is inside me, rigid, scalding, smashing/ And everything hurts in my soul as vast as a Universe.’<sup>27</sup> Pessoa is an absurd Christ because, unlike Christ, he is ‘worthless’, he is a coward and a renegade. ‘Damn it, I am sick of demigods! / Where are there people in the world?’ and ‘If only I could hear someone’s human voice/ confessing not a sin but a disgrace.’ Dylan, however, would evolve into his own Messiah complex becoming more than just Christ-like. In the seventies he wrote ‘There’s a lone soldier on the cross’ in ‘Idiot Wind’; ‘I admit I felt a little uneasy / when she bent down to tie the laces of my shoe / Tangled up in blue’ from *Tangled up in Blue*; ‘I came in from the Wilderness .../ she walked up to me so gracefully / and took my crown of thorns ... / In a little hilltop village / they gambled for my clothes’ from *Shelter from the Storm*.<sup>28</sup> Michael Gray, Dylan’s hagiographer, comments that Dylan identifies himself with Christ not in a sense of Jesus as my saviour or friend but in the sense of ‘confusing’ himself with Christ.<sup>29</sup> Dylan sees himself, as did Nietzsche, as message bringer, charismatic leader and betrayed by his followers. It was soon after this period that Dylan would step down from the cross and hand it over, no longer Christ but a Christian facing a whole new tirade of ‘now look what’s happened’ opined by many followers, and critics alike<sup>30</sup>. It seems there’s always someone in ‘high places’<sup>31</sup> ready to tear down the creative and innovative artist who challenges the conceived order.

The spiritual state of ‘being’ or spiritual type for the modern, Western, poet ranges from saints, martyrs, archangels, a reconstructed Christ to Christ himself. All three of the poets under investigation in this essay are aware of the importance of Christ and the New Testament in the makeup of modern Western man. All three would play with the themes of the Gospel story and Christ in a way that reconstitutes the story of Christ within the frame or being of contemporary man in a real, embodied way. No longer can Christ remain a distant mythological entity or object

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<sup>26</sup> Dylan, B. (2004). *Chronicles: Volume One*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Dylan’s girlfriend, Suze Rotolo, had introduced him to Rimbaud: ‘That was a big deal, too. I came across one of his letters called “Je est un autre,” which translates into “I is someone else.” When I read those words the bells went off. It made perfect sense. ... Everything was in transition and I was standing in the gateway. Soon I’d step in heavy loaded, fully alive and revved up.’ p. 288.

<sup>27</sup> Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (Eds) (2003). *Fernando Pessoa: A Century Pessoa*. p. 106

<sup>28</sup> Dylan, B. (1976). *The Songs of Bob Dylan*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

<sup>29</sup> Gray, M. (2000). *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*. London: Continuum. p. 210.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenbaum, R. ‘Born-again Bob: four theories’ p. 233 in Thomson, E. & Gutman, D. (Eds.) (1990) *The Dylan Companion*. London: Papermac.

<sup>31</sup> Dylan would eulogise the comedian Lenny Bruce for ripping down the curtain of cultural pretence ‘Never robbed any churches/nor cut off any babies heads/he just took the folks in high places/and he shined a light in their beds.’ From the song Lenny Bruce off the Album *Shot of Love*. The lifting of the low and the pulling down of the high is a theme that goes way back even to Hesiod who’s Zeus ‘Easily humbles the proud as he lifts up high the obscure, and/ Easily straightens the crooked as well as deflating the puffed up.’ *Works and Days’ in Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. (2005). Trans.Daryl Hine. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Lines 6 -7.

of religion in the scheme of the ordinary. Nietzsche, of course, launched his ferocious attack on the pretentious piety as he understood it in the Christianity of his own era. He becomes *Ecce Homo* in order to undo or 'revisit' the Christian vision of reevaluating the world. I believe Dylan did the same by making the notion of a god-become-man accessible to the ordinary person; the veil rent and torn down, as by some modern day Jewish prophet. His becoming a Christian can be seen as allowing men to be exposed to the Christian, Muslim or barbarian inside themselves or to unveil the 'populist' rock musician inside the more respectable or legitimate folk musician. It is also a contention of this thesis that Rimbaud and Pessoa had a similar intention, albeit less overtly, pre-empting Dylan and providing him with the fire to continue the job of uncovering hidden, forbidden or potential selves. Pessoa would do this in an exemplary way in his 'Martial Ode' where 'As captain I ordered the shaking peasants to be shot,/I left the daughters of all the fathers tied to trees to be raped./Now I saw that it was within *my* heart that it all happened.' (my italics). How very Christian in sentiment where the latter is exhorted to see the log in their own eye<sup>32</sup>, and this is true of all three poets as they tackled the unresolved themes of Christ's words which would, like all good literature, live on and challenge us, no matter how many times a Nietzsche would declare its progenitor dead.

The artist has no choice but towards freedom through authenticity, not only for herself but for the other also. Indeed Madison concludes in his *The Hermeneutics of Post-modernity* that freedom to be who we are is the 'essence' of Man and that it is the imagination that has a philosophically central role in that freedom and the possibility to be: 'For it is through the imagination, the realm of pure possibility, that we freely make ourselves to be who or what we are, that we creatively and imaginatively become who we are, while in the process preserving the freedom and possibility to be yet otherwise than we have become and merely are.'<sup>33</sup> Yet Clifford Geertz suggests that man is created, that 'Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products – products manufactured ...'<sup>34</sup> and that men are nothing more than 'cultural artefacts'. Geertz, through his conceptualisation of the structured man, however, qualifies that assertion by adding that we are incomplete or '... unfinished animals who

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<sup>32</sup> Matthew 7: 3-5 'Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye'" Even the Greeks long before Jesus would advise men to '... mind your own business'. Hesiod, *ibid.*, Line 312.

<sup>33</sup> Madison, G.B., (1988). *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 191.

<sup>34</sup> Geertz, C., (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. US: Basic Books: a Division of Harper Collins. p. 50 – 51.

complete or finish ourselves through culture...' Man is an animal '... suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun'.<sup>35</sup>

Madison, in a similar vein to Geertz, follows Ricoeur when he says 'It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity ... it makes little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with an identity.' In short, we come into being, are created, within the fabric of our context, our culture, and that fabric is made up of signs and symbols, those that either predate us or those that we have 'spun', which we have created. We both create and are created.

Pessoa / Soares writes of '...aming myself' elaborating on this where ' ... if I want to say I exist as an entity that addresses and acts on itself, exercising the divine function of self-creation, then I'll make to be into a transitive verb. Triumphantly and anti-grammatically supreme, I'll speak of 'aming myself'.<sup>36</sup> 'Anti-grammatically' ? More than just another neologism this 'aming'; it comes back to Bloom's definition of the trope where the 'trope is a cut or gap made in or into the anteriority of language'. That is, Pessoa 'ams' himself into language and thus into human relations. Pessoa evolves his 'anteriority' along two levels: firstly, via his so-called 'semi-heteronym' (a hybrid of himself) Bernardo Soares so that the reader is thrown back upon herself by the 'feign'. Is it Pessoa or another, different voice that we cannot quite pin to him? Is it Soares, who does this 'aming'? Is it through the heteronym that Pessoa becomes?

The second level involves Pessoa's incision into ordinary, everyday fabric through a range of well honed, 'modernist' literary tools such as subversion, bricolage,<sup>37</sup> irony, scepticism, self-concealment, irresolution, short cuts, silences, hiatuses, ambivalences and fusions.<sup>38</sup> With each twist and turn of the poet-surgeon's knife Pessoa cuts open the everyday social fabric and he bleeds it, like the scientist of old using leeches to cut into the body to drain it of toxins. Pessoa's intent is to allow the poison of atrophy to drain away and to dissolve the ossification of being. Why? Because being should be a living thing, not some stereotype or outdated shell of the past that no longer holds any meaning for the present. Buchbinder supports the notion that the poem is a living article of faith in the everyday socio-cultural context when he suggests that:

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<sup>35</sup> Geertz, *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Pessoa, F. (2001). *The Book of Disquiet*. UK: Penguin Classics. Trans. & Ed. Richard Zenith.

<sup>37</sup> McNeil, L.D. (1992). *Recreating the World/Word: The Mythic Mode as Symbolic Discourse*. Albany: State University of New York Press

<sup>38</sup> Hamburger, M. (1969). *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modern Poetry from Baudelaire to the 1960's*. London: Anvil Press Poetry Ltd.

The poem is not only a literary fact, but also a social one. That is, the poem is produced within a context which includes the life of the author, the audience for whom he or she writes, and the background relationships of various social, historical and political factors. The poem, therefore, is enmeshed in circumstance, both in its productions by the poet and its reception by the reader.<sup>39</sup>

Pessoa has been criticised for being too ‘self conscious’ but what are artists if not just that? The three poets discussed here have undergone a range of criticisms as they pursued their art; Dylan as Christian fundamentalist, Rimbaud as abandoning his art, Pessoa as overly nationalistic. The artist’s work stands on its own; the poet is authentic even if his work is not to one or other critics’ or readers’ temperament or taste. Dylan has always claimed that. When Nietzsche, that *enfant terrible*, arrived with his *Birth of Tragedy* some parts of the Academy reeled.<sup>40</sup>

The poet is always the Other for others – fool, trickster, Scaramouche. He should be permitted to stand outside the law if we as a society want to continue to have the capacity to look at ourselves – in all our rawness and great beauty. These three poets have chosen the roles of apartness and abjectness – they have abdicated the commonly accepted roles and norms whilst remaining fully immersed in their contemporary human scenario. The material of the everyday social world is the poet’s greatest trope – the banal, the commonplace or ordinary. The poet takes what is ordinary and turns it back on itself so that those caught up or lost in the everyday can remain faithful to the authenticity of the commonplace. The method of the poets under consideration in this essay is ludic.<sup>41</sup> These three poets, from different eras and cultures, display remarkably similar traits of self-redefinition, albeit each undertakes that process in uniquely different ways.



I create and am created. I reside in the both the origin and the stream of my work. David Buchbinder outlines New Criticism’s theory of this idea where ‘... the poet creates the poem

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<sup>39</sup> Buchbinder, D. (1991). *Contemporary Literary Theory and the Reading of Poetry*. Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia Pty Ltd. p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1993). *The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Penguin Books. p. viii. Michael Tanner in his introduction to this volume of BoT would suggest that ‘...there was no doubt that Nietzsche had done himself a great deal of harm in professional circles, at the same time as he had decisively launched himself on the cultural scene.’

<sup>41</sup> *adj.* Of or relating to play or playfulness: "*Fiction . . . now makes [language] the center of its reflexive concern, and explodes in ludic, parodic, ironic forms*" (Ihab Hassan). [French ludique, from Latin lūdus, play.] Retrieved from <http://www.answers.com/topic/ludic> 1.5.10. Huizinga in his *Homo Ludens* suggests that for poets in general ‘... the function of the poet still remains fixed in the play-sphere where it was born.’ and that ‘Poiesis, in fact is a play function.’ p. 119.

which generates the speaking identity or persona'.<sup>42</sup>Wallace Fowlie would say of Rimbaud that 'His art is the seizure of his own reality'<sup>43</sup>. This comment would almost be a redundancy as many literary critics seem to look for an author's personal reality in their writings as some marker or indicator of authenticity. For some, there seems to be recoil should 'the real' or the everyday of the writer's life not show up in their works. Fowlie, I think, means more than this. At the end of the chapter entitled 'The example of Rimbaud' he concludes 'No precautionary method can be adopted for studying a mind that reveals not the imprint of a learned logic, but the chaotic, unsystemised experience of a primitive. To explain Rimbaud is futile. One has to learn how to understand him ...'<sup>44</sup>. It appears that what Fowlie is driving at here is that this conclusion not only holds true for Rimbaud but for all artists - and for poets, perhaps, in particular. To 'understand' the poet as embedded in the quotidian is far more complicated than to know or to be aware of the poet's historical world. This understanding includes a range of moods, emotions and experiences as played out in relationship to an historical or contextual reality.

The search for 'meaning' in the artist's work lies not only in their psychology, their emotions and consequently their experience but also in deeper, bloodier depths, the very bedrock of their physiology. The artist's work is not only directly related to their psycho-social self but to their biology. It is quite possible that the writer's work can maintain an identity separate and distinct from the author and yet it is the blood of the writer that writes. It is Nietzsche who alludes to what he refers to as the 'problems of the physiology of aesthetics'<sup>45</sup> alluding to physiology as a largely unexplored area of origin of an artist's work. I agree but am limited in this essay from any further elaboration of the problem. Suffice to say that if we agree that the writer writes from all the fields within which he is embedded, the psychological, the socio-cultural, the unconscious and so on, then it behoves us to explore more consciously the effect of an individual's physiology, his blood, on his writing. Nietzsche provides, as his example of this 'physiology of aesthetics', a description in *Ecce Homo* of how his book *Daybreak* came about:

The following winter, the first I spent in Genoa, *Daybreak* emerged from that sweetening and spiritualisation that is almost always the result of extreme lack of blood and muscle. The perfect lightness and cheerfulness, even the exuberance of spirit that is reflected in this work, was accompanied not only by the deepest physiological weakness, but by an excess of painful feelings as

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<sup>42</sup> Buchbinder, D. (1991). *Contemporary Literary Theory: And the Reading of Poetry*. Melbourne: McMillan Education Australia. p. 24.

<sup>43</sup> Fowlie, W. (1965). *Rimbaud: A Critical Study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p. 75.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p 86.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1996). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Trans. Douglas Smith.

well. In the middle of the tortures that go with an uninterrupted three-day headache together with exhausting bouts of vomiting, - I had a dialectician's clarity *par excellence* and could think with cold-blooded lucidity about things that, in healthier conditions, I was not enough of a mountain climber, not refined, not *cold* enough for.<sup>46</sup>

There is a strong body of Feminist scholarship that also examines the nexus between writing and the body. For example Julia Kristeva, psychoanalyst and novelist insists that it is the biological component of the human person that conditions the social and economic sphere where the former is expressed both verbally and non-verbally<sup>47</sup>. Calvin Bedient describes Kristeva's concept of the chora as

... the matrix of the drives, [and] is precultural, subsymbolic. Is it then this, this life, that breaks into the civilized space of representation in poetry, crashing and destroying its party (when culture is partying) or making a shambles of its solemnity (when culture is being religious)? To Kristeva, the person writing poetry is "on trial" or, more strictly, not a "subject" so much as a bundle of nerve impulses hostile to the "edifice" of identity, indeed to all cultural molds. This is the revolution in poetic language.<sup>48</sup>

Here we enter the country of the self.

