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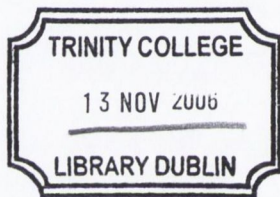
**The Sea of Disappointment: Thomas Kinsella's Pursuit
of the Real**

Andrew Joseph Fitzsimons

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Trinity College, Dublin

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Summary

This study provides an extensive examination of the work of Thomas Kinsella by addressing the fundamental question of form which his poetry presents. There are two phases in Kinsella's writing: one contains poems written for the most part in conventional stanzaic forms; the other utilises forms less bounded by inherited formal convention. Discussions of Kinsella acknowledge the fact of the formal change, and explore how this is manifested in the poems, yet so far no discussion has provided a reading of the underlying impulse that would account for the transformations in the work. This thesis shows why Kinsella questioned the formal procedures of the poetry, and establishes the fundamental drive behind his poetic activity as the pursuit of the Real.

In the 'exploratory form' of 'Nightwalker' (1968) Kinsella displays an intense imaginative engagement with Irish social and political predicaments. In the Peppercanister series, Kinsella returns again and again to the topography and event of the 'established personal places' of his Kilmainham/Inchicore childhood and youth. In his first two major volumes, however, there is a relative lack of engagement with Irish material. In *Poems* (1956), *Another September* (1958) and to an extent in *Downstream* (1962) he deliberately avoids specifically Irish concerns. The critical drive behind this study is to account for the formal transformation in Kinsella's writing and show the connection between the formal and thematic shifts in his work. By an extensive examination of Kinsella's early work, including unpublished work and notes contained in the Kinsella archive at Emory University, and the notes Kinsella made in preparation for the work which became the Peppercanister series, the thesis shows that the radical alterations in Kinsella's poetry derive from continuous and consistent preoccupations.

Kinsella's first poems provide clues to the coherence underpinning his aesthetic

adjustment. In the poems of the 1950s and early 1960s the Real is an undefined, chimerical goal that '[t]he mind leaped towards,' ('Lead' *AS* 45); and which in 'Baggot Street Deserta' maintains a distance and privacy '[t]hat may be countered or may not' (*AS* 31). What the Real consists of is elusive, but its effect is palpable. The Real in Kinsella's early work is the '[r]eality, nagging like the tide,' which undermines form and the efficacy of language. Within Kinsella's pursuit of the Real an ever-returning disappointment questions the ways in which poetic form responds to this corrosive effect. This disappointment has form-shattering consequences.

For Kinsella the quintessential shape of reality is toward dissolution and disappointment. I show that Kinsella's aesthetic disappointment has roots in this fundamental orientation, which takes part of its colouring from the social and political background of post-Independence Ireland. The social conditions into which he was born, and the society within which he was educated and raised, did not *create* Kinsella's orientation toward disappointment. The particular conditions of his social background, and of post-Independence Ireland, however, confirmed an imaginative and temperamental inclination to see the Real in terms of hope perpetually fading away into disappointment.

As with Carl Jung, whose work underpins his poetic development, Kinsella's work is 'permeated and held together by one idea and one goal.' For Jung that goal was to 'penetrate into the secret of the personality.' For Kinsella the goal is to penetrate the 'secret of the Real.' Kinsella's poetry, translations, criticism and his examination of the 'dual tradition' of Irish writing, can be explained from this central point, and all his works relate to this one theme. In pursuing this goal, Kinsella's poetry enacts a continuous adjustment to a disappointment which is the fundamental component in his conception of the Real.

Abbreviations

<i>AS</i>	<i>Another September</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1958.
<i>BF</i>	<i>Blood and Family</i> . Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.
<i>CP 1956-1994</i>	<i>Collected Poems 1956-1994</i> . Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.
<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Poems 1956-2001</i> . Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2001.
<i>D</i>	<i>Downstream</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press; London: Oxford UP, 1962.
<i>FCC</i>	<i>From Centre City</i> . Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
<i>FD</i>	<i>Fifteen Dead</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979.
<i>N</i>	<i>Nightwalker and Other Poems</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1968.
<i>NP 1973</i>	<i>New Poems 1973</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1973.
<i>One</i>	<i>One and Other Poems</i> . Dublin: Dolmen Press; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979.
<i>P</i>	<i>Poems</i> Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1956.

Note:

In quoting from the Peppercanister series of poems I use the versions collected in the trade editions published by Dolmen and Oxford University Press; for *The Pen Shop* and subsequent Peppercanisters the versions published in *Collected Poems* (Carcanet, 2001).

Introduction

the border marches/ Of the Real

The fundamental question the poetry of Thomas Kinsella presents concerns form. Though recent criticism has begun to see Kinsella's development as incremental rather than abrupt, it is undeniable that there are two phases in Kinsella's writing: one contains poems written for the most part in conventional stanzaic forms; the other utilises forms less bounded by inherited formal convention. Why should this be the case? Why did a poet who had achieved aesthetic and critical success question the formal procedures of the poetry in which he had achieved that success?

In the 'exploratory form'¹ of 'Nightwalker' (1968) Kinsella displays an intense imaginative engagement with Irish social and political predicaments. In the *Peppercanister* series, Kinsella returns again and again to the topography and event of the 'established personal places' of his Kilmainham/Inchicore childhood and youth. In his first two major volumes, however, there is a relative lack of engagement with Irish material. In *Poems* (1956), *Another September* (1958) and to an extent in *Downstream* (1962) he deliberately avoids specifically Irish concerns. Why should this have been the case? Is there a connection between both the formal and thematic shifts in Kinsella's work?

Discussions of Kinsella have, of course, acknowledged the fact of the formal change, and explored how this is manifested in the poems. Brian John has said that it is 'hardly debatable' that Kinsella's poetry can be divided into distinct stages, yet so far no discussion has attempted to provide a reading of the underlying impulse that would account for the transformations in the work. Typical discussion accounts for, rather than explains, the origin of Kinsella's impulse. Temperament seems to be the unstated answer underlying, for instance, Thomas Jackson's *The Whole Matter*; other discussions, such as Brian John's, tend toward varying levels of descriptiveness in their analyses. Derval Tubridy's account of *The Peppercanister Poems* does not engage with the question as she concentrates on the stage of Kinsella's career when the formal change had already been achieved. Maurice Harmon's 1974 study, in contrast and by virtue of its publication date, is heavily weighed in favour of the earlier work and has been superseded by Kinsella's achievements subsequent to its appearance. No discussion, therefore, has adequately confronted this straightforward and urgent question.

Previous discussions of Kinsella's aesthetic reformulation prefer to delineate the factors enabling the formal change to occur rather than explore the impulse behind Kinsella's attraction to those same enabling factors. These enabling factors fall into two main strands:

¹ Thomas Kinsella, interviewed by John Haffenden, in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber, 1981) 101.

Anglo-American modernism on the one hand, and the Irish literary tradition, in both the English and Irish languages, on the other. Thus we have accounts which emphasize the influence of Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams on Kinsella's work (Alex Davis, for instance)²; and accounts exploring his work as translator from the Irish language and the influence of this literature on his desire to break away from 'English models' (Donatella Abbate Badin)³. Thomas Jackson's *The Whole Matter* (1995) attempts to provide a philosophical framework within which to understand the entire Kinsella *oeuvre*, but his argument takes us no further in understanding the impulse behind Kinsella's re-evaluation of poetic procedure, rather it serves to place *corroborations* of his artistic direction as the motivation behind Kinsella's reformulated aesthetic: 'Turning from stylistic, and stylish, influences like Auden, turning even from his occasional echoing of his honored compatriot Austin Clarke, he finds in Joyce, in Pound and Williams the motivation to a more inclusive form of attention.'⁴ By examining Kinsella's early work, particularly the unpublished work, I will show that this desire for an 'inclusive form of attention' was present in Kinsella's work from the beginning.

In *Reading the Ground* (1996) Brian John places Kinsella's 'opening up' of poetic form within the context of the economic and socio-cultural 'opening up' of Ireland in the 1960s. Though tentative, John's linking of literary and social transformation elides the often bitterly antagonistic nature of Kinsella's own reading of Irish social change. John writes

Indeed, one might suggest a correlation between the rapid social, economic, and cultural changes in the Ireland of the sixties and Kinsella's own poetic development. Coinciding with the increasingly liberal attitudes prevalent in Irish society, Kinsella consciously examined and rejected "received forms and rhyme" in favor of "free forms" and poems with "unique shape."⁵

There is an element of social impulse behind Kinsella's re-evaluation of form. That social impulse derives less from a 'liberalizing' of Kinsella's views on poetic form in a kind of poetic by-product of the liberalizing of Irish society, than as a corollary to what I call his 'pursuit of the Real.'⁶

² Alex Davis, 'Thomas Kinsella and the Pound Legacy: His Jacket on the Cantos,' *Thomas Kinsella* spec. issue of *Irish University Review* 31: 1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 38-53.

³ Donatella Abbate Badin, 'The Abandoned Formalism of Kinsella's Early Poetry,' *Thomas Kinsella* spec. issue of *Irish University Review*: 22.

⁴ Thomas H. Jackson, *The Whole Matter: The Poetic Evolution of Thomas Kinsella* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP; Dublin: Lilliput, 1995) xii.

⁵ Brian John, *Reading the Ground: The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) 9. John's quotations come from Kinsella's interview with Haffenden 108.

⁶ A phrase first used in the 1930s by the French poet Oscar Milosz to define the quintessence of the

Kinsella's poems of the 1950s and early 1960s grapple with the sense of alienation and distance from authentic relation that Erich Heller in *The Disinherited Mind* (1952) described when he remarked that the modern poet's alienation derives in part from an acute awareness of having been 'left outside through a peculiar contraction of the circumference of the real.'⁷ In early Kinsella the Real is an undefined, chimerical goal that '[t]he mind leaped towards,' ('Lead' *AS* 45); and which in 'Baggot Street Deserta' maintains a distance and privacy '[t]hat may be countered or may not' (*AS* 31).

In a review of *New Poems 1973* Eavan Boland asserts that though Kinsella's stylistic change 'is profound, it is also profoundly coherent.'⁸ Kinsella's first poems provide clues to the coherence underpinning his aesthetic adjustment. In an untitled work, described as a 'Libretto for Reidy' [Seán Ó Riada], and dated January 1958, the character 'King' says to the central character 'Damian': 'I am tempted . . . / Tempted to discover if your eyes, / Looking an instant on a naked queen . . . / An instant . . . on the secret of the Real, would not blink shut with blinding discontent.'⁹ What the Real consists of is elusive, but its effect is palpable, and it is to this effect that Kinsella's poetry attempts to respond. The Real in Kinsella's first work is the corrosive '[r]eality, nagging like the tide,' which undermines form and the efficacy of language until only a 'shell of speech' remains ('Death of a Queen' *AS* 1). Like Kinsella, Louis MacNeice was aware of what Eric Homberger describes as 'the anarchic world constantly assert[ing] its independence of the mental sets which men impose upon it.'¹⁰ In 'Mutations' MacNeice writes:

For every static world that you or I impose
Upon the real one must crack at times and new

poetic act. In an essay entitled 'Poets and the Human Family' his Polish cousin, Czeslaw Milosz, borrows the phrase to argue against a 'pure poetry' which would isolate itself from History, from 'Movement,' which, again quoting Oscar Milosz, 'would remove religion, philosophy, science, politics from its domain,' *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983) 29, which collected the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures Milosz delivered at Harvard University in 1981-1982. The similarities with Kinsella's transformation are striking. Kinsella moves from a 'pure poetry' consoled by its own formal procedures, to a position which shares the 'openness' of the poetics outlined by Milosz. Milosz's discussion of the term 'Movement' also offers an insight into the philosophical orientation Kinsella displays in the Peppercanister poems: 'It is worth noting that it is not the word Progress but Movement (capitalized) that is used, and this has manifold implications, for Progress denotes a linear ascension while Movement stresses incessant change and a dialectical play of opposites,' 35. In this thesis when referring to the quintessential attributes of Kinsella's work I prefer the term 'Kinsellian' to Kinsellan or Kinsellaesque.

⁷ Erich Heller, 'The Hazard of Modern Poetry,' in *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1952; fourth edition 1975) 278.

⁸ Eavan Boland, 'The New Kinsella,' review of *New Poems 1973*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 28 July 1973: 12.

⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 10. These lines can be found on page 4. The version in Folder 9 is not dated.

¹⁰ Eric Homberger, *The Art of the Real: Poetry In England and America Since 1939* (London and Toronto: Dent; Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977) 17.

Patterns from new disorders open like a rose
And old assumptions yield to new sensation; [. . .]¹¹

Yet for MacNeice this awareness does not have the repercussions for form that it had for Kinsella. So the question remains: what reasons unique to Kinsella lead him to his aesthetic re-alignment? Within Kinsella's pursuit of the Real an ever-returning disappointment questions the ways in which poetic form responds to the corrosive effect of the Real. This disappointment has form-shattering consequences.

For Kinsella the quintessential shape of reality is toward dissolution. Kinsella's aesthetic disappointment has roots in this fundamental orientation, which takes part of its colouring from the social and political background of post-Independence Ireland. The social conditions into which he was born, and the society within which he was educated and raised, did not *create* Kinsella's orientation toward disappointment. The particular conditions of his social background, and pertaining in post-Independence Ireland, however, confirmed an imaginative and temperamental inclination to see the Real in terms of hope continually fading away into disappointment.

As with Carl Jung, whose work underpins much of his poetic development, Kinsella's work is 'permeated and held together by one idea and one goal.' For Jung that goal was to 'penetrate into the secret of the personality.'¹² For Kinsella the goal is to penetrate the 'secret of the Real.' Kinsella's poetry, translations, criticism and his examination of the 'dual tradition' of Irish writing, can be explained from this central point, and all his works relate to this one theme. In pursuing this goal, Kinsella's poetry enacts a continuous adjustment to a disappointment which is the fundamental component in his conception of the Real.

¹¹ Louis MacNeice, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 1966) 195. Eric Homberger uses the first three lines quoted above in *The Art of the Real* 17-8.

¹² Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* rev. edn. ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (1973; New York: Vintage, 1989) 206.

Chapter 1

Alone we make symbols of love

I

There is a note in the drafts of 'Baggot Street Deserta' which reads: 'greatest loneliness occurs in the presence of the greatest no. of unattainables.'¹ The themes introduced dominate Kinsella's poetry of the 1950s: intense isolation and lack. In unpublished work, and in the early Dolmen Press pamphlets *The Starlit Eye* (1952) and *Per Imaginem* (1953), as well as in his first two volumes *Poems* (1956) and *Another September* (1958), Kinsella is concerned with the remoteness of love and of knowledge, and of inauthentic relations with the world as a consequence. In *Per Imaginem* poetry is produced out of the vacuum created by the lack of both love and knowledge, as a means of compensation and consolation, but also of potential encounter. At the same time, however, poetry intensifies isolation, and may even produce, as in *The Starlit Eye*, a fracturing of vision. 'All is absence. I, in the midst of my own city, more absent than any,'² Kinsella's note continues. Though this is Kinsella talking to himself, the voice and sentiment point in a number of directions: heightened to a pitch of 'romantic isolation,'³ it becomes the speaker of 'Baggot Street Deserta'; in a later poem, *The Good Fight* (1973), Kinsella re-situates the existential despair into an alter ego, the persona of Lee Harvey Oswald. What the notes to 'Baggot Street Deserta' reveal most significantly, though, is the fundamental basis of Kinsella's entire work 'on shreds of disappointment.'⁴

The drafts of the poem show that the concern with evolutionary energies, found and explored in (and by) the poetic context of 'The Travelling Companion,' and in 'Baggot Street Deserta'⁵ itself, has 'great tendrils reaching out and connecting'⁶ with the poems 'Downstream,' and 'Nightwalker,' and with the poetry of the Peppercanister series. Rather than

¹ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

² Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

³ Denis Donoghue saw in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' Kinsella's 'tendency to luxuriate in gestures of romantic isolation,' 'Irish Writing,' *The Month* (March 1957), Kinsella Papers, OBV 1. O'Donoghue is referring to the first printed version of the poem.

⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

⁵ Consider the lines 'Dreamer's heads/ Lie mesmerised in Dublin's beds/ Flashing with images, Adam's morse' (*AS* 29). The connections between 'Baggot Street Deserta' and 'Downstream' are borne out by the fact that in the first published version of the former, entitled 'Unfinished Business,' *Irish Writing* 34 (Spring 1956): 51-55, the speaker wants to write 'a friendly letter/ To someone in another city.' The drafts reveal the addressee as Seán White and refer specifically to the anecdote of the discovered body which will feature in 'Downstream,' citing the source of the anecdote as White. John (37-43) has a useful discussion of the three different published versions of 'Baggot Street Deserta': the *Irish Writing* version, the revision printed under its final title in *Poetry Now* (1956), ed. G.S. Fraser, and the final version of the poem published in *Another September*.

⁶ Kinsella, in an interview with Elgy Gillespie, *Irish Times* 20 June 1981, Weekend: 14.

Kinsella's interest in the evolutionary thought of Teilhard de Chardin and the depth psychology of Carl Jung deriving from a desire for what Thomas H. Jackson calls a 'more inclusive form of attention,'⁷ this interest in biological and psychic evolution is fundamental in Kinsella's work, even at the supposedly 'formalist' stage of his writing. 'The Travelling Companion' (AS 5) treats the mysterious propulsive energy of life, which travels alongside but is separate from human consciousness, as a form of biological optimism. This optimism is, however, like the Penelope of the poem 'Ulysses,' 'tampered with/ By time' (AS 17). The relentless energy is, in its turn, accompanied by the dark power of the temporal, as the life principle careers about its way, 'the halls of night are slowly filling with force' (AS 5). The thematic components of Kinsella's entire career are already in place: the drive of the life process, undermined by a coterminous force that works away at, and against it. Here is the crucible out of which Kinsella forges his poetic development; a pursuit of the Real, accompanied by an endlessly returning disappointment. In a note which is crucial to Kinsella's work, he links 'Baggot Street Deserta' to 'The Travelling Companion' through reference to what he calls the 'thesis' of the earlier poem, which underpins his aesthetic drive toward the Real and aesthetic re-adjustments in the face of disappointment: 'Time= Hope + Disappointment.'⁸

The great circle of hope and disappointment that is temporal existence is the theme of an unpublished piece called 'Daybreak and A Candle End.'⁹ The poem, according to Rosenberg, takes place on Good Friday, in Cormac's chapel, in Cashel, a setting that, along with the Yeatsian echo of the title, links the poem with Yeats's 'The Double Vision of Michael Robartes.'¹⁰ The gnomic pre-dawn situation that the poem plays out, a dialogue between 'Tenor' and 'Baritone,' is, as in Yeats, that of 'cold spirits called up by the mind's eye.' Rosenberg rightly criticizes the poem for portentousness and metaphorical clumsiness, for what she calls 'mysterious articulation' instead of 'the articulation of a mystery' which Kinsella achieves in his later work.¹¹ The poem is chiefly interesting for its echoes, in imagery and manner, of the later work; for instance the images of 'cupped lip' and 'cauldron,' as emblem of poetic form ('the eloquent vessel of eternity'), and such lines as the 'knot in the snake's

⁷ Jackson xii. Brian John implies a similar motive behind Kinsella's aesthetic development.

⁸ In the drafts to 'Baggot Street Deserta' contained in the Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10, Kinsella refers to this formula as the 'thesis' of 'The Travelling Companion.'

⁹ An excerpt, under the title 'Fragments of a Burst Onion,' was published in the *National Student* 115 (May 1952): 9. The first holograph ms is dated 13/5/1951 and contains 662 lines (Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 1). The title 'Daybreak and A Candle End' is the refrain from W.B. Yeats's 'The Wild Old Wicked Man' (pp. 310-11 of *Collected Poems* ed. Richard J. Finneran), of which the lines 'A young man in the dark am I' and 'All men live in suffering/ I know as few can know' are richly suggestive in the context of Kinsella's poetry in the early 1950s.

¹⁰ 'On the grey rock of Cashel the mind's eye/ Has called up the cold spirits that are born/ When the old moon is vanished from the sky/ And the new still hides her horn,' Yeats 170.

¹¹ Rosenberg 116.

backbone' look forward to *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1973).¹² The thematic concerns of the poem are paramount in Kinsella: 'Daybreak and a Candle End' offers a glimpse of the isolation that pervades Kinsella's work, the overcoming of which is the origin of both his first style, and his later use of mythic and Jungian sources. The lines 'consuming and creating/ creating in the pain of isolation' link the solitary act of creation with the act of eating but also with pain, a gesture which will also mark Kinsella's entire work.¹³ As well as this, the poem deals with what critics such as Calvin Bedient, Edna Longley, Alex Davis and Ian Flanagan see as the quintessential Kinsellian problem of order and chaos ('there may be order, there is no order now'), and the search for the means and the manner to fulfil vision ('how fill the cauldron I have yet to find').¹⁴

The poem expresses, in its own gauche way, a desire to abolish the destructive temporal cycle. The 'Tenor' after a journey of mythical import to 'unimaginable places/ and in the unimaginable pause when time was not' returns with 'the pearl of life' and the gift of art. In Mircea Eliade's *Images and Symbols*, a study of the symbolism of mythical thought, the pearl is 'an emblem of absolute reality'¹⁵ [Eliade's emphasis]. Kinsella's poem, as if possessed already of imaginative access to the primal realm he will explore in *Notes from the Land of the Dead* and *One* (1974), sees art as a means to knowledge of self and of an ultimate reality:

For a man when he studies himself will see
that he is a weaver
shuttling from darkness to light
and from light onward to darkness.

'Daybreak and a Candle End'¹⁶

The gift of art comes from outside the wheel of becoming, from outside time, and offers access to the eternal: 'Through it, darkly,/ will come the fruits of the age of the world.' Underlying the poem is the sense that in the here and now 'we see through a glass darkly' and the poem

¹² Rosenberg 116.

¹³ Seamus Deane has written that in Kinsella 'Eating is the act of survival, but it is never far removed from disgust.' *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature 1880-1980* (Winston-Salem, N.C: Wake Forest UP, 1985) 137. Brian John (17) also uses this quotation from Deane. Donatella Abbate Badin sees '[t]ropes related to hunger, drinking, and eating' as rhetorical complements to an order Kinsella believes immanent in routines of the everyday: 'synecdoches to prove that laws of order are at work in the reality around him,' Badin 20.

¹⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 1.

¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (1961; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991) 144.

¹⁶ The lines here look forward to 'Death Bed': 'Our people are most vulnerable to loss/ when we gather like this to one side, around some death,// and try to weave it into our lives' (*NP* 1973 70). The poem ends 'We can weave nothing' (*NP* 71). Imagery of art as weaving and unweaving occurs also in the

self-consciously echoes 1 Corinthians 13:12, but crucially there is also here an intimation that even darkness is part of the eternal, and that access to the Real, as in the 'Libretto for Reidy,' will not bring contentment.

The lapidary is Kinsella's model of aesthetic perfection in his work of the 1950s. In the essay 'Time and the Poet' (1959) he sees in Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' the 'sadness and the state of the human race [. . .] raised out of the cyclical river.' In this process the human plight, Kinsella says, 'almost seem[s] to take on the characteristics of the stone.'¹⁷ The lapidary is, in 'Daybreak and a Candle End,' an access to eternity, to a timeless Real, yet it is not in itself outside the depredations of time, and does not, therefore, overcome the cycle of hope and disappointment embedded in temporality. What a lapidary aesthetic reveals, as in the aptly titled poem 'Statuesque,' is that this desire for the timeless Real is, Kinsella says, immemorial, 'the unbroken/ Need of man to utter the speechless and make/ Eternal gesture.'¹⁸

Most significantly, 'Daybreak and a Candle End' points to a concern and fatigue with the cyclical nature of time and experience, and with this unceasing need to 'make eternal gesture,' a fatigue which will crucially determine Kinsella's subsequent poetic practice. The poem ends:

The great rusty grappling hook
rose clearing and creaking from the past
and swung dangerously into the present.
The scabbed prong searched and plunged.
After a pause
it sank, satisfied, into the black socket of the future
and yanked the jerking framework off
into another long spin.¹⁹

The cycle of past, present, and future, is taking 'another long spin.' This use of 'another,' which calls to mind how the word is used in the title for Kinsella's first major volume, *Another September*, expresses a tiredness with repetition and recurrence, at the same time as it acknowledges that repetition is at the heart of the cycle of reality, and part of the processes of art.²⁰ In 'The Monk' (AS 25) Kinsella places the self-abnegating, world-denying religious

poem 'Ulysses' (AS 15-17), and in Kinsella's quotation from Proust in 'Time and the Poet.'

¹⁷ Kinsella, *An File agus an tAm* (Time and the Poet), paper signed Tomás Ó Cinnseallaigh, *Comhar* 18 June 1959, 24-26 and 18 July 1959: 23-26. English translation by Máire Ní Chinnéide in Carolyn Rosenberg, "Let Our Gaze Blaze: The Recent Poetry of Thomas Kinsella," diss., Kent State University, 1980, 711-721, 721. Henceforward 'Time and the Poet.'

¹⁸ 'Statuesque,' *National Student* 114 (March 1952): 18.

¹⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 2.

²⁰ Think of the poems 'Lent is for Repentance': 'To one sick of the rose the flash is barren./ He shall have death of a tiredness in the blood' (AS 23), or 'First Light': 'Stars ticked uncontrollably down/ The

optimism of the monk, who sees 'Spring in February night,' within this context of inevitable, and relentlessly recurring, decay: 'Night blooms, accidentally plucked,/ Each lank dawn devours.' The emphasis in Kinsella is, invariably, at the ebb rather than the full. Though, as another unpublished poem of the early 1950s puts it, 'Hope is a Cycle,'²¹ the cycle ends in winter, the movement is from dark to light and back to dark. The origin of the emphasis resides in what the last line of 'Statuesque' says is 'Our poignant inclination [. . .] towards death.'²² Though hope indeed exists, and poetry is an intimate part of the hopeful enterprise, in Kinsella there is none of the self-persuasion of Shelley's 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'²³ In the unpublished poem 'The Road to the South' Kinsella displays an awareness that there is a mysterious something that will continually get the better of the urge to achieve, will undermine the positive gain of poetry: 'I will dare cover her with images of promise still,/ and yet be haunted.'²⁴ What this shows is that, even at such an early stage of his writing, Kinsella's capacity for disappointment is the motivating factor for aesthetic development.

The significance of the emphasis I am placing on the thematic element in these admittedly weak, and justifiably unpublished poems, becomes clearer when Kinsella's comments on theme, in 'Time and the Poet,' are taken into account:

If we remember the conscious effort the poet puts into his work and the strong, single-minded attempt he makes at attaining his goal, we will see two individual entities being born – the theme and the poet's own effort. The poet's Muse probably owes its origin to the former.²⁵

Theme, according to Kinsella, produces the poetic consequences. Kinsella's 'single-minded attempt' to access the Real gives birth to a disappointment that was already there, already fundamental; a disappointment lent its particular colouring and emphasis, by the circumstances of post-Independence Ireland and Kinsella's family background. The Real as the goal of Kinsella's first work produces both the formal finish of the poems, the lapidary 'eternal gesture,' and the dissatisfaction with form, the 'eternal need,' that motivates further work. The Real, paradoxically, produces dissatisfaction and disappointment which in turn provokes aesthetic continuation and renewal. The example from Proust which Kinsella uses to illustrate his point

night-face, registering another/ Million routine stoops/ Into the kindling reeds as quietly accomplished, again' (*AS* 14).

²¹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 25.

²² *Op.cit.*

²³ P.B. Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind,' *The Complete Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: Modern Library, 1994) 618.

²⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 36.

²⁵ 'Time and the Poet' 713.

about theme and muse reveals the motive force behind Kinsella's own aesthetic drive:

. . . while my love, incessantly waiting for the morrow to bring a confession of Gilberte's love for me, destroyed, unravelled every evening, the ill-done work of the day, in some shadowed part of my being was an unknown weaver who would not leave where they lay the severed threads, but collected and rearranged them.²⁶

Kinsella's identification with Proust's rendering of the mysterious establishing, and re-establishing, of the imagination's creative, and destructive, independence is seen in the poem 'Clarence Mangan': 'Long I waited to know what naked meeting would come/ With what was moving behind my eyes and desolating/ What I touched' (AS 24). In these early poems Kinsella attempts to play with the forces that work upon his imagination. In the 'Libretto for Reidy,' and in 'Daybreak and a Candle End,' he is, as he said of Yeats, 'trying to grasp the substance of his own work, even to have a conversation with it.'²⁷

In the poems of the 1950s the controlling and harnessing of the aesthetic impulse, the 'unknown weaver,' within a willed construction, is the theme produced by the poet's conscious effort at poetry making. It is a self-devouring process, in which deliberate choice produces the subject of the poem, which in turn produces the creative effort to make the poem. The emblem of such a process is the *ouroboros*, the snake eating its own tail, which later becomes so prominently a part of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*. At this stage the Jungian psychological profile of this creative process has not become a conscious part of the aesthetic. What is revealed is an anti-poetry theme, derived from the 'bloody labour' involved, and from the disappointing gap between idea and its realization in form. In 'A Shout after Hard Work' the creative process is seen in terms of an illegitimate, unwanted pregnancy and difficult birth:

*Of all the bastard babies begotten in my head
By some nagging murmur in the intellect's bed
Most ferocity you had, lovingkindness least,
When you kicked my creativity squarely in the teeth.
No sin of pleasure got you, no marvellous fornication,
Nothing but the needle of art insemination
Brought on such bloody labour, but I got you out in strings*

²⁶ 'Time and the Poet' 713. First ellipsis in the original quotation. Kinsella is quoting from 'Place Names: the Name,' chapter 4 of 'Swann's Way' in the unrevised C.K Scott Moncrieff translation. The revised version replaces the word 'weaver' with 'seamstress,' Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K Scott Moncrieff, revised by Terence Kilmartin, vol. 1 (1981; London: Penguin Classics, 1985) 445.

²⁷ 'Time and the Poet' 714.

And by God you're in a cradle that a hard hand swings.

I hack these words across the belly of the earth:

IMMACULATE PERCEPTION'S NO IMMACULATE BIRTH.

(P 23)²⁸

Kinsella here is a conscious artificer, acutely aware of the materials at hand, finding 'the poet's order of drama in the very kick of the words.'²⁹ The 'kick' seems almost literal in 'A Shout after Hard Work,' where the struggle is against the words themselves. The ability of the poet to make words establish a satisfying relationship to 'the nagging murmur in the intellect's bed' is suspect. There is a doubt as to the ability of the poet to access language which will adequately represent what the creative instinct wants to achieve. There is, therefore, a measure of self-disappointment in the poem, and a sense that the fault lies deeper, within words, and in the poetic enterprise itself. To counter the debilitating effect of such doubt Kinsella posits an intellectually reasoned, if not entirely satisfactory, acceptance of the limits of words within achieved form, the 'getting out in strings.' The quality of the artifice, almost, but not quite, justifies the labour involved.

Disdain for poetry is also present in an uncollected poem, 'Doomsday,' a satirical look at poetry (not least his own) and literary criticism. A crowd of critics '[s]lapping each other's backs in the arena' demand that the poet rid himself of his preoccupation with symbolic flowers. This poet, they say, should 'have more bite in [his] lines.' As a remedy to his unworldliness they recommend a version of Yeats's place where all the ladders start: 'let's toss him/ On his puss in the mud./ Let him search in that for his symbols and signs.' The poet, however, will not be turned. Unconvinced by the imaginative prerogatives the poet would claim for himself and for poetry (and so to undercut the poet's denial of the worldly values of the critics) Kinsella gives him a speech impediment: 'I theek a pure emblem/ For abtholute vithion/ And leave them alone to their twade and commerth.' The poet remains in his 'ivory tower' while the forces of destruction gather with 'Marvels of science with which to bomb earth.' His main preoccupation is to 'find a thyllable to rhyme with 'bower.'³⁰

In an unpublished eclogue, 'Ending on a Balcony,' a dialogue between the pragmatic 'A' and the visionary 'B' in (unusually for Kinsella) the sestina form, the Real is both remote and present, paradisiacal and earthly. As in 'Daybreak and a Candle End' the poem contains imagery ('a steep and terrifying drop') that will reappear in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*. Though we

²⁸ The poem is italicised in the original.

²⁹ Padraic Fallon, 'Synge to Kinsella: Half-a-Century of Poetic Change,' review of *Collected Works and Poems*, Vol. 1, by J.M. Synge; and *Another September* and *Downstream*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 20 Oct. 1962: 12.

³⁰ 'Doomsday,' *National Student* 112 (Oct. 1951): 15.

never quite grasp what the two are arguing about, 'B' who resembles the figure of artist replies to the scepticism of 'A' concerning the 'point' of looking to the 'stars':

This and that,
The merely mortal things, that have a look
Of ghosts about them, are not worth a drop

Of that real blood which, battling in and out
Of the deathless heart, is needed among the stars
– And not there only, of course. Who was it that
discerned a steep and terrifying drop
inside the sand-grain's little crystal point?
What seems remote is *here*, if once you look.³¹

The allusion to Blake, as I show in Chapter 3, is significant for he is an underestimated influence on Kinsella's poetics. As in Blake the universal, the 'eternal gesture,' which seems remote and unattainable, is available '*here*, if once you look.' As in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' blood, physicality, is an access to a timeless Real associated with the biological basis of human life, in 'the real blood . . . / Of the deathless heart.' The search here is for the Real within reality, but reality ('This and that,/ The merely mortal things') is a source of distraction from the Real. There is an echo here of Yeats's 'The Cold Heaven,' in which a vision of heaven causes the distractions of the everyday ('every casual thought of this and that') to fall away.³² According to Richard Ellmann, Yeats's phrase borrows from Ruysbroek, who said 'the mystic ecstasy is "not this or that".'³³ Yet Kinsella's version of mysticism, if it is that, is body-bound. The yearning for the 'stars' confronts an acceptance of limit. The idea of necessary limit emerges in *Wormwood* (1966), which love provides as 'Love, the limiter.' The idea of body-bound limit contributes to the recognition of a graspable and necessary Real, which forms a significant part of Kinsella's reading of John Keats whose 'all embracing sensitivity [. . .] accepted the limitation that, in the final analysis it is in fact bound to the body rather than the spirit.'³⁴

Yet though the physical and the particular ('the sand-grain's little crystal point,' an anticipation of the crystal imagery in Kinsella's later work) is the potential origin of the Real, in practice the abundance and the malleability of the particular produces its own problems. The poetic act both reveals and intensifies the conflict. 'A Shout After Hard Work,' and 'Reflection

³¹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 23.

³² Yeats 125.

³³ Richard Ellmann, *Yeats: The Man and the Masks* (1948; New York: Norton, 1999) 208.

³⁴ 'Time and the Poet' 720.

of a Poet' disclose ambivalent feelings about the origins and efficacy of poetry:

Why should you take a pen and hold it so
And stare at twenty ruled lines on a page,
Feeling the solid things break up and go
To pieces and time break adrift from age?³⁵

The concentrated act of writing produces fragmentation. This speaker/poet is suspicious of the editing of experience and the necessity for aesthetic selection, of the poet who will 'steal selectively from what you've found.' Love, however, can overcome the worst excesses of doubt. In *The Starlit Eye* (1952) the beloved helps to unify the poet's fractured and, one senses, fracturing, perspective:

That spare and frigid frame of stars
and the minute particulars
of this girl's patient, cool intent
are not at one, and scarcely meant
to occupy me both together.

(*The Starlit Eye* 5)

As Robin Skelton noted, the poem introduces themes that pervade Kinsella's work: a divided self in search of evidence of unity in the natural world and in the world of experience.³⁶ The natural world persuades the speaker that he is mistaken in seeing 'dichotomy' when there is so much evidence of communion, and with this evidence comes the even greater bonus provided by the lover:

Earthly strand and abstract ocean
mingle both in soft commotion;
day, still separate from night,
gathers in a fluid light.

Suddenly she beside me seems
the meeting place of various streams
converging in a placid mirror

³⁵ The poem was published in the *National Student*, 112 (October 1951): 15.

³⁶ Robin Skelton, 'The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella,' *Éire-Ireland* 4.1 (Spring 1969): 87.

that reflects my simple error.

(*The Starlit Eye* 6)

The rhyming couplets evoke the division the poem confronts, and the harmony the poem celebrates. The poem's moment of poise is temporary, and in later poems such as 'Phoenix Park' the experience of unity and the structure embodying the experience of unity become more difficult and tenuous. According to Skelton, Kinsella's work implies 'the unconquerably self-regarding solitude of the individual creature.'³⁷ A point emphasized by the mirror image that ends *The Starlit Eye* and the mirror imagery so frequently employed by Kinsella.³⁸ The self-regarding solitude is more than just a pose, and has aesthetic consequences that are explored in the poem 'Per Imaginem.'³⁹ This poem, with its resonant line 'Love I consider a difficult, scrupulous art' (*P* 9) is a poignant marker to Kinsella's development as a poet. As Harry Clifton has written, Kinsella examines 'love as process, as the grind of proximity and attrition over years.'⁴⁰

Like all of Kinsella's early poetry the poem is written out of a sense of isolation and lack which results in false vision and 'empty words': 'Alone we make symbols of love/ Out of echoes its lack makes in an empty word' (*P* 9). For the isolated individual love is remote, an 'inaccessible softness' (*P* 9). Language, itself a faulty means, can only be used to fabricate symbols in compensation for what is lacking, yet this is temporary and superficial, 'Words like swans are swallowed into the reeds/ With lapping airs and graces' (*P* 9). Subjective vision by itself cannot approach understanding; like love, understanding can only be achieved by 'composite hearts' (*P* 10).

The problem dramatized in the poem is not the struggle with a world inimical to the manipulations of intellectual harnessing. Like love, the Real exists, though at a remove from the isolated speaker. The artistic and human struggle is for the speaker/poet to achieve through the 'graven language' of art (a term which evokes Kinsella's ambivalence about poetry in its allusion to the biblical condemnation of idolatry and symbol-making) a mimicry of the silent

³⁷ Skelton: 87.

³⁸ For example in the aforementioned 'Reflection of a Poet,' 'Mirror in February' (*D* 63), 'The Serving Maid' (*N* 19-20), 'Worker in Mirror, at his Bench' (*NP* 1973 59-63) and *A Technical Supplement* 'XXII' (*One* 50-51).

³⁹ The poem was written for a friend's wedding (Brian Rooney: see Rosenberg 124) and was first published by Dolmen in March 1953, and in *Irish Writing* 24 (Sept. 1953): 68. It was substantially revised for its inclusion in *Poems* (1956). *Per Imaginem* refers to the Dolmen pamphlet, 'Per Imaginem' to the version published in *Poems*. The poem remained un-reprinted for many years until it appeared under the title 'Echoes' in *Collected Poems 1956-1994* (1996). This version contained no further revisions, apart from the title.

⁴⁰ Harry Clifton, 'Message from a Lost Atlantis,' *Poetry Review* 87: 1 (Spring 1997): 79. Kinsella has himself placed a retrospective significance upon this poem, in light of subsequent work, by placing it first in both the Oxford and Carcanet *Collected Poems*. It should be noted however that Kinsella

Real immanent in the world. Yet time, as hope and inevitable disappointment, works away at artistic synthesis, 'Time must pare such images to the heart' (*P* 9), forcing an ever more stringent and difficult achievement. For Kinsella art and love perform the same ordering, 'composite' function. Even though the actual object of love, the poet's lover, appears in most of the love lyrics in Kinsella's first collection, the poems are, as Maurice Harmon says, 'not so much tributes to a beloved's beauty or desirability as statements about the transforming power of love itself.'⁴¹ Love, like art, creates an implicit frame around the fragmentary, a temporary appeasing of a recurring sense of disintegration.

In a prescient review of *Poems*, Donald Davie saw that Kinsella had two poetic modes: one reflective, concerned with a particular occasion or experience; the other, 'a sort of impersonal *poesie pure*,' a self-contained 'universe of images not derived from any occasion nor tied to any particular situation.' It was in this second mode that Kinsella's originality lay, Davie believed, and where he felt 'most at home.'⁴² In this dual poetic process 'the experiences of poetry and love become intrinsically fused,'⁴³ as Brian John has remarked.

'Per Imaginem' is typical of this early strain, as Kinsella grapples with the intellectual idea of art and love as mirror images of each other; the connection is implicit in 'First Night Song':

Now, before I sleep,
My heart is cut down
Like poplar trees, nothing
– Poetry nor love – achieving.

(*P* 11)

Kinsella is most concerned with how art and love work in the struggle with inevitable dissolution. The most urgent difficulties of life and love and art are those connected with the precariousness of all when confronted by Time, whose destructive workings make necessary a scrupulousness of response.

The Starlit Eye, 'Per Imaginem,' and the work in *Poems*, are examples of Kinsella's predilection for lyrics in M.H. Abrams's sense of the term: 'any fairly short, non-narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling.'⁴⁴

rejected previous opportunities to reprint this poem, in *Poems 1956-1973*, for example.

⁴¹ Maurice Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella: With Darkness for a Nest* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1974) 19.

⁴² Donald Davie, 'First Fruits: The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella,' *Irish Writing* 37 (Autumn 1957): 47.

⁴³ John 14.

⁴⁴ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (New York, 1981) 99; quoted in Culler, 'Changes in the Study of Lyric' 38.

They are, in Barbara Herrnstein Smith's phrase, 'fictive utterances'⁴⁵ in the sense that they purport to present the unitary voice of a speaker. Therefore, though the themes of the poems are fracture of self and world, they do not in their forms embody this fracture; the speaking voice is unified, centred, even as it speaks of rupture. In the drama between the conventions of poetry and the fragmentary nature of experience, the unities of art prevail, for now, against a sense of their inadequacy. Kinsella is not yet the redactive organizer of voice and tone and source that Dillon Johnston outlines in *Irish Poetry After Joyce*.⁴⁶ Kinsella's deliberate, if fatalistic, artistic ploy in the essay 'Writer at Work' attempts to overcome isolation and lack through using borrowed forms and conventions in a consciously 'classic' mode that, increasingly, becomes incompatible with his pursuit of the Real. The lack and isolation I have outlined here 'prompt' the poetry, but the convention-bound solution to this isolation creates a division in Kinsella's work between his actual circumstances and background, and the poetry he produces. While Kinsella comes to see this division in social and historical terms, for the moment I want to detail the division.

II

Dolmen Press published Kinsella's first major collection *Another September* in March 1958. He was almost 30 years old, had been married just over two years, with one young child, and was a senior Civil Servant within the Department of Finance. The book collected work produced over the preceding five years and included, unrevised, nine of the twelve poems which had appeared in *Poems*. *Another September* also republished Kinsella's 1956 Dolmen Chapbook *Death of a Queen*, but not the three earlier pamphlets *The Starlit Eye*, *Three Legendary Sonnets* (1952) and *Per Imaginem*, nor did it include the translations from the Irish, *The Breastplate of St. Patrick* (1954), and *The Sons of Usnech* (1954), commissioned by the founder/Director of the Dolmen Press, Liam Miller.

Reviewers and subsequent critics consistently remark upon the formal elegance and technical accomplishment of the poems and the traditional, self-consciously 'poetic' themes and performances. While Kinsella's 'developed sense of craft commanded trust and continual respect'⁴⁷ from John Montague, subsequent criticism, even from the vantage point of reviews of *Moralities* (1960) and particularly *Downstream* (1962), noted that 'the sculpted distinction of the intelligence held a number of the poems at something of the distance from passion.'⁴⁸ The formalism, borrowed stanza structures, and archaic diction 'often sequestered the poet from the

⁴⁵ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, from *On the Margins of Discourse* (Chicago, 1978) 8; quoted in Culler 38.

⁴⁶ Johnston 100-02.

⁴⁷ Montague, 'Strife in Darkness.'

⁴⁸ Valentin Iremonger, 'Messages from the Fish,' *Irish Times* 17 June 1961: 10.

audience,'⁴⁹ and 'allowed its decorum to qualify [Kinsella's] sensibility.'⁵⁰ The dark and disquieting nature of the sensibility when it emerged in the poems was tempered by this formal and traditional element, giving the audience 'secure poetic objects to contemplate.'⁵¹ Calvin Bedient's comment that they are the poems of a young man who has 'decided to be a poet'⁵² contains an element of truth. The revelation of obsessive theme and the self-perpetuating need subsequent to such a deliberate decision, however, is a theme which is prominent in "Priest and Emperor," as I will discuss shortly.

Kinsella in his note on *Another September* in the PBS Bulletin of March 1958 displays a keen awareness of the problems his poems presented both to himself and his audience:

At least two voices will, I imagine, be detected through most of *Another September*. One is clouded, and possibly obscure; its poems satisfy a compulsion to arrange rather than communicate.[. . .] The second voice is reasonable and its poems are comparatively clear. Occasionally there is a fusion of the two voices.⁵³

The two voices of Kinsella's poetry indicate both a duality and division that inhabits the poems, and the circumstances of their composition. The direction Kinsella's imagination took, away from the 'this and that' of the social and political circumstances of his experience, away from what he calls in 'Tear' (1973) the 'early guess' at the 'lives bitter with hard bondage' (*NP* 1973 27) of his parents and relatives and neighbours, derives in part from the very conditions that the poems, as he put it to Peter Orr, 'eschewed.'⁵⁴ This social and political reading can be supported by Kinsella's own exploration of his background in subsequent work, and indeed from the fact that Kinsella in 'The Irish Writer' (1966) begins to see his own background, in terms provided by Daniel Corkery, as a version almost of T.S. Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility.' The tension in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' between past and present, art and life, is in no small measure derived from the deliberate turning aside from social actuality.

Yet in his PBS Bulletin note for *Another September* Kinsella displays a significant awareness of familial and social origins:

⁴⁹ Johnston 102.

⁵⁰ Skelton: 88.

⁵¹ Johnston 102.

⁵² Calvin Bedient, *Eight Contemporary Poets* (London: Oxford UP, 1974) 120.

⁵³ 'Thomas Kinsella Writes . . .' Poetry Book Society Bulletin 17 (March 1958): 2. *Another September* was selected as the Poetry Book Society's Spring Choice. The selectors were J.R. Ackerley, Patric Dickinson, and Roy Fuller. Michael Hamburger's *The Dual Site* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958) was the Society's Recommendation.

⁵⁴ Thomas Kinsella, interview by Peter Orr, dated 24 Sept. 1962, in *The Poet Speaks: Interviews with Contemporary Poets*, ed. Peter Orr (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) 107.

My grandfather came to Dublin, eighty years ago, from desolate hill country near Tinahely in County Wicklow. He worked for most of his life in Guinness's Brewery and became eventually captain of a Liffey barge. He was, at the same time, one of the original recruits to Father Matthew's Total Abstinence Association and resisted, until his death in 1947, all persuasion – even by his doctors – to take alcohol.⁵⁵

The note on his family background reveals the sharp divide between Kinsella's personal life and his poetry. Though the poems, he says, attempted to 'make real, in whatever terms, the passing of time, the frightening exposure of all relationships and feeling to erosion,' this 'making real' is done in terms which had little to do with the actual substance of his background and daily life:

An instinct which dramatises events against such an alien background is both the source my poems come from at present and the reason for any lack of public concern which may be found in them. I find in practice that social or political matters, for example, or any motifs characteristic of a group, never arise; little is relevant but the dignity of the isolated person, whose conscious or unconscious bargainings with time insist, like those of a condemned or dying man, that they be respected.

As John Montague noted, there was a lack of identifiable locality in many of the poems. Though Brian John has questioned this impression, the fact is that little of Kinsella's background enters the poems of *Another September*. The ambivalence that the poetic act provokes in Kinsella's work of the 1950s may indeed originate in the disparity between background and the poetic act. The ambivalence about the efficacy and function of poetry and the ability of the poet/speaker to adequately encounter the Real, is the aesthetic counterpart to the recurring existential themes of isolation and lack.

Donald Davie wrote that '[t]he poet cannot write the poems he wants to write, except by making himself into the poet who can write them.'⁵⁶ Within the contradictions and dissatisfactions of Kinsella's early work there are forces that will *disrupt* his constructed style. In 'Time and the Poet' he calls these 'unworldly forces,' working upon the imagination, 'All-encompassing.' The 'home-town' of these catalysts for creation are located in 'a small place off the beaten track, way back in the poet's imagination.'⁵⁷ Kinsella's creative drive is continually fuelled by disappointment, whose geographical home-town he had deliberately consigned to the 'back of his imagination.'

⁵⁵ PBS Bulletin 17.

⁵⁶ Donald Davie, review of *The Tradition of the New*, by Harold Rosenberg, *Guardian* 5 Oct. 1962: 13.

III

Thomas Kinsella was born on 4 May 1928, the first child to John and Agnes (née Casserly) Kinsella, while the couple were staying with one of Agnes' six sisters at Tyrconnell Street, Inchicore. Soon afterwards the family moved to Phoenix Street, part of a self-enclosed area of originally railway workers' cottages known as the Ranch. They lived in Phoenix Street until 1939.

The Ranch was, and at the time of writing still is (2005), situated on the crest of a hill overlooking Phoenix Park to the north, and Islandbridge, which lies to the north-east. The Liffey bends here, arriving from Chapelizod in the west on its course past Memorial Park eastwards into Dublin city, visible in the distance from the open land at the eastern end of Phoenix Street. Kinsella visits and re-visits this site, in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, throughout the Peppercanister series, in *The Messenger* (1978) for instance, and *St Catherine's Clock* (1987).

A second son, John, the noted composer, was born in 1932, and the couple had a daughter, Agnes, who died soon after birth. Her cot death is remembered in 'Tear,' a poem which implies that though the death gave an 'early guess' at the 'lives bitter with hard bondage,' this intimation of the social context of the loss of the child and the straitened circumstances of the family soon faded.

John and Agnes came from the Liberties area of central Dublin, an area to which both sets of Kinsella's grandparents had migrated, on the paternal side from south Wicklow, and on the Casserly side from County Westmeath. The extended family lived within a short distance and indeed such was the intimacy of acquaintance and aura of self-containment that the Kilmainham/Inchicore area of Kinsella's childhood and youth had the feel, he has said, of 'an almost rural village,'⁵⁸ a perception not without some historical foundation considering the status of Kilmainham as a settlement anterior to Dublin. The mid-nineteenth century observer, the Reverend Nathanael Burton, wrote in 1843: 'The rustic and village-like appearance of Bow Bridge and Old Kilmainham, the latter the county town, presenting even at the present [1843] in the hollow of the Cummogue [Camac] vale all the semblance of a village street, separated from the great metropolis by the hill.'⁵⁹ This village-like network of personal and familial relations, separated socially, economically and geographically from the city centre, appears in 'The High Road' (1973). The poem is set in precisely the area of Kilmainham described by the Reverend Burton, the Camac 'vale,' where much of the extended Kinsella family lived:

⁵⁷ 'Time and the Poet' 714.

⁵⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 100.

⁵⁹ Colum Kenny, *Kilmainham: The History of a Settlement Older than Dublin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1995) 69.

Over the parapet of
the bridge at the end of Granny and Granda's
the brown water poured and gurgled
over the stones and tin cans in the Camac,
down by the back of Aunty Josie's.

(NP 1973 21-22)

Kilmainham had, in fact, from 1868 existed as a separate township and had only been incorporated into the city of Dublin as recently as 1900, a result of the needs of Dublin Corporation to increase revenue after an extended period of middle class exodus from the rate-paying centre. The problems attendant upon an overcrowded and disproportionately high working class city population had made expansion socially and financially irresistible.⁶⁰

Dwellings such as the Ranch, built specifically for workers by employers, had been common in the Kilmainham area from the early nineteenth century. In 1812, for instance, the Yorkshire mill owner Obadiah Willans established the Hibernian Mills 'for the manufacture of the finest woollen clothes.' He housed his employees nearby, attracted, like other industrialists, by the plentiful supply of water from both the Liffey and the Camac.⁶¹ By the second half of the nineteenth century the population of the 'self-contained village' of New Kilmainham, as another commentator, Mary E. Daly, has described it,⁶² was almost entirely working class, 'either soldiers, employees of the Great Southern and Western Company engineering works or of some smaller factories, or warders at Kilmainham gaol.'⁶³

What follows is a brief introduction to Kinsella's upbringing and education, material which will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter 3 and 5 in relation to 'Nightwalker,' *The Messenger* and *Songs of the Psyche*. In these later poems Kinsella explores the circumstances of childhood memory, personal and communal isolation, frustrated ideals, waste, loss, and political failure as the original location of disappointment. In the PBS Bulletin for *Another September*, Kinsella himself briskly runs through what will become prominent thematic material in 'Nightwalker,' and in subsequent volumes: he had, he says, 'an uneventful career as Christian Brothers' boy, civil servant, night student.'⁶⁴ Kinsella's time as 'Christian Brothers' boy' at the O'Connell Schools in Richmond Street, Dublin, was enlivened intellectually by the experience of having an educational 'stroke of luck.'⁶⁵ Like George Browne, his teacher at the Model School, Inchicore, which Kinsella attended as his primary school, James J. Carey was what

⁶⁰ Kenny 82.

⁶¹ Kenny 65.

⁶² Mary E. Daly, *Dublin: the Deposed Capital* (Cork: n.p., 1984) 159; quoted in Kenny 77.

⁶³ Kenny 77.

⁶⁴ PBS Bulletin 17.

⁶⁵ Kinsella, O'Driscoll: 58.

Kinsella calls 'the good teacher who makes sense of things.'⁶⁶ The examination-oriented nature of the schooling and the nationalist bias (to which Kinsella admits he subscribed at the time⁶⁷) was tempered by the teaching of Carey and by his father's political leanings, as well as by an innate temperamental contrariness. Carey recalled that the young Kinsella held a number of 'unconventional opinions.' He was not one to draw attention to them, however, yet would 'vigorously defend his father's Connolly Socialism whenever such defense was needed.'⁶⁸

Kinsella's enthusiasm for learning, encouraged and fed by such teachers as Carey, and the breadth of his activity as a student is evidenced by his founding, along with four other students, an occasional newspaper called *An Glaoch* ('The Call')⁶⁹. In an interesting pre-figuring of later activity with both Dolmen and Peppercanister Kinsella had a hand in producing all aspects of the paper including printing and distribution. He also contributed essays and verse, humorous and satirical principally, so, as Rosenberg comments, it is necessary to treat Kinsella remarks that his first poetic 'experiment' occurred when he was eighteen with a degree of caution.⁷⁰ Rosenberg sees Kinsella's comment as referring to the occasion when he first 'became consciously aware of the possibilities of poetry.'⁷¹ Some of this awareness, and possibly even the urge toward making that fateful literary experiment, she attributes to the influence of Carey, who, in fact, edited one of the Leaving Certificate literature textbooks of the time.⁷² Leaving aside the fact that Carey's textbook was an anthology of prose, the effect of his literary acumen is perhaps what Kinsella is referring to when he remarks to Dennis O'Driscoll that part of Carey's teacherly contribution to the young man's 'making sense of things' was in the opening up of an 'understanding of history and the use of reading.'⁷³

At the O'Connell Schools, and later at University College Dublin, Kinsella's drive to make sense of things, to 'see how the whole thing works,' found its first location in the sciences rather than in literature. After qualifying for a scholarship, due to an impressive performance in the Leaving Certificate of 1946, Kinsella entered University College Dublin in the autumn of that year, as a science student. He was planning a world-changing career, he recalled

⁶⁶ Kinsella, O'Driscoll: 58.

⁶⁷ The contemporary effect of this educational experience at the O'Connell Schools is captured in Kinsella's remarks in *Poetry Ireland Review*: 'I left Secondary School and its nationalist atmosphere, and its treatment of the literature in Irish, with a partly-informed vague interest in the literature and an enthusiasm for the language,' 'Translation from the Irish,' *Poetry Ireland Review* 49 (Spring 1996): 26. See also Chapter 3 and 5, and Ó Mórdha for Kinsella's comments on the effect of the nationalist slant to his education.

⁶⁸ Rosenberg 93.

⁶⁹ Rosenberg (94) mistakenly refers to this newspaper as *An Gaoch*.

⁷⁰ In the PBS Bulletin for *Another September* Kinsella said: 'I wrote my first poem when I was eighteen, out of curiosity.'

⁷¹ Rosenberg 94.

⁷² James J. Carey, *Senior Prose: An Anthology for Leaving Certificate and Matriculation* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1942).

⁷³ Kinsella, O'Driscoll: 58.

light-heartedly to Rosenberg, as a politically conscientious scientist, who would maintain at the same time a vibrant inner life by conducting various artistic activities.⁷⁴ Such ambitions were soon thwarted, however, by the realization of mistaken career signals, and the awareness that he 'couldn't spend the rest of [his] life at that.'⁷⁵ Kinsella later wrote that he 'stopped short, with relief, of [his] primary degree.'⁷⁶ Carolyn Rosenberg writes that this 'revelation' occurred in a UCD laboratory when Kinsella was trying to memorize a formula, a story Kinsella tentatively confirmed to Philip Fried in 1988.⁷⁷ This interview also revealed, however, that the decision to abandon his studies was not only due to a lack of vocation, but had, underlying it, an economic and financial aspect. Kinsella had taken examinations for the Civil Service, was successful and offered a post, and he said 'I found myself weakening, and took it.'⁷⁸

Kinsella began work in the Congested Districts Board in Hume Street, but maintained contact with the acquaintances he had made at U.C.D. He continued studying at night for the Diploma in Public Administration, which he received in 1949. It was around this time that Kinsella's interest and commitment to poetry became more manifest. He had written his first poem in his final year at the O'Connell Schools, 'to see if I, personally, could produce anything which could pass for a poem.'⁷⁹ With curiosity for a time satisfied, Kinsella wrote no more poetry for another two years. When he did eventually return to writing poetry, and with a greater degree of seriousness, he sought advice. Kinsella showed some of this new work to the poet Valentin Iremonger, an acquaintance of John Kinsella, and to Roger McHugh, of the U.C.D. English Department, whose acquaintance he had made while a student at U.C.D. Both men were encouraging and recommended that he read widely. Kinsella followed this advice assiduously if we take at face value the references dotting the reviews he published in the *Irish Press* and *Irish Writing*.⁸⁰ The deepest catalyst for this growing commitment to poetry, however, was Kinsella's burgeoning relationship with Eleanor Walsh:

⁷⁴ Rosenberg 97-98.

⁷⁵ Kinsella, Fried: 5. There is inconsistency in Kinsella's accounts of his University career. In the interview with Philip Fried he said 'When I left high school, I went into university and for a couple of terms, a half-year, specialized in physics.' Yet to John Haffenden Kinsella said 'I started in Economics. My career took me from school into the Civil Service. I studied English for a short while, but economics and politics were my main interests.' See Haffenden 101. The most succinct account is that given to O'Driscoll (58), where Kinsella seems to refer also to an eventual completion of his primary degree: 'I put the thing together in my own way, finally.'

⁷⁶ PBS Bulletin 17: 2.

⁷⁷ Rosenberg 98. Kinsella, Fried: 5.

⁷⁸ Kinsella, Fried: 5.

⁷⁹ Kinsella, Orr 105.

⁸⁰ Kinsella's began reviewing for the *Irish Press* in October 1955, and in *Irish Writing* in the Winter issue of the same year. He contributed reviews to the *Press* more or less monthly until March 1957, after which they became less frequent, ceasing regular contributions in October 1958. In 1958 Kinsella began contributing occasional reviews to the *Sunday Independent* and the *Irish Times*.

It was quite some time after [the writing of the first poem] before the possibility of continuing to write verse entered my mind. I think it was meeting the particular woman whom I eventually married that got me seriously writing love poetry, which was the first poetry I now regard as valid.⁸¹

At around the same time another meeting with long-lasting personal and poetic consequences occurred. Kinsella had shown some of his work to Captain Henry Neville Roberts, a 'retired army officer who wrote poetry.'⁸² He had met Roberts through a mutual interest in *An Óige*, the hostelling group. Roberts in turn introduced Kinsella to another hiker, 'Billy',⁸³ Miller, a draughtsman in an architect's office who at the time (1951) was making the first moves toward the founding of a small press. Thus began a personal and literary association which would last until Liam Miller's death in May 1987.

IV

Kinsella's first published poems appeared in *National Student*, the University College Dublin magazine in 1951. Subsequently, *The Starlit Eye*, typeset by Kinsella himself, was issued in pamphlet form by Dolmen. Miller had in effect, quite haphazardly, and with few delusions as to the chances of success, established what would become the leading Irish publisher of contemporary Irish literature. The goal originally was to fill a perceived void, in effect to provide professional primary publication in Ireland for Irish writers who would otherwise have had to send their manuscripts to publishers abroad:

The Press started because there was a great lack of Irish publishers for young people who were growing up in Ireland at the same time I was, people who were beginning to write new poetry in Ireland. It started, very simply, by my snap decision to print a little book of ballads by one of these people, Sigerson Clifford.⁸⁴

The effect was almost immediate. Soon Dolmen, however, 'found itself dealing with a new Irish poetry.'⁸⁵

⁸¹ Kinsella, Orr 105.

⁸² Thomas Kinsella 'A Note on Irish Publishing.' Essay. *Southern Review* 31: 3 (Summer 1995): 635.

Kinsella's fullest account of Roberts and the first meeting with Miller, as well as of that period in Dublin is contained in *The Dolmen Press: A Celebration* 138-144.

⁸³ For reference to Miller's change from 'Billy,' 'Bill,' or 'William' see Kinsella in *The Dolmen Press: A Celebration* 140; John Montague, *Company: A Chosen Life* (London: Duckworth, 2001) 71.

⁸⁴ Liam Miller, interviewed by William York Tyndall *Modern Irish Literature* 23.

⁸⁵ Kinsella, 'A Note on Irish Publishing': 635.

The introduction to Miller provided an opportunity which had seemed unthinkable, and not just to Kinsella. The isolation so prominently a part of Kinsella's experience in Kilmainham, and so prominent in his early poetry had, at least in terms of literary endeavour, a generational characteristic. According to his near contemporary, Anthony Cronin, this was a period in the literary life of Ireland when a young poet 'felt for the lack of confreres.'⁸⁶ Kinsella found in Miller a confrere and publisher, like himself young and at the initial stages of a commitment to literature. Miller was willing to allow writers the freedom to develop at their own pace and, significantly for Kinsella, length. Miller's belief that 'a work is a work no matter how long or short'⁸⁷ meant there was no pressure on Kinsella to complete a full volume. The publication of *Three Legendary Sonnets* and *Per Imaginem* as a single poem, emphasize the point. This belief in the validity of a book which might contain a work only a few pages long is something that Kinsella has carried with him into his Peppercanister series.

The objective of 'Dolmen Press,' Miller planned, would be the 'quality' publication of Ireland-centred work. This meant work 'by Irish writers,' or work 'from any author regardless of their nationality' who wrote on Irish subjects.⁸⁸ An unremarkable ambition, it would seem, at least in an environment more congenial to such endeavours than the Ireland of the early 1950s. At the time there was no professional publishing house for poetry, drama or literary commentary. Miller's ambition, though, was not to break new ground in these fields, as a look at Dolmen's first publications will reveal.⁸⁹ With the publication of past classics and new work, however, what Miller in effect was doing, according to Terence Brown, was to 'revive[...] a tradition which had died with the closure of Maunsel and Roberts publishing house in 1926.'⁹⁰ After

⁸⁶ Anthony Cronin, *Dead as Doornails* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1976; Poolbeg Press, 1980) 2.

⁸⁷ Liam Miller, interviewed by Unterecker 29. See also Miller quoted by Peter Lennon, 'Dolmen Dublin,' *Guardian* 23 Oct. 1962: 7: 'A single poem deserves to be treated as a work in its own right.'

⁸⁸ Liam Miller to Vincent Kinane, transcript with notes of a taped conversation with Liam Miller, Feb. 1985. Recorded on visit to Mountrath in preparation for article on Dolmen Press by Christine Nudds, in *Treasures of the Library TCD* (Dub. 1986) 5.

⁸⁹ Miller, according to Quidnunc in the *Irish Times*, was breaking at least one 'Dublin literary tradition' however, in 'establishing an "art" press on the prosaic North side— in Drumcondra.' Of the first publications Quidnunc wrote: 'They include a volume of Tinker ballads by Sigerson Clifford, who shares an affectionately intimate knowledge of the ways of the wandering folk with his fellow-Kerryman Bryan MacMahon; some Christmas carols by Mrs. Clifford and Captain Neville Roberts; a short collection of the poetry of David Marcus; the ballad, "I am a poor girl and my heart it is breaking", so finely sung by Jack O'Connor in "God's Gentry", with a line drawing by Louis Le Brocquy, and a long lyric poem, "The Starlit Eye", by Thomas Kinsella, illustrated by Liam Miller himself. [...] The next venture of the Dolmen Press, although it is a re-tilling of well-worked earth rather than the breaking of new ground, should still command attention. It is the production of a limited edition of a new translation of Bryan Merriman's eighteenth century satirical poem, "The Midnight Court".' 'An Irishman's Diary,' *Irish Times* 16 April 1952: 5. Dolmen's first publication was Sigerson Clifford's *Travelling Tinkers* (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1951). The publication date was 'Gathering Day' at Puck Fair. 'All 500 copies of the volume were sold,' Peter Lennon, 'Dolmen Dublin.' Miller later referred to this as 'an extremely amateur piece of book production.' Quoted by Dillon Johnston in *Irish Poetry After Joyce* 42.

⁹⁰ Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-2002* (London: Fontana Press, 1981; 1985; third edition, 2004) 301.

Maunsel and Roberts had ceased publishing, there were sporadic and limited opportunities provided by the occasional title issued by the educational and university presses, as well as the potentially compromising opportunities, for those with broader literary ambitions, provided in the nationalist and religious press. Irish writers whose ambitions were for professional literary publication had to focus their attentions on London firms. Kinsella recalling the literary atmosphere of the time wrote:

London was the place of significant exile. Austin Clarke had spent a whole generation of his life there. People said that Patrick Kavanagh was there much of the time, because there was 'nothing in Ireland'. London was where books were published. Kavanagh's *A Soul for Sale* had been published by Macmillan. And Valentin Iremonger's *Reservations*. A book by Donagh MacDonagh had been published by Faber & Faber, where T.S. Eliot was Director – a great achievement.⁹¹

There was nothing new in this 'look to London,' of course. Kinsella sees the tradition of earlier generations of Irish artists 'setting themselves up in England,' and one presumes that he is thinking of Oliver Goldsmith, Shaw and Wilde as exemplary figures in this regard, or seeking, like Yeats, publication in London, as a 'matter of colonial survival.'⁹² Kinsella argues that in the 'colonial or provincial situation there is a "senior" outside audience' and it was this which had created a situation where the survival of Maunsel, for example, would have counted for little. It was not, he maintains, an 'adequate professional publisher.'⁹³ There was no 'real' publisher in Ireland precisely because both author and audience looked elsewhere for corroboration of the worth and value of work produced in Ireland. In the documentary film *One Fond Embrace*, Kinsella recalled what he elsewhere refers to as the 'post-colonial' mentality that this 'look to London' provoked in the young, and not so young, Irish writer. At the time when he himself was beginning to look around for publishing opportunities London was the place where, he said, if things worked out, he would be 'really, properly published.'⁹⁴ However, for Kinsella in 1951 '[t]he prospect of publication was remote; the prospect of "real" publication by an established

⁹¹ *The Dolmen Press: A Celebration* 139.

⁹² Kinsella, 'A Note on Irish Publishing': 633.

⁹³ *Ibid.* See also *The Dual Tradition* 107-110.

⁹⁴ Ó Mórdha, *One Fond Embrace*. The effect of this 'look to London' is still operational, Kinsella writes: 'The same impulse continues, and still works against the development of an adequate professional publishing industry in Ireland. There is a practical reason, having to do with the small Irish market and the economics of distribution, but difficulties of this kind are soluble. The post-colonial impulse is the deciding consideration: primary publication in England is regarded as the desirable norm by most Irish writers and by the commentators. 'A Note on Irish Publishing': 633. Kinsella reprints the remarks, unrevised, in *The Dual Tradition* 108; and in *The Dolmen Press: A Celebration* 134.

British publisher not to be thought of.⁹⁵

Kinsella's formative years and the years of his first literary efforts were inevitably marked by the atmosphere that pertained in his native city. Indeed Kinsella's pursuit of the Real, like the impulse that Alain Badiou argues is behind the twentieth century's 'passion for the Real,'⁹⁶ was provoked in no small measure by the 'unreal' atmosphere of the Ireland of his formative years. According to Anthony Cronin:

Dublin in the late 1940s was an odd and, in many respects, unhappy place. The malaise that seems to have affected everywhere in the aftermath of war took strange forms there, perhaps for the reason that the war itself had been a sort of ghastly unreality. Neutrality had left a wound, set up complexes in many, including myself, which the post-war did little to cure.⁹⁷

At the time of his first literary experiment, Kinsella had little sense of contemporary poetry or indeed of poetry as 'a human activity' carried out 'by human beings in the ordinary course of their lives.'⁹⁸ Indeed it has to be said that Kinsella's work up to and including *Another September* evokes this sense of poetry as something divorced from the 'ordinary course' of life. Intermittently, however, an awareness that this is the case achieves reflexive, critical self-comment, in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' for instance, and in a comment such as that quoted from the Poetry Book Society Bulletin of 1958. His poems, Kinsella wrote, were 'the voices of an occasional schizophrenia.'⁹⁹ Part of this 'schizophrenia' derives from the fact that the composition of poetry was a part-time activity, an intense hobby pursued after a working day at the office. Yet it is possible to argue, as Kinsella does in literary terms in 'Time and the Poet' and in more markedly social and political terms in 'The Irish Writer,' that there was also an encounter with division in Kinsella's introduction to poetry during his schooling. Poems, he remembered, existed in textbooks as monuments devoid of context apparently delivered of the poet in some fit of supernatural inspiration: 'Let's take a look at how extensive the image of the lyric poet is – emotional, head in the clouds, inspiration dictating to him, without any effort on his part – such is the picture taught to schoolchildren.'¹⁰⁰ This was a picture far different from the lives of quiet, and at times unquiet desperation, led by the literary figures of 1930s and 1940s Ireland, presented in memoirs such as Cronin's *Dead as Doornails*. A picture that was far

⁹⁵ Kinsella, 'A Note on Irish Publishing': 634.

⁹⁶ Alain Badiou, *Le siècle*, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London and New York: Verso, 2002) 5.

⁹⁷ Cronin, *Dead as Doornails 2*.

⁹⁸ Kinsella, Orr 105.

⁹⁹ PBS Bulletin 17.

¹⁰⁰ 'Time and the Poet' 712.

different too from the circumstances of Kinsella's boyhood and adolescence.

Kinsella was later to refer to the generation of Irish poets beginning to publish in the 1950s as a 'scattering of incoherent lives,'¹⁰¹ and the recurrent motif of isolation in Kinsella's writing takes on the veneer of existential verity and artistic fate in poems such as *The Starlit Eye* and *Per Imaginem*. Among writers in Ireland older than Kinsella, if only slightly older, there was a sense of isolation which derived from causes which had little to do with personal vision. The title of Robert Greacen's poem 'Written on the Sense of Isolation in Contemporary Ireland' captures the frustration of the poet who would take 'the world for subject' but had little hope of finding anyone to listen 'to those with honest passion.'¹⁰² Pearse Hutchinson could write of the contemporary Irish poet as one who 'was not so much in pursuit of truth/ as in flight from those in flight from it.'¹⁰³

By the early 1950s there seemed to be 'stirrings in the darkness.'¹⁰⁴ The imaginative writer in the 1930s and 1940s faced a grim task sustaining mind, body and achievement in a society belligerently unresponsive, dismissive and frequently hostile to work which might either challenge, or not reflect the 'Catholic nationalist isolationist'¹⁰⁵ orthodoxies of the state. The Irish writer from the 1950s on, began to encounter circumstances less inimical to a minimum of sustained intellectual and imaginative endeavour.¹⁰⁶

When accounting for the marked difference between the generation of writers who began appearing in print in the 1950s – John Montague, Aidan Higgins, and Kinsella among them – it has been said that they were at a remove from the 'subject of Ireland.' If Ireland had been too pressing in the lives of the previous generation of Irish writers (Austin Clarke, Seán O'Faoláin and Frank O'Connor) this first generation born after Independence had an ease with their Irishness, if not with Ireland itself. What coherence the Kinsella generation had coalesced around the desire to avoid the aesthetic pitfalls of argumentation and social concern, and the desire to turn instead to an engagement with the personal predicament. John Montague accused the O'Faoláin-founded magazine *The Bell*, the leading outlet for Irish writers at the time, of renegeing on its first duty:

¹⁰¹ 'The Irish Writer' 57. Kinsella clarified to Philip Fried that he was specifically referring to his Irish contemporaries, particularly John Montague and Richard Murphy, Fried: 24-25.

¹⁰² See 'Fifty Years Of Irish Writing': 103-04; Robert Greacen, *Collected Poems 1944-1994* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995) 69-70. In his *Collected* Greacen re-titles the poem *On the Sense of Isolation in War-Time Ireland*.

¹⁰³ Pearse Hutchinson, *Tongue Without Hands* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1963) 12. Quoted in Kersnowski 20.

¹⁰⁴ Fergus Linehan, 'A Life on the Boards,' review of *The Company I Kept*, by Phyllis Ryan, *Irish Times* 23 Nov. 1996, Weekend: 8.

¹⁰⁵ Seán O'Faoláin, 'Fifty Years of Irish Writing,' *Studies* (Spring 1962): 97.

¹⁰⁶ For an insightful overview of the changes in the situation of Irish writers between the 1950s and 1980s see Thomas Kilroy, 'The Irish Writer: Self and Society, 1950-80,' *Literature and the Changing Ireland*, ed. Peter Connolly. Irish Literary Studies 9 (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe; Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1982) 177.

The Bell has developed an argumentative complex, and by constantly keeping in mind the social angle or problem has tended to lead writing away from its real purpose at the present time, the imaginative and honest expression of the writer's own problems, not those of his sickening community, though the one will be reflected in the other.¹⁰⁷

Terence Brown argues that the origins of the cultural activity of this period in Irish life lay partly in the social and political reality that the state had acquired during the 'Emergency'.¹⁰⁸ The Irish state was undeniably present and, therefore, possible to take for granted in the way that Kinsella and Dolmen took 'Irishness' for granted. The aestheticism and formalism of Kinsella's first work, the lack of Irish circumstance and the conventionality of formal procedure, are also a deliberate turning aside from another type of conventionality, self-consciously 'Irish' writing. Anthony Cronin echoes Brown's point in his outline of these established modes of literary 'Irishness':

We are very nearly free from the picturesque, the romantic-rural, the nostalgic-archaic, the historical archaeological, the tribal subconscious as our only modes. And the truth is that we are free from these deliberately nationalist, and therefore, in a deep sense truly provincial modes which appealed to the early Yeats and to the later and less spontaneous O'Casey precisely because we have won for ourselves a greater degree of national independence and national self-confidence in the matter of literature.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ John Montague, 'The Young Writer,' *The Bell*, XVII: 6 (September 1951): 6. This edition of *The Bell* was a special devoted to the young writer. Quoted in Kersnowski 19. Though O'Faoláin had ceased editing *The Bell* in 1946, and by this stage the journal was under the editorship of Peadar O'Donnell, Montague's comments offer a foretaste of the poem 'The Siege of Mullingar' and its refrain '*Puritan Ireland's dead and gone, / A myth of O'Connor and O Faoláin*' (1972), John Montague, *Collected Poems* (1995; Oldcastle: Gallery, 1998) 67. O'Faoláin, when editor, was acutely aware of Montague's point, but also of what the age demanded, and, at least for a time, was prepared to pay the imaginative price: 'And when all is said and done, what I am mainly left with is a certain amount of regret that we were born into this thorny time when our task has been less that of cultivating our garden than of clearing away brambles,' Seán O'Faoláin, 'Signing Off,' editorial in *The Bell*, April 1946, reprinted in *Great Irish Writing: The Best from the Bell* ed. Seán McMahon, (1978. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1983) 120. As Bernard O'Donoghue has written, Kinsella, like Anthony Cronin, and Montague, was part of 'the first generation after Yeats which belonged in literary Ireland to the liberalising scepticism of *The Bell*, which complicated notions of Irishness, as of everything else,' Bernard O'Donoghue, 'Helping us to be modern,' review of *The Minotaur and Other Poems*, by Anthony Cronin; *The Familiar and Godhead* by Thomas Kinsella. (Peppercanister 20 and 21), *Irish Times* 10 July 1999, Weekend: 10.

¹⁰⁸ Brown 159-198. See also John Ryan. *Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at the Mid-Century* (1975; Mullingar: Lilliput Press, 1987) 34: 'The isolation brought about by war had made us look to ourselves for distraction and entertainment. With the scramble for worldly prizes temporarily shelved, cultural awareness grew.'

¹⁰⁹ Cronin, 'England on a Clear Day,' *An Irish Eye: Viewpoints by Anthony Cronin* (Dingle: Brandon, 1985) 140.

Kinsella actively resisted the claims on his poetic attention of such 'Irish' modes. The work he was drawn to, as he said in his interview with Peter Orr, was the 'conscious, constructed real fabrications of the human intellect and spirit like Dante and Keats, and the later Yeats.'¹¹⁰ This sense of 'real fabrications' is crucial. Kinsella, acutely conscious of the fictive nature of poetic form, deliberately follows a tradition that sees this inescapable lie as a means to a truthful end. In his prose statements of intent, such as 'Time and the Poet' and 'Writer at Work' (1961), and in various interviews, the deliberate and self-conscious nature of aesthetic choice is paramount.

V

Kinsella's early work is acutely aware of superabundance, dichotomy and lack. Love, art, and death, provide principles for potential order. The most significant ordering principle however, in his writing of the 1950s, is literary convention. As a 'measuring artist,'¹¹¹ and admirer of what he called 'the formal constructors of poems,'¹¹² Kinsella followed a tradition that accepted the ready-made limits provided by conventions which (as he argues in 'Writer at Work') paradoxically create a countervailing force when faced with exorbitant reality. In the 'struggle against oblivion and lack of form'¹¹³ the poet creates 'enclosures,' within which (to adapt Louis MacNeice) one might see the end of a particular action. Barbara Herrnstein Smith has seen the impulse behind this desire for highly organized structure as a common reaction, in both the creative artist and the audience for art, to the random and incomplete nature of the world of experience:

It would seem that in the common land of ordinary events – where many experiences are fragmentary, interrupted, fortuitously connected, and determined by causes beyond our agency or comprehension — we create or seek out 'enclosures': structures that are highly organized, separated as if by an implicit frame from a background of relative disorder and randomness, and integral and complete.¹¹⁴

In this view, formal, arbitrary parameters enable rather than restrict. The 'unavoidable

¹¹⁰ Kinsella, Orr 108.

¹¹¹ 'Writer at Work': 30.

¹¹² Kinsella, Orr 108.

¹¹³ 'Time and the Poet' 717.

¹¹⁴ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968) 2.

artificiality'¹¹⁵ inherent in such a conviction is embraced by the Kinsella of 'A Lady of Quality' rather than set aside. In fact Kinsella's instinctive apprehension of the function of poetry as provider of a state analogous to Robert Frost's 'momentary stay against confusion' is the motivating factor, the *raison d'être* behind what contemporary reviewers of *Another September* referred to as the 'rhetorical tricks,' 'archaisms' and 'dense lyric vocabulary' of the poems.¹¹⁶ Kinsella in 'Writer at Work' succinctly described the poetic credo, the 'classicism,' behind the work he produced in the period up to and including *Downstream* (1962):

Its formality arises from the artist's awareness of the ideal spectator in himself. This is the classic self-awareness, the source of that distancing power which characterises the highest art, in which the work contains all that is necessary for its own existence, in a self-perpetuating serene tension. It recognises the means of art; it does not try to hide the instruments it uses. On the contrary, it exults in the artistic medium, knitting craft and the ideal into one. It recognises the artificiality of art and accepts that artificiality both as a limitation and as an opportunity for structure, a frame of reference within which completeness is possible, as it is not possible in life.¹¹⁷

However, in the poetry itself the confidence evident in 'Writer at Work' is missing. Looking at the poems from the vantage point of the subsequent abandonment of the 'classic' stance, there are signs of a corrosive dissatisfaction with fabrication. In 'Death of a Queen' this dissatisfaction is figured as the erosive effect of 'reality':

Reality, nagging like the tide,
Undermined her voice
Until its mass almost vanished.
Only a shell of speech,
Covered with wild flowers,
Clung to the necessary bones in her mouth.

(AS 1)

The narrative source here is Irish legend, the story of Deirdre of the Sorrows. One would be hard-pressed to discern the source from the procedure of the poem. Explicit reference to

¹¹⁵ 'Time and the Poet' 714.

¹¹⁶ John Montague, 'Strife in Darkness,' review of *Another September*, *Irish Times* 26 April 1958: 6.
Robin Skelton, 'A Question of Craftsmanship,' review of *Another September*, *Guardian* 16 May 1958:
6.

¹¹⁷ 'Writer at Work': 30.

Deirdre or Naoise is avoided, they become instead 'knight' and 'queen'; the Ulster of the legend becomes 'a kingdom.' Deirdre's death through dashing her head against a rock as she travelled alongside her tormentor/husband Conchobor Mac Nessa in a chariot driven by her lover's killer Eogan, is denuded of names and a sense of the particularities of the tale. Instead it becomes for Kinsella an occasion to confirm a generalized conclusion about the nature of life and 'a queen's' motives:

Yet it is not so much
For disintegration of a lover or a kingdom
Or burning of oak- and bronze-leaved
Capitals that a queen grieves
But that life, late or soon,
Suddenly becomes, on the face, a jaded rouge.

(AS 2)

'Death of a Queen' deliberately avoids explicit reference to the Irish source, so well in fact that when Kinsella in 1962 attempted to recall those few poems he had written thus far 'where the references are completely and exclusively Irish'¹¹⁸ he could think of only two, both of which were contained in *Moralities* (1960). The deliberate avoidance of exclusively Irish material is an attempt to achieve a poetry as 'full' and as relevant to the whole human situation as possible. For Kinsella Irish subjects are 'limited in themselves,'¹¹⁹ and the greater part of the poems in *Another September* suggest a belief that localized reference reduces potential wider implication. Hence the young Kinsella's predilection for the abstract pseudo-legendary narrative, the 'alien background' of poems such as 'Death of a Queen' and 'Test Case.'

The roots of Kinsella's aesthetic stance, and use of rhyme, rhythm and inherited stanza forms, derives from another impulse. As well as confronting chaos with form, the 'classic' aesthetic is also a way of overcoming the accusation of solipsism. 'The poet grapples with the unchangeable both in time past and in the ideal future,'¹²⁰ Kinsella says. The timeless Real as preoccupation is part of the justification of theme, and self-justification of Kinsella as poet. The themes are evoked in structures which are themselves of a venerable pedigree. Kinsella finds, or at least says so in 'Writer at Work' and 'Time and the Poet,' that he finds aesthetic and existential 'consolation' in the idea that as a 'classic' artist he is involved in an activity that has an enduring tradition. In this view, as he argues in 'Time and the Poet,' 'every good poem is

¹¹⁸ Kinsella, Orr 107.

¹¹⁹ Kinsella, Orr 107.

¹²⁰ 'Time and the Poet' 716.

traditional.¹²¹ Kinsella's poems use both form and theme to avoid the solipsistic, eccentric, and idiosyncratic, but also, most significantly, as a way to overcome the isolation so prominently a part of his personal and social experience: 'The consolation of the classic artist is that he is not alone, but engaged on the same work that has always occupied the best minds of his race.'¹²²

Kinsella's attempt to overcome isolation is expressed (in part) through a craft which attempts to instil confidence in the reader, and also in himself, a desire that is also expressed in deliberate choice of theme. Inherited forms and the, at times, archaic diction ('hark,' 'a fell dismay'), as well as an engagement with venerable themes, were ways for Kinsella to avoid the pitfalls of mere opinion,¹²³ and solipsistic concern; also as a way to forestall the corrosive disappointment and sense of the futility of the exercise.

Kinsella's pursuit of the Real gives rise to a particular view of the meaning and significance of poetic form.¹²⁴ As John Montague noted in his review of *Another September*, 'A few place names apart, it gives little indication of time and place.'¹²⁵ This lack of local circumstance, and local detail, is part and parcel of Kinsella's attempt to engage the 'full personality' and 'experience' with the human situation *in extremis*, the human against the backdrop of what is considered the 'real' issue: decay and inevitable death. The disappointment inherent in Time's processes is the ultimate source, Kinsella believes, of the poet's most urgent task: to 'trap formally' the vital, most important elements of life and to create in the poem's achieved form an adequate response to dissolution. In his interview with Peter Orr Kinsella affirmed that at this period in his writing life his idea of poetry's function was intimately connected with art's capacity to combat the depredations of time, the 'erosion' and passing of things, the power to undermine wielded by a capitalized Death and Time:

I have a distinct feeling, for instance, that one of the main impulses to poetry, or for that matter, to any art, is an attempt more or less to stem the passing of time; it's the process of arresting the erosion of feelings and relationships and objects which is being fought by the artist, not particularly because one relationship or one object has

¹²¹ 'Time and the Poet' 717. In a review of Donald Davie's *Articulate Energy: An Enquiry into the Syntax of English Poetry* and his *Brides of Reason: A Selection of Poems*, *Irish Press* 19 November 1955: 4, Kinsella said that he agreed with much of Davie's, and indeed Yeats's, 'sid[ing] with the traditional.' He quotes approvingly the following Davie comment: 'it is hard not to agree with Yeats that the abandonment of syntax testifies to a failure of the poet's nerve, a loss of confidence in the intelligible structure of the conscious mind, and the validity of its activity.'

¹²² 'Writer at Work': 30-31. It is important to note here that by 'race' Kinsella is referring to the category 'artists.'

¹²³ 'I cannot bear very much opinion. Informed discussion and reasonableness, after a while, make my eyes turn up in my head and my jaws ache,' 'Writer at Work': 31.

¹²⁴ 'The ideal life remains silent. Its qualities are so precise that they never change. In order to compose a poem, the poet need only look at them and proceed to define their expression. But he cannot possibly see them; he can only feel that they exist,' 'Time and the Poet' 716.

all his love at the moment, but simply because he is there to combat the erosion.¹²⁶

This view of the poet's function is connected to the 'classic' artist's awareness of the 'ideal spectator in himself,' controlling the linguistic means, and maintaining an objective distance from the thematic material.¹²⁷ What Kinsella implies is that an engagement with the concerns of a national context entailed a debilitating limitation of the poet's function and potential to 'combat the erosion,' and encounter not the particular but the essential in human experience.

In 'Test Case' the hero's powers and dilemma do not originate in his native place. After the heroic culmination the native place has the 'merely' anecdotal and the biographical to contribute to an achievement which is beyond the scope of the native place's contingent, quotidian, and 'minor' claims:

His native village, vaguely honoured
And confused by stories newly arriving,
Would have a little of minor value to add
– Anecdotes to charm students of his mad
Bleeding retreat to a stoic beloved,
The famous death already avalanching.

(AS 4)

Though Kinsella comes to see this disparagement of Irish material in Corkery's post-colonial terms, I will argue that, in his mature work, this attitude to place does not in fact change. The Real is never located in 'place,' in and for itself. One of the results of seeing Kinsella's work in terms of a pursuit of the Real is, paradoxically as it might seem, to reveal that the identity politics and 'essentialism' that Peter McDonald and John Goodby find in Kinsella, underappreciates the contingency that underwrites *all* of his work. As he remarks in 'Magnanimity' (*Nightwalker*) Kinsella is 'sure there are no places for poets,/ Only changing habitations for verse to outlast' (N 46). Throughout Kinsella's work 'place' continues to have, as in 'Test Case,' only contingent claims on significant meaning.