I confront some 'thing' as I negotiate the Pleroma<sup>49</sup> that is the original 'fullness' substrate of my world. This thing, this 'crisis', I refer to as my 'self'. I wake up one day and interrogate the mirror image that looks back at me and discover that I am an 'I' separate from all other 'I' s and all other things. Such a discovery can happen to some people very early on, such as for Paramahansa Yogananda who, in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, recounts a memory of his self-conscious, self-

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<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, F. (2005) *Ecce Homo* in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Edited by Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, translated by Judith Norman. In Nietzsche's seventh discourse in the first book of Zarathustra, *Of reading and Writing*, he would emphasise, '... of all writings I have only that which is written with blood; and you will discover that blood is spirit. It is not an easy thing to understand unfamiliar blood: I hate the reading idler.' p. 67. Nietzsche, F. (1969). *Nietzsche: Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Middlesex: Penguin Ltd. Translated R.J. Hollingdale

<sup>47</sup> Bove, C. (2002). Revisiting Modernism with Kristeva: DeBeauvoir, Truffaut and Renoir. *Journal of Modern Literature*. XXV, 3 / 4. p. 114 – 126.

<sup>48</sup> Bedient, C. (1990). Kristeva and Poetry as Shattered Signification. *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Summer) p. 807-829.

<sup>49</sup> Meaning 'fullness'. According to Hans Jonas 'pleroma' is a standard term used by some Gnostic writers for '... the fully explicated manifold of divine characteristics' at the beginning of time. Man came about as a result of a crisis arising within the 'all' of the Pleroma. Jonas, J. (2002). *The Gnostic Religion*. Boston: Beacon Press. p. 178 – 182.

reflecting self beginning in his infancy where ‘I was resentfully conscious of being unable to walk and express myself freely. Prayerful surges arose within me as I realised my bodily impotence.’<sup>50</sup> I remember a next door neighbour (who was seventy years old at the time) telling me about his first conscious memory at around age two. I have discovered my separate nature but whom or what is this nature? What are the reference points for navigating this ‘self’ discovery? For Kierkegaard the ‘self’ is a synthesis made up of infinitude and finitude elements, ‘But this synthesis is a relation and a relation which, though derived, relates to itself, which is freedom. The self is freedom’. That freedom, however, is contingent upon consciousness. ‘Thus consciousness is the decisive factor. In general, what is decisive with regard to self is consciousness, that is to say, self-consciousness.’<sup>51</sup> Hence the question might be asked: how can any well developed artist be anything other than self-conscious?

The corollary to the discovery of the self-reflecting self, this relation that relates to itself, is a question that faces many individuals. The ‘Who am I?’ hits most of us sooner or later in one form or another; however, I am not quite so sure if the ‘aha’ moment of the ‘I am’ is within the experience of everyone. Over my life I have been asking people this question and many indicate that such an experience did indeed come upon them early in their lives. For me it was at around age ten or eleven – it was a glance, a self-recognised full participant in this world no longer able to retreat into my former state of naiveté or innocence. ‘Self’ awareness: this did not necessarily imply an ‘enlightened’ state, simply awareness of an ‘I’ as distinct from others.

For those who have experienced the ‘I’ as separate and distinct from all else and others in this world, the question can no longer be framed as ‘Who am I?’ but, if indeed I am, then ‘Why am I?’ I began a search for meaning that revolved around that fundamental inquiry. As my cognition around the brute fact of ‘I am’ grew, so did my awareness of my aloneness in this world, as differentiated from loneliness. Questions such as ‘Who is “I”?’ started formulating and, from that, my interest in the existentialists developed. Later in my life, as a first generation Australian and son of Austrian migrants, these questions had much to do with cultural identity.

Paul Ricoeur, in whose works hermeneutical enquiry into selfhood and personal identity is a central feature, suggests that the driving force in any such enquiry into the self lies in the question ‘Who?’. This question breaks down further into two other questions: of whom does one speak in designating persons, as distinct from things, in the referential mode? And who speaks by

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<sup>50</sup> Paramahansa Yogananda. (1950). *Autobiography of a Yogi*. London: Rider Books. p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Kierkegaard, S. (1849). *The sickness unto Death: a Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening by Anti-Climacus*. London: Penguin Books. p. 59. This translation by Alistair Hannay (1989).

designating him or herself as ‘locutor’?<sup>52</sup> For Ricoeur the ‘primary trait’ of the self is its temporality. He outlines, as key to the discussion around identity, the Latin signifiers *ipse* and *idem* where *idem* suggests a sense of permanence as continuity of ‘sameness’. *Ipse*, on the other hand, ‘... implies no assertion concerning some unchanging core of the personality’ and where *ipseity* may be referred to as ‘selfhood’. *Ipse* is a dialectic of the ‘other than self’ where the ‘selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other, that instead one passes into the other.’<sup>53</sup>

For Nietzsche it is this *idem* self that dislodges the notion of an ‘empirically real man’ and thus an empirical self:

The lyric poet’s images are nothing but the poet himself, and only different objectifications of himself, which is why, as the moving centre of that world, he is able to say ‘I’: this self is not that of the waking empirically real man, however, but rather the sole, truly existing and eternal self that dwells at the basis of being, through whose depictions the lyric genius sees right through to the very basis of being.<sup>54</sup>

Carroll writing about Camus’ writing from the point of view of a critique of colonisation states that ‘Cultural identity can thus not be taken as a given; it can no longer be assumed to be homogenous or *one*.’<sup>55</sup> For Carroll, the outside or ‘... the foreign, and the alien, which in principle are in opposition to the sameness or homogenous identity of the inside, are in fact located within it, functioning as constitutive elements of the inside rather than intrusions from the outside.’<sup>56</sup>

Thus, for many, the notion of a unified I as distinct and separate is not all that clear; there is more a fullness of self, perhaps a ‘Pleroma’ from which, for some, the distinct voice of an ‘I’ can venture forth.. In ‘Cat, you tumble down the Street’ Pessoa, in his non heteronym poem, writes:

I look at myself – it’s not me

I know myself – I’m not I.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p. 17.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p 2 – 3.

<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1993). *The Birth of Tragedy*. London: Penguin Books.p. 29

<sup>55</sup> Carroll, D (2007). *Albert Camus the Algerian: colonialism, terrorism, Justice*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 42.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>57</sup> Pessoa, F. (1986). *Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. Translated and Edited by Honig, E. & Brown, S.M. San Francisco: City Light Books. p. 164 . Keith Bosley translates these lines slightly differently and with a very different effect: ‘I see my absence, know / the self that is not me.’ Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (2003). *Fernando Pessoa: A Centenary Pessoa*. Manchester: Carcanet Books. p. 41.

Pessoa, it is claimed, wrote under at least seventy five different names or heteronyms. Richard Zenith lists nineteen of these as significant in Pessoa's work.<sup>58</sup> In his posthumously published 'Fact less Autobiography' – *The Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa's alter ego, Bernardo Soares, writes 'Each of us is several, is many, a profusion of selves. So that the self who disdains his surroundings is not the same as the self who suffers or takes joy in them. In the vast colony of our being there are many species of people who think and feel in different ways.'<sup>59</sup> Is this 'vast colony' of being Rimbaud's 'other'? Is this 'colony' of others true for all poets; do all artists (and non-artists, if there is such a thing) experience some sense of alterity?

At the same time as there exists the 'self-reflecting self' there is also the self that is reflected upon by the Other, in particular for Sartre for whom '... the non reflective experience which reveals the Other to us in our being through an internal negation is the gaze or look of the Other as experienced in pride or shame.'<sup>60</sup> For Sartre the 'self' is constituted by the look of the Other. As Olsen delineates,

For the Other and consequently for myself I am no longer simply a point of view on the world without any possible point of view upon myself. I am now conscious of myself as a spectator of the world before the Other. I now have a nature, an essence, an ego. And although it has been constituted by the Other, I experience it myself on the non-reflective level of consciousness.<sup>61</sup>

How do we reconcile these two views where we are at once the self reflecting self and the self reflected upon? Perhaps we can look for a middle way, a non-dualist paradigm for an explication of the origins of this dichotomy of self and other. The Mahayana Buddhist refers to the Fifth Aggregate – *vijnana*, or 'store consciousness' which, according to Welwood, is the Sanskrit term for the 'ordinary, mundane state of consciousness' where *vi* is translated as 'divided' and *-jnana* is 'knowing'. Divided refers to the subject / object, perceiver / perceived split. 'When we reflect on self, self becomes divided - into an object of reflection and an observing subject. This is *vijnana* at work.'<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps for the self-reflecting artist (and one might ask: are there any non-self reflecting artists?) the notion of the dichotomous self constitutes a perennially vexing problem. For Rimbaud 'I is

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<sup>58</sup> Pessoa, F. (2001). *The Book of Disquiet*. New York: Penguin Books. p. 505.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>60</sup> Olsen, R.G. (1962). *An introduction to Existentialism*. New York: Dover Publications Inc. p.177.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*

<sup>62</sup> Welwood, J. (2000). *Toward a Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and a Path of Personal and Spiritual Transformation*. Boston: Shambala.

another' – '... un autre'. In his youth he would play the role of the 'vouyou', the deliberate delinquent. Fowlie sees this role, Rimbaud's 'insolence and his silence' as a mask, as (amongst other things) his revolt against his family, his mother and any forms of family that he would subsequently come across, including Verlaine's. Fowlie suggests that 'Some of the meaning of Rimbaud's work is in the prevaricating mask he had to wear at the age of seven. The effort that Rimbaud was to make somewhat later toward the creation of a new or radical language was similar to the effort he made at the age of seven toward *'the creation of a being that was not he.'*'<sup>63</sup> (italics mine). Although Dylan's mask-making also started early with his Kerouacian 'on the road' characters and self-made myths and personas, he too would soon develop his 'vouyou' self to fend off the spotlight of commercialist journalism beaming on him as the newly hailed 'prophet' of a generation. The most famous representation of that hack journalistic voyeurism was 'Mr Jones'. 'Ballad of a Thin Man'<sup>64</sup> is a typical Dylan formulation, a reaction to the perceived inanity of his times and a refusal of the commercialist market place of the sixties, something his fellow younger generation were keen to refute. Ken Kesey says 'That's a Dylan feeling. That's the feeling he talked about in '... something's happening here / But you don't know what it is / Do you Mr Jones?''<sup>65</sup> The song goes on: 'You try so hard / But you don't understand'; of course the object of the game was to ensure that the 'code' was unintelligible to those, like the media, who claimed knowledge and, through that, power over others it would be like casting pearl before swine should such insider truths become known to the enemy, the establishment. Hence Dylan's other mask – that of the jokester, the prankster, trickster – now you see me, don't you Mr Jones, but you don't understand. This attitude is well captured in the bio-pic on Dylan - *I'm not there*. Interestingly, Pessoa had also become an icon for representation through non-presence as the 'Man who never was'.<sup>66</sup> The greatest trick of Rimbaud was to abscond completely – even from the world itself where, almost methodically step by step, he removed himself first from the literary world, then his social milieu (France) then Europe altogether, then from 'civilisation' and, finally, from his mortal coil.

For Dylan, and in some ways Pessoa and Rimbaud, there are at least two levels of operations in his early refusals of the world around him. Firstly, the rebelliousness of the adolescent against the adult world, known to operate since at least Aristotle's times, alluding to the notion of the recurrence of basic human themes since Hesiod and, no doubt, before. For example, in *Works*

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<sup>63</sup> Fowlie, *A Critical Study*. p. 6 – 9; 25.

<sup>64</sup> Bob Dylan, *Highway 61 revisited*, 1965

<sup>65</sup> Kesey, K. (1972) from *Crawdaddy*: Summing up the '60s, sizing up the '70s. In *The Dylan Companion* Thomson, E. & Gutman, D. (Eds.) (1990). London: Papermac.

<sup>66</sup> Montiero, G. (Ed.) (1981). *The Man Who Never Was: Essays on Fernando Pessoa*. Rhode Island: Gavea-Brown.

*and days*,<sup>67</sup> a title portending the everyday of everyman for millennia thereafter, Hesiod foresees a time when ‘... fathers will differ from children and children from fathers’ and again, ‘And no more will a brother, as previously be beloved. When they grow old, people will show no respect to their elders’.<sup>68</sup> At another level we see in both contemporary artists such as Dylan, as well as in those of old such as Hesiod, the capacity to take the mundane, everyday such as, in this case, the truth of adolescence, and turn these home truths into a new thing, into art. In the above examples we see both one of the earliest and one of the more recent acts of poetic creation.

Indeed, the pre-eminent gift of the poet is to take the ordinary and everyday and shape these with her own unique tools into a new, life-affirming extraordinary.<sup>69</sup> In one of his letters the poet John Keats writes ‘I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the heart’s affections and the truth of imagination – What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth...’<sup>70</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh might refer to the act of imagination as watering the seeds of Vijnana: store consciousness.<sup>71</sup>

Arthur Schopenhauer proposes that:

... in the lyrics of true poets the inner nature of all mankind is reflected, and all that millions of past, present, and future men have found, or will find, in the same situations, which are constantly recurring, finds its expression in them. And because these situations, by constant recurrence, are permanent as man himself and always call up the same sensations, the lyrical productions of genuine poets remain through thousands of years true, powerful, and fresh. But if the poet is always the universal man, then all that has ever moved a human heart, all that human nature in any situation has ever produced from itself, all that dwells and broods in any human heart – is his theme and his material, and also the rest of nature. Therefore the poet may just as well sing of voluptuousness as of mysticism, be Anacreon or Angelus Silesius, write tragedies or comedies, represent the sublime or the common mind – according

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<sup>67</sup> *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*. (2005) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, lines 180 – 99.

<sup>69</sup> Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (Eds.) (2003). *Fernando Pessoa: A Century Pessoa*. Manchester: Carcanet. Pessoa would state that ‘Poetry is in everything – in land and in sea, in lakes and riverside. It is in the city too – deny it not – it is evident to me here as I sit: there is poetry in this table, in this paper, in this inkstand; there is poetry in the rattling of cars on the streets, in each minute, common, ridiculous motion of a workman, who on the other side of the street is painting the sign board of a butcher’s shop.’ p. 204.

<sup>70</sup> Adams, H. (Ed.) (1971.) *Critical Theory since Plato*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers. p.473.

<sup>71</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1998). *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching*. London: Rider Books. ‘All mental formations lie in our store consciousness in the form of seeds. Something someone does may water the seed of agitation, and then agitation manifests in our mind consciousness. Every mental formation that manifests needs to be recognised.’ p. 74 – 75; and every time we water one of the seeds of consciousness ‘... or allow it to be watered by someone else, that seed will manifest and become a mental formation.’ p. 181.

to humor or vocation. And no one has the right to prescribe to the poet what he ought to be – noble or sublime, moral, pious, Christian, one thing or another, still less to reproach him because he is one thing and not another. He is the mirror of mankind, and brings to its consciousness what it feels and does.<sup>72</sup>

I will take it as a given that all that human nature has ever produced from itself through the aeons remains the artist's repertoire and will take this notion as a base from which to further explore the three poets in this essay. One need not cite from a hundred thousand sources stretching over the ages to validate Schopenhauer's position; one need only to take a case in point from around 600 BCE and another case of recent times and draw a line between them to show what humans in between have experienced what might be termed 'recurring' situations. Nietzsche, a follower of Schopenhauer, of course, would turn the concept of the 'eternal recurrence' into one of his own most powerful themes.