Kinsella in *Another September* is a self-consciously sophisticated, cultivated and detached measuring presence. Distance from subject, which Kinsella considered a *sine qua non* for the

¹²⁵ Montague, 'Strife in Darkness.'

¹²⁶ Kinsella, Orr 106.

¹²⁷ In the interview with Peter Orr Kinsella remarked: 'I feel, for instance, that the 'artistic act' is one of almost levitation above the event, even if the poet himself is involved. This is purely instinctive: I don't think I could justify it. If the poet is involved in an event which he is called upon to judge, he must levitate above the circumstances and judge it as if he himself is simply a factor,' Orr 106.

type of artist he admired and sought to emulate, the 'formal constructors of poems,' gives an air of the literary exercise to such poems as 'Test Case' and 'Death of a Queen.' Literature rather than experience, art rather than life, are the prime movers, the main impulses generating and controlling the work.

The poems are worked, and often worked-up, exercises in articulacy using 'forms and modes, diction and tone,' and even complete stanzaic moulds, 'borrowed from admired models.'¹²⁸ For Kinsella, the ideal poem, as his comments on Keats reveal, is one lifted out of historical reality, given universal significance in a practice which, according to Jane P. Tompkins, exemplifies Shelley's view of poetry as an ahistorical 'repository of eternal values.'¹²⁹

What Kinsella has called a 'responsibility toward actuality'¹³⁰ was not the primary impulse guiding the poetry he produced in the 1950s. Quite the contrary. In an interview with John Haffenden, Kinsella remarked that 'at the beginning my poems were influenced more by literature than by fact.'¹³¹ Kinsella's practice in *Poems* and *Another September* at times appears analogous to the Biblical Elohist in Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*: writing what the conventions of Biblical tradition demanded, his creative freedom limited and his activity reduced to composing effective versions of that tradition. What the Elohist produced, according to Auerbach, was not primarily oriented toward representing actuality; if he succeeded in being realistic it was a means to the pious end.¹³² Take, for instance, Kinsella's 'A Lady of Quality', a poem which models its rhyme scheme and stanza form upon W.H. Auden's 'A Summer Night'¹³³:

In hospital where windows meet
With sunlight in a pleasing feat
 Of airy architecture
My love has sweets and grapes to eat,
The air is like a laundered sheet,
 The world's a varnished picture.

Books and flowers at her head

¹²⁸ Kinsella, in interview with Michael Smith, *Poetry Ireland Review* 75 (Winter 2002/3): 109.

¹²⁹ Jane P. Tompkins, 'The Reader in History,' *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980) 217.

¹³⁰ Kinsella, Haffenden 102.

¹³¹ Kinsella, Haffenden 104.

¹³² Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask, with a new introduction by Edward W. Said (1953; Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2003) 14.

¹³³ Kinsella, Haffenden 101. 'A Lady of Quality' was published in *Poems* under the title 'Dusk Music' and reprinted, in slightly revised form in *Another September*.

Make living-quarters of her bed
And give a certain style
To our pillow-chat, the nonsense said
To bless the room from present dread
Just for a brittle while.

(AS 7)

Both form and theme work in a satisfying and mutually reinforcing tension; the theme of dissolution, and the hovering presence of Death, is archetypal Kinsella. However, linguistic flourish, polish and writerliness seems a falsification of the destructive facts that the lovers, in their 'pillow-chat,' and the poem's intricate Herrick-like form, implicitly acknowledge but explicitly avoid. The incidental details of such an occasion, a visit to the beloved, seriously ill in hospital, are present: 'sweets and grapes to eat'; 'Books and flowers at her head.' There is no doubting the sentiments expressed; the emotional content is, as Kinsella later said, 'profound and real,'¹³⁴ but the poem's most urgent attention is elsewhere, on the 'how' rather than the 'what' to be expressed. It is precisely this concentration on the 'shaping joy' of poetry, the 'lapping airs and graces' of 'Per Imaginem,' the aspect assumed to mark out a poetic achievement, that Kinsella will come to disavow and refer to as 'a trivial exercise.'¹³⁵ The poem itself provides clues as to why this disavowal takes place:

'Ended and done with' never ceases,
Constantly the heart releases
Wild geese to the past.
Look, how they circle poignant places,
Falling to sorrow's fowling-pieces
With soft plumage aghast.

We may regret, and must abide.
Grief, the hunter's, fatal stride
Among the darkening hearts
Has gone too long on either side.
Our trophied love must now divide
Into its separate parts [. . .]

(AS 8)

¹³⁴ Kinsella, Smith: 109.

¹³⁵ Kinsella, O' Driscoll: 65.

The artificiality, ('Grief, the hunter's fatal stride/ Among the darkening hearts'), the generalized assertions ('We may regret, and must abide') and the archaic diction ('soft plumage aghast') fulfil the demands that Kinsella's understanding of the 'classic' tradition imposed. By means of 'classic' formality, through the second thoughts forced upon the poet by the stanzaic mould and verbal requirement, through the distancing entailed in this process of conscious manipulation of expressive means, the world of exorbitant and recalcitrant detail is made 'yield up a formal significance.'¹³⁶ There is, though, even in as aesthetically accomplished a piece as this, signs of disappointment in such achievement, the sense that repetition of this mode has caused a diminishment in effectiveness:

And I communicate again
Recovered order to my pen
 To find a further answer
As, having looked all night in vain,
A weary prince will sigh and then
 Take a familiar dancer.

(AS 9)

Form is returned to only because, for the moment, a better alternative has not been found. There is a weariness in that use of 'again'; the order delivered 'to the pen' is a 'recovered order' that, achieved on many other occasions, has become stultifyingly familiar. This is not that sense of the 'familiar' as haunting presence Kinsella explores so thoroughly in later work.¹³⁷ The beginnings of an interest in this sense of the word can be seen in other poems in *Another September*, such as 'An Outdoor Gallery': 'Nowhere is stranger than the familiar – given/ The intervention of a window-pane' (AS 36).

The phrase 'recovered order' is a revision of 'limping ardour' from the version of the poem entitled 'Dusk Music' in *Poems* (15). This change emphasizes the process of retrieval, and the effort involved in the creation of the moment of poise, balance and significance. The original phrase also demonstrates Kinsella's ambivalence about poetry, as well as his self-deprecating attitude towards his own achievement. The revision, however, widens the scope of the poem considerably, and manages to encompass the *raison d'être* of the 'classic' poetic process itself. As Brian John notes, the revision strengthens the order achieved for reasons of the utmost significance: 'For the poet is acutely conscious of the needs to maintain order, to regain health,

¹³⁶ 'Writer at Work': 30.

¹³⁷ Think of *The Familiar*, Peppercanister 20 (1999).

and to protect their love in a world destructive of all such positives.’¹³⁸

Kinsella’s attempt to sift experience and actuality for the timeless Real, and make ‘eternal gesture,’ creates a language in *Another September* at a remove from speech. This is particularly discernible in those poems, such as ‘A Lady of Quality,’ concerned with the experience of love. The transformative power of love, its ability to bring together the disparate, to mould and yield new perspective is in ‘Midsummer’ almost heraldically emblematic. The awakening and the realization of love are played out against the background of an idealized, mythical, landscape, a wood referred to archaically as a ‘glade’:

We have, dear reason, of this glade
An endless tabernacle made,
 An origin.
Well for whatever lonely one
Will find this right place to lay down
 His desert in.

(AS 11)

In portraying the event in this ceremonial and sacramental way, in the deliberate adoption of quasi-seventeenth century English form and diction,¹³⁹ there is a distancing irony. In this practice Kinsella reveals a suspicion of sentiment similar to that which Randall Jarrell noted in John Crowe Ransom. Both Ransom and Kinsella developed, from admired exemplars, ‘rhetorical machinery [. . .] as a way of handling sentiment or emotion without ever seeming sentimental.’¹⁴⁰ Yet Kinsella’s poem by adoption of this manner seems almost to suggest that loneliness is the natural state, the companionship of the ‘glade’ the exception. What we see here is that love, like traditional form, in ‘Midsummer’ as in *The Starlit Eye*, are ways in which isolation is lessened and potentially overcome.

Kinsella’s love poems of the 1950s concern the first flush of love, love the transformer, the harbinger of a new state. The difficulties of love are not, as yet, present, and indeed seem a mere rumour to the young couple of ‘Soft, to Your Places’:

Soft, to your places, animals,
Your legendary duty calls.
 It is, to be

¹³⁸ John 21.

¹³⁹ Kinsella displays an admiration for Robert Herrick in ‘Time and the Poet.’

¹⁴⁰ Randall Jarrell, ‘John Ransom’s Poetry,’ in *Poetry and the Age*, quoted in Eric Homberger, *The Art of the Real: Poetry in England and America since 1939* (London: Dent, 1977) 38.

Lucky for my love and me.

*And yet we have seen that all's
A fiction that is heard of love's difficulty.
(AS 12)*

The influence of Yeats and Auden is clear, as Donald Davie said of 'Soft, to Your Places': 'stanzas out of Auden, refrains out of Yeats.'¹⁴¹ Yet the poem also marks a significant moment in Kinsella's development of an individualized perspective within borrowed form. According to Robin Skelton, it is 'the first of Kinsella's poems in which the acceptance of man's mortality and imperfect understanding is seen as a necessary attribute, and part cause of human endeavour.'¹⁴² Brian John agrees, and states that this form of acceptance 'constitutes a significant qualification of Kinsella's response to humanity's imperfect state.'¹⁴³ It is not quite true that the poem is the *first* to accept human limitations, (as 'Daybreak and a Candle End' and 'Statuesque' have shown). Yet 'Soft, to Your Places' reveals that acceptance of imperfect understanding is, like the fragile order which continually needs to be recovered in 'A Lady of Quality,' something that Kinsella's poetry continually needs to establish and re-state. The process is one of continual adjustment to disappointment which shapes Kinsella's entire poetic endeavour. Time, a cycle of hope and disappointment, eats away at the achievement of poetic form, the achievement of love, and life itself. In a sense 'Soft, to Your Places' uncannily predicts the denuded forms that Kinsella will use in *Nightwalker* as a result of this process:

But O when beauty's brought to pass
Will Time set down his hour-glass
And rest content,
His hand upon that monument?

*Unless it is so, alas
That the heart's calling is but to go stripped and diffident.*

(AS 12)

If, in 'Soft, to your Places,' dialectical oppositions between order and disorder, growth and decay are 'transcended, if only temporarily, by the speaker's affirmation of love,'¹⁴⁴ they are also overcome by the elaborate and intricate artistry of the poem. Kinsella confirms the

¹⁴¹ Davie, 'First Fruits': 49.

¹⁴² Robin Skelton, 'The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella,' *Éire-Ireland* 4 (Spring 1969): 89. Quoted by John 17.

¹⁴³ John 17.

¹⁴⁴ John 17.

wilfulness and significance of aesthetic form in 'Writer at Work.' Poetic ordering accepts its limitations and 'exults' in craft with full knowledge of its artificiality. The affirmation, according to Kinsella, is not lessened by an awareness of the futility of the exercise, in fact this awareness gives to the enterprise a heroic aspect (and here we see that the hero of 'Test Case' is perhaps as much literary as martial). I am arguing, however, from a different position.

In Kinsella's poetry an awareness of futility debilitates assertions of order. Brian John is right to recognize in 'Soft, to Your Places,' a 'querying voice posing doubt, difficulty, and uncertainty.' Such doubts are defeated, at least temporarily by what John calls 'the affirming alternative voice of the refrain.'¹⁴⁵ This momentary rhetorical victory is Kinsella's affirmation of the significance of conventional form. It is precisely this rhetoric that Kinsella comes to disavow in certain poems in *Another September* and increasingly in *Downstream*. What predominates is the goal of form itself. Both Donald Davie and John Montague remarked that Kinsella was indebted to the legacy of French Symbolism for poems in which 'the ostensible themes hardly matter.'¹⁴⁶ For Montague, Kinsella's goal is a 'Mallarmean intricacy, a mesh fine enough to hold his vision,' and for this paid the price that '[s]uch hermetic concentration exacts [. . .]; *Another September* is one of the most "poetic" books I have read by a contemporary.'¹⁴⁷ Yet Montague, aware that the book presented the poems according to the chronology of their composition,¹⁴⁸ noted that the 'greater variety of approach' of the poems toward the end of the book, 'In the Ringwood,' 'Lead,' and 'Thinking of Mr. D,' evinced awareness of the problem of the 'magnificence of language.'

Montague also implied a connection between the self-conscious artificiality and lack of Irish detail; despite its linguistic splendour, 'King John's Castle,' Montague insists, 'tells us very little about either that specific castle in Meath, or castles in general.' Brian John believes, however, that the topographical references of 'King John's Castle,' and poems such as 'Lead' and 'In the Ringwood,' complicate the idea of the supposed 'placelessness' and 'unIrishness' of the collection.¹⁴⁹ Kinsella himself saw that the dramatizing of the human individual struggle against the impersonal forces of time and erosion might 'account for the poems not being especially "Irish" except, here and there, in certain habits of conception or expression which would be foreign to a writer in the English tradition.' Yet he resisted the implication that the poetry was therefore to be considered under the term 'Anglo-Irish':

I am not sure that an Anglo-Irish poetry survives, apart from Yeats and his personal

¹⁴⁵ John 17.

¹⁴⁶ Davie, 'First Fruits': 47.

¹⁴⁷ Montague, 'Strife in Darkness.'

¹⁴⁸ 'The poems are printed in the order in which they were finished,' PBS Bulletin 17 (1958).

¹⁴⁹ John 29-30. John reads Kinsella's own underplaying of the Irish settings and elements in *Another September* as a ploy to escape from under the shadow of Yeats and the labelling of his work as regional.

reign over two generations. Good poetry by Irishmen is quickly absorbed into the English system and is only vaguely differentiated there. Much of what is called Anglo-Irish is either a sophisticated imitation of Gaelic modes or else regional verse: these are the retreats most favoured by those who cannot otherwise resist, or keep their balance in, the gravitic force of English writing.¹⁵⁰

In writing this, of course, Kinsella is implying that his poetry resists, and has the strength to sustain itself, against the pull of the English verse tradition without recourse to usual Irish modes of resistance: the Gaelic mode, and a poetry focused on the local. Kinsella has no need of either of these aids to establish the difference and value of his work. When Brian John suggests that 'the formal language and tone and the emblematic metaphor establish distance, enabling the poet to avoid narcissism or confessionalism, but at the same time, in reflecting a more distinctly English taste, suggest the gravitational pull of the English poetic tradition,'¹⁵¹ he in fact alludes to the language Kinsella himself used to distance his own writing from an indebtedness to English verse. John's significant point, though, with regard to the initial importance of W.H. Auden, who 'provided a political and social perspective with which Kinsella could more readily identify,'¹⁵² illuminates the social and political incompatibility informing Kinsella's engagement with Yeats. John rightly cautions that Auden's influence was technical rather than political,¹⁵³ however, and Kinsella's PBS Bulletin remarks on 'Anglo-Irish' poetry betray an element of literary manoeuvring. In this context of literary influence and strategic establishment of difference, the reception of Kinsella's work in England makes for an interesting contrast.

In the Cambridge magazine *Delta* Richard Weber referred to Kinsella as 'an Irish phenomenon.'¹⁵⁴ In the same issue, the Australian critic Vincent Buckley found himself attracted by Kinsella's difference from the 'Movement' poetry of English contemporaries: 'Coming to it [*Poems*] from the aridities and evasions of most contemporary English poetry, I have been grasped and held by it.'¹⁵⁵ It should not be overlooked that Kinsella's poetry had appealed to 'Movement' taste. Robert Conquest, the editor of *New Lines* (1956), the anthology which is considered the 'Movement' manifesto, called *Another September* 'by far the best and most interesting book of the season,' and continued by making comments which both confirm Kinsella's views on the treatment of Irish poetry in England at the time while providing an illumination of the qualities that differentiated Kinsella within the 'gravitic' and generalizing pull of such thinking:

¹⁵⁰ PBS Bulletin 17.

¹⁵¹ John 14

¹⁵² John 17-18.

¹⁵³ John 18-19.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Weber 'Poetic Potential in Ireland,' *Delta* [Cambridge] (Spring 1958): 14.

¹⁵⁵ Vincent Buckley, review of *Poems*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Delta*: 17.

The Irish literary tradition appears far more marriable with the Anglo-Saxon than any other in these islands. It is self-confident enough not to need to exclude the influences of the English poets, some of which may be detected in Kinsella's verse. But at the same time it has its own life. What is most striking in this book is that the oblique approach and the dark image are used with a naturalness that has long been difficult in England. It is as if the devaluation which for years rendered them practically worthless over here has never affected Dublin. But it is also a sign of Kinsella's own power, depth and clarity.¹⁵⁶

Though his remarks concerning 'Anglo-Irish' poetry in the PBS Bulletin suggest a confidence in his 'own power,' Kinsella expresses a dissatisfaction with his poetic achievement so far, as well as a recognition that the impulses which drive the work, of which he is not fully conscious, for good and ill, do produce a self-portrait: 'These voices have not yet succeeded in uttering the kind of poetry I most admire. But I cannot say that they do not reflect the kind of poet I am. (Feidlimid's wife, on the night that Deirdre was born, protested: No woman knows what it is she bears.)'¹⁵⁷

Padraic Fallon captured the principal feature in the work produced in the 1950s when he said that Kinsella came to passion from form, and not the other way around.¹⁵⁸ Yet within the very deliberate choosing of theme, and the borrowing of stanzaic mould and verbal gesture, Kinsella discovers a self-perpetuating need, and a force that takes on its own momentum. In 'Priest and Emperor' the speaker is dominated by impulses which, like Feidlimid's wife, he bears, but does not comprehend:

(At one time the gift took continually
The shape of my right hand, denying it its human
Fitness to undo or make.) I try;
But it discourses of one woman
Ritual, strife in darkness, cold grouped stars. (AS 26)

¹⁵⁶ Robert Conquest, 'New Poetry,' BBC *The Third Programme*, transmission Friday 30th May 1958 10.10 – 10.40 p.m. Text in Kinsella Papers, OBV 1. Quotation from page 12. Conquest included Kinsella in *New Lines – II* (1963), see John 8. It is interesting to note Kinsella's own views on 'Movement' poetry. He called *New Lines* 'less an anthology than a symposium,' and the work of this 'school of University poets,' which included Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, D.J. Enright, Thom Gunn, Elizabeth Jennings, John Wain, John Holloway, and Kingsley Amis, 'intellectualised, unecstatic verse.' Thomas Kinsella, review of *New Lines*, ed. Robert Conquest, *The Chatto Book of Modern Poetry* ed. C. Day Lewis and John Lehmann, *Poetry Now* ed. G.S. Fraser, *Irish Press* 1 December 1956: 4.

¹⁵⁷ PBS Bulletin 17.

¹⁵⁸ Fallon op.cit.

The poem expresses, though, a faith in impulse, and in the (violent) work to achieve what impulse engenders: 'Truth is in impulse, and in the strokes that flay/ Impulse from it' (*AS* 28). Kinsella acknowledges the obscurity and lack of communicated meaning of many of the poems in *Another September*, faults that John Montague and Donald Davie, and later Edna Longley and Calvin Bedient, ascribe to Kinsella's predilection for often convoluted constructions. Kinsella ascribes this aspect of his writing to the impulse within the primal area of the imagination where poems are generated.¹⁵⁹ Despite the mysteriousness of the purpose and designs of this impulse, Kinsella imbues himself with a weatherworn faith in the operation: 'When I write now, it is with feelings like those of the Redemptorist preacher's sparrow, which so foolishly devoted itself to the task of transporting to an unknown destination, grain by grain, and for a reason it could scarcely grasp, the sands of the sea.'¹⁶⁰

In practice, however, despite the implied emphasis here on particularity, the momentum of this instinctive force results in a disparagement of detail: 'Detail is disfigurement and impairs/ The statuary eye' (*AS* 28).¹⁶¹ 'Priest and Emperor' illustrates a tension that is prominent in Kinsella between a lapidary aesthetic, a desire for sculpted roundness of form in pursuit of 'eternal gesture,' and the graininess of the particular.

Czeslaw Milosz ascribes this tension between form and the particular to inherent aesthetic procedures: 'Form favors a penchant for the hieratic and the classical; it resists attempts to introduce realistic detail.'¹⁶² In a poem such as 'An Outdoor Gallery' detail gives way to the force of generalized assertions about the nature of the world:

Life was a mute wrenching of the heart,
A wound in the red roof of the mouth. Often
The very accomplishment of its bitterness
Insisted one should smile and, smiling, accept. (*AS* 36)

¹⁵⁹ Of the supposed wilful difficulty of Kinsella's verse William Kean Seymour said, 'Sometimes Mr. Kinsella is cryptic, disguising the private moment of experience in deliberate obscurity,' 'A Pride of Poets,' review of *Poets of To-Day IV; The Stone Angel and the Stone Man*, by Frances Bellerby; *Beyond Words*, by Eric Knight; and *Another September*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Poetry Review* 49 (5 May 1958): 170. However, there were voices which found themselves, despite the difficulty, persuaded by the performance: 'Even when the verse of Mr. Kinsella is over-elaborate and baffling, his accomplishment is unmistakable.' John Press, 'Recent Books of Verse,' review of *Poems*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Sunday Times* [n.d., n.p.]

¹⁶⁰ PBS Bulletin 17.

¹⁶¹ Kinsella, in a review of Charles Tomlinson, makes an illuminating point about his view of accuracy in language. Of Tomlinson he says: 'His technique is rarely at fault. When it is, it is due to an excessive concern for the visual effect; words, one feels, are not the proper medium for this kind of accuracy,' 'Modern Lyrics in a Minor Key: Each Like a Still Photograph,' review of *The Necklace*, by Charles Tomlinson; *Elegy for the Death of a Clown*, by Stuart Evans; *Poems*, by Laurence D. Lerner, *Irish Press* 8 Oct. 1955: 4.

¹⁶² Milosz, *The Witness of Poetry* 69.

The drafts reveal the setting of the poem as Bray, County Wicklow, but in published form Kinsella has removed all reference to particular location.¹⁶³ ‘An Outdoor Gallery’ is an example, like ‘First Light,’ of a poem which Kinsella will re-write, as ‘Ritual of Departure’ in the later collection *Nightwalker*.¹⁶⁴ The poem is significant in that, for one of the few times in the collection, hope seems to have gained the upper hand in the struggle with disappointment. Yet hope, here, is not transformative. The Real has not been altered in substance, rather love, ‘nervous of rapture’ and thus as unillusioned as the speaker, has, through the speaker’s acquirement of an altered perspective, again provided access to structure:

Love, so regarded, nervous of rapture, placed
 Item after item of beauty behind her.
 Softly the lime of her own beauty traced
 A structure in the rain. The sky grew kinder.

(AS 36)

In ‘The Fifth Season’ knowledge of the Real causes the deliberate chastening of hope; hope is something which needs to be ‘apprised’ of a past tense’ (AS 34). The poem praises death, as *Wormwood* and ‘Phoenix Park’ will later praise love, as the provider of structure: “‘God be praised for death, for even/ That, that especially, is a kiss,/ A direction and an end”” (AS 34). Death answers, therefore, the Kinsellian urge to see coherent patterns with clear conclusions, a desire for ‘finish’ which, as Frank Kermode argues in *The Sense of an Ending*, derives from man’s attempt to make sense of the movement of time in his own life:

Men, like poets, rush ‘into the midst,’ *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. The End they imagine will reflect their irreducibly intermediary preoccupations.¹⁶⁵

In the ‘intermediary occupation’ of poetry, love, and death, for Kinsella will replace convention as providers of ‘limit,’ as the means to access the Real.

As previously mentioned, Kinsella’s idea of poetry as a means to ‘combat erosion’ bears similarity to Robert Frost’s view that the lyric poem is a ‘momentary stay against confusion.’¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Kinsella Papers, box 1, folder 26.

¹⁶⁴ In its drafts ‘An Outdoor Gallery’ also looks forward to ‘Our Mother’ and ‘Phoenix Park’ from that same volume, *Nightwalker*. Kinsella Papers, box 1, folder 26.

¹⁶⁵ Frank Kermode *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 200) 7.

¹⁶⁶ In ‘Time and the Poet’ Kinsella writes: ‘Every poem that was ever written is an attempt to stop

In Kinsella the 'momentary' nature of the 'stay' is of paramount significance. It is both the origin of the frequency with which he returns, in the poems of the 1950s, to the same problem (dichotomy/separation/alienation) and the same solution (the ability of art and love to provide form, the 'stay'), and also to the eventual dissatisfaction with this version of the poetic process. *The Starlit Eye*, for instance, engaged with alienation from the world of nature, a 'dichotomy' which love temporarily resolved. Similarly 'An Ancient Ballet' confronts the situation, with a knowledge of the delusional nature of a self-created order. The moon, the poet says:

[. . .] draws our gazes thronging
Into the figured void
Her light feet deck, where we forget
We know her power is our longing
(AS 18)

'Baggot Street Deserta' deals with the same sense of dislocation, albeit in a more aesthetically sophisticated way, but with less assurance as to the success of the operation, and is the poem that best articulates both Kinsella's disappointment with poetry and his determination to pursue the Real. In notes made for an introduction at a 1959 poetry reading, Kinsella describes it as the poem of a 'solitary worker' in which 'above all, what is struck is the note of private purpose, where the work is an examination of self and the goal wakefulness considered as work.'¹⁶⁷ The rhetorical ploy is to frame this work within failure; the poem begins as the act of writing is abandoned ['The will to work is laid aside' (AS 29)], yet it is a poem which, in its different published versions, demonstrates how hard Kinsella worked to shape the material.¹⁶⁸ Douglas Dunn expressed admiration for the speed of geographical movement in the first section: in thirteen lines we move from desk, to window, to stars, back to attic room, to river, to sea, to mountains, and into the heads of dreamers in 'Dublin's beds.' The descriptions both set the scene and introduce the poem's concern with origins and outcomes, present and past, and the questionable efficacy of art. This introductory section also presents imagery that will return later in the poem as markers of both an interior landscape and an inward and outward tending resolve.

life in its course in order to see how it works; to catch hold of the present and to attach eternal idealism to it, so as to gain something from an oppressive life' 716.

¹⁶⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 10.

¹⁶⁸ Vivian Mercier wrote that '[Kinsella's] friends assert that he works fiendishly hard on his poems, and, after comparing the first and second printings of 'Baggot Street Deserta' I believe what they say,' 'The Art of Exclusion' review of *The Oxford Book of Irish Verse* ed. Donagh MacDonagh, and Lennox Robinson, *Another September*, by Thomas Kinsella; *Too Great a Vine*, by Austin Clarke, *The Nation* 188 (11 April 1959): 322.

Poetry is again seen in terms of violent struggle and self-torture ('the spent attack,' 'the strain of the rack'). The speaker, a highly self-conscious poet, is examining, in the peace and quiet after failure, the nexus of concerns that make his poetry, and make it unsatisfactory. Though he claims to be speaking in the hiatus after poetry, what he offers in his account, as Dunn remarked, is a 'more risky utterance' than the failed, abandoned poem might have done.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, in the forensic examination of the inadequacies of 'versing' that follows, we are offered a glimpse of the temptations to which this writer is prey:

A cigarette, the moon, a sigh
Of educated boredom, greet
A curlew's lingering threadbare cry
Of common loss. Compassionate,
I add my call of exile, half-
Buried longing, half-serious
Anger and the rueful laugh.
We fly into our risk, the spurious.

(AS 29)

The choice of the word 'exile' seems odd. The speaker is not, it seems, a foreigner in a strange city. This exile we learn is from the past, from authentic relation, and from poetry. The past in 'Baggot Street Deserta' is unfinished and unfinishable, and here it is useful to recall that the poem as first published was entitled 'Unfinished Business.' The past, both distant and recent, haunts in its unconnectability with the present; attempts to encounter it are doomed by distance, by time, and by desire for an impossible authenticity. In the drafts Kinsella writes that he is 'exiled from the past.'¹⁷⁰ The present condition is the result of uncertain foundations, what he calls 'our basis on shreds of disappointment,' to which I referred in my introduction to this chapter. The poem anticipates not only 'Downstream' but also 'Nightwalker' and the essay, 'The Irish Writer,' where the Irish tradition is seen as broken, through language-loss.

In 'Baggot Street Deserta,' however, the speaker looks back and 'all is lost;/ The Past becomes a fairy bog' (AS 30). Brian John sees an allusion to Frank O'Connor's survey of the Irish tradition *The Backward Look*, which seems unlikely given that O'Connor's book was published in 1967, and the version of 'Baggot Street Deserta' which contains these lines in 1956.¹⁷¹ Yet O'Connor's question at the beginning of that book is relevant: 'Is there such a

¹⁶⁹ Douglas Dunn, 'Baggot Street Deserta,' *Thomas Kinsella* ed. John F. Deane, spec. issue of *Tracks* 7 (1987): 14.

¹⁷⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

¹⁷¹ The poem first appeared under the title 'Unfinished Business' in *Irish Writing* (Spring 1956), and in a

thing as an Irish literature, or is it merely two unrelated subjects linked by a geographical accident?'¹⁷² This is the central question in 'The Irish Writer.' 'Baggot Street Deserta' figures the division and brokenness of the Irish tradition as the relationship of the individual to the past. Time and memory make the past 'unreal,' a theme which recurs in 'Downstream' where the living 'pattern' replaces the past pattern in a process which Kinsella calls in his notes 'the drift of history.'¹⁷³ In the draft fragment of prose notes for 'Baggot Street Deserta' Kinsella's offers a basis for response to the unreality and divisions fostered by the relentless passage of time: 'Our acts and our products are the only guide to our state – [what wd. (would) not exist but for us]. [i.e. what we create during our lives].'

Kinsella wrote of Louis MacNeice's *Autumn Sequel* that 'as with the young man who went to the back of the picture because he saw a Shape there, he has found primal man in a busy darkness, battering down the walls for Light.'¹⁷⁴ He continued approvingly (and with acute relevance to his own poetry) that 'Mr. MacNeice has learned to regard his past with suspicion.'¹⁷⁵ Kinsella wonders what the quality is that 'transmutes these reminiscences into poetry' and guesses that it might be 'honesty, the determination not to be trumpeted off into ghostly battles, not to wave any banners.'¹⁷⁶ 'Baggot Street Deserta' displays similar qualities. The doubts expressed are less to do with the existence of an ultimate Real than with art's, and the artist's, inevitable shortfall.

Versing, like an exile, makes
 A virtuoso of the heart,
 Interpreting the old mistakes
 And discords in a work of Art
 For the One, a private masterpiece
 Of doctored recollections. Truth
 Concedes, before the dew, its place
 In the spray of dried forgettings Youth
 Collected when they were a single
 Furious undissected bloom.

(AS 30)

revised (partial) version with its present title in *Poetry Now*, ed. G.S. Fraser (London: Faber, 1956) 102-03.

¹⁷² Frank O'Connor, *The Backward Look: A Survey of Irish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1967) 1.

¹⁷³ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Kinsella, review of *Autumn Sequel – A Rhetorical Poem in XXVI Cantos*, by Louis MacNeice, *Irish Writing* 29 (December 1954): 65.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*: 66.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 66.

'Baggot Street Deserta' subjects the theoretical virtues of 'classicist' art to a rigorous questioning. Within a poem of formal poise, we see dissatisfaction with the formal idea of poetry itself, 'the doctored recollections' to which Kinsella as yet can find no aesthetic alternative. At this time Kinsella's main reading was in Blake, Joyce and Thomas Mann.¹⁷⁷ Mann's sense of the consolations derived from language and form provided Kinsella with a potential solution to his feelings about the futility of writing: 'But his love of the Word kept growing sweeter and sweeter, and his love of form; for he used to say (and had already said it in writing) that knowledge of the soul would unfailingly make us melancholy if the pleasures of expression did not keep us alert and of good cheer.'¹⁷⁸

Self-knowledge, whether achieved through psychic self-surgery as in 'Clarence Mangan,' or through the effect of inward alterations of perspective provided by love is, in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' revealed as a knowledge of the world. The tension between knowledge of futility and the drive that continues despite this knowledge:

I nonetheless inflict, endure,
 Tedium, intracordal hurt,
 The sting of memory's quick, the drear
 Uprooting, burying, prising apart [. . .]

(AS 31)

Kinsella's dilemma is that, despite the assertions of his poetry, there is an awareness of an inadequacy of response. He knows that poetry should preserve and protect against the 'tamperings of time.' He is also aware of the poet's vocation, of art's 'eternal' responsibilities but he has not resolved to his own satisfaction the particularities of his own situation and the demands of his own place and circumstance in time. There is, as in the 'Prologue' to *Downstream*, a lack of confidence in the world outside his door, the stuff of his everyday experience, as fit subject for an imagination which 'arches' outward toward 'chilly points of light' and inhabits a space along 'the border-marches/ Of the Real.'

The detachment which the measuring artist (the ideal spectator, the controlling aesthetic watchdog within the poet) brings to bear on material is linked to the artificiality of the achievement of order and the precariousness of the moment of poise; an artificiality and a precariousness that Kinsella can see no way out of, and is resigned to continuing, working

¹⁷⁷ Thomas Kinsella, letter to author, 28 August 2003.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice: Tristan: Tonio Kröger*, trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (1928; Penguin, 1955) 147. For the identification between Kinsella and Tonio Kröger see 'Brothers in the Craft': 'Tonio Kroeger, malodorous, prowled Inchicore'. *BF* 19. See also Tubridy 181; John 252.

harder and more self-critically, achieving aesthetic success which is insufficient existentially:

Fingers cold against the sill
Feel, below the stress of flight,
The slow implosion of my pulse
In a wrist with poet's cramp, a tight
Beat tapping out endless calls
Into the dark, as the alien
Garrison in my own blood
Keeps constant contact with the main
Mystery, not to be understood.
Out where imagination arches
Chilly points of light transact
The business of the border-marches
Of the Real, and I – a fact
That may be countered or may not-
Find their privacy complete.

(AS 31)

In the image of the 'alien garrison' in the blood we see the body as access to the past. Kinsella, like Keats, is 'bound to the body rather than the spirit' and it is the body that keeps the poet in contact with the 'main mystery.' Of the 'alien garrison' Kinsella asks, 'Who are they?' and gives a list of possible answers:

The dead? My many fathers whom I don't know. Cobblers, sailors, poor farmers on a hill; from that into the mist – sheep minders, peasant soldiers (98) . . . back to where God knows what began, . . . the apes, the oceans, the first amoeba. The pulse keeping in touch all the time with the beginning, which is always with us. . . . How alien the thing is which we carry with us, which causes us to be here. We are not more distant from the beginning than from our own fathers.¹⁷⁹

Douglas Dunn sees the lines quoted from 'Baggot Street Deserta' as 'hint[ing] at exposing the borderline between reality and the unexplained.' In his explication he comes near to a definition of the Real: that 'realm which the imagination may enter, but from which it returns with as

¹⁷⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10.

fragile a certainty as it took in with it.¹⁸⁰

Kinsella does not give in to this sense of futility, as beleaguered though the faith in the efficacy of the process may be at times. The faith remains and is bolstered by a tradition of similar attention to the 'validity of order': the artist is not alone but involved in 'the same work that has always occupied the best of his race.' Kinsella's adoption of a rhetorical attitude which emblematises and universalises as it encounters the world of objects and event ('Midsummer,' for example), is bolstered by an awareness of a tradition behind such a rhetorical approach to the world. The pose adopted in 'Pause en Route' has a venerable pedigree, and the poet makes his scene intimate with the antiquity of the theme by unironic recourse to antique circumlocutions:

Death, when I am ready, I
Shall come; drifting where I drown,
Falling, or by burning, or by
Sickness, or by striking down.

Nothing you can do can put
My coming aside, nor what I choose
To come like — holy, broken or but
An anonymity — refuse.

(AS 33)

Kinsella wanted poems that were as objective as possible and to have almost the feel of the anonymous. 'In the Ringwood' reaches for the de-authored timelessness of the folk ballad¹⁸¹:

As I roved out impatiently
Good Friday with my bride
To drink in the rivered Ringwood
The draughty season's pride
A fell dismay held suddenly
Our feet on the green hill-side.

(AS 37)

The human capacity for wilful destruction of the order that is happened upon and constructed is

¹⁸⁰ Dunn, 'Baggot Street Deserta': 17.

¹⁸¹ 'I suppose my favourite poet is in fact Anon.,' Kinsella to Peter Orr 108.

something that has associations with Kinsella's own poetic process. As I have previously noted in connection with 'A Lady of Quality' and 'Soft, to Your Places,' Kinsella needs to continually re-make and re-state order, implying that disorder is a continually re-establishing force. 'In the Ringwood' shows that the pre-eminence of disorder in the order/disorder dialectic derives, like the evil in 'Nightwalker,' from deliberate choice. The subjective origin of destruction's pre-eminence fuels Kinsella's disappointment:

Love that is every miracle
Is torn apart and rent.
The human turns awry
The poles of the firmament.
The fish's bright side is pierced
And good again is spent.

(AS 38)

Though the poem is set on Good Friday the allusion to the crucifixion ('the fish's bright side is pierced') is only part of the wider references to violence and 'ancient slaughter.' In draft form the reference to Christ and religious good were more overt. Indeed there was a Nietzschean element to the last line quoted above 'And God again is spent.'¹⁸²

In the drafts for the poem Kinsella planned much of it out in prose sketch form. A prospective seventh stanza ran: 'All sin is yours. Each time God dies he dies in more complexity [therefore] evil & good grow more complex, flowing & changing like a river. And evil is growing subjective; every man represents all others' evil & sin.'¹⁸³ These thoughts will go on to have relevance in Kinsella's work, particularly in 'Downstream,' with the speaker of that poem's reference to himself as both 'Urmensch and brute,' and in 'Nightwalker' with its examination of the violence of self and society.

In the published version of 'In the Ringwood' the human is contra-natural in its urge to destroy what it has accomplished. This destructive capacity is the fear (and knowledge) of Death, a 'dread' destructive of the ordering principles of both love and poetry:

Though every stem on Vinegar Hill
And stone on Slaney's bed
And every leaf in the living Ringwood
Builds till it is dead

¹⁸² Kinsella Papers, box 1, folder 21.

¹⁸³ Kinsella Papers, box 1, folder 21.

Yet heart and hand, accomplished,
Destroy until they dread.

Dread, a grey devourer,
Stalks in the shade of love.
The dark that dogs our feet
Eats what is sickened of.
The End that stalks Beginning
Hurries home its drove.

(AS 38)

The line 'The dark that dogs our feet/ Eats what is sickened of' might be a fitting description of the motivation for Kinsella's poetic development and his treatment of the work of *Poems* and *Another September*.

While 'Another September' has been written about extensively, I would like to emphasize the momentary pause in the face of reality's 'black breathing' that the speaker allows both himself, but most especially the beloved. Indeed it is love that has caused this momentary allowance of wishful thinking. As if death had taken a holiday, the speaker sees the loved one in a moment of heightened moral and intellectual reality. The speaker, though, is aware that the Yeatsian goal of holding 'reality and Justice in a single thought' has been mimed into existence rather than achieved. The moment is only a hiatus; the 'black breathing' is 'Drugged under judgment.' In this bedroom, as in the poem, and as in the emblem of form that is St. John's, 'all Toil/ Locked fast inside a dream with iron gates' (AS 41), reality has been altered.¹⁸⁴ The knowledge is eloquently figured in the 'wakeful moth wings' that 'toss their light shell at the glass' of the window, the frame of the unreal moment, and then 'go/ To inhabit the living starlight' (AS 41).

The volume soon returns to a concern with the Real, though acknowledging again, however, the human desire for a formal cleaning up of awful fact. In 'Death and the Professor' the deceased archaeologist is a seeker after the 'deeper source' (AS 43) and is admired for the example given to those who would rather not follow:

You moved the muddy spade with open mind,
Slitting the hill of myth, and bled out truth. [. . .]

¹⁸⁴ With regard to the location of St. John's, Kinsella wrote: 'The St. John's in 'Another September' is a place on the Slaney where an uncle of Mrs. Kinsella's lived, a few miles south of Enniscorthy, near her mother's house at Lucas Park,' Letter to Mrs. Margaret Wynne, 7 March 1997, Kinsella Papers, box 65, folder 8.

You send them casting to a deeper source.
A death they do not want to measure. Soon
It will be well they should learn to bury
The private welter in the public work.

(AS 43)

The congruence achieved between private and public is admired, but not yet achieved by Kinsella himself, as the 'Prologue' to *Downstream* wittily shows.

'Lead,' like 'Baggot Street Deserta,' is a meditation on form and time, and the past as a necessary component of the Real. The poem is significant in that it is the first time Kinsella locates the awakening of disappointment in a childhood experience. In 'Clarence Mangan' Kinsella had displaced memory of the onset of disappointment into the experience of the poet ['Sometimes, childishly watching a beetle, [. . .]/ [. . .] sudden unhappinesses/ Would bewilder me' (AS 24), an image that will recur in 'Hen Woman' as part of Kinsella's own experience]. 'Lead' is set in Luttrell's Glen, Co. Dublin, however, the naming of the location is not used to give the poem a sense of particular place, and the disappointment experienced is not connected to anything especial about the social circumstances of the place, as in 'Nightwalker.' Luttrell's Glen could be anywhere, despite Brian John seeing the named Irish settings of 'King John's Castle,' and 'Another September' and 'Baggot Street Deserta,' as a qualification of Kinsella's own attempt to distance his poetry from the category 'Irish.' The Real here, as elsewhere in the volume, is not located in the everyday, not in particularity, but in the ravages that time has effected on that location, and the pursuit of the Real is the creation of a living relationship with the dead of a lost past. 'Place' is held in a fine tension between the essential and the contingent, between 'first purpose or first accident' (AS 44), and this tension informs all of Kinsella's writing, despite appearances to the contrary.

Within the disorder that time and nature have re-established by the start of the poem, the speaker finds '[t]wo dull dice of lead.' The find induced a reverie, we are told, in which the 'mind leaped toward the clash of the real' (AS 45). Visions of the different pasts of the 'disused/ Forges' of Luttrellstown House appear. The origins of the word 'poet' (Greek *poētēs*: 'maker') are alluded to in the vision of pre-History, as Vulcan in a 'maker's rage/ Smelted and hammered on his smoking ledge/ A bit to bridle Chaos' (AS 44). The emblem of poetic form as a controlling harness for the wild stallion of nature melds into a vision of 'leather-vizored workmen' who 'in their time/ Roofed many a teeming manor/ With sheeted calms no violence could dispel' (AS 45). Their forms, like Vulcan's bridle, and as strongly controlling of the stuff of nature, are 'risen out of nothing.' Yet though these are 'classic' forms, counters to chaos, they

do not endure: the vision fades, Nature re-establishes itself and Time works its inevitable logic:

Craft and Craftsmen, risen out of nothing,
Sank to a jackdaw chatter in the head.
The road to Dublin churned back into mud.
Gea, [sic] naked as slate,
Caught in her fern those quenched eyes, scarred with seeing
Let drop like dice the aproned dead
Stretched in silence under this estate.

(AS 45)¹⁸⁵

The last poem in the book, 'Thinking of Mr. D,' also illustrates the effect of the Kinsellian thesis 'Time= Hope + Disappointment.' In this case Kinsella approaches the theme in a portrait poem which places disappointment for the first time into a social context. In Mr. D the effect of drained hope is visible in his manners and encounters with others. He drinks slowly, preoccupied as he is with the telling of scurrilous gossip; his humour as corrosive as time's effect upon him. It is, in many ways, a portrait of an artist manqué, 'A barren Dante leaving us for hell' (AS 47); perhaps even, like Gabriel Conroy in 'The Dead,' a self-portrait envisioning an alternative art-less fate. As in Joyce's story, and as in 'Lead,' the dead ('his friends/ And peers') haunt the portrait of Mr. D. He is ageing but not old, angry but hemmed-in, all of which happens, Kinsella suggests, when disappointment inevitably defeats hope:

A man still light of foot, but ageing, took
An hour to drink his glass, his quiet tongue
Danced to such cheerful slander. Yet his look
Was narrowed to the angry ember the young,
If they should notice, would pity as rage barred in
By age, the knot where hope's perspective ends.

(AS 46)

Mr. D. 'knows his tatters lack the act of blood,' the 'real blood' that flows through the 'deathless heart' in 'Ending on a Balcony'; the blood that is the living link to the past in 'Baggot Street Deserta.' Kinsella is suggesting that poetry must have this 'act of blood.' Mr. D., however, did, on at least one occasion try. When the world still mattered to him, 'he loosened hope like a

¹⁸⁵ In the 1962 re-set edition of *Another September* Kinsella took the opportunity to revise the spelling of 'Gaea.'

thong,' and 'Time' dropped before him a landscape 'bitten by flaming threads [. . .] by broken dykes and smouldering watersheds,' images of violation which inevitably recall the 'shreds of disappointment' of Kinsellian reality.

The barrenness of Mr. D. derives from his turning aside from these 'shreds' and from pain, the fount of knowledge, it seems here, of the Real. Like 'Old Harry,' he is condemned to a 'bodily plight,' but ignores this source of knowledge. Yet there still remains in him the impulse for art:

A priestlike figure turning, wolfish-slim,
Quickly aside from pain, in a bodily plight,
To note the oiled reflections chime and swim.

(AS 47)

The last image is of congruence, flux, and potential. Kinsella will return to such an image in 'The Shoals Returning.' With 'Thinking of Mr. D' Kinsella's work of the 1950s ends on a premonition of the dangers of turning aside from the psychic and bodily sources of the Real.

Chapter 2

Futility flogs a tambourine

In an overview of the poetry scene in Britain in 1961 Charles Tomlinson included Kinsella in a group comprising Norman MacCaig, Ted Hughes, and Peter Redgrove; the reason: 'a certain tortuousness of stylistic texture.' Kinsella is promising, Tomlinson says, but 'needs, perhaps, to prune his verse a little more drastically if it is to achieve something akin to the energy of the best of Hughes.'¹ Kinsella had, by the time this article appeared in *Poetry* (Chicago), already set about 'pruning' his verse. If the poems in *Another September* had been produced out of an 'occasional schizophrenia,' the poems in Kinsella's second full volume *Downstream* were, he said, 'roughly as I intended them and as good as I could make them.'² Augustine Martin found evidence in *Moralities* and in 'A Country Walk' that Kinsella had 'applied the discipline of clarity to himself.'³ The 'tortuousness' that Tomlinson noted remained part of Kinsella's poetic make-up, however. The syntax at a significant remove from speech, as well as the abstractions and allegorical landscapes continue to appear in poems such as 'Old Harry' and 'Check.' This element in his writing began, as Kinsella implies in 'Priest and Emperor,' 'unbidden,' but developed into a conscious and deliberate part of his poetic procedure.⁴ The abstract, and allegorical is a crucial element in the wider scheme of Kinsella's poetic, the side of his poetry which, he says in his note to *Downstream* for the Poetry Book Society (PBS) Bulletin, derives from 'the occasional intellectual idea.'⁵

Downstream is both an aesthetic and thematic advance on *Poems* and *Another September*. 'Cover Her Face,' 'Dick King,' 'A Country Walk,' 'Chrysalides,' and the title poem, 'Downstream,' mark a move into material both more personal and more public than he had tackled before. Such was the effect of the public nature of much of the utterance and the technical accomplishment of the verse – 'ever more finished, ever more correct' – that a contemporary reviewer, John C. Kelly, was provoked to announce to the Irish public '*Habemus Poetam!*'⁶ Other reviews were quick to note the change in Kinsella's work. Valentin Iremonger saw the book as 'a two-pronged extension of [Kinsella's] poetic interest' toward 'the longer

¹ Charles Tomlinson, 'Poets and Mushrooms: A Retrospect of British Poetry in 1961,' *Poetry* (Chicago) 100. 2 (May 1962): 110.

² Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34 (September 1962).

³ Augustine Martin, review of *The Dolmen Miscellany* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1962) and *Poetry Ireland*, ed. John Jordan, *Studies* 52 (Summer 1963): 222-4.

⁴ Edna Longley is speaking of this element when she refers to the 'marshy portentousness' of the introductory section of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, for example.

⁵ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34. In *Downstream*, according to Kinsella, examples of this 'intellectual' poetry can be seen in such poems as 'Charlie' and 'Scylla and Charybdis'.

⁶ John C. Kelly, review of *Another September* and *Downstream*, *Studies* 51. 204 (Winter 1962): 546. 'Habemus Poetam!' ['We have a Poet!'] A play on 'Habemus Papam,' used to announce the election of a new Pope.]

lyrical poem' and toward poems 'dealing with themes of a more public nature than those he has hitherto handled.'⁷ Though these 'more public' poems concern themselves in the main with themes and incidents from Irish experience, it is not to the exclusion of other concerns. 'Old Harry,' for example, deals with the President of the United States, Harry Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The poem also demonstrates the continuing desire on Kinsella's part not to be 'limited' by Irish experience when the 'main mystery' lies elsewhere and will 'bother all of us equally.'⁸

The collection is divided into four sections, and is framed by a 'Prologue' which, in its clarity of presentation, and in its subject matter, illustrates the personal and public dimensions to Kinsella's development away from the gnarled, self-conscious 'eternal gestures' of *Another September*. Indeed the poem registers the poet's incongruous feelings as he begins to include, despite himself almost, the suburban 'unpoetic' nature of his everyday experience as material for his poetry. Brisk rhyming couplets deliver the ironic contrast between the 'poet' as removed and airy figure of romantic expectation, and the drained and draining circumstances of the nine-to-five, suburban world that Kinsella inhabited as Department of Finance official. The tension is palpable between the romantic figure of 'Poet,' and the impinging demands of his particular reality:

*I wonder whether one expects
Flowing tie or expert sex
Or even absent-mindedness
Of poets any longer. [. . .]
But surely not the morning train,
The office lunch, the look of pain
Down the blotched suburban grass,
Not the weekly trance at Mass . . .
Drawing on my sober dress
These, alas, I must confess.*

(D 9; italicised in original)

Downstream begins, therefore, as the book of a man facing into, and reflecting on, life as a poet. He is a man coming to grips with established traits, taking stock of what his life has become, surprised even to be a poet when the life he knows is the suburban rather than the bohemian cliché.

⁷ Valentin Iremonger, 'Lyrics and Statements,' review of *Downstream*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Guardian* 5 Oct. 1962: 15.

The 'Prologue' was, at one stage, called 'Good Morning,'⁹ and contained within its overview of his life so far, lines of elegy for two young deaths, 'Richard' and 'Maura.' These young deaths eventually became the subjects of new poems, 'String-Puppets' ('Enter Richard, dying' *D* 60), and 'Cover Her Face' (*D* 22-4); and death is a major theme throughout the volume.¹⁰ The composition of the piece began in April/May 1958.¹¹ As well as being a testament and a farewell to his twenties, the poem in draft form looks forward ten years, to '1968.' The poet plans to get rid of old habits and expresses the wish to 'start my thirties sweet and clean./ To tidy my twenties for the bin.' His health is 'well-enough,' he says, but cautions that '[t]he psyche is another matter':

Hands that twitch & nerves that shatter
 Sometimes seem to show the cracks,
 The choppings of the inner axe.¹²

The inner turmoil belies the suburban exterior. The violence of the metaphors reaches a comic climax when he names his indefatigable psychic demon 'the inner Lizzie Borden.' Less dramatic, but as unsettling to the speaker of the poem, is his talent for disgruntlement: 'More occasion for alarm/ Are dourness and a loss of charm.'

There is, of course, self-deprecation in all of this. The poem in this draft, and in its final form, is wry in its reflections on self and social position: 'I have stayed a poet/ Though, honestly, you'd scarcely know it.' The everyday grind he faces is full of *ennui*, but most significantly for the future turn that Kinsella's poetry will take, there is a boredom with the resources and machinery of poetry itself: 'Three steps on, two back, we come/ Beating the iambic drum.' The frustrations with form introduced in *Another September*, in such poems as 'Baggot Street Deserta,' had been directly connected to the depredations of time and the attempt to establish a satisfying relationship between form and the past; in *Downstream* the frustrations are more markedly connected to the habits and rhetoric of poetry. If lack and isolation had caused the hollowness of words in a poem such as 'Per Imaginem,' in 'The Force of Eloquence' words are (and the violence of the verb indicates the suspicion in which the act is held) 'constricted into other terms' to create 'eternal breathless appearance' (*D* 62). This frustration is accompanied by an awareness of the need to move on from provisional achievements of form:

⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 113.

⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 3. Subsequent quotations of the poem come from this box and folder.

¹⁰ Robin Skelton writing about *Moralities*, which forms section two of *Downstream*, said 'Death and the fear of death are everywhere,' 'The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella,' *Éire-Ireland* 4. 1 (Spring 1969): 97.

¹¹ Though undated, the first lines of the ms begin '[t]he long, forgivable twenties pass/ Into their final month, alas.'

¹² Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 3.

'He must progress/ Who fabricates a path' (*D* 32).¹³

In *Downstream* measure and rhythm, and what Kinsella later calls 'decorative language',¹⁴ are inimical to, and potentially destructive of, meaningful speech. Technical advances in prosody, Kinsella implies, are not enough. In the draft version of the 'Prologue' the facile rhyming and sing-song rhythm undermine the 'Three steps on' of the poet's (public) achievements; it is 'Love, and the inner Lizzie Borden' rather than the 'enabling' influences of senior poets which will prompt and provoke him into the advances that will gain purchase on the Real:

As I write, a recent book
Of 30 poems slips the hook
And makes some headway, helped to sea
By the Poetry Book Society.
Love, and the inner Lizzie Borden,
A touch of Yeats and lots of Auden,
Some Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound
And Robert Lowell; underground, [...] ¹⁵

These lines reveal that the influences of Yeats and Auden had, even at this stage, begun to be supplemented by a reading of American poets.¹⁶ Kinsella's move to America in 1965, to take up a position as Artist in Residence at Southern Illinois University, is often seen as crucial to his understanding of American poetry, yet even before the publication of *Another September*, Kinsella had in 1956, almost ten years before his move, written in praise of Stevens and Pound in reviews in the *Irish Press*.¹⁷ In an interview with Dennis O'Driscoll Kinsella says that he

¹³ For a suggestive explication of the stanza in 'Interlude: Time's Mischief' (in *Moralities*) from which this line comes, see Seamus Heaney, 'Cornucopia and Empty Shell: Variations on a Theme from Ellmann,' *The Place of Writing* (Emory, GA: Scholars Press, 1989) 57-59; partially reprinted as 'Thomas Kinsella' in *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* (London: Faber, 2002) 240-41.

¹⁴ Kinsella, O'Driscoll: 65.

¹⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 3.

¹⁶ See '... New Found Land,' review of *The Faber Book of Modern American Verse* ed. W.H. Auden; *The Old Man's Road* by W.H. Auden; *Poems* by Elizabeth Bishop; *The Greenhouse in the Garden* by Charles Edward Eaton, in *Irish Writing* 36 (Late Autumn 1956): 184-86. Kinsella wrote: 'I cannot think of a group of English poets born since 1910 who could rival – to take a quick census – Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell, Richard Wilbur': 184. What these writers and 'lesser lights' such as Delmore Schwartz, Peter Viereck, Robert Horan, Anthony Hecht point toward, according to Kinsella, is that 'the production of good poetry is becoming a normal function of modern America as it was, in a different way, of Elizabethan and Cavalier England': 184.

¹⁷ See 'Major American Poet,' review of *Collected Poems* by Wallace Stevens, *Irish Press* 23 June 1956: 4; and 'The Hundred Cantos of Ezra Pound,' review of *Section: Rock-Drill 85-95 de los cantares*, *Irish Press* 26 Oct. 1957: 4. These reviews are interesting for the light they throw on Kinsella's ambitions for his own poetry. Kinsella expressed admiration for Stevens's 'disturbingly precise sensibility, as fit to

'was excited about the poetry of Pound long before going to America.'¹⁸ Perhaps it is from Pound that another influence makes its presence felt in the 'Prologue,' that of Francois Villon's poem 'Le Testament,' written like Kinsella's poem 'En l'an de mon trentiesme aage' ('In the thirtieth year of my age') when the poet admits to being 'Ne du tout fol, ne tout sage' ('not wholly foolish, nor yet a sage').¹⁹ The drafts of the poem confirm this source: Kinsella adopts the 'Item' refrain Villon uses in his long poem of final bequest.²⁰ Villon's influence has been unremarked upon, though Kinsella in 'Time and the Poet' sees Villon as having written perhaps 'the most beautiful and illustrative' poem on the 'sorrow caused by the plunder of time.'²¹ Villon's significance in terms of Kinsella's pursuit of the Real can be seen here, particularly in relation to the light the comments throw on the mix of anger and ruefulness in 'Nightwalker': 'Everything that he considered reality is mentioned in his huge tomes, with malice but also with regret, e.g. the bourgeois mind and the church [. . .] in a way that seems to say that they (the poet and his enemies) are all children of the one mother.'²² Villon's poems derive their origin and their theme, Kinsella writes, from the 'ever active image of Death and separation.'²³ He relates that in Villon's Paris there was a painting of the *danse macabre* along one wall of Les Invalides, and that Montfaucon, the haunt of courting couples, was festooned with the rotting carcasses of the hanged. With this mind it is clear that the medieval mode of *Moralities*, which Kinsella was working on at the time of this lecture, was undoubtedly influenced by Villon.

The influence of Robert Lowell on Kinsella's poetry is usually ascribed to the period beginning with the 'confessional' element in the poems of *Wormwood* (1966).²⁴ The drafts of

paint a shading of light or colour as to sculpt an idea.' His review emphasizes the idea that 'good poems [...] do not ignore the intellect,' but also that Stevens's poems 'see things whole – as they are – and not with the intellectual faculty, which would see things as they "ought to be".' Good poems, Kinsella says, 'direct their effect towards [...] the whole mind and not to one part only.' Kinsella's review of Pound provides an intriguing early insight into Kinsella's thoughts on waste, and his interest in a poetry that goes beyond the confines of 'the lovely short poem': 'believers in Mr. Pound's method are tired of the view that the cantos consist of a series of lovely short poems embedded in a waste of poetical and syntactical error. But their counter-praise seems as extravagant as that view is stupid.' Kinsella's first visit to America occurred in 1963, on an exchange scholarship visiting and lecturing at 'centres concerned with poetry,' including Harvard, Berkeley, the University of Washington, and the University of Chicago, Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 20.

¹⁸ Kinsella, O' Driscoll: 60.

¹⁹ Francois Villon, *Selected Poems*, trans. Peter Dale (London: Penguin, 1978) 41. Pound adapted Villon's opening line in the 'E.P. Ode Pour L'Election De Son Sepulchre' section of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*: 'Unaffected by the "march of events,"/ He passed from men's memory in *l'an trentuniesme/ De son eage*.' *Collected Shorter Poems* (London: Faber, 1984) 187.

²⁰ The refrain is also used in Villon's 'Le Lais' [The Legacy] which Kinsella quotes from in 'Time and the Poet' (718). See Villon 26-28.

²¹ 'Time and the Poet' 718. The poem Kinsella is referring to is 'Ballade: Des Dames du Temps Jadis,' the famous refrain of which can be rendered into English as 'Where are the snows of yesteryear.'

²² 'Time and the Poet' 717. Parenthesis in original.

²³ 'Time and the Poet' 718.

²⁴ See Thomas Dillon Redshaw, 'The Wormwood Revisions': 'Perhaps the most extreme shift from a poetry of portraiture to one in the confessional mode has been made by Thomas Kinsella.' *Éire-Ireland*

the 'Prologue' point to an influence even in *Downstream*, and poems such as 'Dick King,' and 'Cover Her Face,' for instance, though still recognizably part of Kinsella's early style, do contain an autobiographical element reminiscent of Lowell's *Life Studies*. Lowell's influence on Kinsella is most usually considered in terms of what James Longenbach calls the 'breakthrough narrative' of modern American poetry, with Lowell's 'breakthrough' into 'freer' forms seen as an 'enabling' example for Kinsella's own formal dilemma.²⁵ Kinsella has confirmed an element of truth to this interpretation of Lowell's influence.²⁶

However, within Kinsella himself stronger forces undermined the attractions of traditional formal measure. The draft version of the 'Prologue' reveals what poems like 'Old Harry' and 'A Country Walk' demonstrate: Kinsella's willingness to face demons on the personal and the public plane. Kinsella's attraction to Lowell is partly explained by Lowell's psychic daring, the willingness to explore inner turmoil. 'Clarence Mangan' (*AS* 24) had revealed, through the persona of the nineteenth century poet that Kinsella saw the poetic act as a relentless process of self-surgery ('Ultimate, pitiless, again I ply the knife'). That Kinsella sought out this trait in others can be evidenced by a review he wrote of R.S. Thomas, Jon Stallworthy and John Montague in which he said '[p]sychic energy, [. . .] is lacking in all three of these books to varying degrees.'²⁷ As the motor of formal change the 'inner Lizzie Borden,' the ruthless dissatisfaction Kinsella noted in himself in 'The Road to the South,' which constantly questions the achievement of formal balance, will take on greater and greater significance in Kinsella's poetry.

The temporary appeasing of this inner demon is a constant temptation. The pleasures of form, as in Mann's *Tonio Kröger*, keep the artist in good cheer, but, as in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' also 'risk the spurious.' In *Downstream* Kinsella evokes a different conception of 'risk.' In 'Into Thy Hands' (*Moralities*), the speaker proclaims 'let accident/ Complete our dreadful journey into being.' The original title of this poem, 'Savour of Desperation,'²⁸ captures well what becomes the characteristic Kinsellian note, the embracing of adversity in pursuit of increased understanding, and as an opportunity for growth. It is worth recalling here that the trouble with 'Mr. D' had been his turning aside from adversity. The poem itself illustrates Kinsella's determined imaginative thrust: the sensation the diver feels as the diving board 'Gives to the body' is compared to 'giv[ing] to the instant,' and there is, the speaker says, 'In

6. 2 (Summer 1971): 112-13. John Montague did note a 'rather fabricated Lowellian density' to the poem 'Lead' in his *Irish Times* review of *Another September* 'Strife in Darkness.'

²⁵ James Longenbach, *Modern Poetry After Modernism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997) 5.

²⁶ See Kinsella's interviews with John Haffenden and Philip Fried.

²⁷ 'Voices from Home,' review of *Poisoned Lands* by John Montague; *Out of Bounds* by Jon Stallworthy; and *The Bread of Truth* by R.S. Thomas, *New York Times Book Review* 12 April 1964: 5.

²⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 42.

risk a salty joy' (D 28). The drafts indicate that this is a dive into 'non-being,'²⁹ and so prefigures Kinsella's dive into primal imaginative realms in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*.

The temptation to rest on aesthetic laurels, to be satisfied by achieved form, is resisted through another element in his poetic make-up. The 'Prologue' is a further example of the unsatisfiable urge for a complete account of all the constituent parts of the creative process. *A Technical Supplement* (1976) is the fullest expression of this aspect in Kinsella's work. In the 'Prologue' the account of the poetic process indicates the underlying dissatisfaction with the 'classic' style that will eventually lead to Kinsella's aesthetic renovation. Kinsella allegorises his mode of poetic composition in a context which questions the validity of the entire process. Poetry as work, even with such a struggle as portrayed in 'A Shout After Hard Work,' can become mere habit, 'blind routine.' Kinsella sees the making of poetry as absurd. The whole enterprise, if not doomed from the start, produces very little by the end:

*And so my bored menagerie
Once more emerges: Energy,
Blinking, only half awake,
Gives its tiny frame a shake;
Fouling itself, a giantess,
The bloodshot bulk of Laziness
Obscures the vision; Discipline
Limps after them with jutting chin,
Bleeding badly from the calf:
Old Jaws-of-Death gives laugh for laugh
With Error as they amble past,
And there as usual, lying last,
Helped along by blind routine,
Futility flogs a tambourine . . .*

(D 10)

The personified abstractions of 'Laziness', 'Discipline,' 'Jaws of Death,' 'Error,' and finally, 'Futility,' are portrayed as a *danse macabre*. In 'Ballydavid Pier' (N 14-15), allegory is something which happens 'of itself,' as an accompaniment to *significant* event. In the 'Prologue' Kinsella's allegory is an active figuration of event. Kinsella creates abstract representations to act out event, makes the allegory out of the significant material.³⁰ In the 'Prologue' this use of

²⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 42.

³⁰ Donald Davie sees this allegorical turn of mind, and his persistence with this mode, as virtually

allegory, though comic, serves to underline the inescapable nature of disappointment, which frames the entire collection.

In 'A Portrait of the Engineer' the disappointment with poetry introduced by the 'Prologue' is evoked in a poem which dramatizes the uselessness of words when confronted with the de-humanizing and lethal 'flesh-eating engines' of the 'Engineer.' All the poet can offer against the murder machine is 'the blurred response of a phrase' (*D* 16). The futility that the 'Prologue' portrays, however, is different in that it is potentially catastrophic for all effort. The disappointment with poetry visible in these two poems contrasts with Kinsella's explaining away of the corrosive effect of futility in 'Writer at Work.' In his prose Kinsella places futility within a philosophical frame that neutralizes and lessens its destructive power. In an argument derived in part from Thomas Mann, the 'measuring' artistic attitude, the artificial poetic style Kinsella calls the 'classic,' provides a kind of 'consolation.' The consolation for 'inevitable' artificiality, and for the fact that the process must continually be repeated, comes from the self-consciousness of the poetic act, and the realization that the act in its very nature is 'unreasonable': 'No one knows more than the conscious rhymers, the measuring artist, the kind of insanity which his work represents: that it is an act of unreasonable faith in the continuity of things and in the validity of order in a world not understood.'³¹

Yet Kinsella's poems of the 1950s and early 1960s continue a critical questioning of a poetry concerned with its own procedures. As in the earlier poem 'Doomsday,' the unpublished poem 'Classical'³² contains an implied questioning and criticism of the 'classic' stance:

The blue surf of spring
trickles between the trees like smoke
into pools on the wood's edge.

Emotionlessly, arranging her dress,
the sea-girl, noble star-mother,
drinks from a pool.

The trees' intake of breath
combs the maidenhair
nervously.

unique among Kinsella's contemporaries. See 'Thomas Kinsella,' *Under Briggflats: A History of Poetry in Great Britain 1960-1988* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989) 68.

³¹ 'Writer at Work': 30.

³² Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 15.

The girl is far removed from psychic energies, 'Emotionlessly, arranging her dress.' The self-criticism implied, particularly in the use of the word 'arranging,' gains force when we recall Kinsella's comment on his own poetry, which derived from 'a compulsion to arrange rather than to communicate.' The atmosphere in 'Classical' is one of poise, yet a nervousness, and unease pervades, in the response of the natural world to the formal arranging of its processes.

The girl's gesture is repeated, more powerfully and poignantly, in the first poem proper of *Downstream*, 'The Laundress.' The gesture is not an arranging, but a 'fixing,' an adjustment to brutal fact like Kinsella's own aesthetic re-alignments, in hopes of an adequate response to Nature's indifferent processes:

The sower plumps his acre,
Flanders turns to the heat,
The winds of Heaven winnow
And the wheels grind the wheat.
She searched in her basket
And fixed her ruffled sheet.

(D 13)

Natural process is the most significant underminer of form, and the most significant natural process is death. In *Downstream* the recognitions of death's erosive power that were present in *Another September* have a new basis in experience. In a note in the drafts of 'Dick King' Kinsella writes: 'Parting sums up a relationship/ Death sums up a life.'³³ 'String-Puppets,' a poem which also concerns the death of a friend, contains a similar reflection upon the conclusive effect of departure and death. The poem adds to this thought, though, a note of dissatisfaction with aestheticised renderings of death, and indicates the increasing tenuousness of the grip on Kinsella of an aesthetic of control: 'Enter Richard, dying; manipulated/ On withering cords' (D 60). Reinforcing this interpretation is the fact that the poem was, at one stage, called 'The Entertainer.'³⁴ Manuscript pages, dated 12 June 1961, include the following deleted lines: 'In the presence of death the past breaks down before me/ into dead lengths.' Death, as in 'The Fifth Season,' has an art-like effect, turning the past into 'monuments standing aloof/ in still periods among the still living.'

Like 'Baggot Street Deserta,' the poems in *Downstream* grapple with the problem of art as a separation from the flow of life. The struggle with incompleteness is compounded of the awareness that art feigns a completion which in reality only death and time provide. Notes made

³³ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 27.

³⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 34.

during the composition of 'Downstream' clarify this aspect of Kinsella's thought and art: 'My poetic urge = the working process of life itself (it doesn't provide a meaning for living; it merely presents us with our own completed (however unsatisfied) experience, ending, with a logic wh.[ich] only time can show, with an (apparently unlogical) death.'³⁵ Death, in *Downstream*, is a source of completed experience, and therefore an occasion for Kinsella to examine the 'working process of life itself.' But death has another effect. It is an irruption into a settled state and provokes re-assessment of position; it is the ultimate which interrogates all intermediate states.

In 'Cover Her Face' and 'Dick King,' Kinsella explores what knowledge can be gained from an acquaintance with death, in poems concerned with the effect of the losses of a friend and a childhood neighbour. *Downstream* marks a significant development in Kinsella's poetry for the particularity of these explorations, but also for another reason. 'Dick King' as a reflection upon a figure from his Kilmainham/Inchicore childhood contains the first indications of where Kinsella's work eventually finds vital and nourishing material.

In the Carbondale student newspaper, the *Daily Egyptian*, Kinsella called Dick King a 'positive human being, the custodian of potential for good.'³⁶ In this sense the 'vanished good' King represents is reminiscent of Kinsella's father as keeper of 'the eggseed Goodness/ that is also called Decency' in *The Messenger* (BF 8). The composition of the poem appears to have brought out for Kinsella's this strong association between King and John Kinsella:

Around the fountain fifty years ago
My cold-kneed father with his schoolboy's stare
Watches their black cabs careering, watches them throw
Their bowler hats in the water, and the bare
Heads burning with Saturday's night bacchanal
Poke through the windows, shouting on the horses.
The wheels on the cobbles died. Nothing shall
Bring their bodies back, their buried forces.

King told my father.³⁷

In its eventual form, however, reference to the father is removed and the incident the poem recalls becomes instead something from Kinsella's own memory:

³⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

³⁶ *Daily Egyptian* 48. 139, 6 May 1967: 4.

Clearly now I remember rain on the cobbles,
Ripples in the iron trough, and the horses' dipped
Faces under the Fountain in James's Street,
When I sheltered my nine years against your buttons
And your own dread years were to come [.]

(D 20)

Death has a paradoxical value in that it enables the love the young boy inarticulately felt for the old man to reveal itself in the memory of the adult poet: the personified Death 'roves our memories igniting/ Love.' The departed King is a 'kind plague' conjured by Death from out of the memories of the poet, just as King is himself in the scene involved in an act of remembering. This communing with the dead, for King and by extension for the poet who, in the memorial act of writing the poem echoes King's spoken act, has repercussions for the quality of afterlife available to the dead in the memory of the living:

And your voice, in a pause of softness, named the dead,
Hushed as though the city had died by fire,
Bemused . . . discovering, discovering
A gate to enter temperate ghosthood by [.]

(D 20)

Brian John conjectures that Jonathan Swift and Robert Emmet may be among the dead invoked by King, though the poem, he admits, 'is silent on this score.'³⁷ This is an understandable inference considering the use, in *St Catherine's Clock* (1987), Kinsella subsequently made of personal and historical associations with the area of Dublin in which the poem takes place. The suggestiveness is created by Kinsella's removal of specific reference. Likewise the removal of reference to Kinsella's father opens the poem to implications beyond the personal. One might also conjecture that the removal of reference to Kinsella's father moved the poem more toward the effect of death on memory than might have been possible had the poem followed the train of feeling and thought provoked by his still living father.

As the draft quoted above reveals, the figures from the past that haunted the area around the Fountain in James's Street, Dublin, were in actuality middle class revellers. Fifty years before the moment the poem commemorates, these men would come in horse-drawn cabs and go 'Round and round, and round, The Fountain. Honouring Victoria.' The revelry would end

³⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 27.

³⁸ John 52.

with these men 'throw[ing] their bowler hats in the water.'³⁹ This socio-political element, as in Kinsella's practice in *Another September*, is removed in favour of the existential. Yet a socio-cultural and political element indirectly remains.

King, from the Claddagh area in Galway, comes to Dublin 'To bring a dying language east/ And dwell in Basin Lane' (*D* 20). King embodies, if in a minor chord, the linguistic and cultural disjunctions of Ireland itself.⁴⁰ Like the emblematic figure of Aogán Ó Rathaille in 'At the Western Ocean's Edge' (*FCC* 26), King was a native of 'the salt seaboard' of the Irish-speaking west coast. Like so many others before him, King adapted to linguistic and social realities, and in Dublin 'his second soul was born/ In the clangour of the iron sheds' (*D* 21). This wider significance to King's person and experience comes in the ballad section of the poem where we can see Kinsella's indebtedness to W.H. Auden's 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats.' Both poems move into a rhythmic ballad-like stanza from stanzas of less rhythmically insistent form. The lesson that Auden desires from the ghost of Yeats ('In the prison of his days/ Teach the free man how to praise'⁴¹), however, differs from the lesson gleaned from reflection upon King. In the notes taken during the composition of the poem Kinsella wrote:

There is no such thing as happiness except in retrospect. We love and have joy in the Lost only. Tragedy simplifies, purifies down, the future and the past, and discovers happiness. There is no problem in life but to keep ~~love~~ joy pure. Joy is a quiet hidden thing and will not disclose that it was here, except by a backward sign and it goes from us. Tragedy is the solution to a situation. It comes in a brief act and suddenly gives meaning. It is the only source of meaning. It grants (meaning, happiness, etc. in retrospect) by destroying them.⁴²

The passage implies an overturning of what are commonly held values. In the seeing of the negative as positive ('Tragedy is the solution to a situation'), in a kind of Nietzschean 'transvaluation,' Kinsella was influenced by William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (see Chapter 3). The overturning of value, the appraisal of the negative in positive terms, and its use for positive ends, informs Kinsella's aesthetic change. Disappointment, which like futility could cripple the creative act, is transformed into a creative force. Kinsella's disparagement of poetry's 'unreality' when faced with time, death, natural process and the forces of industrial might, provokes him into change, just as disappointment with the 'elaborately prepared

³⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 27.

⁴⁰ Brian John believes the poem flawed by 'the reader's inability to accept the mundane details of the dead man's life as capable of carrying his symbolic status,' John 52.

⁴¹ W.H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems 1927-1957* (London: Faber, 1984) 143.

⁴² Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 27.

solutions'⁴³ of religion, and of 'classicist' poetry, spur the discovery of alternative organizing principles for his experience.

In *Downstream* Kinsella begins to engage himself with material that he had previously chosen to ignore. There is an increased ability and desire to include as material for poetry his quotidian experience as a civil servant in the Irish Department of Finance. Though Kinsella had worked as a civil servant since 1946 such material had been notably absent in *Poems* and *Another September*. Yet this advance into subject matter derived more obviously from experience does not signal a change of thematic preoccupation. The themes with which he had previously been concerned ('love and death and the artistic act') are still to the fore in poems marked otherwise by aesthetic advances in clarity and in their basis in actual rather than primarily imaginative experience. The inclusion of material derived from background and experience carries a warning system attached to it, as evidenced by his remark to Peter Orr. Kinsella consciously 'eschews' material that is 'Irish' for its own sake. The local detail, and the detail from experience, earns its keep after passing through a stringent internal vetting system.

The inclusion of limited local material occurs alongside a discernible growth in the clarity of presentation and a tact with words noted by Padraic Fallon when he cited the poem 'Wedding Morning':

Down the church gravel where the bridal car
 Gleams at the gate among the waifs and strays
And women of Milewater, formal wear
 And Fashion's joker hats wink in the breeze.

Past, the hushed progress under sprays of broom
 And choirs of altar lilies, when all eyes
Went brimming with her and the white-lipped groom
 Brought her to kneel beside him. Past, the sighs [.]

(D 14)

Kinsella, Fallon wrote, 'refines on the thing observed by imaginative verbs and double-edged adjectives. "Brimming" has the double-image of tears and mirror and is the sort of use that defines a talent. The reportage turns into poetry.'⁴⁴

⁴³ Kinsella, Haffenden 100. Asked if he regretted the loss of the religious framework, Kinsella replied: 'No, the supports that one might think of finding in organized religion I found elsewhere.'

⁴⁴ Padraic Fallon, 'Synge to Kinsella.' The article ostensibly concerns Synge's *Collected Works* and *Downstream* but is an overview of the poetic developments in post-Independence Ireland, with Kinsella given pride of place among contemporary Irish poets .

Valentin Iremonger found that in poems such as 'Old Harry' and 'Cover Her Face' Kinsella was 'maturing emotionally as he had already matured intellectually.'⁴⁵ The emotional advance that Iremonger noted produced aesthetic results, which can be seen, for example, in the differences between 'Death of a Queen' (1956) and 'Cover Her Face' (first published in 1961). Both poems concern the death of young women; one is abstract, unreal and imagined in a de-conceptualised landscape, devoid of particularity ('Death of a Queen'), the other conveys a real, remembered event, clear and known as 'felt' experience ('Cover Her Face'):

They dither softly at her bedroom door
 In soaking overcoats, and words forsake
 Even their comforters. The bass of prayer
 Haunts the chilly landing while they take
 Their places in a murmur of heartbreak.

'Cover Her Face' (D 22)

There is a clarity of notation here that was largely missing in *Another September*, though the stanza is flawed both by dependence on 'they' and 'their' ('words forsake/ Even *their* comforters.' Does 'their' refer to the words or the people? The people, most logically, but there is a delay in processing this information which weakens the poem) and by an over-dependence on padding adjectives and adverbs ('dither *softly*'). As in 'Dick King,' shared memory, between the elegised woman and the speaker of the poem, is the dramatic centre of the attempt to understand the lesson death teaches. In 'Cover Her Face' the attempt is even more emphatic due to the unexpected nature of the death, and the fact that the person, Maura, died so young.⁴⁶ The tension in the poem derives from the desire to record, examine and feel, and at the same time, understand within a larger philosophical framework. As in 'Downstream,' a consciousness informed by visions of death, 'stretched calm as effigies,' meets actual death and tries to integrate the vision and the fact in a revised version of reality. The speaker wants a physical accounting of, and a metaphysical accounting for, the fact of death, but does not have the framework of religious belief. This tension between notation and meaning in the poem is increased due to the speaker's friendship with the dead person. He describes the physical

⁴⁵ Valentin Iremonger, 'Messages from the Fish,' *Irish Times* 17 June 1961: 10. Iremonger qualifies this statement by saying that *Another September* had poems, like the title poem and 'Thinking of Mr. D' and 'Baggot Street Deserta' that contradicted the perceived idea that the collection was overly intellectual and lacking in passion.

⁴⁶ The poem's variant titles were 'Pain of Loss' and 'She Died Young,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 4. The title Kinsella eventually settled on is also a reference to John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*: 'Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle; she di'd young' (4.2.263), John Webster *Three Plays*, ed. David Gunby (1972; London: Penguin, 1985) 260.

process of decay; the absurdity that now, by virtue of having breath, the living strangers in the room are more kin to each other and the dead girl's own family, than the family are to the dead body in the room. Though he 'cannot deny her death, protest, nor grieve' the two share a secret, a photograph, but also, he suspects, a dark intuition. Memory prods and provokes him, and he recalls a quality in Maura's laugh which seemed to reveal that she, like the speaker, was privy to a dark awareness of the sudden corrosive effects of time: 'As though she also knew a single day/ Would serve to bleed us to a diagram' (*D* 23). This shared knowledge helps the poet do justice to both the person elegised and his own sense of the larger facts:

I watch her drift, in doubt whether dead or born
– Not with Ophelia's strewn virginity
But with a pale unmarriage – out of the worn
Bulk of day, under its sightless eye,
And close her dream in hunger. So we die.

(*D* 23)

After this 'moral,' however, the poem moves on, to end with a secular prayer. Even though he has stated the case for acceptance of brutal facts, these facts are not the end. As in 'A Lady of Quality,' in order to go beyond a debilitating despair and futile pessimism, Kinsella requires a 'further answer' to the question of how to live in the face of grief and death. The 'fortuitous conjunction' of matter 'severs,' and has 'anchors in extinction,' yet there remains, as in 'The Travelling Companion,' an evolutionary optimism in the post-traumatic groping for function. The decay of the rose petals happens so that 'the fruit of justice may be sown in peace/ To them that make peace, and bite its ashen bread' (*D* 24). An active engagement with the worst can lead, not to resignation and defeat, but an inexplicable arriving at an unillusioned, substantial peace. A peace unlike that offered by 'the black official' whose words only give 'discipline/ to shapeless sorrow.' There is still, though, a hint of unease, an intimation that futility inhabits such words of tentative, secular hope: will the poet's words be like this priest's, merely efficacious, and of the moment?

Kinsella added the last stanza late in the composition. It is a variation on James 3:17-18, a text which compares earthly wisdom and the wisdom that comes 'from above.'⁴⁷ Kinsella's re-writing of the biblical text retains the sanctified rhythm but changes the emphasis. Rather than the patience that leads to wisdom being a divine gift, wisdom comes 'out of all

⁴⁷ '17. The wisdom that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, judging without dissimulation.

18. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace,' James 3.17-18 (King James version).

likelihood.⁴⁸ In *Downstream* a sense of a lapsed faith is strongly evident; ‘An Old Atheist Pauses by the Sea’ (*Moralities*) with its admission that ‘I choose at random, knowing less and less’ (D 28) is only the most obvious example. ‘Cover Her Face’ is a post-Christian poem in its distance and scepticism concerning the ‘black official giving discipline/ To shapeless sorrow’ (D 22). Loss of faith and the ‘death of God’ is a consistent theme in Kinsella’s poems between 1952-1962, particularly in early drafts of the better-known poems. In ‘The Laundress’ natural process continues in a world, as one of the drafts put it, ‘empty of Christ,’ and the pregnant woman was more self-consciously associated with the Virgin Mary, indeed a possible title for the poem had been “‘Virgin of the Sewing-Room” (A Ballad).’⁴⁹

Though Kinsella is a post-Christian writer, he, like Beckett,⁵⁰ uses language and themes derived from his religious background. In ‘Cover Her Face,’ and ‘Carol,’ Kinsella uses the story of Christ to make his own point about the role of religion:

Meadows whiten, stores are piled.
 Again in our icy barn the Child
 Sleeps before the play.
 Adore Him, now our hearts are mild,
 To profit us when we have whiled
 Our innocence away.

(D 19)

Religion is part of the disappointed, and disappointing, present scene in Kinsella, a memory of cohesive structure. The last two lines of this final stanza in the drafts reads ‘To do us good when we have whiled/ Our innocence away.’⁵¹ The change to the word ‘profit’ indicates how orchestrated a collection *Downstream* is. As I will discuss in relation to ‘A Country Walk,’ metaphors of commerce abound. The word ‘profit’ occurs elsewhere, in ‘Wedding Morning,’ for instance, where it is ‘Blood, the trader’ which ‘profits’ from the peace of two families coming together. Such ‘architectural’ and thematic consistency over the course of the book points forward to Kinsella’s working methods in the Peppercanister series.

Kinsella has dismissed the religious element in his writing as an expression of ‘need.’ In

⁴⁸ See Harmon: ‘The ‘peace mentioned, although echoed from James 3:18, is not the conventional, Christian R.I.P., but resembles the state found in ‘The Laundress’ or ‘Dick King’ which arises from the identification with natural processes,’ *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* 33-34.

⁴⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 5. ‘The Laundress’ is based on a painting in the possession of Eleanor Kinsella’s family in Co. Wexford: ‘The painter not very notable, but the picture was poignant and memorable,’ Thomas Kinsella, letter to author, 28 August 2003.

⁵⁰ Kinsella himself makes a connection between both Beckett and religion in his interview with Ian Flanagan, *Metre* 2 (Spring 1997): 113.

⁵¹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 1.

an interview with Donatella Abbate Badin, he distances himself from the implication of personal belief by saying that such elements in the poems are 'observed.'⁵² In other words, much like the Christian imagery in Beckett, they are an inherited part of the living scene, part of the vocabulary of the time and place the writer is exploring. Kinsella's comments are relevant here because of their emphasis on futility, and on art as the product of failure. The similarity Beckett shares with the impulse and trajectory of Kinsella's writing is striking: 'It is an expression of need, pathetic in some ways. People in a given place and time need something; they go about finding it and fail. And you get something like the pyramids, cathedrals.'⁵³ Kinsella's poetry acts out a drama between the 'random and the controlled' in his quest for the Real, a drama set in motion by the loss of religious belief. As he said in an interview with Ian Flanagan: 'In the poetic voice, once religion disappears, you're in trouble, you're on your own and you're really forced back on your own depths then.'⁵⁴

Though poems such as 'Wedding Morning,' 'Dick King,' and 'Cover Her Face,' mark an advance into particularized experience, the actual is not valued for its own sake. Kinsella could still criticize a poetry too concerned with the personal at the expense of the poetic. He called Elizabeth Jennings to task for such a fault in the *New York Times Book Review*, criticizing her for the fact that in her volume *Recoveries* 'personal experience has out-stripped the poetic.' What Kinsella's admires as a poetic ideal is apparent in his comment that 'even where life has cut deeply [. . .]. What we see is not life being transmuted but discussion being resumed.'⁵⁵

In this same review Kinsella discussed Philip Larkin's *The Whitsun Weddings*, and called Larkin a 'mild, sourly judging poet – a pallid, observant figure opting out of the life struggle for the sake of an unhappy peace.'⁵⁶ This disinclination to involve poetic consciousness in the 'life struggle,' read as referring to Kinsella's own concerns at this stage in his development, implies once again a degree of self-criticism. The poet as observer, as passive judging presence, is as much a part of Kinsella's poetic personality as Larkin's. As Brian John has said, poems such as 'The Laundress' and 'Dick King,' were 'written under the delusion that poetry is a passive affair.'⁵⁷ However, as the tension in 'Cover Her Face' indicates and his comments imply, Kinsella regarded passive observation as inadequate.

Though Kinsella in *Downstream* is predominately a distant, 'sourly judging' presence, he questions his own moralizing distance, a distance brought about by his own poetic attention.

⁵² Badin 200.

⁵³ Badin 200. Compare Beckett's 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better,' *Worstward Ho* (London: John Calder, 1983) 7.

⁵⁴ Kinsella, Flanagan: 113.

⁵⁵ Kinsella, 'Between Grandeur and Foolishness,' review of *Man Does, Woman Is*, by Robert Graves; *The Whitsun Weddings*, by Philip Larkin; *Recoveries*, by Elizabeth Jennings; and *Poems*, by B.S. Johnson. *New York Times Book Review* 20 Dec. 1964: 4.

⁵⁶ Kinsella, 'Between Grandeur and Foolishness': 4.

⁵⁷ John 75.

This is one of the origins of Kinsella's frustrations within poetry. In 'Scylla and Charybdis,' in an ironic echo of *The Waste Land*, the moralizing distance of the uninvolved poet is questioned on the grounds of its simplification of the facts ('I have slipped at evening through that ghostly quarrel,/ Making a third, to round the simple moral' *D* 18). In 'Cover Her Face' part of the tension derives from this dilemma between distance and involvement, a dilemma that is made more intense when the particular (the death of a loved one) is more persistent and persuasive than the universal.