Of the two cases I have in mind, the first is that of Hesiod. Hesiod's *Works and days* is credited with having been the first written account containing the Prometheus story as well as that of Pandora and a host of other ancient Greek legends. It is not clear that these were all his original inventions but it is true that these myths fired the imagination of some of history's greatest writers and trigger the writing of poems up to the present day. According to Nietzsche the 'Oracle Verses' of Hesiod constitute the most ancient maxims of wisdom. 'If the Hexameter was the oldest temple verse, it becomes in this way the verse of wisdom – such a genre is first of all created and spread and then it continually produces new verse out of itself.'<sup>73</sup> However, even that ancient 'new creation' is derived of the oldest symbols available to man. *Works and days* utilises a broad range of ambiguous, yet well known (even to modern man) symbols, including not only basic farm wisdoms but also practical proverbs and seasonal advice. Hesiod, at the same time also creates an epic genealogy of the gods themselves, new myths such as Pandora and Prometheus and ancient histories of men. Eric Voegelin would agree with Nietzsche that Hesiod did indeed create a 'new kind of truth' but one that arose out of the ontological tension between the oldest most stable symbols of humanity and the downward pouring of the divine or the transcendent. The 'It-reality' of being, of the gods, stands in a special tension with the 'Thing-reality', of men, where, for Hesiod at least, the vast and varied manifold of 'thing-reality' carried

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<sup>72</sup> Adams, op. cit., p.486.

<sup>73</sup> From Chapter Three 'Mythical preliminary stage of philosophy' in Nietzsche, F. (2006). *The pre-platonic philosophers*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. p. 16. Peter Levi would see Hesiod's work as a 'combination of the rules of agriculture with religious and magical rules, with country morality, and with the observation of seasons..' in *Atlas of the Greek World*. (1984). p.55.

for him ‘... the divine aura of transcending into the comprehending It-reality, and because of their divine aura all things – earth, heaven, sea, stars, mountains, rivers, trees, animals, men – could imaginatively rise into the divine rank, to the rank of ‘gods’.’<sup>74</sup> Just as the mundane would forever be the subject of poesy, so too would the gods where ‘The god-things participate in an unfinished story of reality.’<sup>75</sup> The self is in a continuous and continuing state of becoming where the tales, fables, images and metaphors and myths that Hesiod utilised would derive from the even more ancient Hebrews, Babylonians and the whole eastern Mediterranean region. The new would forever derive from the eternal, recurring ancient.

Voegelin would also conjecture, with great relevance to the moderns, that perhaps it was a ‘... personal distress of Hesiod, his suffering from injustice, which motivated him to break the older anonymity, to appear as the individual man in opposition to the accepted order, and to pit his knowledge of truth against the untruth of society.’<sup>76</sup> Hesiod chronicles the key sources of anxiety and suffering in human life: sickness, old age, death, hunger, poverty, hard work, disease, imbalance of power and being a righteous man in times of unrighteousness. This is the disorder for which Hesiod sought ordering symbols. It could be argued that a similar task stands before modern artists. Ralph Smith, in his article, ‘The question of modernism and postmodernism’ states that ‘The ambiguity of modernism is compounded by the word's ability to stand for a perennial occurrence as well as for a discrete historical phenomenon. As a recurrent feature in the history of art, modernism refers to those moments when artists attempted to move beyond tradition to something that was new, something of their own time.’<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps this ‘eternal recurrence’, this ‘perennial occurrence’ derives not only from the perennial symbols of man’s life or history on earth such as those enumerated by Hesiod and which still remain the staple of all poetry since him but also from what Thich Nhat Hanh would refer to as the Fifth Aggregate – store consciousness or *vijnana*. ‘Consciousness here means store consciousness, which is at the base of everything we are, the ground of all our mental formations. When mental formations are not manifesting, they reside in our store consciousness in the form of seeds – seeds of joy, peace, understanding, compassion, forgetfulness, jealousy, fear, despair and so on. ... Consciousness is, at the same time, both collective and individual.’<sup>78</sup> Both

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<sup>74</sup> Voegelin, E. (2000). *Order and History. Volume V In Search of Order. From ‘The Collected works of Eric Voegelin Volume 18.* (Ed. Ellis Sandoz). p.93.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>76</sup> Voegelin, E. (1957) *Order and History Volume II The World of the Polis.* London: Louisiana State University Press. p. 130.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, Ralph A. (1995). The question of modernism and postmodernism. *Arts Education Policy Review*, 96(6), 2. Retrieved December 22, 2009, from Academic Research Library. (Document ID: 6966902).

<sup>78</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching.* London: Rider Books p. 180-181

Buddhism and modern psychology propose a 'collective' notion of consciousness. One of the founding fathers of modern psychology, Carl Jung, elaborated on what he referred to as the collective unconscious where

...the conscious personality is a more or less arbitrary segment of the collective psyche. It consists in the sum of psychic facts that are felt to be personal. ... A consciousness that is purely personal stresses its propriety and original right to its contents with a certain anxiety, and in this way seeks to create a whole. But all those contents that refuse to fit into this whole are either overlooked and forgotten or repressed and denied.<sup>79</sup>

In any case, would it be a long bow to draw from Hesiod to Dylan if we compare some of the most beautiful lines penned by Dylan from his song 'Never Say Goodbye'<sup>80</sup> - 'My dreams are made of iron and steel/ with a big bouquet of roses hanging down/ from the heavens to the ground' - with these from Hesiod's *Theogony* - 'Flowing a long way under the wide-travelled earth from the sacred river,/ a branch of the Ocean cascades through the blackness of night.' Robert Creeley provides a hint of what I think underpins writing from Hesiod (and before) to now, when he answers Roberta Obermeyer.<sup>81</sup> He says:

I was trying to make the point that what's particular in the words as they say things, seems to me the real point, not what they refer to that's outside. When I'm reading poems, what's moving to me is not that these words river or tree refer to a platonic river or tree, a river or tree that's not there. As I read, those rivers and trees become actual in my mind. Now, in some obvious ways of course, the word refers to a tree that permits that, but it doesn't refer to a tree that's not in the poem. In fact, the tree in the poem, in a funny way, is nowhere else.<sup>82</sup>

The phrase 'hanging down' immediately gives cause for my mind's eye to look up and down from the 'heavens to the ground'. Similarly, so does Hesiod's phrase 'Flowing a long way under

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<sup>79</sup> Campbell, J. (Ed.) (1971). *The Portable Jung*. New York: Viking Penguin. p. 105

<sup>80</sup> *Songs of Bob Dylan: From 1966 to 1975* off his Planet Waves album. Apparently this particular song was not Dylan's 'type of song. I think I did it just to do it' Biograph liner notes, Bob Dylan.

<sup>81</sup> Roberta Obermeyer's question was 'I came across a quote where you said "Meaning is not importantly referential' and 'that which exists through itself is what is called the meaning" Can you explain this?' in Creeley, R. (1999) *Good Company*. *The American Poetry Review* 28, (5)

<sup>82</sup> Creeley, R. (1999). Creeley: *Good Company*, an interview by Roberta Obermeyer. *The American Poetry Review*. 28 (5) p. 17.

the wide-travelled earth'. Vijnana, store consciousness, as quite distinct from Freud's notion of the unconscious, allows the 'seed' of expectation to be watered and activated in the here and now. Dylan says, of his song writing, that 'It starts off as a stream of consciousness thing and you add things to it. I take things from all parts of life and then I see if there is a connection, and if there's a connection I connect them.'<sup>83</sup>

For Dylan to be 'true' or authentic was an essential element to his writing. In response to interviewer Paul Zollo, and in reply to a question about the song 'Absolutely Marie',<sup>84</sup> Dylan would claim 'Every single letter in that line. It's all true. On a literal and on an escapist level.' In a similar vein, Jung would claim that dreams are facts<sup>85</sup>. If the dreamer experiences them then they are real and true: that is, they cannot be denied. Dylan describes some of his inspiration, where it is the effable that works upon him in a concrete way, thus:

... yellow railroad, that could be from looking some place. Being a performer you travel the world. You're not just looking off the same window every day. You're not just walking down the same street. So you must make yourself observe whatever. But most of the time it hits you. You don't have to observe. It hits you. Like "yellow railroad" could have been a blinding day when the sun was bright on a railroad someplace and it stayed on my mind. These aren't contrived images. These are images which are just in there and have got to come out. You know, if it's in there it's got to come out."<sup>86</sup>

Trakl, a modern, *fin de siècle*, Austrian poet, would emphasise the concrete image as being central to his work. Trakl was influenced by Rimbaud, and would in turn significantly influence other European poets such as Paul Celan and Thomas Bernhard. McNeil, on Trakl, suggests that one example of such Rimbaudian influence was the process whereby the poet would diminish the presence of the speaker in the poem by '...dramatising processes of consciousness by means of concrete images rather than commenting on these images.' Trakl shared with Expressionists the emphasis on '... concrete images as the central unit of poetic meaning' and had a particular fascination with themes such as death, decay and transformation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Cott, J. (Ed.) (2006). *Dylan on Dylan: the essential interviews*. p.400

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 377. Interview with Paul Zollo 1991 in *Song Talk*: the lines from the song in question are "I stand here looking at your yellow railroad/ in the ruins of your balcony ..."

<sup>85</sup> Jung, C.G. (1983). *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. London: Flamingo. p. 194. Dreams '... are the facts from which we must proceed.'

<sup>86</sup> Cott, *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 378.

<sup>87</sup> McNeil, L.D. (1992). *Recreating the World/Word: the Mythic Mode as Symbolic Discourse*. New York: State University of New York Press. p. 134 ; p. 122.

For Dylan, the ‘yellow railroad’ was real or authentic in that it was not contrived. He says ‘I’ve got to know that I’m singing something with truth to it. ... all I have to do is lay them [songs] down correctly, lyrically, and they’ll do what they need to do.’<sup>88</sup> Yet the locus of authenticity lies not just within the concrete realm of the everyday, it must also remain within the personal *experience* of the everyday. For the ‘strong’ poet, to put it in Bloom’s terms, ‘Poetry has an origin in the body’s ideas of itself ..... poetry is always at work *imagining its own origins*.’ The strong poet must also ‘... divine or invent himself, and so attempt the impossibility of *originating himself*.’<sup>89</sup> For Les Murray, poetry involves the rational mind, the dreaming mind and the body... ‘You’ve got to be able to dream at the same time as you think to write poetry ... you think with a double mind.’<sup>90</sup> Upon the ‘meaning’ of lines or words Dylan’s answer is typically mystifying ‘It’s anything you want it to be.’<sup>91</sup>

Murray would similarly state that the main character from his verse novel, his alter ego Fredy Neptune, arose from the unconscious area within himself where ‘... the figure of the hero stood up in his mind and demanded attention: “I’ll never know where he came from, he just stood up in the poem. Fredy’s poem. He wanted to be told. Forbut did the same; he stood up and said there was a man who needed burying.”’<sup>92</sup> Jung would say much the same of a character that demanded his attention called Philemon and which then led to the writing of the curious *Seven Sermons to the Dead* narrated by Basilides in Alexandria, ‘...the City where the east toucheth the West’.<sup>93</sup> Outlining a system of stages of lyrical poetry writing, Pessoa starts the poet off at his feelings and their expression. Next, given that the poet has numerous and ‘fictitious’ feelings, she then expresses herself through a variety of persons ‘no longer unified by temperament and style’ as temperament has been replaced by imagination. Next, the poet moves towards ‘depersonalisation’ (or imagination): ‘we are confronted with a poet who becomes so much at home in each of his different states of mind that he gives up his personality completely ... One

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<sup>88</sup>Cott, *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 393.

<sup>89</sup> Bloom, H. (1988). *Poetics of Influence*. New York: Henry R Schwab. p. 124

<sup>90</sup> Alexander, P.F. (2000). *Les Murray: A Life in Progress*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 134. ‘It’s wonderful, there’s nothing like it, you write in a trance. Once you’ve written the poem and had the trance, polished and so on, you can go back to the poem and have a trace of that trance, have the shadow of it, but you can’t have it fully again. ... It’s an integration of the body-mind and the dreaming mind and the daylight conscious mind.’ p. 135.

<sup>91</sup> Cott, op. cit., p. 400.

<sup>92</sup> Alexander, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Jung, C.G. (1983). *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. p. 207 – 215. ‘Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I.’ p. 207 Another such being within Jung was Ka, a ‘spirit of nature’ like the Anthroparion of Greek Alchemy ... the Anthroparion is a tiny man, a kind of homunculus. ... To the group which includes the Anthroparion belong the gnomes, the Dactyls of classical antiquity, and the homunculi of the Alchemists.’ p. 209.

final step, and we find the poet who is several different poets at once...'<sup>94</sup>The characters of Fredy for Murray, Philemon and Ka for Jung, and the heteronyms of Pessoa fulfilled psycho-literary functions of these writers. Each writer would refer to these characters both as real, having a life of their own, but also as constructs of their authors' own making. The unitary 'I', or 'empirical' I in Hamburger's sense, that most individuals take for granted, is seemingly not bound by the usual, at least Western, socio-cultural boundaries. There is a case for the plural self. Pessoa insists, for example, that we 'Be plural like the universe'.<sup>95</sup> Is there room for a new paradigm of the self? Or is such a notion simply the prerogative of the artist?

It is a central task of this thesis to address the questions around the plurality of the self and the tensions arising between the notions of singular and multiple selves. I attempt to show, through the works of the three poets chosen and through my own creative work, that this 'singular' self is not the same throughout our lifespan but is a self-in-becoming; a self constructed under the influence of the interlocutions of culture, biology and history and its own becoming or participation in reality. Voegelin elaborates on this interlocutory tension via the evocation of Plato's term 'metaxy' where '...the psyche exists in the Metaxy, in the tension toward the divine ground of being.'<sup>96</sup> Two formulae weave through Voegelin's work and underpin my own interests in the study of Being in this essay. The first of these formulae is 'A man's identity is constituted through existence in tension toward the ground of his existence'<sup>97</sup> and the second is 'Man participates in the process of reality'. The implications of the latter are that:

Man is conscious of reality as a process, of himself as being a part of reality, and of his consciousness as a mode of participation in its process ... While consciously participating, man is able to engender symbols which express his experience of reality, of himself as the experiencing agent, and of his conscious experiencing as the action and passion of participating ... Man knows the symbols engendered to be a part of the reality they symbolize – the symbols

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<sup>94</sup> This quotation is cited in Hamburger's *The Truth of Poetry* p.139. However, in *A Centenary Pessoa* p. 239 - 240, in his essay, 'Degrees of lyricism in poetry' Pessoa writes that the poet, in the 'third degree of lyric poetry ... even more intellectual, begins to depersonalise himself, to feel, not just because he feels, but because he thinks he feels; to feel states of soul which he truly does not possess, simply because he understands them.' and finally 'The fourth degree of lyric poetry is that much rarer one, in which the poet, even more intellectual but equally imaginative, embarks upon complete depersonalisation. He not only feels, but lives, the states of soul which he does not directly possess.'