In the search for a satisfactory accommodation of event and meaning, observation and significance, Kinsella has consistently resorted to allegory. A medieval emblematising occurs in part two of *Downstream*, which is a slightly revised version of *Moralities*, originally published by Dolmen in 1960. In this sequence of short poems the figures of Faith, Love, Death, and Song preside over events in the human world. Whereas allegory in the 'Prologue' was deployed in order to present an event in abstract personified terms, the allegory here works in a different way, and points to Kinsella's later use of allegory in *Nightwalker*. After their initial appearance in the introductory section, the personified abstractions do not reappear, but become thematic organizers: the headings for sections of four eight-line poems which explore the themes of Faith, Love and so forth. The term 'allegory,' therefore, denotes the meaning which frames, and accompanies, significant material in its passage from the particular to the universal.

Kinsella called *Moralities* 'a formal sequence of epigrammatic poems.'⁵⁸ The use of the word 'formal' is not without qualification. The dangers of self-conscious arranging are acknowledged when he writes in the PBS Bulletin for *Downstream* that the sequence had been 'assembled with a view to something more than an artificial symmetry.'⁵⁹ This intention, as well as its comprehensive architecture, makes *Moralities* the first example of a sustained sequence in Kinsella's work, and looks forward to later manipulation of the mosaic-like patterning as a means for large poetic statements.

Reviewers emphasized the technical advance that the self-consciousness of the form conveyed. Augustine Martin saw an 'almost deliberate attempt to reverse' Kinsella's tendency for the recondite reaction and subjective concept.⁶⁰ Both Martin and Austin Clarke recognized that in choosing the potentially restrictive eight-line rhymed form Kinsella was deliberately testing himself.⁶¹ Though he did not bring to his review an awareness of the motivations for 'classicist' procedure Kinsella describes in 'Writer at Work,' Martin did note that Kinsella was 'imposing a classical aesthetic on himself which demands a concentration on the artefact to the

⁵⁸ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34.

⁵⁹ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34.

⁶⁰ Martin, *Studies* (Winter, 1960): 428.

⁶¹ Austin Clarke, 'Form and Informality,' review of *Moralities*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 30 April 1960: 8.

virtual exclusion of the poet's personality.' He comes close to the heart of Kinsella's aesthetic reasoning when he remarks that the poems in *Moralities* 'crystallize the eternal moment in human destiny.'⁶² Pearse Hutchinson wrote, though, that Kinsella's 'zealous quest for "formal completeness" often leads to padding-out from which "high-sounding" words may follow.' There is nevertheless, Hutchinson said, 'strength and vitality of imagination behind the language.'⁶³ Richard Kell believed that Kinsella had successfully overcome the possible accusation of artificiality in the choice of such a deliberate and self-conscious form: 'Too contrived, you may think. In certain circumstances it might have been so; but here (whether or not the use of quadruple units is symbolic) the fine quality of the poetry recommends the scheme as an artistic resource.'⁶⁴

What these reviews reveal is that *Moralities* is significant from the point of view of Kinsella's *technical* advance, but what I want to emphasize is that, taken with 'Dick King,' and 'A Portrait of the Engineer,' what we are seeing is the early appearance of the claims of a *social* form of disappointment on Kinsella's imagination. In 'A Portrait of the Engineer,' as well as that sense of frustration with the poetic act, there is an anger at the human cost of industrial exploitation, derived in no small measure from Kinsella's working class origins:

[. . .] O should it come to pass

At length that our ghosts met,
 We'd match our hatreds in a gaze:
 Mine for the flesh his engines ate,
 His for the blurred response of a phrase.

(D 16)⁶⁵

Austin Clarke saw that a social element had entered Kinsella's work, in poems such as 'A Pillar of the Community' and 'Handclasp at Euston.' The first, he says, in a comment which echoes much of Clarke's own preoccupations, 'concerns the profitable hypocrisy of our Republic,' and the latter, 'defines our economic plight without unnecessary expostulation.'⁶⁶ 'A Pillar of the Community' is included under the allegorical rubric 'Faith' and works the pun of its title to macabre effect, teasing satire out of a Dublin placename:

⁶² Martin: 428.

⁶³ Pearse Hutchinson, 'Irish poet Knows His Trade,' review of *Moralities*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Press* 23 July 1960: 4.

⁶⁴ Richard Kell, 'Fine and Frenzied,' review of *Moralities*, *Guardian* 13 May 1960: 6.

⁶⁵ There is a notable change of emphasis in the revision Kinsella made to this poem for *Collected Poems 1956-1994*: 'If it should come/To pass at length that our ghost met/We'd match our questions in a gaze' 35; a removal of a poeticism ('O') and a significant turn towards the quest for 'understanding' that Kinsella emphasizes in his later writing. The revision was maintained in *Collected Poems*.

⁶⁶ Austin Clarke, 'Form and Informality.'

Descending on Merchant's Alley, Lucifer
 Gave jet-black evidence of fatherhood.
 A column rose to meet him from the mud;
 He perched and tuned to metal. Polished, foursquare,
 A noble savage stopped in stride, he stood.
 Now gingerly our honest deals are done
 Under that puckish rump, inscribed: Do good.
 Some care and a simple faith will get you on.

(D 29)

In 'Handclasp at Euston' the economic plight to which Clarke refers is the necessity, in the Ireland of the 1950s and early 1960s, for thousands to take the emigrant boat to England. In the drafts Kinsella refers to this as the 'national journey.'⁶⁷ The effect of exile is captured through the speaker's looking back at a companion who will remain in London, 'Murphy, isolate,' as his train leaves Euston Station on the start of the journey back: 'Weight,/ Person, race, the human dwindle there' (D 35). To get a sense of the manifold frustrations evoked by this poem it is worth recalling that at the time the poem was written Kinsella was, as Assistant Principal Officer of the Department of Finance, in the engine room of the Irish economic expansion of the 1960s. *Downstream*, with its inclusion of a slightly revised version of *Moralities*, and in poems such as 'Dick King' and 'A Country Walk,' introduces an often satirical disaffection infusing those poems dealing with the modernizing process Ireland was undergoing at this time; it reaches its fullest expression in 'Nightwalker' (1968). Disappointment had been presented in *Another September* as part of the cycle of temporal existence, in *Downstream* we begin to see disappointment provoked by, and derived from, social conditions, and in 'Old Harry,' from human choice.

Kinsella's thoughts about that other source of disappointment, the broken Irish tradition, are revealed in two reviews of Irish-language poems from between the publication of *Moralities* and *Downstream*. Here Kinsella gives a hint of his developing thoughts about form and tradition. In his review of *Dónall Óg-taighde ar an amhrán* by Seosamh Ó Duibhghinn, Kinsella makes the remark that he did not at first hold the poem in high regard, but came to see it as 'in fact a song of marvellous humanity and sorrow, with passages of the highest poetry; a masterpiece of the tradition which it has survived.'⁶⁸ Kinsella makes a significant point, in terms of his own subsequent practice, about the processes behind the formation and survival of a single element

⁶⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 41.

⁶⁸ Kinsella, "Gaelic Masterpiece in Many Guises," review of *Dónall Óg-taighde ar an amhrán*

within a tradition: Ó Duibhginín's work, he says, presents 'a spectacle of intense activity within a tradition; of the entire Irish-speaking world busying itself with a cherished song, adapting it to local events, borrowing sections, stanzas, even single phrases, from it for use in other songs, echoing it clearly or faintly, unable to forget it or leave it alone.' Like *Moralities*, the process described here is suggestive in terms of Kinsella's later procedure, in the Peppercanister series most especially, but also in such poems as 'Nightwalker' and 'Phoenix Park,' in *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (1968), where phrases from other Kinsella poems appear (and will reappear in later poems); where such a poem as 'Handclasp at Euston' is re-presented in 'Ritual of Departure.'⁶⁹ Kinsella's comment also points to an influence from the historical vagaries of the Irish language tradition in terms of what he calls 'allowing the marginal, the unexpected, the sudden eruption, its own completely free behaviour.'⁷⁰ In other words a creative exploitation of (and adjustment to) disappointment.

In his interview with Ian Flanagan, Kinsella dates the first instance of an imaginative 'balance between controlling and allowing' to *Wormwood* (1966), because in that poem 'all the negative is taken account of, allowed for, not rejected.'⁷¹ In *Downstream*, instead, what we have are instances of irruption into settled states, and into controlled poetic environments, in the title poem most obviously, but also in 'Chrysalides,' with the recognition that the 'negative,' the half-eaten corpse of the tramp, the destruction of an ant colony, must be absorbed into new paradigms of actuality and, eventually, into poetic form.

The second review, of Seán Ó Tuama's edition of the *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, reveals Kinsella's deepening knowledge of the Gaelic tradition. The poem is, he says, 'rich enough in its background to repay very amply an examination of all the implications of its material.' Ó Tuama's scholarship reveals, Kinsella says, 'the poem in the interplay of its parts and in its relation to the time and place that produced it.'⁷² A significant comment with regard to how Kinsella's interest in the Gaelic tradition fed into his movement out of a poetry devoid of specifics of time and place.

Kinsella's comments on the Irish-language tradition in these reviews, however, do not uniquely point forward to subsequent work. Kinsella finds not only evidence of modes, material

Gaelic Requiem,' by Seosamh Ó Duibhginín, *Irish Times* 31 March/ 1 April 1961: 6.

⁶⁹ The drafts of 'Handclasp at Euston' show Kinsella musing on the effect of departure in terms that will be re-used in the later poem.

⁷⁰ Kinsella, Flanagan: 112.

⁷¹ Kinsella, Flanagan: 112.

⁷² Kinsella, 'Gaelic Requiem,' review of *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, ed. Seán Ó Tuama, *Irish Times* 3 March 1962: 8. Kinsella subsequently collaborated with Ó Tuama on *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1981; reprint 1994), which included Kinsella's translations of both *Dónall Óg* (289-93) and (extracts from) *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire* (200-19). Kinsella included a shorter extract from his translation of the *Caoineadh* in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986) 218-21.

and manner that might useably be retrieved for his own work, but also corroborative evidence for what was already there in his writing. The *Caoinéadh* is, in many ways, the quintessential 'classic' poem. In her grief the artist, Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill, '[f]ortified with a tradition of poetic expression for her feelings, [. . .] finds at hand the great constants of bereavement and loneliness, as discovered by her race, and employs them with naturalness and immediacy, linking her poem with the most ancient of Ireland's known poetry.'⁷³ This classicism is not imposed from without, but part of an 'instinctive craft' and 'organic growth.' Kinsella's review notes 'the absence of the ideal "original"' of Ní Chonaill's text and finds that this gives the enterprise of textual analysis 'a proper sense of precariousness.' Kinsella, in what will become a more pronounced part of his adjustment to the various losses and disappointments he finds, makes of this absence an opportunity for actual conditions to inform response.

In *Downstream*, as in *Another September*, Kinsella consciously engages with a tradition of poetry in which artifice is accepted despite its limits in the 'struggle against oblivion and lack of form.'⁷⁴ The 'classic' tradition, Kinsella maintains, is 'central and not idiosyncratic,' and, like the *Caoinéadh*, 'not the product of individual peculiarity.'⁷⁵ The 'essential formality' of the 'measuring artist' derives from the 'essential humanity' of the artistic enterprise. The deliberate forms are constructed for deliberate existential purpose. The formality of Kinsella's work in *Downstream*, therefore, is self-conscious on two levels. As a 'measuring artist' he exhibits a cultivated awareness of verbal means. Yet he is also acutely aware of a fundamental 'unreasonable faith' underpinning what might appear an arbitrary choice of artistic manner. The 'romantic' artist may be 'popularly regarded as the only true artist,' but the 'classic' artist too, 'works in the neighbourhood of chaos.'⁷⁶

The 'neighbourhood of chaos' is apparent in part three of *Downstream*, which is devoted principally to three long poems: 'Old Harry,' 'A Country Walk,' and the title poem, all of which, to some extent, concern the human capacity to wilfully choose violence. In these poems the Real that Kinsella is attempting to find is less an 'eternal gesture,' and more a fundamental basis for understanding; an attempt to cope with the relativity of experience, historical experience most especially, after the loss of the controlling perspective of religion.

The two short poems which begin section three were, the drafts show, originally intended as part of 'Old Harry.'⁷⁷ In its initial stages as a separate poem the first of these, 'Check,' had the title 'East of Eden.' As published in *Downstream*, instead of a biblical banishment from paradise, Kinsella conjures up a primordial landscape that, 'awaiting' (*D* 39) the entrance of

⁷³ Ibid. Eibhlín Dhubh Ní Chonaill (fl. 1770) was an aunt of Daniel O'Connell. See *An Duanaire* 199.

⁷⁴ 'Time and the Poet' 717.

⁷⁵ 'Writer at Work': 30.

⁷⁶ 'Writer at Work': 30.

⁷⁷ In the Kinsella Papers the drafts of 'Old Harry' are contained in box 2, folders 7, 8 and 9.

man, is almost practicing indifference. 'Tyrant Dying' prepares the way for 'Old Harry' in its depiction of a now aged leader who, in his past life, had, by a stroke of the pen, monstrously sanctioned the dispatch of human life: 'Fat hands, no longer guided, rest their talons,/ The bone- and sinew-shattering pen let fall' (*D* 40), and the fact that the tyrant's death, like Old Harry's, is rendered as a moral 'criticism' ('Old Harry' *D* 44). 'Tyrant Dying' is also connected to the longer poem in its imagery of the tyrant's moral blindness. The original first line, 'Pity the reviewers of morality,'⁷⁸ which Kinsella believed might also function as a last line, reveals the tension that underlies both this poem, but in particular the longer disquisition on monstrous human capacities in 'Old Harry.'

'Old Harry' is divided into three sections, one entitled 'The Ordeal,' in which 'Death states the theme,' the second, 'The Twilight of Old Harry,' which is itself divided into five (numbered) sections, and which presents what Kinsella calls 'the example': the aged Harry Truman's 'choice; his guilt; his victims; his half-awakening.'⁷⁹ The third part is a 'Vale' in which we discover Old Harry's punishment.

In 'The Ordeal' the personified figure of Death relates that 'Master Love,' like Dante's *primum mobile* which moves the sun and the other stars, pre-existed the human body and indeed created the body with its 'thirst and pain' and 'blood/ Sped by onward self-torment and by desire' (*D* 41). Echoes of Kinsella's comments on Keats as 'bound to the body rather than the spirit'⁸⁰ follow as the speaker beholds 'Body and spirit together, open-eyed,/ Drink up their sour ordeal, heaped with curses' (*D* 41). A typescript introduction to the poem tells us that Death is indicating here 'the region of sin, in which the human flesh and spirit are required to undergo the ordeal of existence.'⁸¹ What follows is a statement of adjustment to 'bitterness,' a process in which 'misery' is absorbed, and the 'pursuit' resumed:

The body rocked, enduring this bitterness
 – a figure fathoming its own misery –
 Straightened, and resumed its accurate pursuit.

(*D* 41)

That the 'accurate pursuit' is, among other things, a search for a poetry adapted to the suggestions of reality is emphasized by a note Kinsella appended to the line 'In accurate pursuit of the ideal,' to which he added the word 'poetics.'⁸² In its physical and psychic manifestations

⁷⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 12.

⁷⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 9. This note to the schema of 'Old Harry' was included when the poem was published in *Studies* 50 (Summer 1961): 186. See John 58.

⁸⁰ 'Time and the Poet' 720. See chapter 1's discussion of 'Baggot Street Deserta.'

⁸¹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 9.

⁸² Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 8.

this is the 'intracordal hurt' of 'Baggot Street Deserta,' which the speaker inflicts on the self in pursuit of an accurate rendering of the Real. The echoes of that poem are strong, not least in the re-cycling of a word ('fathoming') from the earlier poem, with an emphasis on a different shade of one of its possible meanings.

Kinsella's pursuit of the Real, though, at another level, is an attempt to discover an ultimate moral basis on which to judge horrendous human action. The opening section of 'Old Harry' is the moral frame for the criticism that death provides at the end of the poem. For the guilty, the body itself is the curse. For the innocent, those '[i]n accurate pursuit of the ideal,' the end will be 'harmonious' (*D* 41). This moral frame might be best read as an expression of hope for, rather than belief in, a (post-Christian) moral reckoning of human action. A similar hope informs the Czech poet, Miroslav Holub's 'The Dead' in which two characters who live differently, die differently:

Both here and there the angel of death
quite simply stamped his hobnailed boot
on their medulla oblongata.

I know they died the same way.
But I don't believe that they are
dead the same way.⁸³

There are cases, Kinsella's poem says, where 'death is a criticism' (*D* 44). This grasping for what Yeats called 'unpersuadable justice'⁸⁴ is partly a result of the enormity of the crime: the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Truman's decision provokes a justice similar to Dante's *contrapasso*. In Dante punishment for sin is the sin itself, eternally repeated, with the sinful constantly aware of their crime and of their distance from God; in Kinsella, though a sense of moral eternity has gone, 'Old Harry' comes to a 'half-awakening' of the crime of 'invit[ing]/ The criminal darkness to the human womb' (*D* 41) and his punishment is death with this knowledge. As in 'Cover Her Face,' underlying the poem is the problem of judgement and reckoning in a post-Christian moral environment, the dilemma between the impossibility of, yet necessity for, a human, however flawed, accounting of action. In the PBS Bulletin Kinsella described 'Old Harry' as a poem whose theme was 'guilt and retribution.' Yet

⁸³ Miroslav Holub, *On the Contrary and Other Poems*, trans. Ewald Osers (1982; Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1984) 92. Seamus Heaney uses this poem to discuss the different poetic attitudes to death in W.B. Yeats and Philip Larkin, 'Joy or Night: Last Things in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Philip Larkin,' *The Redress of Poetry* (London: Faber, 1995) 146-163.

⁸⁴ 'Ego Dominus Tuus,' Yeats 161.

the figure of Harry Truman, though condemned for moral ignorance, is also pitied, though it is an acid pity, for the human imperfection of his understanding.⁸⁵

He raved softly and struggled for righteousness,
Then chose in loneliness near the blurred curtains
The greater terror for the lesser number.

(D 43)

Maurice Harmon reads the lurid descriptions of the destruction and horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as part of Old Harry's 'insane memory,' as one of the consequences of 'the failure of the moral sense and of the intelligence.'⁸⁶ Brian John avoids the issue of whether to ascribe such references as 'the notorious cities of the plain,' 'Lascivious streets,' and 'cities of wickedness' (D 43) to the poet or Old Harry, but suggests that Kinsella 'acknowledges that Hiroshima and Nagasaki' are fit for such description.⁸⁷ If this section of the poem is a representation of Old Harry's memories and imaginings of the destruction his decision wrought, then to whom are we to ascribe such references as 'delicate creatures of love'? If the descriptions are ascribed (even if through a 'speaker') to Kinsella, and the consistency of this section with the moral frame provided in the first part of the poem implies that we should, then the opprobrium they imply is disturbing. The section might more accurately be read as a mix of both the poet's and Old Harry's perspectives, yet as such fails to achieve that doubleness of voice that will, in a poem such as *The Good Fight*, be a mark of Kinsella's later style.

'A Country Walk' is also concerned with the Real as source of ultimate perspective, this time when beleaguered by layers of historical violence and by the impermanence of civilization's forms. The poem shows Kinsella, in Augustine Martin's words, using language 'in an incessant effort at final coherence,'⁸⁸ and Kinsella would seem to agree when he writes that the poem 'begins in petty agitation and ends in creative calm. The instrument of inner change is the gradual intrusion of the outer world; the final focal moment, where the road and river intersect, is one of total awareness of the self in its physical and metaphysical surroundings.'⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34: 'the luxury of a personal judgment has not been foregone, and it is unashamedly bitter; nevertheless, as suggested in the section entitled 'The Ordeal', the vessel of decision is imperfect and, even in this case, a subject for pity. Bodily existence may constitute in itself a fit punishment for what is done with it.'

⁸⁶ Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* 38, 39.

⁸⁷ John 59. Kinsella revised 'Old Harry' for *Collected Poems 1956-1994*. Section titles were removed, stanzas re-arranged, and the final 'Vale' section deleted. The phrase 'notorious cities of the plain' was changed to 'the two chosen cities of the plain' (44); the other phrases I mention were unchanged. The poem was again slightly revised for *Collected Poems*, though these phrases remained the same.

⁸⁸ Augustine Martin, review of *The Dolmen Miscellany* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1962) and *Poetry Ireland*, ed. John Jordan, *Studies* 52 (Summer 1963): 222.

⁸⁹ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 34.

What emerges from a reading of the poem, however, is less a 'creative calm' and coherence than a sense that the calm and coherence will soon evaporate under the pressure of the 'sucking chaos' the poem so relentlessly evokes. In the drafts Kinsella writes 'Chaos is hungry'⁹⁰ and in the published poem we see the instrument of chaos is time:

Mated, like a fall of rock, with time,
The place endured its burden: as a froth
Locked in a swirl of turbulence, a shape
That forms and fructifies and dies, a wisp
That hugs the bridge, an omphalos of scraps.

(D 46)

This is a description of the town the walker enters after a journey through a rural landscape half-symbolic, half-real. A landscape that seems dead or dying, with the life that there was now drained by parasitical forms: 'dead trunks in drapes of creeper,/ Strangled softly by horse-mushroom, writhed in vanished passion, broken down like sponge' (D 45).⁹¹ The description is also Kinsella's view of civilization's forms, not least of them poetry, and is the most succinct evocation of 'the shreds of disappointment' of Kinsella's note to 'Baggot Street Deserta.' It is in 'A Country Walk' that it becomes apparent that Kinsella's most intense regard is not to the creation of order, but with order as a subject, with what happens to all forms of ordering under pressure from the Real.

The speaker finds respite from an anger provoked by 'the piercing company of women,' through drinking the water of a 'holy well,' but even this seems illusory. In the drafts the speaker feels himself 'half-imaginary'⁹²; what brings an ultimate ground of reality to his thoughts is the violence associated with the place, a violence that outlives the temporary forms erected by civilization, the church, asylum, the 'crumbled barracks, castle and brewery' (D 46). The violence is primordial and historical, internecine and genocidal, vengeful and systematic, and as endlessly recurring, it is implied, as the river in which it takes place: 'Those murmuring shallows made a trampling place/ Apt for death-combat, as the tales agree' (D 46). Reference to the Irish sagas, the combat at the 'speckled ford' of Cúchulainn and Ferdia, and the death of Conchobor Mac Nessa 'the day Christ hung dying,' is a reminder that Kinsella at this time was at the initial stages of translating *The Táin*.⁹³

⁹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 23.

⁹¹ Kinsella's alternate title for the poem was 'A View of the Provincial,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 24.

⁹² Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 23.

⁹³ For the combat of Cúchulainn and Ferdia see *The Táin*, trans. Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1969; reprint in Library Edition, Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1985) 168-205.

The emphasis on inevitable return to primal forms frames even the poem's most celebrated moment, in which the Yeatsian roll-call of 'Easter 1916' inhabits the bathetic, materialistic Ireland of the 1960s:

Around the corner, in an open square,
I came upon the sombre monuments
That bear their names: MacDonagh & McBride,
Merchants; Connolly's Commercial Arms . . .

(D 48)⁹⁴

Kinsella cites names which, according to Maurice Harmon, were 'sanctified by Yeats.'⁹⁵ Edna Longley sees the use of these names much more ambiguously in both Yeats and Kinsella than Harmon does: 'It seems to me that both poets [Yeats and Kinsella] mix glorification and deflation in about equal parts.' What Kinsella brings to Irish writing is, she says, 'the new depressive note': 'The Ireland that Kinsella imagines may not be dead but appears only half-alive, or caught between two lives, suffering along with the poet the inevitable withdrawal symptoms of heady intoxications.'⁹⁶ The inference that the bathos in Kinsella indicates that he had been 'intoxicated' by the violence of the Irish past does not withstand close examination. Part of Kinsella's disappointment (as I argue in Chapter 3) comes from the betrayed ideals of the Irish Independence movement, and the manifold social and cultural failures of the Irish state, as bitterly atomised in 'Nightwalker.' Yet Kinsella's deeper disappointment in 'Nightwalker,' as in 'A Country Walk,' 'Old Harry' and 'Downstream,' is with the violence embedded in the very nature of human being. Repeating the imagery of the accursed body from 'Old Harry,' Kinsella invokes a metaphysical, as much as political, derivation of the violence of the Civil War:

[. . .] freedom burned his comrades itchy palms,
Too much for flesh and blood, and – armed in hate –
Brother met brother in a modern light. (D 47)

⁹⁴ Brian John (60) says that the town is Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. However, the landscape and the town are as much imagined as observed. The lack of naming and the description of the town as an almost platonic version of an Irish town, as well as the historical (to the 1641 and 1798 Rebellions) and legendary allusions (to the Ulster Cycle) indicates this, but what is most persuasive is the fact that Kinsella in the drafts tested many different possibilities for these lines: 'MacDonagh's and McBride's and Connolly/ The Turf Accountant, Pearse the Publican'; MacDonagh's Hardware, by the handball alley/ McBride the Turf Accountant, Connolly'; 'I came upon their sombre monument; MacDonagh's Mills, [. . .] Celtic McBride'; 'Pearse's Patriotic Assurance,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 23.

⁹⁵ Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* 41.

⁹⁶ 'Searching the Darkness' 126.

The final image of 'sweet trade,' and the evening star out of Virgil's tenth eclogue, presents the supposed condemnation of the mercantile Republic within an ambivalent frame:

Venit Hesperus;

In green and golden light; bringing sweet trade.

The inert stirred. Heart and tongue were loosed:

"The waters hurtle through the flooded night . . ."

(D 49)

Mercantilism is not in itself the problem. The letdown is related to the treadmill of violence upon which the present is built, the 'shreds of disappointment' Kinsella evokes in his descriptions of the half-dead and dying landscape, the 'omphalos of scraps' of an ever-contingent reality. Throughout *Downstream* there is a 'financial' undercurrent. The recourse to such imagery, diction, and metaphor is understandable given Kinsella's position in the Department of Finance. In the drafts of 'A County Walk,' there is a recurrence of the image of 'honest merchantry,' and 'honest deals,' phrases which occur in the context of hypocrisy in 'A Pillar of the Community':

I saw the moral order in a zone

Of dubious lanes and outskirt cabbage fields

That kept sound merchants, dryshod, to their streets

And honest farmers short of huckstering.⁹⁷

This 'moral order,' in another version of the poem, is a vision of the church as curb to the baser trading instincts of man. Yet the Church is, like the town itself, one of the forms of civilization that 'forms and fructifies and dies': 'Such settlements that can as little help/ Lodging at river junctions.'⁹⁸ The final image, in this context, which is offered by the Irish-flag-coloured light of evening, is a vision of 'sweet trade' between inner and outer worlds; as in Virgil, the expression of a hope to leave the shade and 'go home replete.'⁹⁹

'A Country Walk' is, like 'Old Harry,' concerned with the problem of 'unpersuadable justice.' The final image, in which the 'inert stirred' and 'Heart and tongue were loosed' (D 49), evokes the entrance of the 'endless debris' the speaker sees 'swept [. . .] through the flailing

⁹⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 23.

⁹⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 23.

dusk' into that 'vision of reality' Yeats believed art provides. The river in spate offers, as Seamus Deane has observed, 'a release of the imagination from the conventional versions of the past and present,'¹⁰⁰ a vision which is, in its emphasis on night, archetypal Kinsella. Though at this point a 'creative calm' may indeed have been reached, the calm is a vision of encroaching darkness. In most of the draft versions of the poem the final word had been 'light': "'The waters hurtle through the flooded light".'¹⁰¹ In replacing the word with 'night' Kinsella places the emphasis on the darkness that surrounds and will inevitably overcome every moment of furtherance and vision.¹⁰²

'Downstream' along with 'A Country Walk,' and 'Baggot Street Deserta,' searches for an ultimate reality and standard, beyond both mercantilism and religion, with which to judge the 'drift of history.' It is an attempt to write a post-Christian poem of soul and judgement, a reading supported by the drafts of the poem. The corpse found 'half-eaten' and remembered by the speaker as he and his 'co-shadow' row toward Durrow is Christ-like, though by no means redemptive, in its effect on the speaker's knowledge of reality. The corpse is referred to as an 'X of wavering flesh' (*D* 55) and the allusion to the crucifixion, ('His posture welcoming the enormous night'¹⁰³) evokes Kinsella's driven engagement with the darker dimensions of experience.

The reference to the corpse as an 'X' has ramifications in Kinsella's subsequent writing. Arthur E. McGuinness tentatively suggests a connection between Kinsella's use of the quincunx image and Sir Thomas Browne's 'elaborate analysis' of this symbol in *The Garden of Cyrus*.¹⁰⁴ Rather than from Browne, McGuinness believes that Kinsella 'probably got the idea of this shape and its relation to human order from Plato's *Timaeus*.' In *Timaeus*, he continues, 'the demiurge joins the parts of the world-soul together by means of two sutures, which form a chi (X).'¹⁰⁵ McGuinness's discussion makes no mention of the quincunx in connection with 'Downstream' and traces its use principally in connection with those Peppercanister poems concerned with 'psychic development.'¹⁰⁶ However, Kinsella's knowledge and use of Browne's work, even at this early stage of his writing, is more persuasive in terms of both the quincunx, and indeed the wider influence of Browne's writings, as evidenced by the fact that the epigraph

⁹⁹ Virgil, *The Eclogues*, trans. Guy Lee (London: Penguin Classics, 1984) 107.

¹⁰⁰ Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 139.

¹⁰¹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 24.

¹⁰² The poem was revised for publication in *Collected Poems 1956-1994*. The poem no longer contains this final image; it ends 'Venit hesperus/ In green and golden light./ Bringing sweet trade' 48. The emphasis, therefore, now on the moment of outer and inner congruence. This ending is the same in *Collected Poems* (47).

¹⁰³ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur E. McGuinness, "'Bright Quincunx Newly Risen": Thomas Kinsella's Inward "I",' *Éire-Ireland* 15. 4 (Winter, 1980): 122.

¹⁰⁵ McGuinness: 122.

¹⁰⁶ McGuinness: 121.

to the poem 'Nightwalker,' ('The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been') comes from *Urne-Buriall*.¹⁰⁷ In the 'Interlude: Time's Mischief' section of *Moralities*, for instance, Browne is acknowledged as 'that gentle pessimist' (*D* 32). This curious poem, in which the speaker is a lecturer who expresses to his class the hope that 'no man had pissed/ Upon those wary ashes, urned in grass,' reveals its relevance to the idea of 'Time's Mischief' and to Browne's own reflections on the uncertainty of posterity when these lines from the dedicatory letter of *Urne-Buriall* are recalled:

When the bones of King *Arthur* were digged up, the old Race might think, they beheld therein some Originals of themselves; Unto these of our Urnes none here can pretend relation, and can only behold the Reliques of those persons, who in their life giving the Law unto their predecessors, after long obscurity, now lye at their mercies. But remembring the early civility they brought upon these Countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; We mercifully preserve their bones, and pisse not upon their ashes.¹⁰⁸

The draft title of the poem, 'Remembering Early Civility,' strengthens this connection further.¹⁰⁹ The quincunx as 'X' suggests that the 'X of wavering flesh' in 'Downstream' is, with Kinsella's awareness (possibly as early as the composition of *Moralities*) of the quincunx and its relations to cosmic order in mind, an example of the use of arcane resources which readings of his aesthetic development have usually associated with *Nightwalker* and, most especially, Kinsella's post-*Nightwalker* work.¹¹⁰ The body in the woods as an instance of the quincunx, 'the meeting point of Heaven and Earth,' is reinforced when we return to the lines:

Spread-eagled on a rack of leaves, almost
Remembering. It searched the skies,
Calmly encountering the starry host,

Meeting their silver eyes with silver eyes
– An X of wavering flesh, [.]

(*D* 55)

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Browne, *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago UP) 167.

¹⁰⁸ The letter is dated May 1 1658. Thomas Browne, *The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chicago UP) 132-3.

¹⁰⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 46.

¹¹⁰ As well as McGuinness, see, for instance, Goodby 121.

However, this reading may be greater testimony to the intertextual cornucopia that Kinsella's methods create. The 'X' appears to have been first suggested by Kinsella's reading of *The Cuchullin Saga* by Eleanor Hull, as part of background research for Cúchulainn and *The Táin*, from which he took note of the following incident: 'It was at this time, we heard, later that Miss X, involved in that storm was killed.'¹¹¹ Nevertheless, what we find again and again in Kinsella, are sources, accidental finds, corroborating each other and lending weight to an approach to the Real which contingent reality 'of itself' provides.

The dead body is an irruptive force which causes a re-assessment of the ultimate basis of 'reality,' yet the speaker, as Kinsella throughout *Another September* and his early poetry, engages in an imagining of death long before hearing of this actual case. The speaker acknowledges the necessity that the horror be integrated into a revised pattern of the actual, and once again imagery of eating and digestion is used to suggest imaginative process: 'that story thrust/ Pungent horror and an actual mess/ Into my very face, and taste I must' (*D* 54). This emphasis on the 'actual' is important. In an earlier version of these lines Kinsella had written: 'that story thrust/ Pungent horror and an *eaten* mess/ into my very face, and taste I must'¹¹² (emphasis added). The adolescent speaker before the encounter with brutal actuality was already preoccupied with death, but through his 'imagining a formal drift of the dead' Kinsella suggests that conventional form is a falsification of the actual. This 'formal drift' offers an ironic commentary on both 'Downstream' and the collection as a whole, framed as it is in the 'Prologue' by boredom with poetry's routine rhetorical strategies. The effect of the irruption of the Real, however, is less to destroy the formal images as to relativise and problematise them, and more importantly, to intensify the engagement with both the actual and the imagined: 'and I, an adolescent beginning to wonder at death found suddenly thrust among these images an actual living eaten man, to make real the Deaths I cd. [could] not see.'¹¹³

Calvin Bedient argues that Kinsella's best poems 'are intent to conjure into existence, or to happen upon, to seize, instances and models in life itself of vital poise,'¹¹⁴ as when in 'Downstream' the swan appears:

¹¹¹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29. Kinsella mentions Hull's *The Cuchullin Saga* (1898) in his translator's note to *The Táin* 257.

¹¹² Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

¹¹³ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

¹¹⁴ Bedient 129. In the plan for 'Downstream' Kinsella breaks the row-boat journey to Durrow into numbered sections and prospective stanzas, and gives a prose rendering of what he wants the sections to contain. The swan's symbolic function, the drafts show, is as an emblem of the progress of the mind and soul. The following note indicates the swan's significance at different stages of the poem: '2. The swan again – ghost white, stirs up & retreats – half accepting us, the known. It is now "reasoning" (will later be the soul, i.e. eye – mind – soul). 10. swan sleeps as we pass it calmly by: the soul,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

Sheathed in obscurity, a quiet hiss
Fluttered against the rock, a folded crest
Shifted in sleep, betraying with feathered kiss

A soul of white with darkness for a nest.
The creature sailed in such tranquillity
I lifted up my eyes. Still without rest

The phantoms of the overhanging sky
Occupied their stations and descended;
But, for an instant, to the starlit eye,

The slow, downstreaming dead, it seemed, were blended
One with those silver hordes, and briefly shared
Their order, glittering.

(D 56)

For Kinsella, he says, 'the one answer to the devastations of history [. . .] is the sight of, a momentary empathy with, an instance of vital serenity in nature.'¹¹⁵ Bedient acknowledges the fragility of the moment, but argues for its fortifying strength: such moments are 'so slight as to be pathetic, so beautiful as to steel hope.'¹¹⁶ Yet in 'Downstream' Kinsella emphasizes the tentativeness and illusory nature of the order the speaker finds: 'for an instant,' 'it seemed,' 'briefly shared.' The image of the swan, 'a soul of white with darkness for a nest' (D 56), figures the beleaguered 'innocent spirit' of 'Old Harry' within the encroaching darkness of 'A Country Walk.' The 'vital serenity' is momentary, and valuable, but as in 'A Country Walk,' such order 'dies.' Momentary order is annulled by the nightmare of history, the returning disappointment that is the end of hope and which causes the relentlessness of the pursuit of the Real:

And then impended

A wall of ancient stone that turned and bared
A varied barrenness as toward its base
We glided – blotting heaven as it towered –

¹¹⁵ Bedient 130.

¹¹⁶ Bedient 130.

Searching the darkness for a landing place.

(D 56)

In 'Downstream' nature provides examples of order and these examples justify the formal grace of the poem. Yet the poem continually questions its own formal poise, and nature again provides the examples: 'Earth winds disturbed the reeds, and blew asunder/ My static pose' (D 53). The poem dramatizes a conflict between poetic order and the disruptive capacities of the actual, what Alex Davis refers to as 'the central problematic of Kinsella's poetry early and late.'¹¹⁷ The contradiction of 'early Kinsella' is that a poem such as 'Downstream,' like 'Baggot Street Deserta,' evokes 'mess' and disorder within highly organized form. The poem is a holding field for this contradiction, where sense might be made of the dilemma. At the end Kinsella is, like the speaker and his companion, still 'Searching the darkness for a landing place' (D 55). There is the profound doubt, as in *The Starlit Eye*, which the poem consciously echoes and criticizes, that the consciousness, which brings about formal shape, may also be the consciousness that *creates* pattern and 'vital poise' where in nature they do not exist. Bedient passes over the formal scepticism in favour of the formal assurance of the poem: 'perhaps never has *terza rima* been given such a "liquid grip".'¹¹⁸

The poem takes place on the Erkina river in Co. Carlow, as described in the drafts: 'Erkina, narrow and deep and black as tar.'¹¹⁹ The idea for the poem, as mentioned in Chapter 1, began at the same time as 'Baggot Street Deserta,' but Kinsella began to work most assiduously on it around October 1961.¹²⁰ In these drafts he writes: 'In lonely peace, coming to conscience. Ireland during the 1940s.' The drafts also supply more information about the corpse: 'a dying tramp who sought those quiet bushes/ Was eaten to the heart.' Kinsella sees the experience in generational terms: 'we were the generation coming to conscience [. . .]/ at the outer rim of events (both in our age and our place).'

The drafts show Kinsella exploring a number of themes that become clarified in the published versions, but there are sections which do not appear in any of the published forms which illuminate, in particular, the theme of cosseted innocence and encounter with 'the actual mess.' The use of Pound and the *Cantos* was an aspect of this encounter. At one stage part of the plan of the poem was to have included snatches of conversation between the speaker and his 'co-shadow,' 'Sean' [J. White]. He quotes 'Sean': 'That wondrous flux of images,' to which the speaker replies 'A pattern torn from ~~their~~ context into ours.'¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Davis, 'Thomas Kinsella and the Pound Legacy: His Jacket on the *Cantos*,' *Thomas Kinsella*, spec. issue of *Irish University Review* 13.1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 41.

¹¹⁸ Bedient 133.

¹¹⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 28.

¹²⁰ One of the ms holographs is dated '18.10.61,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 28.

¹²¹ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 28.

Pound's 'Chinese Cantos' were part of the drama, a fact that has been re-emphasized by their re-instatement in the most recent versions of the poem.¹²² Alex Davis in his essay on the Pound influence on Kinsella found the reference to the Chinese Cantos 'curious,' and the speaker's 'animated response' to the roll-call of Chinese emperors 'surprising,' particularly in light of the speaker's horrified reaction to the death-camps of World War II later in the poem.¹²³ The drafts clarify how the Pound reference functioned as part of the theme. In the drafts the speaker elides and edits Pound's poem, stripping its 'didactic rages' in favour of more aesthetically (and politically) pleasing sections. This editing of Pound is an analogue of the 'unreal' innocence of the speaker's ignorance of the European nightmare, of the editing out of a large chunk of experience, on a personal and public level, in the Ireland of the 1940s. The editing of experience is a preoccupation of Kinsella throughout his writing. In an interview with Philip Fried Kinsella speaks of the editing that accompanies living and shows that he has placed a faith in 'givens' of place and circumstance as editorial organizers of overabundant data. In the drafts of 'Downstream' he has not come so far and editing is instead an ethical problem.

The location of 'crisis' in the Pound section changes in various drafts. At one stage the details of Pound's canto are 'illumined by his [Pound's] crisis,' at other points the crisis is in the world itself. This movement, in and out of the self, into the world, is an early indication in Kinsella of his belief that the imaginative artist's experience reflects the wider world. This belief informs Kinsella's exploration in 'Nightwalker' of his own educational background: the artist's crisis is a national crisis, and vice versa:

We swam in tranquil twilight, talking then
Of poetry; I chose the silken kings,

Luminous with crisis, epochal men
Waging among the primal clarities
Productive war. Spurred by the steely pen

To cleansing or didactic rages, these
Fed the stream in turn and deeper still
Drove its course; then, fading by degrees,

¹²² There are four significant versions of the poem: the version in *Downstream*; a heavily revised version (the poem was reduced from 163 lines to 83) first published in the *Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1964) and later reprinted in *Nightwalker*; a new version in *Collected Poems 1956-1994* which, in its first 34 lines does away with *terza rima*, and re-inserts the reference to the Cantos; and a revision of this in *Collected Poems* which re-arranges lines, and makes a number of word-choice changes.

¹²³ Davis: 39-40.

They shed their natures on the growing chill.

At different stages the 'silken kings' are described as 'Embodiers of energy,' and on one pencil written holograph as 'Embodiers of justice.' The line that now reads 'Luminous with crisis' once read 'Illumined by his crisis,' and what is now 'Productive war' was 'symbolic war.' In his recitation of the 'silken kings' episode, however, the speaker doubts the validity of his actions in 'Sifting their praise, eliding their angry claims':

I closed the page,
Wiped the dewy cover on my sleeve

And drifted deeper on the darkening stage
Murmuring in wonder, though in doubt
At making a garland of another's rage.

And yet what matter if I singled out
Fragment or facet, (decant) or dying fall,
Destroying balance, facing intent about

For slight purpose, or for none at all?

The speaker criticizes himself for taking another person's rage and using it for his own purposes, and at this early stage the poem was an examination of the falsity of aestheticised selection. Some of the early versions of the poem contain information on Pound's manic tone in the passages the speaker decides to elide, and the effect of the speaker's censorious reading: 'the sharp didactic rendered null.' The lines he chooses to read are 'looted threads,' 'ripped tendrils,' 'Selected beauties.' In another version of these lines, Kinsella writes:

Those princes of long ago achieved a place in yet another pattern;
The pattern of that evening's vigil, united
In our mood. For what is meaning
(To life, history? Or art, or nation) but that it takes
Place & comes to an end, forming a whole.

In a note on this draft page Kinsella anticipates his later statements about the superficial nature of formal poise: 'Are we not free to reject? in the interest of the satisfying pattern the

momentary sense of aptness and rightness?’ During the composition of the poem Kinsella was preoccupied by editing and selection done for the sake of ‘lapping airs and graces.’ In another note he writes, ‘hunger is for pattern/ We recompose the world about us/ thus conferring a new lease of life/ on things dead and gone.’¹²⁴ The necessity for selection in artistic process, the drafts reveal, ‘raised a sudden doubt,/ A scruple for the passion of the whole.’¹²⁵

Kinsella’s ‘scruples’ reveal his concern with the effect of uncertain foundations, with ‘our basis on shreds of disappointment.’ The genesis of ‘Baggot Street Deserta,’ as previously mentioned, connects the poem to ‘Downstream.’ In the drafts Kinsella reflects on the story of the body discovered in Durrow Wood, and the jolt given to his sense of reality. Of his memory of the boat trip with Seán White he asks, ‘which was more real that beautiful night [. . .] or the death?’¹²⁶ The weighing of experience, both first hand and, as in White’s anecdote, a mediated experience, becomes central to the final version of ‘Baggot Street Deserta,’ as does the theme of shocked entrance into a deeper knowledge of brutal reality in ‘Downstream.’