<sup>95</sup> Lisboa, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>96</sup> Voegelin, E. (1990). *What is History? And other late Unpublished Writings. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol. 28*. London: Louisiana State University Press. p. 184.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

‘consciousness’, ‘experience’, and ‘symbolisation’ denote the area where the process of reality becomes luminous to itself.<sup>98</sup>

Voegelin elaborates further on consciousness and reality and the relationship between them:

There is a consciousness with two structural meanings, to be distinguished as intentionality and luminosity. There is a reality with two structural meanings, to be distinguished as the thing-reality and the It-reality. Consciousness, then, is a subject intending reality as its object, but at the same time a something in a comprehending reality; and reality is the object of consciousness, but at the same time the subject of which consciousness is to be predicated.<sup>99</sup>

It is the poet’s task to ensure an ethical understanding of the self which does not necessarily involve the ‘goodness’ of the self. As a poet I look to literature and literary works for my own answers to the question of who this self is that participates in reality. Iain Galbraith, in his introduction to the Austrian poetry anthology *The night begins with a question*, intuits that:

Poets are anachronistic listeners, heedful of the rhythms of absent voices, solicitous of the intervals and shifts in breathing that carry across births, deaths, empires and centuries. ..., poets are the heirs to a continuum, participation in whose auditory and visual conference depends on the poet’s alertness – when it seems there is too much noise and too little time to listen – to the fine tuning of instruments shaped and strung by successive generations of inventors, deconstructors, revealers and re-arrangers.<sup>100</sup>

Whilst authenticity seems to be crucial to many poets from Hesiod to modern times, it is clear that, regardless of their ‘meaningfulness’ or coherence, the pure love of words alone and the Dionysian unleashing of them, is also a characteristic component in the creation of poetic art. Dylan has been accused, apparently by ‘professional defenders of poetry’, of ‘barbaric verbosity’ and that he wrote like a ‘word drunk undergraduate who berserked himself into genius.’<sup>101</sup> Despite this seemingly erratic, ‘berserker’ nature of his writing, he has still been cited, at least in the early sixties, as having been influenced by a range of poets that these same ‘defenders’ would

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<sup>98</sup> Voegelin, E. (1990). *Published Essays 1966 - 1985. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol. 12*. London: Louisiana State University Press. p. 120.

<sup>99</sup> Voegelin, E. (2000). *Order and History Volume V. In Search of Order. The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin Vol. 18*. London: Louisiana State University Press. p. 30 -31.

<sup>100</sup> Galbraith, I. (2007). *The Night Begins with a Question: XXV Austrian Poems 1978 – 2002*. Edinburgh: Carcanet Scottish Poetry Library. p. 10 – 11.

<sup>101</sup> Christgau, R. (1971) Tarantula, *New York Times Book Review* in *The Dylan Companion* (1990)

probably feel quite at home with, including Blake, Whitman, Rimbaud, and Celine.<sup>102</sup> Alongside these illustrious lineages, Michael Gray also locates Dylan in the lineage of more recent poets such as Kenneth Patchen and other 'Beat generation' poets of the fifties, including Kerouac, Ferlinghetti and Alan Ginsberg and their milieu.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, Perloff observes that Rimbaud used the '... absence of organisation as the very principle of organisation that governs these texts.'<sup>104</sup> Like Blake and Dylan, Rimbaud could cram together, for poetic effect, a range of signifiers freed of their ' "normal" channels of reference' exemplified by such juxtapositions in Rimbaud's 'Villes' of 'chalets, craters, canals, gorges, inns, avalanches, a sea, flowers, a waterfall, suburbs, caverns, chateaux, towns, a boulevard in Baghdad.'<sup>105</sup>

How easily then a range of 'isms' come into play around the categorisation of the 'types' of poems these are. In this approach, for example, Dylan could come under the category of either Symbolist poet which, for Perloff, is '...a poetry of multiple relational meanings' or his work could also fall into the camp of 'Post modernism' where, for Friedman, in her very extensive coverage of modernism and Post modernism, descriptors of the latter could include 'antiform, open, play, chance, parataxis, indeterminacy and anti-narrative' to list but a few.<sup>106</sup> Jordy Rocheleau puts forward an interesting case for Dylan's turn away from his protest songs as postmodern. Rocheleau suggests that 'Dylan's skepticism about the inability of any ideals and institutions to give us freedom ...'<sup>107</sup> puts him the same camp as postmodernists like Lyotard and Derrida who were also sceptical about rational understanding and its capacity to assist us in reaching any shared agreement or understanding of concepts such as justice or freedom. Finally, Dylan's work can still fall under the rubric of 'modern' according to some critics.<sup>108</sup> A broad

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Gray, M. (2000). *Song and Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan*. London: Continuum. Gray in his *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* (2006) demonstrates a lovely range of connections not only between some of Dylan's style but also of some of the characters for which he is so famous in comparing Blake's *Island in the Moon* (1784 – 85) with some of Dylan's liner notes on his "Highway 61 Revisited" album (1965). Compare with Blake's ' ... in a great hurry, Inflammable Gass the Windfinder enter'd. They seem'd to rise & salute each other. Etruscan Column & Inflammable Gass fix'd their eyes on each other; ...' with Dylan's 'Savage Rose & Openly are bravely blowing kisses to the Jade Hexagram – Carnaby Street & To all of the Mysterious juveniles & the Cream Judge is writing a book on the true meaning of a pear - ...' p. 53-54. We see the Blake/Dylan influence on the Trappist poet Thomas Merton also in poems like 'Atlas and the Fatman'. Many more examples could be given and half the fun of reading these poets is their never ending delight in such wordplay, word smithing and 'disconnected' bricolage of ideas and words.

<sup>104</sup> Perloff, M. (1981). *The poetics of indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. Illinois: Northwestern University Press. p. 54.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>106</sup> Friedman, S.S. (2001). Definitional Excursions: The Meanings of Modern/Modernity/Modernism. *MODERNISM/modernity* 8 (3) p. 493 -513.

<sup>107</sup> "Far Between Sundown's Finish An' Midnight's Broken Toll": *Enlightenment and Postmodernism in Dylan's Social Criticism*. Jordy Rocheleau in Verneezze, P., & Porter, C.J. (Eds.) (2006). *Bob Dylan and Philosophy: It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Thinking)*. Chicago: Open Court., p. 74

<sup>108</sup> Marqusee, M. (2005). *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s*. New York: Seven Stories Press. Marqusee puts up 'self-consciousness' as a key feature of the modern artist and he is not alone on this one, almost universally agreed upon, signifier of modernism. Peter Watson sees modernism as 'highly self conscious' and its works with a 'high

swath of 'isms' flow through the so named modern era including, but not limited to, 'symbolism, imagism, Futurism, expressionism, surrealism ...'.<sup>109</sup> as well as impressionism, post impressionism, fauvism, cubism, Dadaism.<sup>110</sup> It was the constrictions of these very 'isms' that the rebelliousness of Blake, Rimbaud and Dylan fought against, as in Dylan's adolescent anthem 'My Back Pages': 'Yes my guard stood hard when abstract threats/ too noble to neglect/ deceived me into thinking/ I had something to protect./ Good and bad, I define these terms/ quite clear, no doubt somehow,...'.<sup>111</sup> It appears a case can be made for either or some of the above categorisations of Dylan's work however it is beyond the reach of this paper's capacity to explore this discussion further. These poets have carried the torch of rebellion for one another in succession, with Dylan being the latest 'torch bearer' (although, typically with non-conformist attitude, he would deny any such conscious role), over the last centuries. In the 'modern' sense of introspection and through their authentic 'self consciousness' our poets had no option but to, like Dylan's Lenny Bruce, 'shine a light in the bed'<sup>112</sup> of the establishment or conservative forces, forces that tend to entropy rather than to progression. These artists were self-appointed warriors and each one of them faced charges of sedition, either literally or, metaphorically, as cultural heroes. They used their words in non-conformist ways to confound, startle, attract, and entertain but most of all to create something new, to reach into their inner self and draw out new life. Their word, in Bloom's sense of the trope, was the sword they used to cut their way into the world, to make it different, new. I believe they knew what they were doing and as much as the adolescent formulation of such fighting into the world may be a developmental task in the early years of an artist, later in life, as can be seen with Dylan, that process becomes a meditative act but no less potent. In his early years Dylan would write the semi-inflammatory exhortation 'The times they are a changin'. In his middle years that song would become 'Things have changed' where the urgency of youth has receded and Dylan languorously sings 'I used to care':

Lot of water under the bridge, lot of other stuff too  
 Don't get up gentlemen, I'm only passing through

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degree of self signature' p. 997 in his extensive survey of ideas through history *Ideas: A History from Fire to Freud* (2006).

<sup>109</sup> Hamburger, M. (1969). *The Truth of Poetry*. Middlesex: Penguin Books. p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> Watson, *ibid.*, p. 997.

<sup>111</sup> *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective* (n.d.) New York: Warner Brothers. Publications Inc.

<sup>112</sup> Lenny Bruce from the album *Shot of Love*

People are crazy and times are strange  
I'm locked in tight, I'm out of range  
I used to care, but things have changed<sup>113</sup>

Finally, the return - but reflectively different and gone the urgency of youth - with the song from his latest album, 'I feel a change comin' on'. The poet no longer exhorts urgently but feels deeply and reflects:

I'm a-listening to Billy Joe Shaver  
And I'm reading James Joyce  
Some people they tell me  
I've got the blood of the land in my voice

Everybody got all the money  
Everybody got all the beautiful clothes  
Everybody got all the flowers  
I don't have one single rose  
I feel a change comin' on  
And the fourth part of the day's already gone<sup>114</sup>

A recent 'politico-literary' movement with its very own 'poet' has sprung from the depths of the Lacandon jungle in the Chiapas, southern Mexico: 'our word is our weapon' is a collection of writings by Rafael Guillen aka Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, a Che Guevara of contemporary times.<sup>115</sup> Guillen explores the plurality of diversity in his support for the under-represented Indigenous peoples of southern Mexico and his other political work *Conversations with Durito* would easily sit alongside various literary works, styled as it is on *Don Quixote*. Guillen is an ex university lecturer who took up the cause of the indigenous up risers of the 1994 Mexican Zapatista insurrection. Initially a militant group, the Zapatistas took on a more political role, with Marcos as their very own poet. A revolutionary precursor to Guillen, Che Guevara, a doctor by training, would read Neruda's *Canto General* to his guerrillas at night on his own campaign

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<sup>113</sup> From the album *Wonder Boys* 2000, Columbia Music

<sup>114</sup> From the album *Together Through Life*, 2009, Columbia Music

<sup>115</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (2001). *our word is our weapon* New York: Seven Stories Press. 'As that figure, exceptional and exemplary for many reasons, whom we know by the name of the Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, writes of "a world where there is room for many worlds, a world that can be one and diverse" p. Xxi.

trails.<sup>116</sup> Guillen's favourites also included *Canto General* and *Don Quixote*, and he refers to the latter as 'the best book of political theory'.<sup>117</sup> For Marcos:

Rebellion is like a butterfly who flies towards that sea without islands or rocks ...

With its flight the flying rebellion, that is, the butterfly, is saying NO!

No to logic

No to prudence

No to immortality

No to conformism

...

And there are butterflies, like rebellions, of all colours

...

And all are skin, skin which shines no matter the colour it is painted

And there are flights of all colours.<sup>118</sup>

Alex Khasnabish would read this radical literary movement in this way:

Certainly for the Romantic poets, playwrights, and authors of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, their work was inspired in part as a response to the epistemological violence of the Enlightenment, which had resulted in profound disenchantment of the world – a disenchantment which they sought to contest and a world which they sought to re-imagine through their writings. Undoubtedly, the writings of Zapatista spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos strive to accomplish much the same ends, written as they are both in a style and substance that seeks not simply to provoke revolutionary fervour but a reimagining of the world, of its multiple realities, and of the dreams, hopes, and aspirations of the people who share it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Neruda, P. (2004) *Memoirs*. London: Souvenir Press.

<sup>117</sup> Henck, N. (2007) *Subcommander Marcos: The Man and the Mask*. London: Duke University Press. p. 21.

<sup>118</sup> Subcomandante Marcos. (2005). *Conversations with Durito*. New York: Autonomedia. p.311 - 312

<sup>119</sup> Khasnabish, A. (2008). *Zapatismo beyond Borders: New Imaginations of Political Possibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p.26. In the 60s Dylan was hailed as the prophet of a new generation and in particular as a

Zapatismo would become an anti-establishment movement – anti neo-liberalism and pro the underdog, i.e. the indigenous and other oppressed – recently bringing under its banner women, children and gays, alongside all the other seeming-misfits that Dylan would write about in his songs like ‘Chimes of Freedom’. Dylan would claim, in 1969, ‘I say what I have to, man. The artist is the most political figure in society because he stands outside.’<sup>120</sup> Most recently Dylan still rings out that bell of freedom with one of his darkest songs yet, ‘Political World’. Here he writes about the mirrors of life and how nothing is as it seems:

We live in a political world

Wisdom is thrown into jail

It rots in a cell misguided as hell

Leaving no one to pick up the trail

We live in a Political world

Where mercy walks the plank

Life is in mirrors, death disappears

Up the steps into the nearest bank

We live in a political world

Courage is a thing of the past

The houses are haunted, the children aren’t wanted

The next day could be your last<sup>121</sup>

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representative of the anti-conservative forces set against Eisenhower’s industrial-military complex and as anti-establishment. Blake also saw himself as a representative of the new generations supporting the revolutionary freedom of the breakaway colony of America. He sought out the young idealists of his time and in some ways mentored them. Rimbaud, of course, represented the ultimate anarchist, wild child, ‘voyou’. Pessoa claimed himself to be the greatest poet since Camoes, that greatest of Portuguese poets, aligning himself with that other ‘ism’ of his time ‘futurism’. He too was a political animal. Dylan always denied the title of ‘spokesperson of the new generation, and would write much more consciously his later dark political piece ‘Political world’.

<sup>120</sup> Herdman, J. (1982). *Voice without Restraint: Bob Dylan’s Lyrics and their Background*. New York: Delilah Books. p.139.

<sup>121</sup> <http://www.metrolyrics.com/political-world-lyrics-bob-dylan.html> Retrieved 29.12.09

Zapatismo speaks to the very themes of our three poets – identity, otherness, loss, power, difference, plurality - and it uses all the tools that our three poets have employed over the last three centuries: non-conformist, ‘standing things on their heads’, bricolage, derangement, deconstruction, re-construction, con-fessional writing (as opposed to pro-fessional <sup>122</sup>), dismemberment, re-invention, plurality, the concrete image. Theirs is a language and world of sub-version, the world of the mask, the lie and the truth. Marcos evokes the flower as a counter image to military might and political power – subverting the whole discourse on power. Here the flower of ‘flower power’ of the hippy era of the 60’s is evoked in a new way:

And that is why I am asking you, companero, companera, for us to

Salute the children and young people.

The indigenous children and young people.

The non-indigenous young people and children.

Because in saluting them, we are also saluting our dead.

And we salute them exactly as we salute our dead.

With a flower.

With a flower we tell them that they live.

With a flower we are telling ourselves that we live.

That our dead shall always live.

That death always dies.<sup>123</sup>

I raise the example of Marcos to exemplify a lineage of writing that is pervasive, moving and literary whilst still being subversive and political – a backdrop within which I can analyse the historico-participatory subjectivity of the three poets under consideration in this essay. In other words, these three poets are not isolated examples of participatory (fluid) subjectivities, and

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<sup>122</sup> Dylan, probably in one of his more ‘trickster’ like moments would claim that his writing is con-fessional rather than pro-fessional. I take this to be another jibe at those who claim some sort of authority over others. Although I also see in this a more serious reference to his writing as being rooted in his day to day reality and hence confessional.