The self-critical element in Kinsella, the ‘inner Lizzie Borden’ is prominent in ‘Downstream.’ The self-accusation mainly centres on the innocence of the speaker. However, in referring to himself as ‘Urmensch and brute,’ and thereby implicating himself in the European horror, the speaker reveals that the self-accusation also concerns a fundamental human baseness. ‘Downstream’ takes its place, in this context, with ‘Nightwalker’ and ‘A Country Walk,’ as a poem in which the instability of the present is derived from a disappointment intimately connected with violence in the past.

The poems in the last section of the book, Kinsella says, ‘speak for themselves – and perhaps for future work.’¹²⁷ If ‘Chrysalides’ speaks for Kinsella’s later work it is in the sense, like ‘Downstream,’ of a need to adjust to ‘lasting horror.’ The other poems in this last section speak for later work in their examination of the shortcomings of an art whose patterns need to be altered when faced with such experiences. ‘Chrysalides’ is an anecdotal poem of a youthful summer cycling trip through the countryside. Like ‘Mirror in February,’ the poem concerns the end of youth; differently to that poem, however, and like ‘Downstream,’ the poem is a memory of how youth had come into contact with horror. In ‘Chrysalides’ the effect is a delayed, if ‘lasting,’ shock. The cyclists in the full stream of their youth are as oblivious to the transience of

¹²⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 28. This anticipates the line ‘hunger is for order’ in ‘Phoenix Park.’

¹²⁵ Kinsella crossed out the line replaced it with ‘Scrupulous for that passionate control,’ Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 29.

¹²⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 10. Interestingly, in a review of Kinsella’s *Poems*, Seán White said ‘Outside the love-poems – even, in them, occasionally – Mr. Kinsella is a hermit. His territory is on the solitary frontier between private reverie and dream,’ Seán J. White, ‘An Irish Poet’s First Book,’ review of *Poems*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Press* 26 January 1957: 4. In a comment on ‘Baggot Street Deserta’ Donatella Abbate Badin also uses the word ‘reverie’ in connection with what she calls the self-reflexive’ mode in Kinsella’s writing, Badin 38.

¹²⁷ PBS Bulletin 34.

their youth as they are to the durability of horror:

[. . .] insensitive alike

To the unique succession of our youthful midnights,
When by a window ablaze softly with the virgin moon
Dry scones and jugs of milk awaited us in the dark,

Or to lasting horror: a wedding flight of ants
Spawning to its death, a mute perspiration
Glistening like drips of copper, agonized, in our path.

(D 59)

This irruption into a settled state of mould-shattering experience is congruent with the themes that dominate *Downstream*, the irruption of the Real, and the resultant disappointment that must be adjusted to and incorporated into a new formal dispensation.¹²⁸

Kinsella's rigorous questioning of poetry, and the power and uses of rhetoric, is evident in 'The Force of Eloquence':

A token of bronze, long out of currency,
Vivifies an impossible worn world,
Of speech constricted into other terms [.]

(D 62)

On a draft dated 14.8.61 these lines (ll. 9-11 of the published version) were given more prominence. They were italicized and placed as lines 2-5; the first line 'The brink of living is inhabited,' stayed the same in all of the drafts. Kinsella evokes the power of art to transform into other terms the first world of things. The persuasiveness of rhetoric is seen in terms of gentle force and willing captivity. The 'bald/ Muscular' figure who, in the plan of the poem, dated 1959, 'draws after him a willing crowd fastened to him by slender golden chains, the ends of which pass through his tongue,' is 'the god of Eloquence, the inventor of Ogam.'¹²⁹ His power contains both 'captivity and willingness, force and charm, in such perfect balance that the group

¹²⁸ The long gestation of this poem attests to the significance of the experience. The first page of the manuscript is dated 24 November 1951; the drafts also show that originally the poem was to have concerned a trip to the Gaeltacht, with such lines as 'spoke in Irish awkwardly,' Kinsella Papers, box 2, folder 22.

¹²⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 1.

is halted – forever – continually self-satisfying.’ Though the plan is dated 1959 Kinsella seems to have worked on this poem most consistently in April and May 1961. In these drafts there are references to the ‘predicament of charm.’ The ‘token of bronze, long out of currency’ is an emblem of art which ‘preserv[es] one “world” in terms of another leading to a new world altogether, with coherences and consequences of its own, wh[ich] had never existed before.’¹³⁰ On the same page he writes that it is ‘current again in a different way . . . “sub specie aeternitate”?!’ The drafts indicate that Kinsella at this stage was concerned with the power, yet most acutely, and with most consequences for his future writing, the limits of art: ‘constrained, by the problem of how to preserve [. . .] sound in a silent metal medium, into the imaginative act. The part of ephemeral speech moulded in silent durability?’ On one page a disparagement and frustration with art is reflected in the use of the ‘lumpish’ to describe the ‘token’ of art. The imaginative act is ‘[b]orn of constraint.’ Yet the power of art is that it refreshes and renews, ‘vivifies an impossible worn world.’ Kinsella elaborates on this effect: ‘an imaginative force that renews its currency in another way, in each mind that beholds it as long as (the coin) shall last.’ Art has its ‘own coherent weirdnesses,’ he writes. The force of eloquence and the charm of art can lead to what he calls ‘Persuasions gentle hill, conviction’s brutal dale.’ Art is an ‘act of being’ which ‘[c]omes warm from the moulding, horrifying hand.’¹³¹

Ambivalence about art is reflected also in an unpublished 15-line poem, ‘Desertion,’¹³² which shows Kinsella, significantly, beginning to make of disappointment an opportunity for positive gain. The inevitable onset of darkness can be an occasion for a renewal, for ‘a new reaping, another harvest.’ Disappointment becomes a spur, a creative force and the negative, a productive occasion. The last lines of the poem give an insight into this aspect of Kinsella’s philosophic orientation:

I had known for a long time that it would come
 Yet the maturing seed had not made me faint-hearted,
 And when I saw, that evening, the sun going down
 On calm water, where a little skiff buzzed in the harbour,
 Gathering home the crew from each peeled and anchored boat-blossom,
 I saw in another light a new reaping, another harvest.

That day we shed the first of our sorrow wildly.

The imagery returns in ‘Mirror in February,’ the last poem of *Downstream*, a poem of

¹³⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 1. Draft dated 5.5.61.

¹³¹ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 1.

resignation to realities, rather than the wild sowing of sorrow. The poem ends the book with an echo of the gesture with which the book began. The 'fix[ing] of the ruffled sheet' of 'The Laundress,' becomes in the last poem the resigned folding of a towel, both emblems of the consolatory function of conventional poetic form, but the latter, in the 'slow distaste' (*D* 63) with which it is done, hints at the formal adjustments to come. In the drafts of 'Mirror in February' Kinsella writes 'trees cropped, freshened, to enter a new phase of bearing.'¹³³ This could be an epigraph to this stage of Kinsella's life and writing. On another draft page he writes of 'the inscrutable familiar': 'I marvel at the changed familiar,' indicating the sources of his next book, *Nightwalker and Other Poems*. Indeed *Downstream*, as Brian John says, 'represents the watershed beyond which he begins to formulate his own myth and to draw upon more indigenous material.'¹³⁴

Kinsella in *Downstream* and *Another September* is, to speak negatively about the 'classicist' style adopted so deliberately, doing what the poet *should* do qua poet. The poet deals with 'immemorial' truth, eternal verity, the timeless preoccupations of man in his generality rather than in a particularity of time or place. In adopting this style, Kinsella creates a rhetoric removed from everyday speech, but which he questions and criticizes in poem after poem. This distrust of the pressure a poet brings to bear on his material led Kinsella to do what Seamus Heaney calls 'punish the lyricist in himself.'¹³⁵ Many of the poems repeat the same frustration with the poetic act. In *Downstream* Kinsella had not found any way out of the dilemma, in fact the volume is an intense registering of Kinsella's frustration rather than an attempt at seeking a way out of what was fast becoming a trait that could only lead to a dead-end. Kinsella's rhythms and diction in these poems find their source in the literary tradition rather than in the language Kinsella actually heard around him. Again, this would have no relevance to the current discussion had not Kinsella, in subsequent work, attempted to find, in Heaney's words, 'a more indigenous way with the poetic line. [. . .] something genetic at the roots of [his] own Dublin speech.'¹³⁶

¹³² Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 17.

¹³³ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 4.

¹³⁴ John 46.

¹³⁵ Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber, 1988) 32.

¹³⁶ Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue* 32.

Chapter 3

I think this is the Sea of Disappointment

The poems in the last section of *Downstream* look forward to the work in *Wormwood* and *Nightwalker* in the sense that the aesthetic disappointment and criticism of rhetorical manipulation implied in 'String Puppets' and 'The Force of Eloquence' and the self-accusation of 'Mirror in February' ushers in a poetry of 'self-reproach as well as a new awareness of realism.'¹ Reproachful self-scrutiny had of course already been present in 'Clarence Mangan,' 'Baggot Street Deserta,' and the 'Prologue,' but in the later books the scouring of self results in a formal change, a 'hacking clean,' rather than a thematic repetition of Kinsella's frustrations.

Helen Vendler claims that Robert Lowell's movement 'out of strictly metered and rhymed verse [. . .] reveals his inward revulsion at his own past practice,' and is indicative of an 'inward imaginative upheaval.'² Kinsella's own reading of Lowell's 'change of idiom' is illuminating; it allowed Lowell, he believes, 'to keep on writing.'³ Kinsella's frustration with his own poetic practice required such a change in order to keep going. As he says of Lowell, so could be said of his own case: 'the earlier poetry, under mounting pressure, had come to an impasse.' In Lowell's 'relaxation of effort' Kinsella finds a way out of his own 'impasse,'⁴ and in this context of 'relaxation' the metaphors he uses for form are revealing. In 'Lead' form is seen as 'A bit to bridle Chaos' (*AS* 44) in an almost antagonistic relationship with formlessness; in *Nightwalker* aesthetic manipulation offers a looser, though not entirely 'free,' environment in which the poet's controlling hand provides 'a hint of harness' ('Tara' *N* 24).

Kinsella's revulsion at his past poetic practice, at the 'moulding, horrifying hand,' leads toward a verse of denuded effects in *Nightwalker*. The imaginative upheaval that provoked this change derives from Kinsella's view that life is inherently disappointing and destructive of human desires.⁵ Though this view is expressed in poems of formal polish in *Another September* and *Downstream*, Kinsella had come to a dead-end. The impasse is aesthetic, yet contains within it another element.

World War II, Kinsella believes, had qualitatively altered the disappointment inherent in human affairs, which became perversely 'disappointing' in a new and brutally destructive, man-created, way. Kinsella first expressed this idea in a roundtable discussion organized for

¹ Eavan Boland, 'Kinsella: A New Direction,' review of *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 6 April 1968: 9.

² Helen Vendler, 'Robert Lowell and History,' in *The Given and the Made: Recent American Poets* (London: Faber, 1995) 7.

³ Kinsella, 'Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views,' transcript of panel discussion featuring Stephen Spender, Patrick Kavanagh, Thomas Kinsella and W.D. Snodgrass, Northwestern University Yeats Centenary Festival, 29 April 1965, *Tri-Quarterly* 4 (1965): 106.

⁴ Kinsella, 'Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views': 106.

⁵ Kinsella, *Haffenden* 107.

Yeats's centenary in 1965:

It was of course no news that the human mind was an abyss, and that the will, just as much as the imagination, was capable of every evil. But it was something new that creatures out of Hieronymous Bosch should have materialized in the world, [. . .]. The coming to reality of these apparently fantastic images is an inner catastrophe: we have opened up another area of ourselves and found something new that horrifies, but that even more intensely disappoints.⁶

The 'newness' of this twentieth century form of existential disappointment urges Kinsella's aesthetic re-evaluation. The goal remains the Real, the artistic expression of the ultimate knowledge hidden within reality, but now the contemporary informs this drive in a way it had not done in earlier work. 'Baggot Street Deserta' noted the consequences for the artist of the 'shreds of disappointment' of the present; but in *Nightwalker* and in the later work, Kinsella accounts for how the decrepit present had originated. The effect on Samuel Beckett of his experience at the Irish hospital at Saint-Lô in 1945-6 is appropriate in this context: the vision, Beckett wrote, of 'humanity in ruins' provided 'an inkling of the terms in which our condition is to be thought again.'⁷

How does this disappointment enter Kinsella's poetry? Disappointment has *always* been fundamental in Kinsella. However, in *Nightwalker*, in conjunction with the aesthetic impasse, disappointment issues in what Eavan Boland called 'new structures [. . .] not just a new style; an entirely new selection [. . .] of experience and new emphasis placed on that selection.'⁸ Boland is right in not regarding Kinsella's new structures as 'experimentation' and in seeing how Kinsella's forms function: 'he is a deliberate artist; his forms are rarely haphazard surroundings for his perceptions. They are perceptions in themselves, insights into how experience should be selected and organised.'⁹

Both aspects of Kinsella's aesthetic turnaround, the disparagement of literariness and the need for a 'modern' poetry to cope with the desolating effect of reality, surface in reviews

⁶ Kinsella, 'Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views': 108. A large portion of Kinsella's presentation, including these remarks, was incorporated with little emendation into the essay 'The Divided Mind,' in *Irish Poets in English: The Thomas Davis Lectures*, ed. Seán Lucy (Cork and Dublin: Mercier Press, 1973) 208-18. The remarks I have quoted appear on pp. 214-215, with the word 'disappoints' given especial emphasis.

⁷ Samuel Beckett, 'The Capital of the Ruins,' *As the Story Was Told* (London: Calder, 1990) 28, written for a *Radio Éireann* broadcast in June 1946. Beckett worked as an interpreter and store keeper from August 1945 to January 1946. See also James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 345-51.

⁸ Boland, 'The New Kinsella,' review of *New Poems 1973*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 28 July 1973: 12.

⁹ Boland, 'The New Kinsella.'

written in the mid-1960s. His assessment of Jon Stallworthy is particularly appropriate. According to Kinsella, Stallworthy's poetry suffered 'an excess of "literature" and good manners,' which is now 'rapidly disappearing in favor of the truer tone – encompassing compassion and violent opinion – of one who has felt his own savagery and that of others.'¹⁰ Time and again in Kinsella's reviews opinions and judgements reflect back on his own practice. The last sentence could apply to Kinsella himself, particularly in the emphasis on violence and compassion, both of which suffuse *Nightwalker*. Yet of the poets Kinsella reviewed for this article, it is R.S. Thomas who seems most Kinsella-like to Kinsella: 'Most things are seen shivering in the winds of disappointment and desolation; [. . .] In this slight mutilation of the spirit, he seems most modern of all.'¹¹

By the mid-1960s Kinsella's poetry wants to, as it were, catch up with modernity. Isolation is now not only personal but the quintessential modern condition. It is also an Irish condition, with its Irish particularities. The broken Irish tradition which hovers behind the existential brooding of 'Baggot Street Deserta,' and the link Kinsella makes between Irish cultural fracture and modernity is a theme to which I will return. For the moment I want to illustrate how Kinsella associates modernity with disappointment, and with Irishness.

In a *Poetry* (Chicago) review of Ewart Milne's *A Garland for the Green* Kinsella makes comments which are suggestive in relation to his own work and experience. Milne is 'far more conscious of Ireland than Ireland is of him – or any of her sons – and the significance of the offering [Milne's book] has on the whole not been understood; I am afraid that his immense capacity for disappointment has been taxed to the full.'¹² Kinsella, while being disposed toward the Milne project, is critical of the poetic results: 'Much of the difficulty is caused by Mr. Milne's very wasteful methods, his utter lack of self-criticism.' Kinsella's own criticism reveals a desire for poetic growth and development and a welcoming of even negative critical appraisal. Notes made in October/November 1967 indeed reveal a strongly Blakean element in Kinsella's attitude to critical attention to his work: 'praise and criticism welcome/ foolish praise not welcome/ judicious criticism best of all (even adverse).'¹³ In a review of Curtis Bradford's *Yeats at Work* Kinsella elaborates on thoughts first expressed in *Time and the Poet* and 'A Shout After Hard Work': 'the power of Yeats's work came from the energy and sensitivity with which he elicited growth from his material during the toil of composition as much as it did from the quality of the original perception.'¹⁴ If 'A Shout After Hard Work' had been a dead-end

¹⁰ Kinsella, 'Voices from Home': 41.

¹¹ Kinsella, 'Voices from Home': 41.

¹² 'Some Irish Poets': 325.

¹³ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13. The Blakean element to which I am referring is best rendered by this line from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'Opposition is true friendship,' Blake 119.

¹⁴ Kinsella, 'Yeats' Poetry: Inspiration Was the Toil of Composition,' review of *Yeats at Work*, by Curtis Bradford, *Daily Egyptian* 47.89 (Carbondale, IL) 12 Feb. 1966: 6.

proposition, a straightforward registering of fact, what we see here is a desire to move on, to find a way out of the impasse. Though in both *Wormwood* and *Nightwalker* Kinsella returns to the familiar themes of 'love, death and the artistic act,' like Yeats he has 'elicited growth from the material.' Kinsella in talking of Yeats shows his awareness of the dangers of his own working of recurrent themes; his growth and manoeuvring out of aesthetic impasse comes through a conscious re-positioning which alters his ambivalence about the efficacy of the poetic act, and creatively harnesses disappointment.

Of the four sections into which *Nightwalker and Other Poems* was divided, the first two parts, Kinsella told the PBS, contain poems concerned with 'certain private experiences under the ordeal, and follow with celebrations of the countermoves – love, the artistic act – which mitigate the ordeal and make it fruitful, and even promise a bare possibility of order.'¹⁵ The Bishop Percy epigraph to the collection, 'Fair Eleanor, O Christ Thee Save,' is from a poem entitled 'The Ballad of Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinor.'¹⁶ The coincidence of the names and the aptness of the sentiment, considering the seriousness of his wife, Eleanor Kinsella's health problems, are an example of Kinsella's creative borrowing and use of sources. This can also be seen in Kinsella's exploration, for the purposes of congruence between the actual and the symbolic, of associations between his own wife's name Eleanor and the names Helen and Selene in his use of Goethe's *Faust* in 'Nightwalker' and exploration of the moon goddess figure in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*. Another example of the creative application of coincidence and thematic consonance is the epigraph to 'Phoenix Park' ('The Phaenix builds the Phaenix' nest./ Love's architecture is his own') which comes from Richard Crashaw's 'In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God: A Hymn Sung as by the Shepherds.'¹⁷ The theme of Love as an ordering principle is a key element in both 'Phoenix Park' and in the 'Wormwood' sequence.¹⁸

In the PBS Bulletin for *Nightwalker* Kinsella displays a greater confidence in his awareness of what the poems are saying and doing, but is reluctant to provide explanations, preferring instead to leave it to the readers' prerogatives and 'let the details speak for

¹⁵ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 55 (December 1967). Anthony Hecht's *The Hard Hours* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1967) was the Christmas Choice; *Nightwalker and Other Poems* was the Christmas Recommendation. *Wormwood*, which was first published in 1966, was included in revised form as the second section of *Nightwalker*.

¹⁶ Bishop Percy, *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, 4 vols. 6th edition (London: Richards, 1823) Vol. 3: 341-44. See John, 106; Badin, *Thomas Kinsella* 79.

¹⁷ The lines Kinsella uses are spoken by the shepherd Thyrsis: 'Proud world (said I), cease your contest,/ And let the Mighty Babe alone./ The phoenix builds the phoenix' nest;/ Love's architecture is his own./ The babe whose birth embraves this morn/ Made his own bed ere he was born.' Richard Crashaw, *Carmen Deo Nostro* (1652), *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. Vol 1 (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2000) 1636-37. See also John 106; Badin, *Thomas Kinsella* 75.

¹⁸ Henceforward 'Wormwood' refers to the sequence in *Nightwalker*, and *Wormwood* to the 1966 Dolmen edition.

themselves.’¹⁹ In ‘Our Mother’ both the relaxation of Kinsella’s moulding hand and the faith in detail is immediately evident:

Tall windows full of sea light,
Two women and a child in tears
Silent among screens and flowers,
The ward a quiet zone of air.

(N 11)

‘Our Mother’ is evidence of what Maurice Harmon called ‘the bareness of means predicted by “Mirror in February”.’²⁰ The unadorned notation and mythic undertow work to allow both detail and import to emerge and clarify each other.²¹ The setting and atmosphere are reminiscent of ‘A Lady of Quality,’ but the presentation is strikingly different. Rhyme does not disappear entirely, however; there is occasional rhyme and that ‘hint of harness’ alluded to earlier, but the poet does not make all the line-endings chime. The full rhyme in the final stanza is allowed to emerge without clamour or bathos, and to moving effect:

All three women, two in my care,
The third beyond all care, in tears.
Living, dying, I meet their stare
Everywhere, and cannot move.

(N 12)

As well as retaining an echo of rhyme, other conventional procedures remain, such as capitalized first lines, which complicates the idea of an ‘abandoned formalism’ in *Nightwalker*.²² Even in the later (supposedly) ‘formless’ stage of Kinsella’s writing, he reverts to rhyme, in *Butcher’s Dozen* and *Open Court*, for example. The critical narrative which makes of *Nightwalker* the supposed ‘breakthrough’ into ‘freer’ forms is also complicated by the revisions Kinsella made to the Dolmen version of *Wormwood* when including the sequence in *Nightwalker*. If anything, according to Thomas Dillon Redshaw, Kinsella *reduced* the first published version’s formal wildness. *Wormwood* the book, and ‘Wormwood’ the sequence, are different in that the latter, revised sequence, is a less ‘raucous, hysterically histrionic, rudely

¹⁹ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 55.

²⁰ Harmon, *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* 47.

²¹ For useful discussion of the mythic dimension to the three female figures in this poem see John 84-85.

²² See Badin ‘Rhyme and Rhythm and Beauty: The Abandoned Formalism of Kinsella’s Early Poetry 1956-68’: 19-37.

uncoordinated²³ examination of self and form than the earlier book. In a comment which complicates the idea of a strictly linear progression in Kinsella's development, Dillon Redshaw argues that 'Wormwood' instead marks a 'return to the vital decorum and clarities of such early poems as "Who is My Proper Art"'.²⁴

Eavan Boland believed that *Nightwalker and Other Poems*, in its continuation of the move away from 'heraldry' she noted in her review of *Wormwood*, 'confirm[s] a change of outlook and a new direction' for Kinsella, a direction in which the poetry 'now aims at creating the whole atmosphere of desolation.'²⁵ Like Calvin Bedient, Boland suggests that Kinsella's writing attempts a counter value to the brutalities he finds, using 'Downstream' to illustrate her point. For all the 'disquieting repression of lyricism' in *Nightwalker*, Boland found compensation in the 'new strength' of the poems. Boland's review established the by now canonical view that with *Nightwalker* Kinsella abandoned traditional form. The contradiction is that 'Downstream II,' the even more finely wrought revision of the 1962 original, is included in a volume which supposedly signals this aesthetic turnabout.

In *Nightwalker* and beyond, Kinsella remains a 'measuring artist.' The kind of measure changes, and the attitude to the purpose of poetic measure changes, to incorporate a larger sense of 'aptness' than the momentary,²⁶ but in Kinsella's drive toward a poetry responsible to actuality, there is still the inevitability of selection and shaping, and adjustment to this inevitability is part of the tension and theme of 'Ballydavid Pier,' 'Museum,' and 'The Shoals Returning.' A note Kinsella made in November 1967 gives a more nuanced view of his poetic upheaval: 'poetic revolutions do not reduce our means, they add new means to old (wh[ic]h) must then be used [. . .]'.²⁷ Rather than total abandonment of traditional procedures what in fact takes place is an addition to existing means.

'Office for the Dead' is a poem in which vestigial rhyme lingers (in the first stanza the line endings are: marble/loins/assemble/begin) just as in the poem the last vestiges of the cohesive power of religious ritual disappear.²⁸ Religious teleology, the prescribed and, to Kinsella, crudely generalizing ritualised explaining away of human suffering, is an inadequate, and condescending, response to the particular and the actual. The stultifying boredom of the

²³ Thomas Dillon Redshaw, 'The Wormwood Revisions,' *Éire-Ireland* 6: 2 (Summer 1971): 153.

²⁴ Dillon Redshaw, 'The Wormwood Revisions': 152.

²⁵ Eavan Boland, 'Poetic Advances,' review of *Wormwood*, by Thomas Kinsella *Irish Times* 1966, n.p. (Kinsella Papers, box 62, folder 12); 'Kinsella: A New Direction.'

²⁶ See Kinsella's interview with Donatella Abbate Badin, for example, in which he speaks of the 'ability to say proportionately what one has to say,' 'From "An Interview with Thomas Kinsella,' *Thomas Kinsella*, spec. issue of *Irish University Review*: 114.

²⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13. The dating can be made because the notes on this page concern a 'criticism class' held on 2 November 1967.

²⁸ In this context of vestigial rhyme it is tempting to read in the last stanza's 'thrashing of chains' (N 13) an ironic echoing of Austin Clarke's formalist declaration that he loaded himself with chains in order to see how he could get out of them.

‘weekly trance at Mass’ is an intrusively empty ritual, into which the Real, as physical pain and suffering, refuses to be co-opted:

We watch, kneeling like children, and shrink as their Church
Latin chews our different losses into one

– All but certain images of her pain that will not,
In the coarse process, pass through the cloth and hidden boards
To their peace in the shroud; that delay, still real – [. . .]

(N 13)

In a note written during the period of the composition of *Nightwalker*, Kinsella says: ‘For the sake of the unassimilable note of difference art invents a new pattern.’²⁹ ‘Ballydavid Pier’ continues both the association between aesthetics and loss of religious conviction, and the attempt to find forms to accommodate meaning more amply and adequately. Like ‘The Shoals Returning’ and ‘Seventeenth Century Landscape: near Ballyferriter’ the poem is set in the Dingle Peninsula. The coastal setting and the movement from neutral observation to implication carries traces of the influence of Elizabeth Bishop’s ‘At the Fishhouses.’³⁰ From the eponymous pier an observer follows the movement of a ‘film of scum’ through a wash of detritus, and through stony shallows which cover the silent traces and shard-like remains of marine life. The line of vision moves out to ‘a bag of flesh./ Foetus of goat or sheep.’ The second stanza presents a reckoning of what has been observed:

Allegory forms of itself:
The line of life creeps upward
Replacing one world with another,
The welter of its advance
Sinks down into clarity,
Slowly the more foul
Monsters of loss digest . . .

Small monster of true flesh
Brought forth somewhere

²⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

³⁰ Kinsella reviewed, and praised, Bishop’s *Poems in Irish Writing* 36 (Late Autumn 1956). In the review he agrees with the writer in the New York *Sunday Herald Tribune* who believed, Kinsella says, that some of Bishop’s poems would ‘become a permanent part of the poetry of our time’: 186.

In bloody confusion and error
And flung into bitterness,
Blood washed white:
Does that structure satisfy?

(N 14)

In an interview with Ed Bomberger of the Carbondale newspaper the *Daily Egyptian* prior to the publication of the Knopf edition of *Nightwalker* in 1967, Kinsella revealed an interest in the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Bomberger asked about his view of the future and Kinsella 'started by mentioning the omega point conceived by Teilhard de Chardin, an idea that there is a point toward which all processes are tending.'³¹ For Teilhard de Chardin the Omega point of evolution coincides with 'God, the centre of centres.'³² In light of this context and the placing of the poem immediately after 'Office for the Dead' the question posed at the end of the evolutionary account in 'Ballydavid Pier' is ironic, the 'blood washed white' of Teilhard's Catholic evolutionary teleology does not satisfy.

Dillon Johnston claims that 'Ballydavid Pier' is the poem which 'introduced readers to the radical shifts in Kinsella's form, tone, and type of "allegorical" speculation,' and draws attention to the poem's concern with the relationship between 'life's process and intellectual processes.'³³ An early typescript³⁴ is even clearer in its association of evolutionary and imaginative processes:

digesting
Slowly the more foul
Monsters of loss: the system
Of images and meaning settles
Half-formed into place
Before my very eyes

A note on the side of the typescript reads 'of fruitful incompleteness contemplation of own incompleteness.' In 'Baggot Street Deserta' incompleteness of self is a debilitating negative, here Kinsella re-positions himself with regard to his earlier insights. As in Bishop's poem, meaning tempts with its availability, and is continually on the point of emerging, 'as if

³¹ 'A Poet's Concern with the Human Ordeal,' interview by Ed Bomberger, *Daily Egyptian* 48.139 (6 May 1967): 4.

³² Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* trans. Bernard Wall et al, with an Introduction by Sir Julian Huxley, rev. edn. (New York: Harper and Row, 1975) 294.

³³ Johnston 106.

³⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 1.

considering spilling over.’³⁵ In Kinsella’s poem ‘The ghost tissue hangs unresisting/ In allegorical waters,’ but at the same time maintains an inward-looking autonomy, ‘Lost in self-search’ (N 15). The liminal, ‘half-formed,’ yet potential, meaning is disquietingly rendered by the foetus ‘unshaken/ By the spasm of birth or death,’ just as it is also emphasized by the liminal setting: ‘Noon.’ The poetic image for Kinsella is a ‘mediator between man and his experience.’³⁶ The foetus as mediator exists in a state the meaning of which is, and at the same time is not, co-opted by the ‘order-imposing victim,’³⁷ Kinsella’s term for the human observer. The attributes of the actual and evolutionary process are inviolable. The scene shifts to ‘some church in the distance,’ and both the vague determining pronoun and the geographical remove emphasize how little the religious reckoning of the process has to offer:

The Angelus. Faint bell-notes
 From some church in the distance
 Tremble over the water.
 It is nothing. The vacant harbour
 Is filling; it will empty.

(N 15)

The final image is one which out of brutal fact both offers and resists transmutation: ‘The misbirth touches the surface/ And glistens like quicksilver (N 15). ‘Ballydavid Pier’ evokes the coming to consciousness of the kind of poetic meaning Kinsella in his poetry now aimed for, a meaning which resulted from the absorption of what Samuel Beckett called, in another context, ‘the new thing that had happened,’³⁸ and what Kinsella calls man’s ‘recent new experience of himself.’³⁹ The poem is a re-writing of ‘A Shout After Hard Work’ which had used imagery of the birth struggle to suggest poetic composition. In that earlier poem Kinsella’s ambivalence about poetry was strongly evident. ‘Ballydavid Pier’ shows, as do other poems in *Nightwalker* which can be read as *ars poetica* statements, that Kinsella’s formal adjustment yields a more benign attitude to poetry.

In the Yeats Centenary symposium Kinsella gave, ‘with grave reservations,’ the name Teilhard de Chardin, in connection with the search for a new kind of poetry: ‘As mediator between man and his experience the new image, or whatever is to perform the crystallizing function for a new poetry, must possess new characteristics and must also continue to have some

³⁵ Elizabeth Bishop, *Complete Poems* (1983; London: Chatto and Windus, 1991) 64.

³⁶ Kinsella, ‘Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views’: 109.

³⁷ Kinsella, ‘Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views’: 109.

³⁸ Samuel Beckett, ‘Recent Irish Poetry,’ *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment* (London: John Calder, 1983) 70.

³⁹ Kinsella, ‘Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views’: 109.

of the characteristics of the Romantic image, but transformed.⁴⁰ In his presentation at the symposium Kinsella related the need for renovation of the poetic image to ‘the experience of history as treadmill, a nightmare of returning disappointments.’ The Romantic image he said, was ‘hitherto the hypnotic focus of the poet’s stare, an entity with an independent “other” vitality, which it is the poet’s function to find and make concrete in our terms.’⁴¹ Kinsella was not sure what form the image which might arise out of man’s absorption of the nightmare would take, but in ‘Ballydavid Pier’ he presents an attempt at that image, an image that, in Seamus Deane’s words, ‘remains itself, just beyond the range of structuring’s good intentions.’⁴²

Alex Davis claims that Kinsella’s use of Jung emerged in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*,⁴³ but as Brian John discusses and as the drafts from the period 1966/7 show, Kinsella’s use in his poetry of Jungian ideas can be dated to *Nightwalker*. Quicksilver, as Mercurius and Nous, is according to Jung associated with ‘the wisdom [. . .] that lies hidden and bound in matter.’⁴⁴ What Herbert N. Schneidau writes of Pound and ‘Luminous Detail’ is to the point here: ‘the reverence for “Luminous Detail” implies a faith, a confidence in the close and illuminating relation of visibilita to invisibilita – or [. . .] the particular to the universal.’⁴⁵ It is not stretching a point to see in Kinsella’s use of the word ‘luminous’ in the first line of ‘Ballydavid Pier,’ as in its use in ‘Downstream’ and in ‘Wyncote, Pennsylvania: A Gloss’ (*NP* 1973 75), a reference to Pound, and to what Kinsella calls, in a definition of the process of discovering insight into the Real, ‘the moment of discovering of principle [. . .] a moment of revelation of order a purpose affecting the whole instant of flux, implying backward and forward.’⁴⁶ The connection is underlined by the following, in which Pound writes of the Platonic ‘enthusiasm’ which has ‘caused man after man to be suddenly conscious of the reality of the *nous*, of mind, apart from any man’s individual mind, of the sea crystalline and enduring, of the bright as it were molten glass that envelops us, full of light.’⁴⁷ In his review of Pound’s *Rock-Drill* cantos Kinsella wrote that Canto CX was ‘a psalm in preparation for the coming of light and the becoming real of the mystery.’⁴⁸ The final image of ‘Ballydavid Pier’ offers faith in purposeful experience, horrific though that experience may be, and a belief that the Real is found in the wash of actuality.

⁴⁰ Kinsella, ‘Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views’: 109.

⁴¹ Kinsella, ‘Poetry Since Yeats: An Exchange of Views’: 108.

⁴² Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 139.

⁴³ Davis, ‘Thomas Kinsella and the Pound Legacy’: 50. Davis’s point is derived from the research of Carolyn Rosenberg.

⁴⁴ Jung, *Psychology and Religion: East and West*, trans. Hull, vol. 11 of *Collected Works* 236; quoted in Johnston 106.

⁴⁵ Herbert N. Schneidau, *Ezra Pound: The Image and the Real* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969) viii.

⁴⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

⁴⁷ Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (1938; New York: New Directions, 1970) 44.

⁴⁸ Kinsella, *Irish Press* 26 October 1957: 4.

'Landscape and Figure' was at one stage called 'Landscape, Near Pontoise,'⁴⁹ and seems to have begun as an attempt to create for Ireland vis-à-vis England an effect similar to Francois Villon's 'Quatrain,' which makes the great city Paris a suburb of the village, Pontoise.⁵⁰ There is a clear-eyed moral neutrality at work in the poem, accompanied by an advance in simplicity of diction and syntax: 'The blight breathes, or does not, invisibly,/ As it will.' In such poetry, the notation of fact, and almost scientific deduction of law from the empirical investigation, is its own reward, a sustaining clarity of address to the actual. Kinsella moves, as Thomas Jackson says, 'beyond stoicism'⁵¹ in *Nightwalker*, into a state beyond forbearance, presumption and despair.

The farmer in the poem is persistent in his effort, concentrated on the work at hand. What Auden called the 'eye-on-the-object-look'⁵² carries a moral weight, for it is this relentless concentration which yields a dividend, not *despite* disease, but *as well as* disease: 'Stalks still break into scattered flower./ Tissue forms about purpose as about seed' (N 16). The poem carries lightly its allusion to the Great Famine, in the use of the word 'blight,' and though not a comic meditation on mortality and decay and knowledge of death, traces of the influence of Villon's poem can still be discerned:

He works toward the fruit of Adam. It darkens the plain,
Its seed a huge brain. The protecting flesh
When it falls will melt away in a kind of mud.

(N 16)⁵³

The tension between flux and order, value and judgement, and the difficulty of formal renderings to adequately register the shape of things is also present in 'Museum.' Through the medium of a poem about the embalming effect of museums, Kinsella attempts to register what happens when the flux of actuality is mediated, and in this implicitly criticizes the conventional technique of his earlier work:

Webs of corridors and numbered rooms
Catch the onward turbulence of forms

⁴⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 9.

⁵⁰ Je suis Francoys dont il me poise,/ Né de Paris emprés Pontoise;/ Et de la corde d'une toise/ Sçura mon col que mon cul poise. [Francis I am, which weighs me down/ born in Paris near Pontoise town,/ and with a stretch of rope my pate/ will learn for once my arse's weight], Villon 216-17.

⁵¹ Jackson 39.

⁵² Auden 326.

⁵³ The poem appears to have also been based on a painting by Pissarro, and is linked to Millet's 'Fruit Grower,' Kinsella Papers box 5, folder 9.

Against museum technique; flux disperses
In order everywhere, in glass cases
Or draped or towering in enormous gloom.
Human voice and footstep die.

(N 17)

In 'Museum' we see again that the goal of Kinsella's poetry is not so much order, as an accurate understanding of 'how the whole thing works.' As Kinsella puts it in a note from circa 1966/67: 'the care in this art is less to reenact a process, than to arrange that everything of significance is presented at once at the crucial moment of understanding.'⁵⁴ In 'Museum' a disaffection from *a priori* forms of structuring knowledge and reality can be discerned, but, as in 'Landscape and Figure,' the poem attempts an austere rendering of fact, ('Human voice and footstep die'). Where 'Baggot Street Deserta' had called into question the very act of poetry, here there is evidence in Kinsella's poetry rather than his prose of an adjustment to the inevitability of artifice, even as its falsifying excesses are criticized. Poetry can be both artifice *and* access to the Real. Though 'Museum' does not offer an alternative formal dispensation, in 'Tara' Kinsella implies the ideal of poetic control he now sought: 'A horse appeared at the rampart like a ghost,/ And tossed his neck at ease, with a hint of harness' (N 24).

'Museum,' 'Tara,' and 'The Serving Maid,'⁵⁵ are, in a sense, allegories of poetic composition. In 'The Serving Maid' the motif, and the implicit pun, of looking in a mirror is again used as an opportunity for reflection and self-laceration: 'This squawking busybody almost thrives/ On jeering at itself; it serves me well' (N 19). The poem is also a rumination on a falsifying variety of poetic process, yet there is a new skill displayed here, as in 'Landscape and Figure,' and 'Museum,' in setting the metaphorical system in circumstances that have primary command of the attention. 'The Serving Maid' swims in 'allegorical waters,' but as in 'Ballydavid Pier' the secondary meaning emerges 'of itself' out of the exact rendering of the primary scene:

I come, I come, in decent skirt and jumper
And flat-heeled shoes, with flowers and prayer book
All in order, to remember you;
To kneel by the grave's gravel and pluck the weeds
And replace the withered things – and, if I could,
Grope down at your bones and take away

⁵⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

⁵⁵ 'The Serving Maid' was originally part of *Wormwood*.

Even death's eery filth, tidying your substance.

(N 20)

In the epistle-like prologue to 'Wormwood' the foreknowledge of failure ['the search continues until we fail' (N 28)] is used not so much as a guard against inevitable disappointment, but as the means to access a profounder understanding of the actual. Inevitable disappointment, Kinsella says, both motivates and is the result of a cyclical process that brings us ever closer to an understanding of the forces at work against us. The prologue to 'Wormwood,' though it echoes the formulation given by 'Death' in 'Old Harry,' is the first clear statement of what will become, with modifications, the entire continuing process of Kinsella's poetry. The relentlessness of the marriage relationship is, in 'Remembering Old Wars,' an analogue of the process. It is 'without hope of change or peace,' yet a vestigial sense of 'purpose' (N 34) continually re-establishes itself.

The first poem in 'Wormwood' recycles an image from 'Mirror in February' and continues the theme of ruthless self-scrutiny, and the remorseless pursuit of the Real, in its reference to 'the self-punishment/ [that] cannot rest till it is bare,/ Though branches crack and fibres tear' ('Open this and you will see' N 29). In this suite of marriage poems, tree imagery is a key motif, echoing the story of Baucis and Philemon. The dream-vision of the title poem, in which the speaker sees two trees 'in an infinitesimal dance of growth [. . .] turned completely about one another,' is the most direct allusion to the myth, and the image of 'their join/ A slowly twisted scar' (N 30) conjures up the fraught intensity of a marriage relationship.

The 'Mask of Love' presents a Blakean marriage of contraries: she 'bent on some tiny mote'; he 'in grief/ For the world in a speck of dust,' the intimate space between them an 'Abyss' (N 31). Even though marriage is a wearing away at each other, it is at the same time the relationship which reveals pattern, induced by love. After other forms of belief give way under the corrosive effect of the actual, love is the ultimate resource:

The other props are gone.
Sighing in one another's
Iron arms, propped above nothing,
We praise Love the limiter.

'Je t'adore' (N 35)

'Wormwood' and the first section of *Nightwalker and Other Poems* are concerned with female presences. Like the Blake who wrote that 'the daughters of memory shall become the

daughters of inspiration,⁵⁶ in Kinsella, memory and the feminine fuse. The doubts about the validity of the insights poetry finds and offers, present in the love poems of *Another September*, gives way in 'Wormwood' and *Nightwalker* to the belief that what poetic attention finds, even if produced out of the self, has implications in 'the violent zone' that area 'between the inner and outer storms, where human life takes place.'⁵⁷

Poems and *Another September* explore the power of love and art to create wholeness where there is disparity, alienation and potential chaos. Unlike those earlier volumes, the poems in 'Wormwood' do not seek verification in literary tradition, either in form or by using a language of heightened syntax and diction; the truth of the saying in a poem such as 'First Light' resides in a fidelity to the shapes of speech and experience:

Upstairs a whimper or sigh
Comes from an open bedroom door
And lengthens to an ugly wail
– A child enduring a dream
That grows, at the first touch of day,
Unendurable.

(N 33)

'First Light' is one of the best examples of Kinsella's 'homecoming toward reality,'⁵⁸ in that it is a re-written version of a poem of the same title from *Another September*. In that earlier version the equivalent stanza to the one quoted above illustrates how far Kinsella in 'Wormwood' had moved away from 'literary' posture and control. The original stanza is significant in itself, though, for its admission of linguistic helplessness in the face of reality, in other words a frustrated desire for control, a trait which marked Kinsella's first work:

Whereupon all manner of birds
Exploded across the estuary. Winds
Opened out white leaves:
A stylus, guided by the horizon, printed and mirrored.
For reply, I find I am left
With an unanswerable dawn on my hands. (AS 14)

⁵⁶ Milton, William Blake, *The Complete Poems*, 2nd edn. Ed. W.H. Stevenson (London and New York: Longman, 1989) 490.

⁵⁷ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 55.

⁵⁸ J. Hillis Miller, *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, Harvard UP, 1965) 12.

Basil Payne thought *Wormwood* Kinsella's 'most disturbing poem to date.'⁵⁹ The conditions out of which the poems emerged can be summed up by the epigraph proposed for the 1966 volume: 'poems written in dejection.'⁶⁰ Yet the despair is not total. There is, as Brian John has indicated, a Blakean 'progress from innocence through experience' informing both the 'Wormwood' sequence and Kinsella's developing poetic.⁶¹ John's insight is confirmed by Kinsella's notes on Blake, whose exploration of contraries in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a title which itself provides commentary on 'Wormwood,' contributed greatly to Kinsella's own thought, and is an under-appreciated part of Kinsella's poetic development.⁶²

Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and
repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary
to human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call *good* and *evil*.
Good is the passive that obeys reason: Evil is the active springing
from energy.

Good is Heaven; Evil is Hell.⁶³

In his notes on this passage Kinsella asks himself what Blake meant by Hell and Heaven. He writes: 'Evil is Hell. Evil is the active, springing from energy is the only life & is from the body. Energy is Eternal Delight.' To the side of this note Kinsella has written the word 'positive' and placed his own initials beside it as if to affirm that his own view is a deviation from usual distinctions. There is in *Nightwalker* the collection, as in 'Nightwalker' the poem, an attempt at a creative engagement with energy as a reality principle with origins in darkness. Kinsella, unlike Blake's Swedenborg, would 'converse with devils'⁶⁴ to know reality: 'the Devil's a/c [account] (the poets)' is that the Messiah fell & formed a Heaven of what he stole from the Abyss.'⁶⁵ This idea of 'stealing from the Abyss' is crucial, and informs the metaphorical 'dive' into primal memory sources in *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, as well as the phantasmagoric arc of 'Nightwalker.' Like Blake's 'Milton,' Kinsella figuratively descends, in both of these poems, into 'hell.' In Kinsella in order to understand and find response to the chaos, which he

⁵⁹ Basil Payne, review of *Poems*, by Thomas Kinsella, Douglas Livingstone and Anne Sexton, *Studies* 57 (Spring 1968): 107.

⁶⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 27. The cover for *Wormwood* was later re-used for *Madonna*, indicating a connection between these two books' exploration of the feminine.

⁶¹ John 89.

⁶² Kinsella, letter to the author, 28 August 2003: 'The only real reading at the time [early 1960s] would have been in Blake, Joyce and Thomas Mann.'

⁶³ Blake 105.

⁶⁴ Blake 120.

⁶⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

says, was produced out of the human will; at the end of 'Nightwalker' the speaker reaches the ultimate source of disappointment to find that 'It has a human taste, but sterile; odourless./ Massed human wills' (N 69). For Kinsella, the source of the problem is the source of the answer, and in *Notes from the Land of the Dead* the descent takes on a recuperative profile. In this descent, as in Blake, previous models are not required: 'We do not want either Greek or Latin models, if we are but just & true to our own imaginations.'⁶⁶

The over-reaching, absurd quality in all this, the melodrama and the risk of bathos, was something John Montague thought Kinsella had not avoided in *Wormwood*: 'the extreme claim that the poet makes for his personal crisis ("a great star fell from heaven") often reduces his language to the clichés of hysteria, [. . .]. Even the central image in the title poem, "Wormwood," has that lack of focus which betrays literary rather than real observation.'⁶⁷ Though Montague's criticism indicates Kinsella's failure to overcome the problem, Kinsella himself recognized the need for this potentially overblown poetry to have a basis in experience: 'To put reality in such ideas it is necy [necessary] to have expd [experienced] – to be convinced is the being & the meaning.'⁶⁸ How Kinsella went about this is instructive.

Just as he made personal connections to the story of *Faust* via the associations between the names Helen and Eleanor, Kinsella found in Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* a corroboration for the goal of 'making real' the obsessions of his imaginative life: 'Art too is only a way of living, and, however one lives, one can unwittingly, prepare oneself for it; in all that is real one is closer to it.'⁶⁹ Kinsella took notes from this passage⁷⁰ and, as the final part of his paragraph of notes, quotes from an earlier line in Rilke's tenth and final letter to Franz Xaver Kappus: 'To be among conditions that work at us, that set us before big natural things from time to time, is all we need.'⁷¹

Wormwood begins Kinsella's active engagement with the darker energies of his own imagination in order to create what Kinsella calls 'Heaven → the Paradise of Art: paradox flux in stasis.'⁷² Energy, of whatever kind, becomes its own value. In his notes on Blake Kinsella emphasizes process, flux instead of stasis: 'Everything that lives is holy (not "that is").' The 'conditions that work at' Kinsella, the 'hells of circumstance' as he calls them in *Wormwood*, set before him the question of where the imagination lies in this struggle between light and dark: 'All deities reside in the human breast; – Good and Evil, Messiah and Devil: they spring from

⁶⁶ Milton, Blake 491.

⁶⁷ John Montague, 'And an Irishman,' review of *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (Knopf ed.), *New York Times Book Review* 18 Aug. 1968: 5.

⁶⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

⁶⁹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, revised ed. trans. M.D. Herter Norton (1954; New York: W.W. Norton, 1993) 78.

⁷⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

⁷¹ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13. Rilke 77.

⁷² Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

Contraries without wh[ich] is no progression.⁷³

'The Shoals Returning' is the last poem in the second part of *Nightwalker*. As with many of the poems in these first two sections, it is concerned with aesthetic order, and seeks emblems for aesthetic process in fishing and singing, and offers a vision of the 'Paradise of Art: paradox flux in stasis.' The poem is an elegy for the drowned fisherman/*sean nós* singer Gerry Flaherty. The new emphasis given to, and the new strength in, observation and detail as values in themselves, are apparent in the description of Flaherty going about his work:

A man in cap and boots
Throws his coat onto the slip:
He stoops and flings out
The body of a cod,
A sheaf of slithering mackerel,
A handful of crabs' claws.

(N 37)

What Wallace Stevens called 'description as revelation'⁷⁴ allows, as in 'Ballydavid Pier,' meaning to accompany and reveal itself out of the process of observation. Yet in the choice of verbs there is a typical Kinsellian emphasis on the corrosive Real:

The Wave of Tóime snarls
With distance, shudders in its caves;
It writhes milkily,
A ragged foam-web joining
And unlinking among the rocks,
Seizes the cliff in white
Turmoil, sighs and crumbles
– Breakers against breakers –
Chewing the solid earth.

(N 38)

This 'snarling,' 'chewing' Wave of Tóime, as rendered through intense observation, achieves

⁷³ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

⁷⁴ Wallace Steven, 'Description Without Place,' *Collected Poems* (1955; London: Faber, 1984) 344. A phrase sometimes attributed to Seamus Heaney, who quotes it in 'Fosterage' the fifth section in the 'Singing School' sequence from *North* (1992; London: Faber, 1975) 65.

what Roland Barthes called *l'effet de réel*, the reality effect.⁷⁵ The words convince that this action has been witnessed, and that there is encounter with fact. Yet the wave also 'undermines' like the 'Reality' in 'Death of a Queen' (*AS* 1). Kinsella's style matures, yet insights that were present in earlier work remain; the development is towards a more accurate rendering of the corrosive Real.

'The Shoals Returning' is a defence of 'style' in the face of this corrosion, which, considering Kinsella's ambivalence about poetry, is a defence made not least to himself. Gerry Flaherty's voice is as subject to decay as Deirdre's in 'Death of a Queen,' but his song while it lives '[a]rticulates and pierces' (*N* 38). However, the human voice must distort itself in order to articulate. The inevitability of artifice is alluded to in the manner in which Flaherty sings, a 'style' which prepares the spirit for its inevitable dissolution:

In the exercise of his gift
His throat constricts; speech
Human proportion, distort
Slightly to permit the cry
That can prepare the spirit
To turn softly and be eaten
In the smell of brine and blood.

(*N* 39)

This aesthetic paradigm shows an adjustment towards a beneficent view of the efficacy of poetry. The artifice described here is the West Munster style of *sean nós* in which variations in rhythm are achieved and extended by use of a glottal stop. In Seán Ó Riada's description of this style, which is richly suggestive in the context of Gerry Flaherty's actual death, and his symbolic role as marker of the end of a cultural era: 'The voice is shut off, as it were, perhaps in the middle of a phrase, or even at the end of a phrase.'⁷⁶

Kinsella's naming of the Wave of Tóime is significant in this context of voice being 'shut off.' As Brian John has noted⁷⁷ the naming of the wave prepares us to recognize Aogán Ó Rathaille in the final movement of the poem, in which 'A withered man, a coat/ Across his shoulders, watches/ From the cliff over the gorge' (*N* 42). In an early draft 'The Shoals Returning' was called 'Marbha' [Death] and the intention had been to end the poem with a

⁷⁵ Roland Barthes, 'The Reality Effect,' *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 141.

⁷⁶ Seán Ó Riada, *Our Musical Heritage*, ed. Thomas Kinsella (Mountrath: Dolmen; Fundúireacht an Riadaigh, 1982) 37. This booklet collected Ó Riada's *Radio Éireann* series of broadcasts of October 1962.

⁷⁷ John 93-94.

translation of the traditional tune ‘Captín Ó Maille.’⁷⁸ It now ends with the unnamed figure of Ó Rathaille, who elsewhere in Kinsella’s work is associated with cultural endings. Ó Riada’s description of the ‘shutting off’ of the voice in *sean nós* might be a description of Ó Rathaille’s end, and with him the loss of the Irish-language poetic tradition. In the notes for the poem Flaherty is himself compared to ‘an old Sioux . . . End of an era. End of any era wd. [would] bring him to the same hunched sentinel posture. cf end of our own.’⁷⁹ The singer’s connection with Ó Rathaille becomes even more striking when Kinsella writes: ‘isolated in so many ways – by age, language, distance; facing a direction in wh.[ich] there is nothing but a New world.’⁸⁰

Fishing, as well as singing, is emblematic of poetry, and vice versa. The following could as well refer to Kinsella’s trawling the depths of self as to the task of fishing: ‘The lines reach far down/ And open everywhere/ Among the haunted levels’ (N 41). Both poetry and fishing, in the search for nourishment, must inevitably break, kill, render lifeless, ‘turn to unbearable stone,’ what they nourish upon. In this there is a criticism of the lapidary aesthetic Kinsella had earlier considered an access to the ‘eternal gesture.’ What we see in *Nightwalker*, in poems such as ‘Ballydavid Pier,’ ‘Museum,’ and ‘The Shoals Returning,’ is a poet adjusting to the inevitability of aesthetic disappointment, accepting limit, but still open to the possibility of piercing articulation; ready to ‘assess’ the shapes presented by the ‘crystalline plasm’ with which the poem ends:

His eyes, out of tortoise lids,
Assess the crystalline plasm,
Formations of water
Under falls of air.

(N 42)

Brian John sees the final image as ‘a vision of contraries’ and hears echoes out of Ó Rathaille’s ‘Gile na Gile’ and Yeats’s ‘Paudeen’ in Kinsella’s use of the word ‘crystalline.’⁸¹ As the earlier quotation from *Guide to Kulchur* indicates (‘the sea crystalline’), Pound is also present. Crystal imagery assumes an increasing significance in Kinsella, with Jung’s association of the archetype with the formation of a crystal particularly important. This theory plays a

⁷⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 7, folder 4.

⁷⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 7, folder 4.

⁸⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 7, folder 4.

⁸¹ In Kinsella’s own translation of ‘Gile na Gile’ the second line reads: ‘Crystal of crystal her eye’ *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (1981; n.p.: Dolmen Press; Bord na Gaeilge, 1994) 151. Yeats’s ‘Paudeen,’ as intertext of ‘The Shoals Returning,’ offers a moving vision of Gerry Flaherty re-voiced: ‘A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought/ That on the lonely height where all are in God’s eye,/ There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,/ A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry,’ Yeats 110.

significant role in Kinsella's later work, and I will return to the Jungian influence in my discussion of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*. In his use of the word in 'The Shoals Returning,' however, there is a trace once again of Teilhard de Chardin. Teilhard describes, in a section of *The Phenomenon of Man* entitled the 'Crystallizing World,' how movement out of evolutionary impasse is achieved. In order to grow, minerals and organisms which 'have chosen a road which closed them prematurely in upon themselves. [. . .] have to get out of themselves, to have recourse to a trick of purely external association.'⁸² This is suggestive in the context of Kinsella's aesthetic impasse and in terms of the necessary artifice described in 'The Shoals Returning.' Kinsella makes a cross-reference to Teilhard's theory in notes on the Jungian archetype made while reading Jolande Jacobi's *The Psychology of C.G. Jung*, the book he used to first acquaint himself with Jungian ideas.⁸³ In these notes Kinsella can be seen using one source to confirm another, finding corroboration for his own poetic practice and instincts, with the ultimate aim of understanding 'how the whole thing/ works' (*One* 33).

The image conjures with the inorganic and organic, and the tension between mould and material, flux and stasis, the call of the wild, and the need for response. With this in mind the image is also one of *potential*, the possible order Teilhard evokes when he writes, 'the earth is veiled in geometry as far back as we can see. It crystallizes.'⁸⁴ The end of the poem gives an image of a returned attention to the task of observation, and the task of sifting that observation down to its essential form, the mould and shape inherent in the word 'crystal' but also in the Greek origins of the word 'plasm.' The poem ends with a vision of Ó Rathaille looking at the flux, which remembering that the Greek origin of the word 'plasm' means 'shape,' and in Latin, 'mould,' has inward structuring potential. It might even be said that what we are seeing is Ó Rathaille 'beholding the brightness most bright' of 'Gile na Gile,' and is like this source an *aisling*, a vision poem which yearns less for cultural turnaround than piercing articulation.

Though Joyce is the tutelary presence in the title poem, it is Yeats who is the dominant presence in the third section of *Nightwalker*, in which the focus shifts to a consideration of poets and poetry. In 'Magnanimity,' written for Austin Clarke's seventieth birthday Yeats's 'magniloquent' presence haunts the reflection on the relationship between poetry and place. To Clarke's vision of a Coole re-built once more as 'a place for poets' Kinsella responds, 'I am sure there are no places for poets,/ Only changing habitations for verse to outlast' (*N* 46). Poetry 'persists,' Kinsella states.

The Yeatsian prominence may be due to the coincidence of the Yeats centenary, as previously noted, while Kinsella was composing the poems that became *Nightwalker*. 'Death in

⁸² Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* 69.

⁸³ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. For a full discussion of Kinsella's first acquaintance with Jung see Chapter 4.

⁸⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* 69.

Illium,' which has the parenthetical epigraph 'In Yeats's centenary year,' compares the great poet to the Trojan hero Hector, harried by 'tireless shadow-eaters.' Literary biographers and critics are envisioned as 'Dog-faces in his bowels,/ Bitches at his face,' unable to gain any sustenance from their eating.⁸⁵ And in a vision of how literary greatness does more than simply 'persist' Hector as Yeats 'grows whole and remote' (N 50).

Nightwalker shows Kinsella re-evaluating his *own* past poetic practice and the tradition out of which it had come, and he finds both wanting. "'To Autumn'" best captures both the disdain and the nostalgia he has for the 'lost,' now impossible forms of poetic synthesis⁸⁶:

Insect beads crawl on the warm soil,
 Black carapaces; brittle harvest spiders
 Clamber weightlessly among dry roots
 In soundless bedlam. He sits still writing
 At the edge of the wheatfield, a phantasm of flesh

'while thy hook

Spares . . .'

Ripened leagues, a plain of odorous seed,
 Quiet scope, season of mastery,
 The last of peace. Along ethereal summits,
 A gleam of disintegrating materials
 Held a frail instant at unearthly heights.

(N 49)

The quotation marks around the title ironize Keats's poem, just as Kinsella's words frame the poet composing his ode, and that moment in aesthetic history when the poetic synthesis embodied in Keats's ode was still possible. The 'season of mastery' that such a moment represents is, from the modern 'entropy-haunted'⁸⁷ perspective, 'ethereal,' the moment 'frail,' and the achievement remains at an 'unearthly' distance above the reality of disintegration. The repetition of such moments of poise, Kinsella concludes, is not possible for the poet who would truly apprehend and provide a countervailing truth to the reality of disintegrating process.

If "'To Autumn'" questions the poetic tradition out of which Kinsella had come, 'Leaf-Eater' the last poem in this section, sets the scene for the title poem's self-devouring investigation of the social conditions out of which Kinsella emerged. 'Leaf-Eater' has, as

⁸⁵ In the Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 31, Kinsella writes of Yeats that 'there is now an industry in u/stdg. [understanding] him.'

⁸⁶ Kinsella, Fried: 17.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Kinsella agrees with Fried that his poems are 'entropy-haunted.'

Seamus Heaney noted, a 'formal ancestry'⁸⁸ in the glosses in early Irish:

On a shrub in the heart of the garden,
On an outer leaf, a grub twists
Half its body, a tendril,
This way and that in blind
Space: no leaf or twig
Anywhere in reach; then gropes
Back on itself and begins
To eat its own leaf.

(N 52)

The placing of the poem immediately before 'Nightwalker' establishes the frame for that poem's anger and self-accusation. The notes for what was at one stage in its composition called 'Walking at Night' make the connection between 'Leaf-eater' and 'Nightwalker' even more emphatic: 'own consciousness in the dark, always the place, the context of inspiration, the "place" of most of my poems – a metaphor for the inside of the head: the caterpillar on the leaf; blunt foolish groping & discovery.'⁸⁹ The note continues:

Must simply expand further so as to include more in acceptance. Can not reject even Haughey's haunch. When in complexity relax, retreat a step & get it all in view. Because it looks as if we are required to bring all our luggage with us: everything in these wild swings, the insane wickedness, the sinful inertia, deceit – and in Ireland we have it all: Haughey, the Germans, the foolish tranquility⁹⁰

These lines reveal Kinsella preparing himself to take Irish poetry into, in Gerald Dawe's phrase, 'uncharted territory.'⁹¹ Dawe has in mind here the 'hostility and indifference of governmental offices and the political chambers [. . .] where, until Kinsella, Irish poetry had never been.'⁹² The lonely poetic furrow evoked by Dawe was of an even more acute cast to Kinsella as he began to write: 'No standard in the atmosphere of new Ireland to guide my thoughts (Church, State, tradition).'⁹³ Yet, unlike Mr. D, Kinsella in 'Nightwalker' engages this aridity rather than turning aside. If a standard is to be found, he believes the nutritive source will be located in the

⁸⁸ Heaney, 'Cornucopia and Empty Shell' 59.

⁸⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18.

⁹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18.

⁹¹ Gerald Dawe, 'In the Violent Zone: Thomas Kinsella's *Nightwalker and Other Poems*,' *Tracks*: 31.

⁹² Dawe, 'In the Violent Zone': 31.

⁹³ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18.

same place as the destructive: 'the imposed order of the Church will not do in this post-atomic chaos. We must do it out of our own bowels: it is we who have, from our inner wills, brought chaos, & we who must, from our inner wills, bring new order.'⁹⁴ This note explains what I referred to earlier as the 'phantasmagoric arc' of 'Nightwalker,' which is a process of gathering knowledge and increasing understanding of the causes of disappointment at the root of an unsatisfiable condition.

The title alludes to Yeats's disillusioned walker in 'Byzantium' ('night-walker's song/ After great cathedral gong'⁹⁵) and the atmosphere the poem establishes from the first is indeed one of resonance receding, of the reverberation after tumult. The epigraph from Browne's *Urne-Buriall* ('The greater part must be content to be as though they had not been')⁹⁶ sets Kinsella's examination of the sources of contemporary Ireland's malaise in a kind of willed 'historylessness,' and the poem takes on a sharper focus when the source is recognized as Browne's reflections upon the 'outnumbering dead,' who might as well not have lived if unremembered by the living. Kinsella echoes *Urne-Buriall* once more in the first section of the poem when he adapts part of the same passage in Browne ('it cannot be long before we lie down in darknesse, and have our light in ashes. Since the brother of death daily haunts us with dying *memento s'*):⁹⁷

I must lie down with them all soon and sleep,
And rise with them again when the new dawn
Has touched our pillows and our wet pallor
And roused us.

(N 59)

Though 'Nightwalker' is most often read as a coruscating indictment of moral and political squalor in 1960s Ireland, the poem moves from contemporary 'shambles' to the foundational, ultimate basis of disappointment in the human capacity to wilfully choose violence. Kinsella emphasized this theme in his PBS Bulletin. He wanted, he said, the poem to be seen 'not as political satire or as an exile's criticism but as a sad poem about violence.'⁹⁸ 'Nightwalker' is concerned with the foundations of self and society on the 'shreds of disappointment' Kinsella had written of in the notes to 'Baggot Street Deserta,' but adds to that poem's existential quandary an overt social and political dimension.

⁹⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 19.

⁹⁵ Yeats 240.

⁹⁶ The epigraph has been deleted from the revised version of 'Nightwalker' in both *Collected Poems 1956-1994* and *Collected Poems*.

⁹⁷ Browne 167-68.

⁹⁸ Kinsella, PBS Bulletin 55.

In 'Priest and Emperor' the poet-figure is a 'night-watcher and night-worker' making unsatisfying patterns out of 'the ordeals of the day' (*AS* 27). The 'Nightwalker' figure 'Mindful of the/ shambles of the day' cautions as to the (necessary) precariousness of his declarative act, while at the same time invoking the bodily and psychic necessity that something be said⁹⁹:

But mindful, under the
 blood's drowsy humming,
Of will that gropes for
 structure – nonetheless
Not unmindful of
 the madness without
The madness within (the
 book of reason slammed
Open, slammed shut)
 we presume to say: [.]

(*N* 56)

The caution derives from the anxiety of the relationship between self and world, as in 'Ballydavid Pier' this is the 'violent zone where human life takes place.'¹⁰⁰ Yet it also comes from awareness that the 'will that gropes for/ structure' is also the will that can choose violence. The need for meaning-making continues, yet faith in the meanings made is contingent and weakening.

The mood of the introduction is provisional, but it is provisional in the same sense that 'Ballydavid Pier' and the last image of 'The Shoals Returning' are provisional. The first line of the poem continues the theme of appearance vs. reality, though with a difference. The speaker knows, or presumes to say that he knows, the difference: 'I only know things seem and are not good.' The economic avidity of the state and the 'soft bellied' material comfort of the walker, mask historical and psychic trauma.

The first section sets the context of violence and uncertainty. In his notes for the poem Kinsella calls this the 'blur,' which relates directly to Daniel Corkery's idea that 'flux and uncertainty' characterize Irish intellectual conditions. This is not only an Irish condition however. In 'The Divided Mind' (1973) Kinsella gives the fuller context of 'Nightwalker' when he talks of 'the world that has replaced the essentially nineteenth-century world of sensible

⁹⁹ The same tension can be seen in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' and the earlier poem is directly invoked here by the use of the word 'nonetheless.' The tension between contingency and necessity is everpresent in Kinsella and is most keenly evoked in *Songs of the Psyche*: 'Judge not./ But judge' *BF* 23.

¹⁰⁰ Kinsella, *PBS Bulletin* 55.

perfectibility.' This is the world where the prophecy of Yeats's 'Second Coming' 'has been accomplished; externally in the physical chaos of race slaughter, internally in a sense of precariousness and disorder in the spirit.'¹⁰¹ This 'blur' can clear. The answer is, in Kinsella's note to himself, 'What wd. [would] I suggest instead: 1. a sense of Ireland's history (Eliot wd. agree) 2. a sense of the 'flux and uncertainty' (exile) 3. an (intellectual) formation (to 'cope' with 1 and 2 ?)'.¹⁰²

This is the Ireland as 'quaking sod' described by Corkery,¹⁰³ which undermines thought and action. The walker, echoing Kinsella's comment on the location and context of his poetic inspiration, is 'a brain in the dark, and bones,' almost carrying the unwilling flesh out to the onerous task of exercise. The discontent has become as physical as it is psychic, even air can offer no comfort to 'lungs that take no pleasure any longer' (*N* 57). The moon throws a threatening glow over the suburban scene, 'Monsters of ivy squat in the lunar glare.' It is at the zenith of its orbit, and is readying itself 'for the return.' What the moon threatens is the return of violence, and its glare reveals past violence as cause of present uncertainty. Of the violence of the past the walker recalls 'talk of it,/ Though only a child.' The 'cratered face' of the moon conjures the landscape of war, and the phrase 'Not far from here it passed through' calls to mind 'Downstream,' in which Ireland was neighbour to the violence of World War II, though the violence is also that of the Irish Civil War. The walker confirms a link with the cosseted speaker of that earlier poem when he says 'It meant little to me then' (*N* 57). The lunatic glare, and its cratered landscape, indicates a malevolence to the moon that the walker, unlike the child, can now make out:

There it hangs,
A mask of grey dismay sagging open
In the depths of torture, moron voiceless moon.
That dark area, the mark of Cain.

(*N* 57)

The walker moves on, 'patrolling the hive of his brain.' The world he walks through has both an outer and inner dimension reflected by the suburban detail of 'street-lamp' and 'living-room' merging and melding into 'Will-o'-the wisp' and 'A laboratory/ near Necropolis.' Like the prowler that Kinsella often casts himself as, he sees 'a shadow slumped in the corner/ Of a living-room,' almost drugged by television (*N* 58). The moon's glare falls on house after house, and 'consumes pitilessly' the passive, enervated dwellers. When the violence returns, it is

¹⁰¹ 'The Divided Mind' 214.

¹⁰² Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

Out of a photograph of O'Higgins's wedding in 1921 Kinsella creates a 'fable' of the birth of modern Ireland in Civil War violence, deceit, betrayal, and finally grotesque cultural vacuity. The meeting with the Germans and the psychic recoil and attraction it provokes, is reminiscent of an untitled handwritten poem¹⁰⁷ which relates a meeting, in social circumstances, with the Weasel, which presumably in this instance as well as in the fable in 'Nightwalker,' refers to Ernest Blythe. The poem is significant for the insight it gives into Kinsella's determination to investigate and confront the psychic and societal locations of violence and provides an amplification for the reference to 'my own dragon self' in 'Nightwalker':

Why can I not take my eyes off you
Because you are a killer, of method
And would certainly kill again

Logic and courage of a weasel
I respect and detest
You teach me about myself

And I am going to study you
Until with as narrow a brain
And vicious a satisfaction

I pin you, grinning, unkillable,
Where you can keep staring back
Poisonous and small [.]

An unpublished poem, a ballad called 'The Death of Michael Collins,' though of dubious poetic merit, is interesting for the symbolism ('mark of Cain'; de Valera as 'Fox') which returns in 'Nightwalker' and for the picture it gives of Kinsella's political and emotional views on the Civil War:

They bore him slowly through the native grain,
Their hands all gory with blood and brain,

Weasel is Ernest Blythe, a treaty politician involved in these executions. Blythe ended his career (to my mind grotesquely) appointed by de Valera to the directorship of the Abbey Theatre – the horn of the Player King. The reference at the end is to Blythe's main interest in the Abbey, a coarse annual pantomime,' Kinsella Papers, box 65, folder 18. See also Harmon 64-65; John 100.

¹⁰⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 14.

O where's the glory and where's the gain
In a great heart broken, and the mark of Cain? ¹⁰⁸

In 'Nightwalker' the moon's 'mark of Cain,' is an allusion to Yeats's 'Blood and the Moon.' Kinsella refers to this poem as 'a mockery of modern Ireland' in notes he made on Kevin O'Higgins's justifications for executing his best man, Rory O'Connor.¹⁰⁹ In a number of unpublished poems of this period Kinsella explores the theme of brotherly conflict in biblical terms. One such is a versification of Genesis 4.2-16, the story of Cain and Abel, with only a few lines of the biblical source elided.¹¹⁰ The theme of violence and of brotherly hate, and present disillusion, appears also in an unpublished poem called 'Old Soldiers,'¹¹¹ in which the meeting with Blythe is related as a fable which contains strong echoes of the imagery of 'Nightwalker':

A weasel and a dog
Crossed each other's paths
And flew at each other
Hysterical with hate.

The weasel shrunk with age
Is stiff and dragonish,
He has a needle smile
And he would still kill.

The dog has grown dull.
He looks after the weasel
– Who does not need it
And does not return respect.

In the second section of 'Nightwalker,' the walker reaches Joyce's tower at Sandycove. The satire has now become farce as under Joyce's eye the New Ireland, in the shape of Charles Haughey, the 'Foxhunter,' emerges 'On horseback, in hunting pinks.' In a photograph from an

¹⁰⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 16. The poem was written for the play *The Stepping Stone* by the Limerick-born playwright G.P. Gallavan. The play was produced by Mary O'Malley at the Lyric Players' Theatre, Belfast. Kinsella was at the time a Director of the Theatre Trust. Stanza six begins 'he fought for peace then and he fought it fair,/Brought back the Treaty to a fox's lair.' Another draft page has the line: 'But war among brothers broke his heart.' In drafts of 'Nightwalker' Collins as the 'star' featured in the Aesopian fable of Irish political violence.

¹⁰⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 21.

¹¹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 8.

¹¹¹ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 8. In some of its drafts the poem is called 'Old Idealists.'

Irish Times the walker sees in a gutter, Haughey, like the moon, 'glares,' a hint that this new Ireland has not done with violence and the threat of it (there had been a glimpse of this earlier in the phrase 'Snigger, and by God' (N 63)). The walker appeals to Joyce, the 'Father of Authors,' for creative guidance, asking him to 'Turn [his] milky spectacles on the sea' (N 63). The sea is 'A rich darkness,/ Alive with signals,' a line which recalls the potential for meaning and creative engagement evoked by the 'crystalline plasm' of 'The Shoals Returning.' What emerges from this sea is a vision of Haughey, presented in language out of *Finnegans Wake* that combines the sexual and scatological and the circumstances of Haughey's ascent to political pre-eminence: he is the 'sonhusband/ Coming in his power: mounting to glory/ On his big white harse' (N 64).¹¹² Haughey's ascent is to Kinsella indicative of the debased standards of modern Ireland: 'The standards of modn. [modern] Ireland: gombeen, new hotels, Germans being sold land, administration, coarse dynastic struggles of Haughey haunch on horse, protruding jaw & silk hat.'¹¹³

Thomas Jackson, Brian John and Derval Tubridy, amongst others, have discussed Jung's influence on *Notes from the Land of the Dead* and the Peppercanisters, but the first signs of the eventual significance that this influence would have, occurred during the writing of 'Nightwalker.' During the preparatory stages of the poem Kinsella took notes on Jung and the 'shadow' figure of the 'dark brother' who, surprising even himself, he thought could be placed symbolically in the person of Charles Haughey: both Christian Brothers boys, products of the New Ireland, and both coming into their own in the mid-1960s. Kinsella's notes reveal the impulse behind, *Notes from the Land of the Dead*: 'my next book: childhood poems – to confront the shadow is necy. [necessary] & = a[n] insular look at one's own nature (no one can be spared this 'bitter cup').'¹¹⁴

From Haughey on his horse Kinsella almost cinematically cuts to the newspaper again, to headlines which succinctly portray the state's concerns: 'THE ARCHBISHOP ON MARRIAGE/ NEW MOVES TO RESTORE THE LANGUAGE' (N 64). Kinsella in 'Nightwalker' uses the Irish education system's language policy and the beliefs that had generated it, as part of a lament over lost opportunity, cultural loss, as well as part of an attack on the ineptitude and social and cultural failure in practice.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Charles Haughey had married the daughter of Seán Lemass, the leader of Fianna Fáil, hence the walker's acid phrase for getting ahead in modern Ireland: 'Marry the Boss's daughter' (N 64). The passage in Joyce to which Kinsella alludes is in the *Anna Livia Plurabelle* section: 'Father of Otters, it is himself! Yonne there! Isset that? On Fallareen Common? You're thinking of Astley's Amphitheatre where the bobby restrained you making sugarstuck pouts to the ghostwhite horse of the Peppers,' *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 1992) 214.

¹¹³ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18.

¹¹⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 29.

¹¹⁵ Kinsella's interest in this policy and its effects, particularly at the time of the composition of 'Nightwalker,' is shown by his keeping of a cutting from the *Irish Times* of an article by Garret

A note on the differences he found between the eighteenth century Gaelic poets, Aogán Ó Rathaille (c1675-1729) and Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin (1748-1784) reveals how closely Kinsella's thinking about the Irish tradition relates to his examination of his own social background, and shows also the connection between 'Nightwalker' and 'The Irish Writer.' Ó Rathaille, he writes, 'shut his eyes to the new Ireland: he looked back & embodied the end of the princely tradn. [tradition]'; Ó Súilleabháin 'was a complete member of the new Ireland: embedded in its misery, & in its reality. A comedown, but living. From whom the future issued.'¹¹⁶ What is especially interesting in these notes is the historical and poetic parallels drawn between Yeats and Ó Rathaille, and Ó Súilleabháin and Kinsella himself: 'Yeats shutting his eyes to the new Ireland: gombeenism; he looked back & embodied the end of the Anglo-Irish tradn.' In making the parallels Kinsella's confidence in his own position in an Irish pantheon is remarkable, given his relative youth, and considering that he had only thus far published two full volumes. It is reminiscent of Yeats's own extraordinary self-confidence in 'To Ireland in the Coming Times.' Yet the confidence is infused with an awareness of the inadequacies of the contemporary scene. Kinsella characterizes himself as 'the Christian Bros. boy: uttered by the new gombeen awkward Ireland; embedded in its vulgarity & its activities, a comedown, but living. From whom the future issues.'¹¹⁷ The intent in 'Nightwalker' is to acknowledge the violent birth of the state and the repercussions in the present state of 'flux and uncertainty' and 'blur.' Kinsella sees both himself and Haughey, his Jungian 'dark brother,' and Ireland, as having been formed out of the Christian Brothers.

In these same notes there is a passage which Kinsella crossed out but which is an interesting variation of the ending of 'The Irish Writer' in which he writes of the 'gapped, discontinuous, polyglot' condition as being both Irish and modern, and, paradoxically, fertile imaginative territory. He writes, '[w]e are not, of course, cut off from our humanity. The hidden part of the iceberg of tradition . . . this we have fully. We can be injured (& maimed perhaps) but not destroyed by the 'blur'. In a sense, it itself becomes a part of a thereby richer imaginative complex for the artist who comes out of it.'¹¹⁸ 'Nightwalker' in this context becomes less a diatribe and lament over lost cultural opportunity than a detached registering of the *effect* on the artist of the loss produced out of those conditions. The 'blur' creates the alienation of 'Baggot Street Deserta.' In 'Nightwalker' he ascribes the reasons for this 'blur' to particular Irish

Fitzgerald which concerned the results of the 1961 Irish Language Census. In the article Fitzgerald comments: 'A system which devotes over 40% of primary school teaching time to teaching a language, but nevertheless leaves up to 95% of less privileged children, such as those who become dockworkers and charwomen, for example, unable to speak it after leaving school, is urgently in need of reform, if we have any real belief in social justice,' Garret Fitzgerald, 'The Irish Language Census Results,' *Irish Times* 6 October 1966: 13. Kinsella Papers, box 62, folder 15.

¹¹⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

¹¹⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

¹¹⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

conditions, seeing in history the reason for his own artistic complexes. In other words, he recognizes that the 'shreds of disappointment' had a social, political and historical origin, and a common generational characteristic.

Kinsella's analysis of the roots of these conditions first finds expression in 'The Irish Writer,' a paper delivered with the original title 'Literary Continuity' at a meeting of the Modern Languages Association in December 1966. Frank O' Connor in *The Backward Look*, as I have previously mentioned, posed a question relevant to Kinsella's thinking about the literature of Ireland: 'Is there such a thing as an Irish Literature, or is it merely two unrelated subjects linked by a geographical accident?'¹¹⁹ In his essay Kinsella diagnoses the predicament of the Irish writer as the inheritor of a 'gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition.'¹²⁰

However, Kinsella in 1966 was only at the beginning of a change in his poetry, indeed a dismantling of his past, to take account of this kind of orientation. In an unpublished autobiographical sketch contained in his papers at Emory University he refers to the preparation for life he received from his education: 'To my schooling with the Christian Brothers I owe my early preparation for the squalid brutalities of the world.'¹²¹ In 'The Irish Writer' he confronts in essay form what he also explores in poetry: the issue of the wider cultural implications of the failure of Irish educational thinking to address in fundamental ways the education of the new state's youth.

Both *Nightwalker* and 'The Irish Writer' are written from the point of view of one lamenting, in Daniel Corkery's phrase, 'the crassness of his own upbringing.'¹²² 'The Irish Writer' asserts that the conditions described by Corkery in *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931) had remained substantially unchanged during Kinsella's own school years in the 1930s and 1940s, conditions in which little curricular attention was paid to the actual day to day substance and events of Irish lives. For Corkery this substance included 'the fair, the hurling match, the land grabbing, the *priesting*, the mission, the Mass,'¹²³ for an urban working class child like Kinsella the substance was different, but nevertheless equally as absent from what he was taught to appreciate and respect as the important matter for study.¹²⁴ Instead of contemporary Irish writing which might have provided opportunities for the young to look at and understand their own surroundings, there was, Kinsella remarks, a 'curious reliance on

¹¹⁹ Frank O'Connor *The Backward Look: A Survey of Irish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1967) 1.

¹²⁰ *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson?* 66.

¹²¹ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 8.

¹²² Daniel Corkery, *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1931) 15. Kinsella, 'The Irish Writer,' lecture delivered as 'Literary Continuity,' MLA (New York), Dec. 1966. Revised and reprinted in *Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer, Writings by W.B. Yeats and Thomas Kinsella*, Tower Series of Anglo-Irish studies, II. Edited by Roger McHugh (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970) 61.

¹²³ 'The Irish Writer' 61.

¹²⁴ 'The Irish Writer' 61.

eighteenth century English journalism':¹²⁵ Leigh Hunt, for example, Charles Lamb, Addison and Steele featured on the English course during the years of Kinsella's secondary schooling.¹²⁶ This might be the place to note, by way of partial explanation for the lack of contemporary Irish writing on the courses of study, the mistrust in which the authorities held much of modern Irish literature, as the Censorship of Publications Acts of 1929 and 1946 testify. Kinsella in 'Nightwalker' sees the Irish state as being presided over by a Catholic Victorianism: 'The Blessed Virgin smiles/ From her waxed pedestal, like young Victoria' (N 66).

Kinsella's remarks about the education he received are usually negative. With reference to its literary dimension, the further point is made that poetry seemed something unconnected to the ordinary course of human lives. As part of the Leaving Certificate English Course for examination in 1946 the prescribed texts consisted of a Shakespeare play (*Hamlet*) and selected poems and essays from course anthologies ('the nineteenth century English journalism' referred to above). Poems on the 1946 paper included Keats's 'Ode to Autumn,' which is of course interesting considering the use Kinsella makes of the poem in *Nightwalker*, Shelley's 'To the Night,' Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' as well as Milton's 'Il Penseroso' and a section of *Paradise Lost*. As if to confirm Corkery's analysis, the only poem by an Irish writer was James Stephens's 'The Shell.' Students were expected to answer questions which tested their ability to parse, memorize and recognize poems as well as 'appreciate,' as one question on Paper II had it, their 'good' qualities.¹²⁷

The examination-oriented nature of the system meant that pupil and teacher, more often than not, concentrated energies and time on sifting through the material and then memorizing the 'miscellaneous uninteresting details which might be asked' on the final paper.¹²⁸ In 1962 Kinsella recalled the literary education of his secondary school years: 'The system of education under which I laboured for most of my adolescence never suggested to me that the writing of poetry was a human activity. Poetry was a literary product. We didn't understand that human beings in the ordinary course of their lives produced this.'¹²⁹

In Kinsella's notes on *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature*, which he made in preparation for 'The Irish Writer,' he sees the 'flux and uncertainty' of Irish life as described by Corkery as the reason for 'the Englishness of the prescribed course.' But 'the confusion is not an admin. [administrative] mistake [. . .] it is a proportionate representation of our gapped condition.'¹³⁰ In Kinsella's analysis at this time he sees the 'flux and uncertainty' as a product and a producer of

¹²⁵ 'The Irish Writer' 61.

¹²⁶ See *Leaving Certificate Examination Paper II*, 1946. The paper did, however, also include the Belfast-born essayist, Robert Lynd (1879-1949).

¹²⁷ Leaving Certificate Honours English Paper, June 18, 1946.

¹²⁸ Akenson 74.

¹²⁹ Kinsella, Orr 105.

¹³⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

Irish conditions. 'Nightwalker,' therefore, at one level, is an examination of the circumstances which led Kinsella to 'consciously eschew Irish subjects as being limited in themselves.'¹³¹ These same conditions are also connected to that distance from the Real that pervades his early poetry.

Irish education is an important issue in Kinsella's work. The seriousness of the poet's involvement can be attested not only by the frequency with which he returns to the classroom in his poetry, but is further underlined by the longevity of Kinsella's engagement with the issue in essay form. In a paper entitled 'W.B. Yeats, the British Empire, James Joyce and Mother Grogan' (1992), Kinsella, echoing Donald Akenson's judgement that the Irish revolution lacked a thinking engagement with the issue of education, asserts that the cultural and political importance of an awareness of what an education system can achieve and how it can be used, was recognised by Patrick Pearse alone amongst the Irish revolutionary leaders. Pearse, according to Kinsella, 'had studied the mechanisms of British colonial exploitation in Ireland and identified the system of education as a powerful device, a "murder machine" doing what Swift had recommended: teaching the English tradition in the English language in Irish schools.'¹³² Indeed Pearse had set about creating an alternative vision of Irish education, at St. Enda's in Rathfarnham, which would provide 'the thing most needful in education: an adequate inspiration.'¹³³ Such an ideological cultural and social analysis of the Irish situation was, Akenson asserts, the radical exception to the 'terrible purity' of the Irish revolutionary movement. The separatist aspiration, he continues, 'precluded subtle analyses of cultural issues,' and with regard to education at least, 'predisposed the revolutionaries to accept existing structures.'¹³⁴ With Pearse's execution in 1916 the possibility of a sustained radicalism in Irish educational thinking effectively disappeared.

The persistence of the educational *status quo* into the workings of the new state was further facilitated by the outbreak of the Civil War in 1922. For the duration of the war Irish education was effectively under the control of civil servants ill-disposed to re-think or alter practices with which they had become familiar under the departing regime, a situation which did not change with the cessation of hostilities in 1923.¹³⁵

Furthermore, the denominational bias in the control of Irish schools was consolidated in the new dispensation not only by the avidity with which the Catholic Hierarchy protected its educational interests, but also by the governmental need for the backing of a powerful Catholic Church. This support was considered a necessity by an insecure Free State government under

¹³¹ Kinsella, Orr 107.

¹³² Thomas Kinsella, 'W.B. Yeats, the British Empire, James Joyce and Mother Grogan,' *Irish University Review* 22:1 (Spring-Summer 1992): 69.

¹³³ 'W.B. Yeats, the British Empire, James Joyce and Mother Grogan': 69.

¹³⁴ Akenson 26.

¹³⁵ Akenson 28, 30-31.

threat during the Civil War and during its unstable aftermath, and in practice meant that the Church's position within education remained inviolable. The reluctance of successive governments, of whatever political stamp, to interfere in what were perceived to be parental prerogatives also had the effect of consolidating Church control over education.¹³⁶ Terence Brown has argued that the formal establishment of these parental rights in de Valera's 1937 Constitution resulted in a limiting of the state's ability 'to interfere with the Church's control of much of Irish education so long as parents wished their children to be educated in denominational schools.'¹³⁷

The Free State's most revolutionary intervention – the priority given to the Irish language within the school curriculum – was founded neither on intellectual grounds nor on sound educational principles, but rather on cultural nationalist pieties.¹³⁸ Kinsella has Brother Burke, in the classroom scene of 'Nightwalker,' mouth these pieties: 'And you will be called/ In your different ways – to work for the native language,/ To show your love by working for your country' (N 66). There was, initially at least, a degree of political expediency involved in the wholesale adoption of the policy, however. While not underestimating the genuine force that the Irish language revival ideal had exerted on the Independence movement as a whole, the language crusade in education became a way for pro-treaty *Cumann na nGaedheal* to establish the quality of its nationalist credentials in the face of anti-Treaty accusations concerning the governing party's 'pro-British' stance.¹³⁹ The burden of success for Irish language policy was placed mainly on the nation's children, and as Joseph Lee has pointed out, mainly on the nation's working class children, insofar as the emphasis on Irish to the detriment of other subjects provided 'one further bulwark to the existing social structure.'¹⁴⁰

Kinsella successfully negotiated the Irish education system, despite the procrustean nature revealed by Donald Akenson's contention that the system's uniformity and rigidity assumed that 'all bright children were the same and that individual abilities should be bent to fit the prescribed curriculum.'¹⁴¹ The disregard for individual needs and abilities created within the system a class of 'failures,' many of whom would have been, because of the fundamentally discriminatory nature of the system economically and socially, Kinsella's friends, family or neighbours. Since secondary school was not free a working class child had to be exceptionally bright in order to have a chance of receiving post-primary education through the scholarship

¹³⁶ Whyte 16.

¹³⁷ Brown 152.

¹³⁸ Akenson 35.

¹³⁹ Brown 37.

¹⁴⁰ Lee 134. See also Lee 132: 'The existing education system was devoted to the defence of the social structure. Secondary schools and universities charged fees which placed them beyond the pockets of most citizens.' Also Ó Cáthain 109-12; Akenson 80.