<sup>123</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, (2005). *the speed of dreams: selected writings 2001 – 2007*. Edited by Canek Pena-Vargas and Greg Ruggiero. San Francisco: City Lights Books. Marcos writes “Making politics has come to be like that, like a continuous writing and erasing .... at times a pencil is not even necessary. At times it is enough for a hand to trace a name on the sea or the sand. A world in which there are two: the one who is named, and the one who has in his hand the point that creates the mutual tomorrow.” p. 142.

Marcos's poetry, like that of our three poets, is similarly incisive, profound, subtle and subversive, designed to undo moral complacency in thought and action and to counter the subjugation of individuality in techno-political systems. This type of writing purposely shakes up the inner world and calls the outer world into account; 'the next day could be your last' as Dylan sings in 'Political world'. From his chapter entitled "To Open a Crack in History", Marcos is on the trail in the Chiapas highlands, on a mountain, reflecting on the recent history of the zapatismo movement and anchored in the reality of his end of day:

Now the Moon is a lacquered nail that strums the night's strings and makes a storm in every sense. The frightened moon hides herself, a white girl, a dark light that clothes itself in darkling clouds. Now the storm is the lady of the night, and lightening sketches trees and foolish shadows with short and hurried strokes."<sup>124</sup>

In his writings Marcos evidences his influences, quoting succinctly from mainly Spanish or Latin American writers such as Hernandez, Borges, Eluard, Cervantes, Paz and also others such as Pessoa, Lewis Carol, Shakespeare, Benedetti, thereby locating himself, as a writer, directly in their lineage.<sup>125</sup>

Politics, like the tree, sky, rain and pain has always been a part of everyman's everyday reality and the poet does not have to be a prophetic protest singer for these symbols to be potent evocations in her art. Pessoa too was considered 'basically a revolutionary'. He was 'Not an anarchist, but simply a revolutionary. He was not the type of person to lead a protest march, but at the slightest provocation his pen became more lethal than a Molotov cocktail'.<sup>126</sup> He was one of the instigators of a student strike in 1907 which caused him to leave his studies going into seclusion on several occasions to hide from the authorities. Despite this seeming liberal stance, Pessoa's allegiances and ideas were complex, leaning towards conservatism where society is best led by an 'enlightened aristocratic leader',<sup>127</sup> along similar lines as that of Nietzsche's Aristocrat as leader. He was, like the other poets I have described, strongly nationalistic to the degree where

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<sup>124</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (2001). *our word is our weapon: selected writings*. Edited Juana Ponce de Leon. New York: Seven Stories Press.

<sup>125</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos (2005). *the speed of dreams: selected writings 2001 – 2007*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.; (2005). *Conversations with Durito*. New York: Autonomed.; (2001). *our word is our weapon: selected writings*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

<sup>126</sup> Cavaco, G.R. Pessoa and Portuguese politics. In Montiero, G. (Ed.) (1981) *The Man Who Never Was: Essays on Fernando Pessoa*. Pessoa himself would say 'Besides my patriotic projects – writing of Portugal Republic – to provoke a revolution here, writing of Portuguese pamphlets, editing of older national literary works ... combine to produce an excess of impulse that paralyses my will. The suffering that this produces I know not if it can be described as on this side of insanity.' p.262. Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (Eds) (2003). *Fernando Pessoa: A Century Pessoa*.

<sup>127</sup> Cavaco, *ibid.*, p. 65.

the only book of poetry published in his life time *Mensagem* or ‘Message’ originally named ‘Portugal’, contained over forty ‘national’ poems. Pessoa’s political ideas and ‘Sebastianism’ are the central elements to these poems. King Sebastian ascended the throne in 1557 and it was to him that the Portuguese poet Camoes dedicated his epic poem ‘The Lusiads’. Despite this particular King being the very monarch to end Portugal’s autonomy ingloriously and dying in the final battle, his corpse never recovered, it was the myth of this ‘The Hidden One’ that fed a yearning for a return to former Portuguese glory – the myth of the return that over the next centuries culminated in a ‘final version’ of Sebastianism that ‘...penetrated Portuguese literature, philosophy, art, folklore and ever since has exerted great influence on Portugal’s spiritual life.’<sup>128</sup>

What does this have to do with this thesis? I wish to explore the view of the poet/self as situated in context, in specific time and place, where that self derives directly from his/her socio-cultural fabric or context. We go to Thomas Merton and his comments on his own epic poem ‘Geography of Lograire’, what I like to refer to as his country of the self. Merton puts it this way:

This is only a beginning of patterns, the first opening up of the dream. A poet spends his life in repeated projects, over and over again attempting to build or to dream the world in which he lives. But more and more he realizes that this world is at once everybody’s. It cannot be purely private, any more than it can be purely public. It cannot be fully communicated. It grows out of a common participation which is nevertheless recorded in authentically personal images.<sup>129</sup>

In his own ‘country of self’ Rimbaud could be viewed as the ‘constant revolutionary’; he was ‘outside the law and outside the human community’.<sup>130</sup> Yet for Fowlie it is Rimbaud’s very existence, his *example*, that counts as much as the influence of his writing. The poet is somehow in the world yet not of it, countercultural and yet remaining true to his historic-cultural truth. Otherwise, how can he claim any sense of authenticity in his work? Rimbaud was caught up as a sixteen year old in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 and, as such, some of his poems derived significantly from the events that unleashed themselves upon him at that time. It was the end of

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<sup>128</sup> Kotowicz, Z. (2008). *Fernando Pessoa: Voices of a Nomadic Soul*. London: Shearsman/Menard. p26 -27. Kotowicz argues that Sebastianism was a critical influence on Pessoa where the latter’s writings would evidence a kind of obsession with it and that greatly influenced his poetry including *Mensagem* (Message) and the patriotic cycle ‘The Portuguese Sea’.

<sup>129</sup> Kramer, V. (1984). *Thomas Merton: Monk & Artist*. Michigan: Cistercian Publications. ‘Geography of Lograire’ was Merton’s last, unfinished, epic work remaining unpublished at the time of his death in 1968. This vast cultural panorama stretches over the four cardinal points of South, North, East and West and covers a broad range of world literature and events including The Book of Chilam Balam (Mexico), The Ranters, the Melanesian Cargo Cults, the American Indian Ghost Dance movement and the Bantu prophets of Southern Africa. Merton writes ‘Geography./I am all (here)/There!.’p. 498. *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton*.

<sup>130</sup> Fowlie, W. (1965). *Rimbaud: A Critical Study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. p. 82.

this period that saw him devise his own new plan of turning himself into a ‘seer’ where: ‘The idea is to reach the unknown by the derangement of all the senses. It involves enormous suffering, but one must be strong and be a born poet. And I have realised that I am a poet. It’s really not my fault.’<sup>131</sup> It was not his fault, either, to be caught up like so many thousands of other young people, in the terrors of war at that time. Perhaps poetry was a safer option. Rimbaud’s other ‘example’, one profoundly influencing his literary work, was the absconding of his self that possibly derived, like Pessoa (and Nietzsche, for that matter, and Camus), from the early loss of his father and the subsequent problematic relationship to his mother. Rimbaud’s stance up against the State was one of mercenary. Again, this may not have been his fault, as it was at this time that there was no nation for him. Choose the world and fuck you seemed to be the only road that lay open for him: his personal ‘Season in Hell’ full of the torment of youth layered over by the brutality of Napoleonic warfare thereafter followed his ditching of poetry, signing up with the Dutch Navy and subsequent desertion, then various other incarnations in Egypt and Cyprus, and finally running guns in Abyssinia. His was a politics of the lost soul – a seer with no place to call home. As Robb puts it: ‘Rimbaud had left the page without changing his clothes. The fantastic curriculum vitae of *Une Saison en Enfer* and the chaotic identity parade of the Illuminations belong to the same story: the search for a missing person who never existed.’<sup>132</sup> Interestingly, Todd Hayne’s recent bio-pic on Bob Dylan, entitled *I’m Not There*<sup>133</sup> would take six actors to play the various and divergent ‘types’ or personas of Dylan. And again, as regards to Pessoa, a collection of essays collated from an international symposium on the poet would be entitled *The man who never was*.<sup>134</sup> It would be incredibly difficult to do this theme of ‘non-presence’ any justice by citing any one or other work: it is by their example and situated-ness in their times that we shall know them. Still there is something about this invisible kingdom of poets, invisible yet fully present and vital. Roberts concludes that *Mensagem* has been puzzling for Pessoa’s critics, in particular for those who see it as a work of nationalistic pretensions. He points out that: ‘The remarkable aspect of *Mensagem* lies rather in the poet’s complete assimilation of Sebastian and other phenomena of Portuguese history to his own lyrical ends’ where:

Pessoa’s whole lyrical process must be seen as a vain and agonizing search for identity. A vital part of this search was for his identity as a Portuguese, after his education in the language and literary tradition of England; his embracing the

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<sup>131</sup> Robb, G. (2000). *Rimbaud*. London: Picador. p. 75-79. The idea of becoming the ‘seer’ being reported in a letter to Rimbaud’s teacher Georges Izambard in 1871 from Fowle’s *Rimbaud: complete Works, Selected Letters*. It is in Rimbaud’s letters that we find greatest expression of his theories on poetry and much else.

<sup>132</sup> Robb, *ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>133</sup> *I’m not there: Original Soundtrack* (2007) from the movie *I’m not there*.

<sup>134</sup> Montiero, G. (Ed.) (1981). *The Man Who Never Was: Essays on Fernando Pessoa*. Rhode Island: Gavea-Brown

great national legend of King Sebastian may be viewed as part of this self-induction.<sup>135</sup>

Pessoa takes the myth and turns it into his own story, he assimilates the loss, hope and disaster of Sebastian into his own psychology: the hailed, damned, lost King. This was the country of the Pessoaan self.

FIFTH: King Sebastian

Mad, yes mad, because I wanted that glory

Which Fate gives nobody.

Self-certitude was uncontainable in me.

That's why there lies on sandy shores

The being that I was, not what I am.

My madness – let others take from me

And what goes with it.

What's a man who isn't mad

But some ruddy beast,

A corpse postponed that breeds?<sup>136</sup>

The reference is clearly about Sebastian who did, indeed, send Portugal to its ignominious end in his vainglorious moment. It was, however, Pessoa himself that feared his own madness and at certain times considered signing himself into an asylum.<sup>137</sup> Martins asserts that Pessoa's art does not lie in expressing his pain, as a Romantic would, but rests on fabricating that pain for voyeurs: 'His art, and pain, have a semiotic nature rather than a psychological one.'<sup>138</sup> Maybe there's some truth to that, but it remains true also that Pessoa lived with death as constant companion in his early years, including the loss of his father at an early age, a convoluted relationship with his

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<sup>135</sup> Roberts, W.H. (1966). The Figure of King Sebastian in Fernando Pessoa. *Hispanic Review*, 34 (4) p. 307-316.

<sup>136</sup> Pessoa, F. (1986). *Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. San Francisco: City Lights Books. From the poem *Message*.

<sup>137</sup> Kotowicz, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>138</sup> Martins, F.C. *Appearances of the author in Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality* (2007) edited by Anna Klobucka and Mark Sabine. p. 245.

mother, another convoluted relationship to his one and only paramour, finally suffering an early death from alcoholic poisoning. If that's not enough to convince the reader of the 'truth' of Pessoa's pain, regardless of its semiotic or poetic usefulness, one need read no further than the posthumously published so-called 'Fact less Autobiography' – *The Book of Disquiet*, that Pessoa's alter ego, Bernardo Soares, wrote. Under the heading 'Lucid Diary' Pessoa refers to his life as:

... a tragedy booted off stage by the gods, never getting beyond the first act. ... I still haven't succeeded in not suffering from my solitude. It's hard to achieve that distinction of spirit whereby isolation becomes a repose without anguish. ... It takes a certain intellectual courage for a man to frankly recognise that he's nothing more than a human tatter, an abortion that survived, a madman not mad enough to be committed. ... I experienced the humiliation of knowing myself.<sup>139</sup>

Regardless of the literary usefulness of the symbol of suffering artist, it is hard not to imagine elements of experience in these words. Furthermore, these types of sentiments are expressed under all the various heteronyms of Pessoa across a broad range of poems and styles. Albert Camus, that other great absurdist, had his own struggles:

After so long a certainty of being cured, this recurrence ought to overwhelm me. It does in fact. But since I have been so uninterruptedly overwhelmed of late, it makes me want to laugh. At last I am free. Madness is a liberation as well.<sup>140</sup>

There is a kind of sustained effort in the themes of madness, solitude and anguish alongside that of suicide, abnegation of the self, and uselessness throughout Pessoa's whole oeuvre. Where *The Book of Disquiet* was considered his book of despair, *The Education of the Stoic* is considered 'the book of suicide'.<sup>141</sup> I suspect it is both experience and aesthetics that sustains these writings. In *Stoic*, Pessoa's heteronym Baron Von Teive, who wrote the book, confesses: 'I confine to myself the tragedy that's mine. I suffer it, but I suffer it face to face, without metaphysics or sociology. I admit that I'm conquered by life, but not humbled by it.'<sup>142</sup> This is both an essential theme of Pessoa and a statement of the existential drama of Man. It is art, philosophy and personal truth.

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<sup>139</sup> Pessoa, *Book of Disquiet*, p. 427.

<sup>140</sup> Camus, A. (1963). *Selected Essays and Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Philip Thody. p. 288.

<sup>141</sup> Pessoa, F. (2005). *The Education of a Stoic*. Edited and translated by Richard Zenith. Cambridge: Exact Exchange.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

Pessoa himself was well aware of the tension between all these levels of reality, even as an adolescent, when he wrote:

I have no one to confide in. ... in truth I haven't any intimate friend. I feel abandoned, like a ship foundering in the midst of the sea. ... What reliance can I place on these lines that I write? None. When I re-read them, I realize they are pretentious, that I write as though for some literary journal. ... The fact remains, however, that I suffer.<sup>143</sup>

What's man ... but a 'corpse postponed that breeds'<sup>144</sup> indeed. Pessoa would write his own epitaph at the tender age of nineteen:

Here lies who thought himself the best  
Of poets in the world's extent;  
In life he had no joy nor rest.

He filled with madness many a song,  
And at whatever age he died  
thus many days he lived too long.

...

He was a slave to grief and fear  
And incoherent thoughts he had  
And wishes unto madness near.

Those whom he loved, by arts of ill  
He treated worse than foes; but he  
his own worst enemy was still.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Lisboa, E., & Taylor, L.C. (2003). *Fernando Pessoa: A Centenary Pessoa*. Manchester: Carcanet Books. p. 126

<sup>144</sup> Pessoa, F. (1986). *Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. San Francisco: City Lights Books. From the poem *Message*.

These were to be central Pessoaan themes over the rest of his life and, whilst aesthetic and of a ‘semiotic nature’, methinks thou dost protest too much, Mr Pessoa, man who is not there. In the sense of Dylan, I suspect Pessoa to have been con-fessional rather than pro-fessional. By this I take Dylan to mean not necessarily that everything he wrote was confessional, rather it was ‘con’, against the technical, the established or authoritarian world view – the work arose from the guts, from experience; it was a case of ‘don’t think – feel’. Again this is not to say that either Dylan or Pessoa were not technically proficient; it could be argued that the several honorary university degrees awarded to Dylan were granted due to the Academy’s acknowledgment of his proficiency, including one from Princeton where he ‘Sure was glad to get out of there alive.’<sup>146</sup> Pessoa ends his Epitaph with ‘He was a thing that God had wrought/And to the sin of having lived/ He joined the crime of having thought.’<sup>147</sup>

Writers of poetry use both cognitive and feeling faculties. Harold Bloom seems to lay an emphasis on the former component where ‘great’ poetry, like that of Shakespeare whose control over phrasemaking was so that ‘... everything in the mind that is out of control finds itself organised by the inevitability of the power to phrase’<sup>148</sup>. For Bloom, ‘Greatness’ in poetry ...’ depends upon splendour of figurative language and on cognitive power ...’ and one definition of poetic power is ‘...that it so fuses thinking and remembering that we cannot separate the two processes.’<sup>149</sup> Finally, and interestingly, Bloom will truncate his collection of *Best Poems of the English Language* at around 1923 thereby largely evading ‘...our contemporary flight from all standards of aesthetic and cognitive value.’<sup>150</sup> However, I rather agree with Bloom’s final say on the matter of what makes great poetry, ‘...poetry at its greatest ... has one broad and essential difficulty: It is the true mode for expanding our consciousness. This it accomplishes by what I

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<sup>145</sup> Pessoa, F. (2007). *Selected English Poems*. Exeter: Shearsman Books. From the poem *Epitaph*.

<sup>146</sup> Marshall, L. ‘Bob Dylan and the Academy’ in Dettmar, K. (Ed.) (2009). *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.100.

<sup>147</sup> Pessoa, F. (2007). *Selected English Poems*. Exeter: Shearsman Books. From the poem *Epitaph*.

<sup>148</sup> Bloom, H. (2004). *The Best Poems of the English Language*. New York: Harper Perennial. p. 20

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Bloom, H. (2004) *The Best Poems of the English Language*. New York: Harper Perennial. Bloom also goes on to propose a range of questions one must ask if one is to determine what good poetry is and what is not. Is not the choice of any ‘Best Poetry’ an arbitrary basis the underpinning of which is ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder’? Of course this can be an interesting post graduate paper on the politics of literary power that has to do with who decides what is best – another spin on the title of this essay ‘Who is it that writes?’. A typical example of this type of politics can be found in Peter Alexander’s *Les Murray: A Life in Progress* where Alexander provides an excellent overview of the state of affairs of Australia’s very own poetry turf wars between the followers of John Tranter (‘the Generation of ’68) and *New Poetry* and Les Murray and those who ‘opposed’ the former in *Poetry Australia*. Interestingly Michael Hamburger, in his criteria for selecting who he would study in his *Truth of Poetry* and who he wouldn’t wrote in his Postscript in that book ‘A far as my home literature is concerned, I had decided decades earlier never to write about the work of my immediate contemporaries and coevals, so as to keep out of the gang warfare that passes for criticism of new work in the journals.’ Unfortunately this latter comment holds all too true in some current circles and journals in the Australian literary scene.

have learned to call strangeness.’<sup>151</sup> Bloom picks up this notion of ‘Strangeness’ from Owen Barfield for whom strangeness is not ‘correlative with wonder’; rather ‘It arises from contact with a different kind of *consciousness* from our own, different, yet not so remote that we cannot partly share in it, ... Strangeness, in fact, arouses wonder when we do not understand: aesthetic imagination when we do.’<sup>152</sup> The fact that Bloom holds ‘strangeness’ as a quality of ‘great’ poetry in such high esteem makes it, for me, even more frustrating that he should feel the necessity to truncate his ‘Best of’ anthology around 1923 as it seems, to me at least, that much good and interesting work has been made since then. I don’t find it too surprising, though, given Bloom’s emphasis on the cognitive aspect of ‘lofty’ poetry,(which I do not wish to deny) that he did not include ee cummings in his collection. Cummings lays a very different emphasis on what is the strength of good poetry. That is, it is intense feelings that guide the strong poet. Richard Kennedy would assert that Cummings ‘... developed an impressionistic idea of beauty as dependent on the intensity of the viewer’s or reader’s response.’ Cummings, Kennedy continues:

...carried this proposition over into all areas of life, placing primary emphasis on feeling rather than thinking: he maintained that to be “Alive” was to live at heightened emotional intensity and, conversely, that merely to exist was the equivalent of being “dead”.<sup>153</sup>

This comes over most effectively in Cummings’ poem VII of Part Four of his book *is 5* written in 1926 (three years after Bloom’s deadline!):

since feeling is first  
who pays any attention  
to the syntax of things  
will never wholly kiss you;  
  
wholly be a fool  
while spring is in the world

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>152</sup> Barfield, cited in Bloom, *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>153</sup> Cummings, E.E. (1994). *Selected Poems*. New York: Liverlight. p. 97

my blood approves  
and kisses are a better fate  
than wisdom  
lady I swear by all flowers. Don't cry  
-the best gesture of my brain is less than  
your eyelids' flutter which says  
  
we are for each other: then  
laugh, leaning back in my arms  
for life's not a paragraph

And death I think is no parenthesis<sup>154</sup>

Cummings, in his forward to *is 5*, would say 'Like the burlesque comedian, [here Dylan would fit very nicely, as would Rimbaud and Pessoa] I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement' and that

If a poet is anybody, he is someone to whom things made matter very little - somebody who is obsessed by Making. ... Ineluctable preoccupation with the Verb gives the poet one priceless advantage: whereas non-makers content themselves with the merely undeniable fact that two times two is four, he rejoices in a purely irresistible truth (to be found, in abbreviated costume, upon the title page of the present volume).<sup>155</sup>

Kennedy would cite Cummings from the latter's book *The Enormous Room* where:

There are certain things in which one is unable to believe for the simple reason that he never ceases to feel them. Things of this sort – things which are always inside of us and in fact are us and which consequently will never be pushed off

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<sup>154</sup> Cummings, E.E. (1994). *Complete Poems 1904 – 1962*. New York: Liverlight.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p. 221.

or away where we can begin thinking about them – are no longer things; they,  
and the us which they are, equals A Verb; an IS.<sup>156</sup>

How evident this philosophy in the lines ‘and kisses are a better fate/than wisdom’ and again  
‘Don’t cry/ - the best gesture of my brain is less than/ your eyelids’ flutter which says/ we are for  
each other: then/ laugh, leaning back in my arms/ for life’s not a paragraph’<sup>157</sup> Dylan would  
write one of his own love songs/poems in this way:

My love she speaks like silence

Without ideals or violence

She doesn’t have to say she’s faithful

Yet she’s true like ice, like fire

People carry roses

And make promises by the hours

My love she laughs like flowers

Valentines can’t buy her.

...

In the dime stores and bus stations

People talk of situations

Read books, repeat quotations

Draw conclusions on the wall

Some speak of the future

My love, she speaks softly

She knows there’s no success like failure

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<sup>156</sup> Cummings, *Selected Poems.*, p. 98.

<sup>157</sup> *ibid*

And that failure's no success at all.<sup>158</sup>

The title of Dylan's song, like that of Cummings' *is 5*, is a transmogrification of a formulistic way of looking at life; the new equation is 'Love – 0 / no limit', no conclusions, no quotations, no history – 'my love, she speaks softly', she's confabulated and ironic, 'she laughs like flowers', she is a Verb, an IS. There is something Koan-like about this song of Dylan's:

The bridge at midnight trembles

The country doctor rambles

Banker's nieces seek perfection

Expecting all the gifts that wise men bring

Like Rimbaud's 'Childhood III in Illuminations':

In the woods there's a bird whose singing stops you and makes you blush

There's a clock which doesn't strike.

There's a clay pit with a nest of white animals.

There's a cathedral coming down and a lake going up.<sup>159</sup>

Zen asks us to suspend all thinking and cognitive knowledge, whilst not getting 'tangled up in blues' either: the poem just IS. Sometimes there is nothing to say, there just 'is': the 'ineffable'. Blake Strawbridge attempts to unpack Pessoa's abrogation of self:

Thus while it remains true that 'there is nothing to flee' or flee to, the affirmation of identity's inability to contain its referent – or the immanent materials of its means of production – can nevertheless be a means of exploration, provided they take refuge from signification as the demand for correspondence.<sup>160</sup>

*The Book of Disquiet* embodies a significant amount of Pessoa's thought in general:

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<sup>158</sup> *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective* (n.d.) New York: Warner Brothers. Publications Inc. *Love Minus Zero/No limit*.

<sup>159</sup> Fowle, W. (Ed.) (1966). *Rimbaud: Complete works, Selected Letters*. Illuminations p. 217.

<sup>160</sup> Strawbridge, B. (2007). *Abdication and Art Production in The Book of Disquiet*. In *Embodying Pessoa: Corporeality, Gender, Sexuality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Edited by Anna. M. Klobucka and Mark Sabine.

I, far away from the paths to myself, blind to the vision of the life I love, .... I too have finally arrived at the vacant end of things, at the imponderable edge of creation's limit, at the port-in-no-place of the world's abstract chasm.

I have entered, Lord, that Port. I have wandered, Lord, over that sea. I have gazed, Lord, over that invisible chasm.

I dedicate this work of supreme Discovery to the memory of your Portuguese name, creator of Argonauts.<sup>161</sup>

Pessoa the wanderer, the alien, stranger in a strange land, reaches the end of the world, the great chasm of being but he carries with him his earthly identity, naming his Lord by his Portuguese name. To the 'imponderable' end Pessoa remains committed to his land, his nation even in the very act of his abrogation of a self. This is Pessoa's other self, the country of the self. As Strawbridge notes 'there is nothing to flee': and still I flee. Very Zen.

This, too, is what Pessoa taught us through his 'amming'. Becoming and being are one activity enacted through a range of heteronymities. Camus would write in his *Carnets* 'the whole of my work is ironic'.<sup>162</sup> I think it would be safe to suggest that it was the same for Pessoa. Despite Camus' call for the over-mannian response to anguish and the 'semiotic', ironic play with his own despair, Pessoa would still drink himself to death by the age of forty-seven. Interestingly, Rimbaud was dead through outright dangerous living and probably some sort of death wish by the time he was thirty seven. We still have Dylan and it is interesting to think of what might have been of the French and the Portuguese poet had they lived long enough to reach a more mature age and perhaps a more reflective stage in their lives.

Despite their sense of locus of a self, as manifested through engagement with their socio-cultural situated-ness, these three poets also struggled with a sense of non-locus, a displacement out of time and belonging to no country. In the country of the self your context is your material, the stuff of your myth. Dylan becomes the Wicked Messenger, Rimbaud the *Enfant Terrible*, and Pessoa the *Man who Never Was*. Fowlie claims, in his chapter 'The example of Rimbaud', that Rimbaud is a mystical writer who is extremely hard to define.<sup>163</sup> Rimbaud has no recognisable type, he was '...outside the law and outside the human community.'<sup>164</sup> I think the same can be said of Pessoa and Dylan. In myriad but consistent ways all three poets considered themselves as

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<sup>161</sup> Pessoa, F. (2001). *The Book of Disquiet*. New York: Penguin Books. p. 114.

<sup>162</sup> Camus, *Selected Essays and Notebooks.*, p. 288.

<sup>163</sup> Fowlie, W. (1965). *Rimbaud: A Critical Study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75 – 82.

alien, as ‘outsiders’. Living outside the Law, the Freudian Law as it is manifest in the culturo-legal scenario of the land, for Dylan, is authenticity.<sup>165</sup> Pessoa/Soares similarly sees himself outside the human circle: he is an alien/seer: ‘And I have a peculiar, mysterious way of envisioning these absurdities. In some way I can’t explain, I’m able to see these things that are inconceivable for any kind of human vision.’<sup>166</sup> Otherness, strangeness or alienation create visions of another land not connected to this earthly domain. Dylan would sing ‘I have dined with Kings/ I’ve been offered wings/ and I’ve never been too impressed.’<sup>167</sup> Again, here, in Pessoa’s orthonymic poem written two years before his death ‘To travel! Leave countries behind’:

To travel! Leave countries behind!

Be someone else indefinitely,

...

Travelling this way is really travelling.

But to do so without needing

More than the dream of an open road.

The rest? Just earth and sky.<sup>168</sup>

Shades of Rimbaud, Kerouac and Dylan run throughout the whole poem: leave countries behind without needing to do other than be someone else indefinitely. The symbols of alien, leaving and open road, and ‘earth and sky’ evoke the whole gamut of Hesiod’s ‘thing-reality’: ‘earth, heaven, sea, stars, mountains, rivers, trees, animals, men’. Here, again, we come to the eternal recurrence with echoes of Nietzsche’s *Dionysus Dithyrambs* where ‘In general their themes were drawn from the landscape of elemental forces with which Nietzsche was obsessed: earth and sun, desert, fire, mountains’<sup>169</sup> and of the Beat poets from Kerouac to Dylan, all part of the perennial wanderer myth. As Zarathustra would declare in his Dionysian epic *Thus Spake Zarathustra*:

I am a wanderer and a mountain climber (he said to his heart), I do not like the plains it seems and I cannot sit still for long.

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<sup>165</sup> In his song ‘Absolutely Sweet Marie’ Dylan’s line is “But to live outside the law you must be honest”. *The Songs of Bob Dylan: from 1966 through 1975*. New York: Alfred.A. Knopf: Cherry Lane.

<sup>166</sup> Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet.*, p. 308.

<sup>167</sup> Bob Dylan, *Street Legal* (1978) Special Rider Music. From ‘Is your love in vain’.

<sup>168</sup> Pessoa, F. (1986). *Poems of Fernando Pessoa*. San Francisco: City Lights Books. Translated and edited by Edwin Honig and Susan M. Brown.

<sup>169</sup> Chamberlain, L. (1996). *Nietzsche in Turin: The End of the Future*. London: Quartet Books. p. 191.

And whatever may yet come to me as fate and experience – a wandering and a mountain climbing will be in it: in the final analysis one experiences only oneself.

The time has passed when accidents could befall me; and what *could* still come to me that was not already my own?

It is returning, at last it is coming home to me – my own Self and those parts of it that have long been abroad and scattered among all things and accidents.

... Alas, I have started upon my loneliest wandering.<sup>170</sup>

Leslie Chamberlain elaborates rather eloquently on the scenario of Zarathustra and how it is as relevant to artists of today as it was for any artist bound on the path of ‘overcoming the self’: the eternal archetype of the wanderer. Nietzsche would claim that his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra* ‘... deals only with me – in it I finally appear with my world-historical mission.’<sup>171</sup> Chamberlain elaborates on this declaration:

To emphasise the ‘I’ here makes clear the difference: Nietzsche himself has taken over from Zarathustra as that Dionysus who metamorphoses into stone and water and sky and is in love with eternity. He would paint himself into the landscape. ... Nietzsche, when he wore the mask of the first tormented Dionysus, knew the young potential world leader was destroyed despite paternal hopes and a grand beginning. The complete myth taken to heart would simultaneously have reinforced his terrified vision of his female family, his flight into poetry, into Zarathustrian metamorphosis, his flight from Titan illness, and his promise, beyond their destruction, of a new eternity in rebirth. That is one speculation, then, that so much of Dionysus’s life, with its bloodiness and its energy appealed to Nietzsche, became the most suitable mask for his own.<sup>172</sup>

Chamberlain reads Zarathustra as a mytho-poetical construction of Nietzsche, similar to the way that Pessoa would read himself (or the other way around) into the myth of King Sebastian. What is the basic stuff of those mythopoetic scenes – “stone and water and sky”, loss, despair, and the love of eternity. These are the materials of the everyday forever. They anchored the poet in the

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<sup>170</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1969). *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Middlesex: Penguin Classics. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. p. 173. The last line quoted above could have been penned (and probably was in one derivation or other) by any one of our three poets – and others to boot.

<sup>171</sup> Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>172</sup> Chamberlain, op. cit., p. 188 -189.

world of yesterday and still do so today. I can understand these materials, these tropes, but they can also lead down the Carrollian rabbit hole to the mystery world below; the mystery world that our poets were so drawn to and familiar with: Cabbalism, theosophy, astrology, the chthonic world, the Dionysian. The fact remains that there is a mystery as to where we go when we write – to that ‘valley below’<sup>173</sup>. Don’t look back.<sup>174</sup> Dylan as Orpheus; Pessoa into the bottle; Rimbaud into the jungles.

The path of the Wanderer is a lonely path. Rimbaud knew this from the beginning as a child:

I am a wanderer along the main road running through the dwarfish woods.  
The noise of the sluices drowns my footsteps. ... I might be the child  
abandoned on the wharf setting out for the high seas, or the farmhand  
following the path whose top reaches the sky. ... The pathways are rough. ...  
How far away are the birds and the springs of water! This must be the end of  
the world, lying ahead.<sup>175</sup>

O Hesiod, farmer, wanderer of rough pathways with naught but stone, sea and sky for company and poetic material. Loneliness or solitude are central, if not dominant themes, for Pessoa. Rimbaud would not only accept being the lonesome outcast as a given, he would outright cultivate that persona till the end of his life. Dylan knew it and accepted it as a kind of *fait accompli*. So what?, he might have said, get on with it, it’s the lot of every blues man’s life. Dylan’s loneliness is less desperate than Rimbaud’s and more rooted in everyday life. It is, in fact, a blues man’s retrospective anthem:

Well, today has been a sad ol' lonesome day  
Yeah, today has been a sad ol' lonesome day  
I'm just sittin' here thinking  
With my mind a million miles away

Well, they're doing the double shuffle, throwin' sand on the floor  
They're doing the double shuffle, they're throwin' sand on the floor  
When I left my long-time darlin'  
She was standing in the door

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<sup>173</sup> Bob Dylan, ‘One more cup of coffee’ from the album *Desire*, 1975.

<sup>174</sup> D.A.Pennebaker’s documentary movie on the 60s Dylan *Don’t look back* (1965).

<sup>175</sup> Fowlie, W. (Ed.) (1966). *Rimbaud: Complete works, Selected Letters*. Illuminations p. 219.

Well, my pa he died and left me, my brother got killed in the war  
Well, my pa he died and left me, my brother got killed in the war  
My sister, she ran off and got married  
Never was heard of any more

Samantha Brown lived in my house for about four or five months  
Samantha Brown lived in my house for about four or five months  
Don't know how it looked to other people  
I never slept with her even once

Well, the road's washed out - weather not fit for man or beast  
Yeah the road's washed out - weather not fit for man or beast  
Funny, how the things you have the hardest time parting with  
Are the things you need the least

I'm forty miles from the mill - I'm droppin' it into overdrive  
I'm forty miles from the mill - I'm droppin' it into overdrive  
Settin' my dial on the radio  
I wish my mother was still alive

I see your lover-man comin' - comin' 'cross the barren field  
I see your lover-man comin' - comin' 'cross the barren field  
He's not a gentleman at all - he's rotten to the core  
He's a coward and he steals

Well my captain he's decorated - he's well schooled and he's skilled  
My captain, he's decorated - he's well schooled and he's skilled  
He's not sentimental - don't bother him at all  
How many of his pals have been killed

Last night the wind was whisperin', I was trying to make out what it was  
Last night the wind was whisperin' somethin' - I was trying to make out what it was  
I tell myself something's comin'  
But it never does

I'm gonna spare the defeated - I'm gonna speak to the crowd  
I'm gonna spare the defeated, boys, I'm going to speak to the crowd  
I am goin' to teach peace to the conquered  
I'm gonna tame the proud

Well the leaves are rustlin' in the wood - things are fallin' off of the shelf  
Leaves are rustlin' in the wood - things are fallin' off the shelf  
You gonna need my help, sweetheart  
You can't make love all by yourself<sup>176</sup>

This could be an epithet for the whole of Dylan's oeuvre as it takes us into the past of the blues man's plaintive cry and old time dance hall with the 'double shuffle, throwin' sand on the floor' and keeps us motoring along at the speed of modern day life 'droppin' into overdrive'. The song also includes not only a great number of his lifetime themes such as nostalgia, loss, the forlorn lover ('she was standing in the door'), desolation, the wind (not howlin' but whispering), death, but also a bunch of the usual suspects, characters from 'old weird America' including Samantha Brown, the captain, my sister, pa, your lover-man the coward, my long time darlin'. Dylan is going to teach his troops about the truth of loneliness and loss in these war-weary lines: 'I'm gonna spare the defeated, boys, I'm going to speak to the crowd / I am goin' to teach peace to the conquered'. Is anything new under the sun; is anything new possible? This question is linked to the *idem*, the sameness, of the self through history and has to do with authenticity and uniqueness of the self. The writer here, the 'I' of 'I am going to speak ...' or 'I am goin' to teach ...' is both the narrator that the poet creates as well as the poet himself. It is therefore incumbent upon the researcher of the 'who is it that writes' to explore linkages to the socio-cultural context of the *idem*. Whilst this sameness of self throughout history might be a core foundation of perhaps all selves, that core self is woven contextually and historically into a range of differentiated socio-historical settings. The writer not only utilises material or ideas from her current context. Given that no socio-cultural settings sits in historical isolation, the author derives much from the whole gamut of ideas, words, thought that have their origins in, usually, but not confined to, the literary history of their milieu.

Because of this understanding of the self as socio-culturally-historically situated the search for meaning in a writer's work must take in historical antecedent. Some researchers of Dylan seem to go to great lengths to do just that with his work. Recent literature has been devoted to tracing the

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<sup>176</sup> From the album *Love and Theft*, 2001, Special Rider Music.

lineage of much of Dylan's works where the origins of many lines are being unearthed in previous blues and other more ancient sources.<sup>177</sup> This search for the past in Dylan's work is not new. For example, Michael Gray in his epic *Song and Dance Man* and *Bob Dylan Encyclopaedia* has carried out a vast Dylanography. It is Christopher Ricks who produces an excellent coverage of the origins of one of Dylan's most well known songs that made it recently into the melting pot of TV advertising – 'Hard Rain'. Almost word for word the recurring refrain from an early nineteenth century Scottish verse 'Lord Randal'. Here's Randal – "'O, where ha you been, Lord Randal my son?/ And where ha you been, my handsom young man?'" and the answer 'I ha been at the greenwood; mother, make my bed soon'. The whole of the Randal poem follows this rhythm – question/answer as does Dylan's song/poem. 'Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?/ And where have you been, my darling young one?' Answer: 'I've stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains/...'.<sup>178</sup> Charges of plagiarism are rife, but Dylan has always admitted that he has lifted lyrics or melodies (let alone actual whole records and record collections) from others before him. There is a formula for this process and it goes something like this: Homer [insert Hesiod and other GKs?] --- Ovid (Black Sea Letters; Tristia) --- [insert rest of Western history including Blake] --- Dylan (Modern Times: Ain't Talkin')<sup>179</sup> --- [insert up and coming poets/song writers eg Wolfmother – 'joker and the thief in the night']

The question of this thesis is 'Who is it that writes?' Given Dylan's penchant for mystification around his 'I' and his chameleon-like career it seems important to explore how Dylan and his art are inter-related with regards to the question of how does he identify. Yaffe suggests that 'Dylan has, in effect, come to embody the cultural pastiche he wove together so inimitably from 'Desolation Row' to 'High Water', incongruous elements yoked together.'<sup>180</sup> Dylan himself at the tender age of twenty one said 'Maybe I'm just all these things I soak up.'<sup>181</sup> Writing about the Austrian poet George Trakl, Lynda McNeil suggests that he had been, like Rimbaud before him, 'in search of a new language that could express a new consciousness/reality, a language and

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<sup>177</sup> Yaffe, D. (2009). *Bob Dylan and the Anglo-American tradition* in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Edited by Kevin.J.H. Dettmar.

<sup>178</sup> Ricks,C. (2003). *Dylan's Vision of Sin*. London: Penguin. p. 329 – 344.

<sup>179</sup> Yaffe, op. cit. 'But it turned out that 'Ain't Talking' could be the most mind polluting of all – lines and lines lifted from Ovid's *Tristia*. Dylan made other Ovid references on *Modern Times*, too ... poems written in exile after the poet was banished by Augustus, resonated most deeply of all. Ovid had been a rock star, perhaps even the voice of his generation in Roman antiquity. But he was also living in a moment of plagiarism – accused of plagiarizing Homer, in a culture that was generally plagiarising ancient Greece – and, at 60, in the same age group as the Dylan of *Modern Times*, railed against the unfair forces that cast him away. 'Ain't Talkin', with a total of nine lines taken from *Tristia*, is a great Bob Dylan song in any case. He's at, in the words of Dylan and Peter Green's translation of Ovid, 'the last outback at the world's end', intoning lines from Roman antiquity by way of the Mississippi Delta, Tin Pan Alley, the confederacy, and God knows what else.' p 27.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

mindset that would shatter bourgeois ‘consensus reality’ with its foundation in Western rationalism and empiricism. This new mode of consciousness (mythic or ‘insane’) would ‘blur the contours’ between self and the world, the subjective and objective worlds, as well as between individual images (objects) and figures.<sup>182</sup> I think McNeil is onto something here where, at least for the three poets under examination in this essay, the self is a ‘politics of the self’; the I is spliced into the cultural landscape to such a degree that the boundaries normally taken for granted between I and Other are dissolved. The search for new language requires a revisitation of the language of the past, but with a new spin on it, a new way of saying what has already been said and probably will be said again. The new myth contains elements of past myths. The Greeks knew this very well and rehashed the old myths ad infinitum. The Romans took over from them and refashioned their gods after Greek and other gods e.g. Aphrodite becomes Venus. And the Christians did the same after that, for example, Mary is the new Isis.<sup>183</sup>

Another examination of how writers write from their contextual space and how their art influences future others rests on this line from one of Rimbaud’s ‘Illuminations’ poems ‘Youth: II Sonnet’. ‘Man of usual constitution, wasn’t flesh a fruit hanging in the orchard? – O childhood days! – wasn’t the body a treasure to spend? – wasn’t love the peril or the strength of the Psyche?’ All good. Then the idyllic scene of youth turns to the scene of the truth of man’s existence in the world: ‘The earth had slopes fertile in princes and artists, and your descendents and your race drove you to crime and mourning: your fortune and your peril.’ How quickly that worm of reality did turn for young Arthur: ‘But now this work is done, you and your calculations, you and your impatience, are only your dance and voice’.<sup>184</sup> Fowlie provides one reading of this piece: ‘... in which the boy sees himself growing into a man. ... His body appears to him as a fruit hanging in an orchard. ... At a distance on a hillside there is evidence of fertility in the princes and artists.’<sup>185</sup> It should be kept in mind that ‘Illuminations’ was written after Mezieres had been obliterated by the Prussians and then cordoned off by them. After Rimbaud’s wanderings through war torn Paris in the same year when he had been:

... slipping in and out of German lines. He had been in Paris at the rise of the Communards when the ‘... unloved children of the Motherland – the oppressed, the weak, the workers, the poor – rose in revolt against the new

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<sup>182</sup> McNeil, L.D. (1992). *Recreating the World/Word: The Mythic Mode as Symbolic Discourse*. Albany: State University of New York Press. p.129.

<sup>183</sup> Jung, C.G. (1969). *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. *Bollingen Series XX: The Collected Works of C.G.Jung Volume 9. Part 1*. p. 107.

<sup>184</sup> Fowlie, W. (Ed.) (1966). *Rimbaud: Complete works, Selected Letters*. p. 219 – 221.

<sup>185</sup> Fowlie, W. (1965). *Rimbaud: A Critical Study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press p. 143.

government ... Barricades rose in the streets; mobs wheeled about; palaces, buildings burned. The city prepared for revolutionary government, the Commune.

Rimbaud returned to Charleville early in March. Images of war, of Paris under siege, filled his head and his poetry. Visions of workers and guardsmen on street barricades, of the 'gasoline girls', the incendiaries, of flames; in Baudelairean phrases he described the occupied city.<sup>186</sup>

Rimbaud was only sixteen when he began witnessing (voluntarily and involuntarily) any number of atrocities in and around Charleville and Paris and the hundreds of miles he walked in between. There is another reading of 'Sonnet' that could be offered here based on a song written by in the mid-1930s by a New York City public school teacher, Abel Meeropol, who was at that time a member of the American Communist Party.<sup>187</sup> The song is called 'Strange fruit' and was given a powerful rendition by Billy Holiday in the 50s, by Nina Simone since then and most recently a hip hop version by Paradigm Shift 302 (2006). The lyrics are as poetic as any protest song written by Dylan and indeed the song was seen as a precursor of the civil rights protest songs of the 60s. It is highly likely that the song was known by Dylan and other 'folkies' such as Dylan's hero Woody Guthrie who was famous for his 'dustbowl' songs of the 30s around the time 'Strange fruit' was written.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit,  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,  
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,  
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,  
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,  
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,

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<sup>186</sup> Schmidt, P. (Trans.) (2008) *arthur rimbaud: Complete Works* New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics p. 59.

<sup>187</sup> "Strange Fruit": the story of a song. By Peter Daniels 8 February 2002. Retrieved 7 January 2010 <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/feb2002/frut-fo8.shtml>

For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,  
Here is a strange and bitter crop<sup>188</sup>.

My contention is that, via a ‘reading by hindsight’, it is likely that Rimbaud could have coined the notion of ‘the flesh a fruit hanging in the orchard’ as based on bodies he himself witnessed swinging in the winds of the Franco-Prussian horror. Regardless whether the conjecture given here has any veracity (it is possible that another essay of similar length to this one would unearth a direct lineage from Rimbaud to Meeropol – and possibly from Rimbaud himself back to even earlier precursors) language is wherein we swim. ‘Fruit hanging in the orchard’ and ‘strange fruit’ is the semiotic framework for the ‘I’. That is, the personal ‘I’, if there is such a thing, is located, as said, in a socio-cultural-historical context which includes language as well as a range of other signifiers. Conscious and unconscious utilisation of that language is a part of the human condition and it was Lacan who suggests that the unconscious is structured like a language.<sup>189</sup> The ‘I’ of the writer is thus historically situated and immersed in language, but his poetics derive from the very fabric of his conscious and unconscious. But not only language per se, it is the language of the now, the actual present and all of the present’s signifiers that structure us, that provide us ‘food for thought’. The beauty and terror of both Meeropol’s song and Rimbaud’s poem are undeniable, the timelessness and truth of the intent of ‘strange fruit’ will stay with us for a long time yet.<sup>190</sup>

A curious, Promethean-like lineage has been noted by George Monteiro in his book *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*.<sup>191</sup> Monteiro would follow a similar Promethean (who stole what from whom?) formula, as Yaffe did with Dylan, in a study of Pessoa’s poem ‘His Mother’s Boy’. Following the trace signifiers of war, death, mother/son love and loss Monteiro traces the poem back to Rimbaud’s ‘Sleeper in the Valley’.

Pessoa (1926):

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<sup>188</sup> Peter Daniels, *ibid*

<sup>189</sup> Lacan, J. (1968). *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*. London: The John Hopkins University Press.

<sup>190</sup> A little more on my conjecture that it is Rimbaud’s real life experience that underpins ‘Sonnet’. ‘The earth had slopes fertile in princes and artists, and your descendents and your race drove you to crime and mourning; the world, your fortune and peril’. Pretty much Robbie Burns’ ‘...of mice and men’ both of whom will ultimately be equalised after being ploughed back into the earth from whence they derive. Rimbaud here is commenting on the aristocracy and himself both of who were in imminent danger of being laid low in the terror of the Franco-Prussian war, both of whom would stoop to crime to survive; this imminent world of danger was their ‘fortune or peril’. The poet looks to his climate of times, be immersed in the zeitgeist, as she/he must, in order to maintain any sense of authenticity or dignity in their work. Dylan would epitomise ‘old weird America’ as Pessoa would mythologise Sebastianist Portugal.

<sup>191</sup> Chapter Ten – Webs of Empire: Caroline Norton, Rimbaud and Others. From Monteiro, G. (2000). *Fernando Pessoa and Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Literature*. Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.

On a deserted plain  
Heated by a warm breeze,  
Drilled clean through –  
by two bullets –  
He lies dead, turning cold.  
...  
So young he was! So young.  
(and now how old is he?)  
As only son, his mother  
had named him and stuck  
With it: “His mother’s boy.”  
...  
Far-off, at home, they pray  
“May he soon return, safe, and sound.”  
(Such webs does the Empire weave!)  
He lies dead, rotting away,  
This mother’s boy.

Rimbaud (1870):

It is a green hollow where a river sings  
Madly catching on the grasses  
Silver rags; where the sun shines from the proud mountains:  
It is a small valley which bubbles over with rays.

A young soldier, his mouth open, his head bare,  
And the nape of his neck bathing in the cool blue watercress,  
Sleeps; he is stretched out on the grass, under clouds,  
Pale on his green bed where the light rains down.

His feet in the gladiolas, he sleeps. Smiling as  
A sick child would smile, he is taking a nap:  
Nature, cradle him warmly: he is cold.  
Odors do not make his nostrils quiver.  
He sleeps in the sun, his hand on his breast,  
Quieted. There are two red holes in his right side.

Monteiro goes on to demonstrate an even earlier lineage for Rimbaud's poem. He also notes a parallel with a C.P. Cavafy poem 'Prayer' written around 1911:

The sea's taken a sailor to her depths below –  
his mother, still unaware, rushes to go  
  
light a narrow candle before the Virgin's shrine,  
for his swift return, good weather, or a sign  
  
that she struggles against the wind to hear.  
But as she bows and reiterates her prayer,  
the icon listens, sorrowful and glum,

quite sure that her son will never come.<sup>192</sup>

Monteiro diligently takes the search for origins even further back, to an English poem by Caroline Norton whose poem 'Bingen on the Rhine' was published in the 1840s. Monteiro's research centres more around the political aspirations of Pessoa rather than the literary origins of the poem per se, and he puts the likely origin of the poem around the time of the First World War, with Pessoa himself declaring the poem to be a World War I poem. The Portuguese Empire was itself at stake during this time with its fate subject to the struggle between England and Germany for their own colonies with Pessoa's sympathy leaning towards Germany. Pessoa, according to Monteiro, had around nine 'war' poems with views ranging from ironic, to outright deploring modern warfare. Rimbaud, too, became the bower bird of the Franco-Prussian war, both victim and voyeur, collecting bits and pieces for his art. Dylan is probably most famously known as a 'protest singer' of the early 60s with a scathing attack on the military-industrial complex left over from Dwight Eisenhower's presidency in his 'Masters of War' and with one of his greatest songs *Subterranean Homesick Blues* inspiring the anti-establishment, anti-Vietnam war movement /group the 'Weathermen' – 'you don't need to be a weatherman to know which way the wind blows'.<sup>193</sup>

What interests me through all of this is not only the politico-cultural material of these three poets' art but, just as importantly, the consistency of the archetype of the mundane through history and time as evinced through writing. Michael Hamburger in his 1982 postscript to his *The Truth of Poetry* writes: 'In every climate of opinion and belief it is the business of poets to add something to the resources of their medium, language, though that can be done by looking back as well as by looking forward – as long as the looks are searching ones.'<sup>194</sup> Hamburger has concluded that '... the tensions out of which poetry is produced remain constant for long periods, though the terminology may change from decade to decade from year to year.'<sup>195</sup> So what makes the difference between a good poem and a bad poem, a 'dead' or 'live' poem? It is a '...matter not of the what, but the how – not the theme, but the treatment and the development of theme; and that brings poetry closer to music once more, despite the bother about meaning.'<sup>196</sup> I am in complete agreement with Hamburger on this where, for him, 'The imagination can also be politically radical, like William Blake's, or revolutionary, as in so many poets since Baudelaire. Yet

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<sup>192</sup> C. P. Cavafy (2008). *Selected Poems*. London: Penguin Books. Translated by Avi Sharon.

<sup>193</sup> *Subterranean Homesick Blues* from the album *Highway 61 revisited*, Bob Dylan.

<sup>194</sup> Hamburger, M. (1982). *The Truth of Poetry: Tensions in Modernist Poetry since Baudelaire*. London: Anvil Press Poetry.

<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316; p. 269.

even at its most utopian or apocalyptic, the imagination is conservative in its recourse to norms and archetypes.<sup>197</sup>

The final poem I would like to add to the Aurobindoian<sup>198</sup> formula following the trace from Norton to Rimbaud, detouring to Cavafay, then to Pessoa, is Dylan's latest epic song based on the American Civil War 'Cross the Green Mountain' (2003):

I cross the green mountain

I sit by the stream

Heaven blazing in my head

I, I dreamt a monstrous dream

...

The world is old

The world is great

Lessons in life

Can't be learned in a day

...

In the deep green grasses

And the blood stained woods

They never dreamed of surrendering

They fell where they stood

...

Chilled are the skies

Keen is the frost

The ground's froze hard

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<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>198</sup> Sri Aurobindo's 'Great Chain of Being'.

And the morning is lost

A letter to mother

Came today

Gunshot to the Breast

Is what it did say

But he'll be better soon

He's in a hospital bed

But he'll never be better

He's already dead

I'm ten miles outside of the city

And I'm lifted away

In an ancient light

That is not of day

They were calmed, they were gloomed

We knew them all too well

We loved each other more than

We ever dared to tell<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Bob Dylan, *Tell Tale Signs. The Bootleg Series Vol. 8 Rare and unreleased 1989 – 2006.*

This poem itself has been identified as having been influenced either in some of its actual lines, or in its intent/content, by Yeats' poem 'Lapis Lazuli', Herman Melville's Civil War poems, and lesser known poet Henry Timrod (1829 – 1867).<sup>200</sup> The question does have to be asked of course doth mimesis good poetry make? Of course not, must the answer be and therein lies another question as a corollary to this one: Can we ever escape our ancestors (or our 'anxiety of influence')? Hamburger, like Bloom, suggests that the '... modern poet may "number the streaks of the tulip" and not only think, but hope, that he has left it at that; but, whether he likes it or not, he has said something new about flowers, and about men.'<sup>201</sup> Whilst the poet's material remains ubiquitous or archetypal, it is in the treatment of that material, with new and different tools of description, perhaps new language to a certain degree, that something new is created. For Rimbaud it is *après le déluge*;<sup>202</sup> for Dylan it is *Before the Flood*.<sup>203</sup>

The absorption of the terms of landscape into the country/myth of the self/selves is critical to the poetic way. I liken it to being a fish in water: it's what you do and who you are. I think the difference between Bloom's 'strong' poet and the 'weak' poet is that the former has found a way of doing this in a more conscious, studied way. Dylan said to one interviewer that he could no longer do what he had done in the sixties with his surrealist 'wild mercury' songs. I would agree to a certain degree. It is clear, however, that his recent output has proven his poetic intent and capacity is as vital as it ever was, somewhat richer and certainly no less captivating than it has been in the past. Paul Ricoeur, in his study *Oneself as Another*<sup>204</sup> suggests that life stories are made more intelligible when narrative models of plots, borrowed from history and/or fiction, are applied to them. For Ricoeur:

It therefore seems plausible to take the following chain of assertions as valid: self-understanding is an interpretation; interpretation of the self, in turn, finds in the narrative, among other signs and symbols, a privileged form of mediation; the latter borrows from history as well as fiction making a life story a fictional history or, if one prefers, a historical fiction, interweaving the historiographic style of biographies with the novelistic style of imaginary autobiographies.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Gray, M. (2006). *The Bob Dylan Encyclopaedia*. New York: Continuum.

<sup>201</sup> Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry*, p. 20.

<sup>202</sup> From his poem 'Illuminations'. Fowle, *ibid.* p. 213

<sup>203</sup> Dylan's 70s comeback album *Before the Flood*; no doubt an ironic play on Rimbaud's version of the phrase!

<sup>204</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, p. 114.

Ricoeur opens us to a final question, albeit one that cannot be more fully explored here yet can perhaps be utilised as an indicator for further study following the themes of the current essay: what is true in what I am reading? Pessoa would cast doubt on the truth of anything:

The more I meditate on our capacity for self-deception, the more my certainties crumble, slipping through my fingers as fine sand. And when this meditation becomes a feeling that clouds my mind, then the whole world appears to me as a mist of shadows, a twilight of edges and corners, a fiction of the interlude. ... And even my senses, to where I transfer my meditation in order to forget it, are a kind of slumber, something remote and derivative, an in-betweenness, variation, by-products of shadows and confusion. ... I was baffled by this dual existence of truth.<sup>206</sup>

It is easy to fall into the trap of relativism here and it is Nietzsche who leads us to the hard ‘truth’ of multiple realities:

It is in a similarly restricted sense that man now wants nothing but truth: he desires the pleasant, life-preserving consequences of truth. He is indifferent toward pure knowledge which has no consequences; toward those truths which are possibly harmful and destructive he is even hostilely inclined. And besides, what about these linguistic conventions themselves? Are they perhaps products of knowledge that is of the sense of truth? Are designations congruent with things? Is language the adequate expression of all realities?<sup>207</sup>

Nietzsche asks

What then is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after a long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical and binding; they are

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<sup>206</sup> Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, p.182.

<sup>207</sup> Nietzsche, F. (1979). *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870s*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. Translated and edited by Daniel Breazeale. p. 81. Further ‘It is only by means of forgetfulness that man can ever reach the point of fancying himself to possess a ‘truth’ of the grade indicated. ... What is a word? It is the copy in sound of a nerve stimulus. But the further inference from the nerve stimulus to a cause outside of us is already the result of a false and unjustifiable application of the principle of sufficient reason. If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for designations, then how could we still dare to say “the stone is hard”, as if “hard” were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation!’ We have not as yet, in my opinion, exhausted Nietzsche’s contribution to the discourse on poetics and this particular chapter ‘On Truth and Lies in a Normal sense’ is a must text for anyone interested in the questions that Rimbaud, Pessoa and Dylan raise.

metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins.<sup>208</sup>

Of course this is all less verbose and more easily resolved if we take the simple position of singer-songwriter Suzanne Vega: '[Dylan's] never pretended to be an academic, or even a nice guy. He is more likely to present himself as, well, a thief. Renegade, outlaw, artist. That's why we are passionate about him.'<sup>209</sup>

Certainly it is the stuff of life that links all poets in a common humanity whether through war, woe or words. The empirical 'I' becomes less and less apparent as the fluid and participatory, hidden or second 'I' or several is validated.



The poets I have discussed in this essay, albeit ever so briefly, struggled and, in Dylan's case, continue to struggle, with the questions of how it is possible 'to be or not to be'.<sup>210</sup> They attempt to address the questions of being and becoming, and they challenge us today with a range of ways of *how* to 'be' in this splintered, fragmented and competitive world; the world of the self and the non-self. They have provided us tools for reconstitution, of gathering ourselves up and renewing our own notions of being by giving us new ways of thinking about the drama of being caught in the 'metaxy', the tension in the gap between that towards that to which we aspire and that which we are. They have done this as a part of the great heritage they have received from the first poets such as Hesiod who had:

... discerned the divine presence as formatively moving in all of the 'things', compromising the whole evolutionary range of reality from earth and heaven to the just order of gods and men, and has concentrated the ability to reveal

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>209</sup> Decurtis, A. (2009). *Bob Dylan as songwriter* in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Edited by Kevin J. H. Dettmar.

<sup>210</sup> *Hamlet*

this truth of reality in the person of the remembering *aiodos*, the singer for everyman.<sup>211</sup>

‘Who is it that writes?’ is the central question of this thesis. I have looked at several prominent poets who wrote over three centuries, within different times and cultures. These poets have attempted to undo reified or ossified concepts of ‘self’ and have tried to create new ways of expressing and examining the notions of subjectivity and of ‘self’. Several things have stood out for me in this study as a result of tackling that question: the Writer (writ large) is situated in a physiological, geographical, weathered place where wind, stone, falling, sitting, smiling, howling, bleeding have always been, and will always be, the basic stuff of poetry; the notion of a fixed, empirical self is a nonsense based on cultural constructs and milieus, whereas the Writer/poet is in fact different at every turn and corner and accesses a range of selves based on anything from a Lacanian ‘second self’ of the unconscious, physiology, cultural structuring or a host of prevaricating factors it would take another thesis to explore. The Writer, in short, is not who we think we see, know, experience, always that same individual at every point or location in time. Finally, this impermanent, unfixed, malleable writer / self is situated by her / his context and remains in a constant tension or negotiation with the ubiquitous symbols of world / time. The new in this world is made possible through how the Writer attempts to make sense of his / her experience and *how* he / she articulates those experiences and symbols throughout time.

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<sup>211</sup> Voegelin, E. (2000). *Order and History. Volume V In Search of Order. From The Collected works of Eric Voegelin Volume 18.* p.102.

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