¹⁴¹ Akenson 76. See also Lyons 652.

scheme established in 1921.¹⁴² This is Kinsella's introduction, in social terms at least, to the reality of 'waste,' which becomes such a key part of his reckoning of the processes of actuality.

In responding well to the advocacy of George Browne¹⁴³ Kinsella managed to receive one of these grants and went on to St. Canice's, a part of the O'Connell Schools in North Richmond Street, Dublin. Yet neither Kinsella's exceptional abilities nor the fact of the scholarship would have counted for much had not parental encouragement manifested itself in the most tangible way: at a time of economic hardship and austerity John and Agnes Kinsella, unlike (understandably) the parents of many of Kinsella's contemporaries, were willing to forego the income their children might have earned had they, instead of continuing in education, gone directly into the labour force.¹⁴⁴ The counter-balancing effect of the scholarships to the overall discriminatory nature of the system was, in fact, minor. The grant level when set in the 1920s was not especially generous and with the effects of the inflation of the 1940s had become even less so.¹⁴⁵

The secondary school Kinsella attended had been established by the founder of the Christian Brothers teaching order, Edmund Rice, in 1828 and its foundation stone laid by Daniel O'Connell himself, hence the name 'O'Connell Schools.' Rice's educational aim, 'to teach the poor with an emphasis on the Catholic religion,' had a humanitarian and socially progressive impulse.¹⁴⁶ The kind of education boys received at Christian Brothers' schools, however, had far-reaching political repercussions. While the 'National Schools' paid scant attention to Irish history, and to the country's cultural heritage, the Christian Brothers' emphasis on Irish achievement and history had the effect of creating what F.S.L Lyons called 'nurseries of the new nationalism.'¹⁴⁷ The O'Connell Schools were at the vanguard of this trend. By the beginning of the twentieth century, comparatively high educational standards and the emphasis on the teaching of Irish language and history, as well as extra-curricular activities such as the playing of Gaelic sports, had cultivated in many O'Connell pupils, as in other Christian Brothers schools, a passion for Irish identity and 'indirectly'¹⁴⁸ contributed to the creation of 'the ideal revolutionary group.'¹⁴⁹ The number of ex-O'Connell students who took part in the 1916 Rising was significantly greater than for other Christian Brothers schools, and far exceeded the number

¹⁴² Akenson 77-78.

¹⁴³ The 'Mr Browne' referred to in 'Settings': 'In the second school we had Mr Browne./ He had white teeth in his brown man's face,' *BF* 19.

¹⁴⁴ See Rosenberg 82-84.

¹⁴⁵ Akenson 78, 80. The stipend ranged from £15 to £50 a year in the case of the county borough scholarships and from £15 to £40 annually for the state intermediate scholarships.

¹⁴⁶ See *To the Cause of Liberty: A History of the O'Connell Schools and the Christian Brothers, North Richmond Street*. The Allen Library Project (Dublin: FAS, 1995) 14.

¹⁴⁷ Lyons 89.

¹⁴⁸ *To the Cause of Liberty* 53.

¹⁴⁹ Barry Coldrey, *Faith and Fatherland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988) 248. Quoted in *To the Cause of Liberty* 53.

from the Jesuit-run Belvedere College.¹⁵⁰

The propounding of a strongly nationalist view of Irish history and the cultivation of national feeling in pupils continued to be part of the O'Connell Schools ethos even after Independence, though with different emphases. In the Brother Burke scene in 'Nightwalker' the walker conjures out of 'the scalding soup of [his] memories' a Christian Brothers' classroom in the Ireland of the 1940s. The scene illustrates both the pieties of Irish national revival and the appeal to patriotic endeavour that surrounded Kinsella as a young man:

But the authorities
Used the National Schools to try to conquer
The Irish national spirit, at the same time
Exterminating what they called our 'jargon'
– The Irish language; in which Saint Patrick, Saint Bridget
And Saint Columcille taught and prayed!
Edmund Ignatius Rice founded our Order
To provide schools that were national in more than name.
Pupils from our schools played their part,
As you know, in the fight for freedom. And you will be called
In your different ways –to work for the native language,
To show your love by working for your country.
Today there are Christian Brothers' boys
Everywhere in the Government – the present Taoiseach
Sat where one of you is sitting now.

(N 65-6)¹⁵¹

In Seán Ó Mordha's *One Fond Embrace*, Kinsella, looking back at the Ireland of his childhood, the years of de Valera and of the Catholic Church's triumphant expression of confidence and historical culmination in the Eucharistic Congress of 1932, remarks that there seemed to be 'a kind of brainless innocence about the whole affair.'¹⁵² This brainlessness, and the all-pervasive influence of Catholicism, Kinsella remarked to John Haffenden, 'hardly

¹⁵⁰ The figures are: O'Connell Schools, 125; Synge Street, 30; Westland Row, 30; Marino, 24; Belvedere, 5. *An tÓglach*, i, 10 (1965), 5; Christian Brothers' School, Synge Street, Dublin: *Centenary Record* (Dublin 1964) 57-8; Christian Brothers School, Westland Row, Dublin: *Centenary Record* (Dublin 1961) 64-5; A.P. Caomhánach ed., *Scoil Iósaif Marino, 1916-66* (Dublin, 1966) 15. Quoted in *To the Cause of Liberality* 53.

¹⁵¹ Kinsella slightly revised this section in both the Oxford and Carcanet *Collected Poems*. See *CP 1956-1994* 82; and *CP* 82.

¹⁵² Kinsella in *One Fond Embrace* (1990), Ó Mordha documentary film.

counted as an influence' because 'it was a reality like oxygen.'¹⁵³ The section quoted above can work as a memory of the 'brainless innocence' and 'reality like oxygen' of the period when Kinsella himself received education. However, the satire directed at a state born out of violence, whose ambitions for its best and brightest extend now to the creation of 'Civil Servants in a state of grace' in its adaptation of nationalist aims to the mercantile present, can also be read as an attack on what the poet sees as the stultifying and petrified nature of Irish life.¹⁵⁴ The satire disperses over a larger historical time-frame when it is remembered that during the period of Kinsella's attendance at the O'Connell Schools the Taoiseach was Eamon de Valera. De Valera attended Charleville Christian Brothers school as a primary student, but as a secondary school student he attended the Jesuit-run Blackrock College. 'Nightwalker' is a poem which can be seen as a bitter commentary on the failure of the Irish state at the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. Around the time of its composition (1966-67) the 'present Taoiseach' was Seán Lemass, patron of Irish economic expansion in the 1960s, veteran of the Rising, and a past pupil of the O'Connell Schools.¹⁵⁵

The disappointment in 'Nightwalker' is in some measure a result of a falling away of the nationalist ethos instilled at the O'Connell Schools, both from the pressure of the 'debased' present and the shortfall in the actual accomplishment of the ideals of Irish Independence. The disappointment also stems from the realization of the messy, violent birth of the Irish state. 'Nightwalker,' like 'Downstream' is as much about the 'mess' as it is a poetic recognition of the reality of the situation.

In 'Nightwalker' Kinsella sees Victorian modes continuing in the mentality and inhibitions of the supposedly 'New' Ireland. A comment from the 2nd National Programme Conference 1925-6, which gives an indication of the importance of religious instruction in Free State Ireland ('a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school') sounds like a Victorian manual, as indeed Ireland can be viewed as Victorian into the 1940s: 'Of all the parts of a school curriculum Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject matter, God's honour and service, includes the proper use of all man's faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use.'¹⁵⁶ The Note expresses the concern that teachers should 'fulfill the primary duty of an educator, the moulding to perfect form of his pupils' character,'¹⁵⁷ which brings to mind the image of the Virgin Mary in 'Nightwalker,' 'like

¹⁵³ Kinsella, Haffenden, 100.

¹⁵⁴ John Banville ascribes the perceived torpor of Irish life of that time to 'a kind of applied spiritual paralysis maintained by an unofficial federation between the Catholic clergy, the judiciary and the civil service,' 'The Ireland of De Valera and O'Faoláin,' *Irish Review* 17-18 (Winter 1995): 147.

¹⁵⁵ Seán Lemass resigned as Taoiseach and President of Fianna Fáil on 10 November 1966, to be succeeded by Jack Lynch. He took part in the Rising while still a student at the O'Connell Schools. He escaped imprisonment and deportation after the Rising and returned to school.

¹⁵⁶ Education Documents 106.

¹⁵⁷ Education Documents 106.

young Victoria.'

The Victorian fuses with other elements in Kinsella's thinking: the Dantesque, the Faustian and the Jungian. The Dantesque in 'Nightwalker' is evident in its tripartite structure, in the infernal imagery of the TV watcher in the 'living-room, in blue trance, buried/ Alive, two blank eyes' and the suburbanites 'in their cells/ Faintly luminous, like grubs' (N 58). Dante's major thematic significance in 'Nightwalker,' though, is as poet of intellectualised love; love as 'the inevitable consequence of knowledge.' Kinsella's notes on the *Commedia* are predominately concerned with those moments of intense harmony in Dante's poem, such as Canto VI where 'the souls rejoice in the harmony of wh.[ich] their state is a part (C. VI),' and Canto XXXI with 'the redeemed in their places, the petals of the divine rose.' It is Dante as perceiver, finder and discoverer of order, who is most crucial to Kinsella:

Dante looks on the Eternal light & consumes his sight. Within its depths he saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the scattered beams of all the universe; 2 fused together into one simple flame. He feels he perceives the universal form of this complex ("node") therefore he feels joy . . . (C. XXXIII ll 82-93). Everything is perfect in this book, all things that are imperfect outside it (ll. 104-5).¹⁵⁸

To see how closely 'Nightwalker' both follows and adapts Dante consider the following passage from *Paradiso* to which Kinsella refers:

O grace abounding and allowing me to dare
to fix my gaze on the Eternal Light,
so deep my vision was consumed by It!

I saw how it contains within its depths
all things bound in a single book by love
of which creation is the scattered leaves:

how substance, accident,, and their relation

¹⁵⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18. Kinsella's notes are rough versions of the following lines in Dante: 'Oh abbondante grazia ond'io presunsi/ ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna,/ tanto che la veduta vi consunsi!/ Nel suo profondo vidi che s'interna,/ legato con amore in un volume,/ ciò che per l'universo si squaderna:/ sustanze e accidenti e lor costume,/ quasi conflati insieme, per tal modo/ che ciò ch'i' dico é un semplice lume./ La forma universal di questo nodo/ credo ch'i' vidi, perché piu di largo,/ dicendo questo, mi sento ch'i' godo,' *Paradiso* XXXIII ll. 82-93; 'tutto s'accoglie in lei, e fuor di quella/ é defettivo ciò ch'è li perfetto,' *Paradiso* XXXIII ll. 104-5. Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 1991) 852, 853.

were fused in such a way that what I now
describe is but a glimmer of that Light.

I know I saw the universal form,
the fusion of all things, for I can feel,
while speaking now, my heart leap up in joy.

Paradiso XXXIII ll. 82-93¹⁵⁹

In 'Nightwalker' these lines are adapted in the 'return home' as Dante's Virgin Mary becomes fused with the Moon and the image of the Imperial Queen Victoria becomes the presiding genius of dilapidated Ireland:

The return:

Virgin most pure, bright
In the dregs of the harbour: moon of my dismay,
Quiet as oil, enormous in her shaggy pool.
Her brightness, reflected on earth, in heaven,
Consumes my sight. Gradually, as my brain
At a great distance swims in the steady light,
Scattered notes, scraps of newspaper, photographs,
Begin to flow unevenly toward the pool
And gather into a book before her stare.

(N 67-68)

The Dantesque in 'Nightwalker' is associated with, and completes, the Faustian beginning through the prism of Carl Jung. In Jungian terms the 'worship of the woman' is equated with 'worship of the soul,' and the culmination of psychic development is an exaltation of the feminine which is also an 'exaltation of his own being,' transformations which Jung sees as the deep story of both the *Divine Comedy* and *Faust*, both of which (like 'Nightwalker') end with prayers to the Virgin Mother.¹⁶⁰

In 'The Worship of Woman and the Worship of the Soul' Jung sees both *Faust* and the

¹⁵⁹ Dante, *The Divine Comedy Vol. III: Paradise*, trans. Mark Musa (1984; London: Penguin, 1986) 392-93.

¹⁶⁰ 'O contrite hearts, seek with your eyes/ The visage of salvation;/ Blissful in that gaze, arise,/ Through glad regeneration./ Now may every pulse of good/ Seek to serve before thy face,/ Virgin, Queen of Motherhood,/ Keep us, Goddess, in thy grace,' Goethe, *Faust Part Two*, trans. Philip Wayne 288. Jung quotes this passage in *Aspects of the Feminine* 7.

Divine Comedy as expressions of the 'birth of modern individualism.'¹⁶¹ The Virgin Mother image, he says, 'show[s] how the soul-image (anima) affects the conscious attitude. She appears as a vessel of devotion, a source of wisdom and renewal.'¹⁶² Of course in Kinsella the Virgin Mother as image of renewal is tainted with history. Queen Victoria as 'vessel of devotion,' like the Virgin Mary, has social, historical and political complications. Yet as Kinsella states in his notes, the Victoria 'as proximate parent of the New Ireland' even if in reacting against her, 'stand[s] for some kind of order in a deadly world.'¹⁶³ In a further note there is a much fuller explanation of the drive that comes to dominate Kinsella's poetry:

Today the positiveness of the Victorian mind survives in Ireland (in me . . .) after the catastrophes of W.W. II & Hiroshima. And who will say this is not an enrichment, rather than an impoverishment? To be able to face the contemporary world, with the positiveness (marginal, yet there) of commitment to structure, meaning, purpose, giving, maybe, a means of dealing with a monster of formlessness & malignity. In this light, one can look back & see that the formalism of Yeats & Joyce is important, & not unconnected. [Kinsella's emphases]¹⁶⁴

Allusions other than the Dantesque and Faustian abound in 'Nightwalker,' which complicates the idea that Kinsella has himself put forward, that his development is characterized by a move away from 'literature' and toward 'fact.' Kinsella continues to use literary sources, yet rather than borrowing forms, Kinsella integrates theme, content and, occasionally, lines from others to his own ends. In the returning home section of 'Nightwalker' there are echoes of Goethe and Dante, and once again Joyce. Kinsella alludes to the 'Wandering Rocks' section of *Ulysses* where the one-legged sailor begs alms on the streets of Dublin: 'He swung himself forward in vigorous jerks, halted, lifted his head towards a window and bayed deeply: – *home and beauty*.'¹⁶⁵ The third section of 'Nightwalker' begins with the walker coming back to where he had begun: 'Home and beauty.' The 'exile' that has been suffered on the walk is the exile that to Kinsella is the essential modern condition: 'the post atomic chaos where everyone is lonely/exiled, not only you, watcher in the Tower.'¹⁶⁶

In 'Nightwalker,' Calvin Bedient claimed, 'Irish poetry comes abreast of "The Waste Land" and "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley".' Yet the poem is, he continued, 'forty years more

¹⁶¹ Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* 5.

¹⁶² Jung, *Aspects of the Feminine* 7.

¹⁶³ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 20.

¹⁶⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13.

¹⁶⁵ *Ulysses* 225.

¹⁶⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 18.

advanced in despair.¹⁶⁷ Bedient noted the falling off in Kinsella's attraction to form, but in a perspicacious reading, relates the atrophied belief in form to the condition the poem explored. The form, he said, is 'perfunctory, as much a habit no longer believed in, as exercise for "Shadowy flesh" or government service.'¹⁶⁸ Yet Bedient concedes the poem a 'triumph [. . .] as a construction':

for all its splintered logic, its associative jerks between narrative and hallucinatory fantasy, the pressure never lets up, everything having equally a note of corrosive misery, the terror of an abscess that is too full. Endlessly resourceful, thoroughly worked out and worked over despite its lived-out nausea, [. . .] it stands as a rebuke to the country its author loves, scorns, regrets: the country that has, in its ill fortune, the good fortune to arouse so much regret.¹⁶⁹

Edna Longley has criticized the 'meandering' form of 'Nightwalker' and in so doing also questioned the entire Kinsellian project: 'It is hard to see how "Nightwalker" [. . .] advances on the more ordered "rage for order" in "Baggot Street Deserta."¹⁷⁰ But of course it is precisely in this 'less' ordered context that Kinsella wants to work. Kinsella's interest is less in 'rage for order' than in (monitoring) the process of creating order. A 'rage for order' had indeed been the theme of 'A Shout After Hard Work,' 'Per Imaginem' and 'Baggot Street Deserta.' Now order is not so ardently sought after, it is instead something that is allowed to happen. The advance is into *differently* ordered, constructed spaces.

Longley reads Kinsella's meandering walk in 'Nightwalker' as a metonym for the poem's 'meandering' form. Robert F. Garratt comes close to the heart of Kinsella's change when he writes that in 'Baggot Street Deserta' Kinsella describes the conditions of his isolation and alienation, whereas in 'Nightwalker' isolation is assumed from the very beginning; the later poem concerned more with an examination of the 'consequences of such a condition upon the artistic consciousness.'¹⁷¹ What Denis Donoghue saw as a cultivation of gestures of 'romantic isolation' gives way in 'Nightwalker' and Kinsella's subsequent work, to an acceptance, as Garratt remarks, of 'fragmentation and alienation as true and valid elements of modern life.'¹⁷² This acceptance validates the inward-tending search for order that comes to supplement the outward search of 'Baggot Street Deserta,' 'Downstream' and 'A Country Walk,' where in order

¹⁶⁷ Bedient 127.

¹⁶⁸ Bedient 128.

¹⁶⁹ Bedient 128.

¹⁷⁰ Longley, 'Searching the darkness' 135.

¹⁷¹ Robert F. Garratt, 'Fragilities and Structures: Poetic Strategy in Thomas Kinsella's "Nightwalker" and "Phoenix Park",' *Irish University Review* 13. 1 (Spring 1983): 94.

¹⁷² Garratt 94.

to establish identity and structure, the poet looked to external reality for moments of poise. Kinsella, as Garratt says of 'Nightwalker,' 'falls back upon subjective meaning, on self and imagination.'¹⁷³

Among the first things to go down with the destruction of the old order was the great poetic stance of Romantic isolation – isolation of the artist from a more or less unified society. After the catastrophe the poet is still isolated, of course; but so now is every man.¹⁷⁴

John Montague argues that the 'old-fashioned' nature of Kinsella's reliance on an iambic line hampers the poem's ability to deal with Kinsella's departure into new thematic territory: 'he has discovered a new subject, but not, I feel, a new metric to energize it.'¹⁷⁵ Brian John considers Montague's point about form apposite, and implies that it provoked tacit agreement in Kinsella himself as the poet finds in later work a way out of the problems of extended form 'through sequences of short lyrics.'¹⁷⁶ Yet John also sees a flaw both in Montague's and in Edna Longley's harsher 'misplaced' criticisms of Kinsella's formal procedure in *Nightwalker and Other Poems*. Taking his cue from Seamus Deane he sees both the lack of metric charge, and the formal 'meandering' as the (deliberate) enactment of the drama of a poetic imagination arriving at what Deane calls 'moments of balance.'¹⁷⁷ In this drama, according to Deane, '[t]he poem is not a structure; it is an action in which structures appear and disappear.'¹⁷⁸

Of the poems in this last section of *Nightwalker*, 'Ritual of Departure' is the shortest, and apparently the slightest. There is a significant draft of 'Ritual of Departure' entitled 'Matching Silver,'¹⁷⁹ which is longer than the version published in *Nightwalker* and contains both more historical detail, and more detail concerning the speaker's preparation for departure. In this sense the poem is, particularly in this earlier version, a bridge between the concerns of 'Nightwalker' and 'Phoenix Park.' Indeed many of the concerns of the volume as a whole meet

¹⁷³ Garratt 94.

¹⁷⁴ Kinsella, 'The Divided Mind' 215.

¹⁷⁵ John Montague, 'The Impact of International Modern Poetry on Irish Writing,' *Irish Poets in English* 157. The essay was reprinted in Montague's *The Figure in the Cave and Other Essays*, ed. Antoinette Quinn (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1989) 208-20.

¹⁷⁶ John 97.

¹⁷⁷ John 98. See Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 142.

¹⁷⁸ Deane believes Kinsella's practice is related to Pound's theory and use of the Vortex. He cites Kinsella's own review of *The Cantos*: 'The meaning is a matter of vortices eddying about us as we possess ourselves of the contents of the poet's mind. Everything is dramatic and immediate, concerned with ideas only in so far as they manifest themselves in action.' Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 142.

¹⁷⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 12.

in this fragmentary and exceptionally allusive poem.

'Matching Silver' contains an epigraph 'To Jack Brophy, White Rock, Tinahely, for valuables received.' This is the Kinsella uncle whose letter concerning the family's Wicklow/Wexford ancestry is used in the later poem 'His Father's Hands' (*One* 25). The epigraph helps to place the 'Landscape with ancestral figures' in the fourth movement of 'Ritual of Departure,' and illuminates as pun the description 'The fields vanish in rain/ Among white rock and red bog' (*N* 72). In the earlier version, as can be seen from the title, the 'dozen silver spoons' have a more central significance. They are referred to as 'Irish Georgian dessert spoons,' and this historical provenance makes clear what in 'Ritual of Departure' is only implied: that the spoons have provoked the rumination on 'Dublin under the Georges' in the poem's third movement. In 'Matching Silver' the speaker tries to match the spoons with a set of silver forks; this manipulation has elements of the aesthetic, and more particularly of Kinsella's aesthetic, in that he 'move[s] them about dissatisfied/ Mixing their mild and brutal lustres.' They have been 'through too many hands' and so, like the inherited forms of poetry Kinsella is in *Nightwalker* contemplating bidding farewell to, here he is unsure whether to take the spoons on his journey of departure or not:

I will add them with their imperfections
To the other near-valuables on my list
To decide later, nearer our departure.

The poem is thus a reckoning of the mental and spiritual material needed for an interior as well as exterior journey. Kinsella's comment on Samuel Beckett's (and Joyce's) departure from Ireland is to the point here: Beckett, he wrote, 'uprooted himself, like Joyce, and left for Europe, bringing his essential material with him.'¹⁸⁰ The use of the word 'uprooted,' and in the poem the imagery of 'roots tear[ing]' (*N* 72), is significant. The preparation for leaving causes what, in the home place was taken for granted, to take on an aura of acute need. Departure is, for Kinsella, like writing. In 'Matching Silver' writing is, as in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' an almost animal impulse to 'uproot,' but it is saved from being merely animal by 'that other impulse' which is restorative of 'the first perfection of the maker's shop.' Kinsella corrects himself to assert a finer gradation: 'Or better, [to restore] the brilliance in use that fell open/ Before the first inheritor.' If you can restore this 'brilliance in use,' Kinsella says, in a re-formulation of the 'Paradise of Art' referred to earlier, 'you will restore/ The past, centred in flux on solid things.' In 'Ritual of Departure' this 'brilliance in use' has become much more ambiguous:

¹⁸⁰ *The Dual Tradition* 104.

count of 11 syllables (of the 225 lines in the poem only five deviate), which once again complicates the idea that *Nightwalker* is a volume of abandoned formalism. Kinsella's interest in numerology may have inspired this count of 'one plus one' to reflect the marriage relationship in the poem. The 'insinuating' structure the speaker finds and the form Kinsella utilises attempt to replicate is the Teilhardian/Jungian 'crystal' discussed in connection with 'The Shoals Returning' and 'Ballydavid Pier,' which in 'Phoenix Park' becomes the central metaphor:

Distinct. A ghost of that ghost persists, structure
Without substance, all about us, in the air,
Among the trees, before us at the crossroads,
On the stone bridge, insinuating itself
Into being.

(N 79)

Though 'Phoenix Park' is as aware of disease and decay as other Kinsella poems, it also has an air of new beginnings. It is informed indeed by that mix of optimism and knowledge of limit expressed by Teilhard when, to finish the quotation used previously, he writes that 'the earth is veiled in geometry as far back as we can see. It crystallizes. But not completely.'¹⁸⁴ Kinsella's aesthetic is an elaborate process of adjustment to the incomplete and the flawed, and 'Phoenix Park' provides an eloquent account how this process informs Kinsella's move away from the traditional paradigms of poetic form:

let the crystal crack
On some insoluble matter, then its heart
Shudders and accepts the flaw, adjusts on it
Taking new strength [. . .]

(N 77)

In a short note on W.B. Yeats written for the *Daily Egyptian* while Poet-in-Residence at Southern Illinois University, Kinsella makes comments on Yeats's practice and philosophic orientation, which throw light on the thought and vocabulary of *Wormwood*, 'Nightwalker' and 'Phoenix Park'

[Yeats's] experience of political tragedy in Ireland, and of the remorseless tragedy of

¹⁸³ Unpublished autobiographical sketch. Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 8.

¹⁸⁴ *The Phenomenon of Man* 69.

bodily decay – and his absorption of these bitternesses strengthened the work of his maturity and caused him, in a fierce search for understanding and order, to set up an elaborate private philosophic structure.¹⁸⁵

The private structure that Yeats developed in *A Vision* Kinsella says ‘served as a framework for his observation of men and gave him new images for his poetry. Most notable was that imagery of crisis, of disintegration and brutal change.’¹⁸⁶ Kinsella’s comment on Yeats’s death is a further illumination of a philosophic orientation and attitude toward the negative which fuels Kinsella’s poetry: when Yeats died, Kinsella says, he ‘vanished back into the fruitful dark.’¹⁸⁷ The comment on the dark’s nourishing qualities is echoed in Kinsella’s notes:

looking into the rich liquid darkness, imagining that we see depth in that flat black mask, the intellect grows still; the deeper the more silent, & one discerns that one is rejoicing, no matter what may emerge from the still, cold cauldron. We are still, absorbing a huge human disappointment.¹⁸⁸

This note clarifies the drive behind Kinsella’s work in *Nightwalker* and in subsequent work. The connection to *Notes from the Land of the Dead* is clear from the reference to the ‘still, cold cauldron.’ Though there is some justice in Edna Longley’s remark that Kinsella ‘reaches out from his solitude to the nation, as he does to the universe, only to retreat dissatisfied into his shell,’¹⁸⁹ it is only part of the story. Kinsella sees the ‘gapped, discontinuous, polyglot’ tradition inherited by the modern Irish writer, as ‘a richer affair,’¹⁹⁰ granting a unique perspective upon the quintessential modern situation, which the writer everywhere must face: ‘But for the present – especially in this present – it seems that every writer has to make the imaginative grasp at identity for himself; and if he can find no means in his inheritance to suit him, he will have to start from scratch.’¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ ‘W.B. Yeats: The Last Romantic,’ *Daily Egyptian* 47.89 (Carbondale, IL) 12 Feb. 1966: 2.

¹⁸⁶ ‘W.B. Yeats: The Last Romantic.’

¹⁸⁷ ‘W.B. Yeats: The Last Romantic.’

¹⁸⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 19.

¹⁸⁹ Longley, ‘Searching the darkness’ 136.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Kinsella in *One Fond Embrace*, Ó Mordha documentary.

¹⁹¹ Davis, *Mangan, Ferguson?* 66.

Chapter 4

The beginning/ must be inward. Turn inward.

Dillon Johnston remarked that ‘much of Kinsella’s recent poetic recovery of personal and public history can be clarified by the dream-analysis of Carl Jung and by the process Jung calls “individuation”.’¹ Kinsella’s preliminary notes corroborate Johnston’s finding when he alludes to the Jungian scaffold of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*: ‘set it all inside a simple plot of “individuation”.’² Yet Jung’s influence on Kinsella as I will show, was not only thematic but also formal.

In ‘The Divided Mind’ (1973), Kinsella wrote that the answer to the chaos of the modern world is within the self. Response entails a descent into the self, the ‘starting from scratch’ Kinsella hinted at in ‘The Irish Writer’ and which he repeated in ‘The Divided Mind.’ This ‘dive’ is figuratively performed in the opening poem, ‘hesitate, cease to exist’:

hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again,
dither in and out of a mother liquid
on the turn, welling up from God knows what hole.

(NP 1973 9)

‘hesitate, cease to exist’ ends ‘on the count of’ the symbol of the ouroboric egg, or zero. Kinsella intended *NLD* to initiate a series which would culminate ‘on the count of quincunx.’ He later described this numerological sequence as an ‘enabling idea’ with Jungian and personal influences:

A reading of Jung threw light on [the numerological system] once. It’s very hard to work on profound personal and family matters without coming up numerological. One begins at zero, one develops as one, one meets another and becomes two; with luck three emerges. [. . .] The scheme I have found most useful can count up to five; that is as far as it gets.³

NLD establishes the scheme and the procedures Kinsella uses in the Peppercanister series: sequences of poems organised around related experiences and co-ordinated images and themes.

¹ Johnston 99.

² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 18. I will refer to *Notes from the Land of the Dead* henceforward as *NLD*.

³ Kinsella, O’Driscoll: 61.

Kinsella's notes reveal the influence of Jung on this formal innovation: 'the constellated contents of the unconscious: the order (of dreams (poems)?) is radial: they cluster round a centre of meaning.'⁴ The importance of the idea of 'constellated clusters' and the continuing effect on Kinsella's thought can be seen in remarks he made during a panel discussion at the Sixth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association for Irish studies at McGill University in Montreal, in March 1973, which he repeats with little variation in interviews throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Kinsella understands myth, he said, as 'clusters of related *events*' and as 'clusters and constellations of digested experience':

In his attempt to come to terms with something that is vital to him, an individual poet will find himself undergoing for the nth time (as I have suggested) the primary mythical experience of death and re-birth, imaginatively understood; or of the night sea-journey; or of Persephone's time in Hell; of encounters with the Snake; of the breaking open of the egg, the hatching of things. All of these can be aids in the muscular, imaginative struggle for understanding.⁵

In the 1972 Cuala Press edition of *NLD*, 'Invocation,' a poem which evokes 'Persephone's time in Hell,' came after the introductory section.⁶ Michael Hartnett in his review of the Cuala edition praised the poem as 'one of the most beautiful evocations of sexual despair I have ever read.'⁷ Carolyn Rosenberg believes the omission of 'Invocation' from the subsequent editions published by Knopf and Dolmen (both 1973), 'improves the flow' of the sequence.⁸ Indeed the function of the poem within the sequence, as the establishing frame of encounter with the anima figure, is made redundant by the recurrence of the theme throughout *NLD*. 'Invocation' is significant in its reconfiguring of the trope of hope whittled away by disappointment in terms of a pun on the Persephone myth⁹:

There is something that is forever
taking a little of the spring
out of a person's step.¹⁰

⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 29.

⁵ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion,' *Myth and Reality in Irish Literature*, ed. Joseph Ronsley (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1977) 9-10. Kinsella's fellow panellists were David Greene, Jay MacPherson, Kevin B. Nowlan, and Ann Saddlemyer.

⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 10.

⁷ Michael Hartnett, 'New Directions,' review of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 12 Aug. 1972: 10.

⁸ Rosenberg 29.

⁹ See John 123.

¹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 10. See also Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 22.

Though 'Invocation' has not been printed in any subsequent edition of *NLD*, the continuing relevance of the lines is emphasized by their re-appearance, in slightly altered form, in *Songs of the Psyche* VII:

It was something
to take a little of the spring
out of a person's step . . . [.] (*BF* 26)

The encounter with the anima figure is part of the 'zero' stage of the process that *NLD* enacts, and guides the image-constellation of the poems: eggs, caves, drops, womb-like recesses are associated with the symbolism of the anima,¹¹ and predominate in this embryonic stage of individuation. Yet Kinsella's 'starting from scratch' in *NLD* is not a total abandonment of previous discoveries.

As with 'Daybreak and a Candle End,' Kinsella finds echoes of his own earlier work in his reading of Jung, and in the process of individuation: 'the differentiation of the ego from the "mother" is the beginning of every "coming to consciousness!"'.¹² Kinsella underlines the phrase from 'Downstream,' and quotations from 'Phoenix Park' are interspersed at points of resemblance in Jolande Jacobi's explication of Jung's work *The Psychology of C.G. Jung* (1942). Indeed Kinsella's notes to Jung corroborate much of what he was seeking to do in 'Phoenix Park':

the form of the archetypes = "axial system of a crystal, preforming the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, but no material existence of its own' (cf. 'a structure without substance . . . a ghost of a ghost . . .')¹³

According to Jacobi, the 'mother liquid' for Jung is human experience. So the speaker of '*hesitate, cease to exist*' is 'dithering in and out' of the formative matrix which the later poems will portray. The memories and image-clusters that Kinsella worked with derived their functional authority from the antiquity and communality which Jung ascribed to archetypal experience:

the archetype is preexisting and immanent in the psyche: images crystallise around the axial system. These images are "not 'engendered' at the time . . . already present in the

¹¹ See Jacobi 116.

¹² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21; Jacobi 46.

darkness, where it has lain ever since the typical and fundamental [Kinsella's emphases] expce [experience] it reflects was added to the psychic treasure house of mankind".¹⁴

Kinsella's notes from Jacobi concern Jung's explanation of the form of the archetypes,¹⁵ from which he drew the 'plot' of '*hesitate, cease to exist*' and 'Hen Woman' amongst those poems dealing with the processes of poetry and memory: 'as the image rises to consciousness, it is irradiated with increasing light, sharpness & clarifies its contours until it is visible in every detail – the process of illumination.'¹⁶

Through Jung, Kinsella enlarges his conception of form, relating poetic form to Gestalt ideas of 'totality.' In her explication of the Jungian archetype, Jacobi uses the analogy of 'Gestalt'¹⁷ to illustrate that the archetype has an 'invariable nucleus of meaning,'¹⁸ the content of which may change according to circumstance and opportunity. This informs Kinsella's maturing conception of the Real, which, like the 'ultimate core of meaning' of the archetype, 'may be circumscribed, but not described.'¹⁹ How the archetype emerges depends on the individual circumstance, as in 'Hen Woman' in which Kinsella retrieves from his Dublin childhood a comic version of the archetypal experience of the 'breaking of the egg.' Despite this ultimate unknowability, the archetype is 'unchanged in fundamental structure and meaning,'²⁰ which allows Kinsella to perceive 'form' in terms of 'totality.' A poem such as 'All is Emptiness, And I Must Spin,' though it ends mid-sentence and is 'unfinished' in terms of the 'well-made' lyric tradition, in Gestalt terms is completed by 'our structural tendency to perceive in Gestalten [totalities].'²¹ In other words, when related to the whole sequence.

Jacobi illustrates how the Gestalt/Archetype 'remains constant, [while] its content

¹³ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

¹⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

¹⁵ Jacobi 43. The quotation is from Jung, 'Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype,' *Aspects of the Feminine* 107.

¹⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's notes are taken from Jacobi 43: 'Thus the archetype as a potential "axial system" (the archetype per se) is pre-existent and immanent in the psyche. The "mother liquid" – the experience of humanity – in which the precipitate must form represents the images which crystallize around the axial system and which take on increasing sharpness and richness of content in the womb of the unconscious. The image is not "engendered" at the time when it rises, but is already present in the darkness where it has lain ever since the typical and fundamental experience it reflects was added to the psychic treasure-house of mankind. As it rises to consciousness, it is irradiated with an increasing light, which sharpens and clarifies its contours until it becomes visible in every detail. This process of illumination has not only an individual but also a universally human significance.'

¹⁷ Jacobi 43-45.

¹⁸ Jacobi 43.

¹⁹ Jacobi 42, quoting Jung.

²⁰ Jacobi 45.

²¹ Jacobi 44.

changes'²² by using a diagram of the 'Developmental Sequence of the 'Archetype of the Feminine,' which (in abbreviated form) contains the following: Mother/ grandmother/ ancestral mother/ witch, fairy, divine maiden, fairy princess/ dragon, whale, spider/ cave, underworld, depths/ forest, valley/ earth, mountain/ sea, water/ night, the unconscious, the receptive.²³ The diagram is striking for its relevance to the figures and situations Kinsella incorporates into *NLD* and in such Peppercanister poems as *One, Song of the Night, Songs of the Psyche*, and up to and including Peppercanisters such as *The Familiar* and *Godhead* (both 1999).

Carolyn Rosenberg writes that Kinsella's first encounter with Jung's work came after he had written 'the first of the poems that now make up *Notes*.'²⁴ A student in Philadelphia noticed 'similarities in imagery between Jung's descriptions of particular dreams that started his patients on the search for individuation and such Kinsella poems as "Tear" and "Hen Woman".'²⁵ Kinsella's reading of Jung led him towards an examination of the images and archetypes discovered in and by his earlier poetry. The active engagement with the sources of his poetry had a deliberate Jungian goal:

The goal = psychic totality – in wh[ich] at least 3 of the 4 types & both attitudes (intravert & extravert) are made as conscious & available as possible "to face life's evening" (making even).²⁶

Kinsella's gloss on 'evening' places the psychic goal as a response to the process of disappointment, the levelling of hope inherent in life, as evoked as early as 'Death of a Queen.' What was seen as undermining progress in that earlier poem, is figured here in the terms of 'Phoenix Park,' with the negative as a source of growth through 'the absorption of punishment.' It is worth quoting the full context of Kinsella's notes from Jolande Jacobi:

For the goal is always psychic totality, the ideal solution in which at least three of the

²² Jacobi 45.

²³ Jacobi 44.

²⁴ Rosenberg 47.

²⁵ Rosenberg 47. 'Hen Woman' was first published in the *Irish Press* on Kinsella's fortieth birthday, 4 May 1968, in a much longer and more discursive version than the one eventually included in *NLD*. The earlier version did include, however, such possibly fortuitous Jungian elements as the scarab beetle, and the breaking of the egg, yet the Gnostic phrase 'Hen to pan,' indicates the deliberate incorporation of Jungian elements during the poem's composition. 'Tear' first appeared in a limited edition from the Pym-Randall Press of Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1969. As previously discussed, there are also explicitly Jungian elements in 'Nightwalker.' Kinsella's notes to Jacobi's book on Jung appear to have been taken in the period 1966-68, so Rosenberg may simply be mistaken in the particular poems she mentions. Kinsella himself remarks in the acknowledgements to the Dolmen Press edition that 'many of these poems were written or begun' during the period of a Guggenheim Fellowship spent in Ireland in 1968-9.

²⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's emphases.

four functions and both reaction types are made as conscious and available as possible. The individual must attempt at least once to achieve an approximation to this ideal, and he must get to know at least something of the fourth function and the danger it can represent for him. If he has not met the challenge at an earlier date, the noon of life represents the last summons. It is now or never that the psyche must be rounded out; otherwise it will be left unfinished and incomplete, to face life's evening.²⁷

The urgency of the task facing those approaching mid-life, as described by Jacobi, is reflected by the intensity of the notes, sketches, and plans made by Kinsella as a result of reading her book. The notes for *NLD* are the most voluminous in the Kinsella Papers at Emory University, and the plan and phrases from these notes recur throughout the Peppercanister series, including the work of the 1980s and 1990s.

Kinsella as he began researching Jung's work was at the 'noon of life,' approaching forty, and beginning the journey towards 'life's evening.' The 'now or never' aspect and the dangers outlined by Jacobi had a double aspect for Kinsella, personal and artistic. Unfinishedness and incompleteness is central to his early work. Kinsella as a counter to incompleteness had accepted the artificial finish imposed by artistic order as 'consolation.' Now he seized on Jungian ideas, spurred by a recognition of certain coincidences with his own poetry's imagery and discoveries, as a way of 'rounding out' both his own personality and developing his work. The excitement Kinsella displays in these notes derives in part from the discovery of a methodology to absorb the disappointment with previous poetic procedure, and in part from the challenge of attempting to move from being a passive 'acted upon' artist, to an artist 'actively' engaging with his imagination. As Michael Hartnett recognized, in *NLD* 'the observer has become the observed.'²⁸

Kinsella's plumbing of the depths of his own psychology and memory is fundamentally connected to his reason for adopting a conventional template in his work of the 1950s and early 1960s. In his rationale for the 'conscious rhym[ing] of the 'measuring artist' Kinsella explained that inherited forms protected the individual artist from idiosyncrasy.²⁹ In the same way, opening up in one's own psyche 'the vast store of ancestral knowledge about the profound relations between God, man, and cosmos' represented by the archetypes, can 'save the individual from his isolation & gather him into the eternal cosmic process. = a way of life.'³⁰

²⁷ Jacobi 23.

²⁸ Michael Hartnett, 'New Directions,' review of *Notes from the Land of the Dead*, by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 12 Aug. 1972: 10.

²⁹ 'Writer at work': 30-31.

³⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's note is taken from Jacobi 48-49: 'Thus for Jung the archetypes taken as a whole represent the sum of the latent potentialities of the human psyche – a vast store of ancestral knowledge about the profound relations between God, man, and cosmos. To open up

Kinsella's sense of the Real, however, dictates the terms upon which any new basis for communication must be constructed:

A poet writing now [in the 20th Century] can rely on almost nothing in the way of shared, common ground. The act of communication, which would normally take place on the basis of some shared experience, or shared beliefs or opinion, has to take place on some other basis. He has to manufacture the continuum in which communication can take place.³¹

Calvin Bedient remarks of *NLD* that 'in opening at last the trunk of his childhood, Kinsella seems to have discovered, like Larkin, an *initial* void' (Bedient's emphasis).³² What to Bedient appears negative, is to Kinsella the means of potential aesthetic and existential redemption, as evoked in *Faust*: 'You send me to emptiness/ That there my arts and powers may both increase;/ . . . So be it. We will fathom it or fall,/ And in your Nothing may I find the All!'³³ Kinsella's aesthetic gradually discards inherited form, the traditional solution of the well-made lyric, and begins again. This time the solution to isolation comes in the form of archetypal experience:

Unless a poet is totally eccentric, he is likely to undergo in his own experience (if it is important enough) the basic experiences that are enshrined in myth. Responding as an individual, to a specific event, he does so in a way that is characteristic of our fundamental human origins and the course of our evolution. Relating certain references together in pursuit of a private order, or of some important obsession – handling material that has been taken in under unique, specific circumstances – he causes the primary mythical process to take place again, for the *n*th time. And so a kind of foundation is provided both for communication and for understanding – the poet's understanding of reality, of what his own life, his ordeal, is about.³⁴

Kinsella bases the foundation for communication on mythical process because these basic experiences 'are *not* eccentric – they are shared.'³⁵ The journey into private areas of experience

this store in one's own psyche, to awaken it to new life and integrate it with consciousness, means nothing less than to save the individual from his isolation and gather him into the eternal cosmic process. Thus the conceptions of which we have been speaking become more than a science and more than a psychology. They become a way of life.'

³¹ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 35.

³² Bedient 136.

³³ Goethe, *Faust Parts 1 and 2*, trans. Louis MacNeice (New York: Continuum, 1994) 167.

³⁴ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 9.

³⁵ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 10. Kinsella's emphasis.

is bolstered by this sense of suprapersonal concern, and by a belief that, though specific references may elude him, the reader 'will, in completing the act of communication, undergo in his turn a primary mythical experience.'³⁶

Though Kinsella's turn toward myth and memory has artistic ends, the notes to Jung reveal Kinsella's desire to also achieve a development of the personality, which will be the key in developing the artistic work. In Jung's terms, the 'well-rounded' work of art does not 'necessarily' benefit the psyche of the artist who made it. The 'complete, well-rounded work' is not enough. To derive existential benefit from artistic transformation what is required is an active engagement with the imaginative sources.³⁷ Kinsella's notes on 'the artistic nature' reveal the inner workings of both an aesthetic and existential re-constitution. The Yeatsian dimension to this attempt at 'perfection of the life *and* the work'³⁸ was noted by Kinsella in his reading of Jung's discussion of the development of the personality and the relation of the artist to the work of art:

an artist may take a positive attitude toward 'the figures of the vision' (images, symbols & visions that rise up from the depths): this can lead to artistic achievement. The gr. [great] artist faces the 'figures' actively – assimilates and integrates, humanly experiences & understands [Kinsella's emphases], the images and symbols & visions that rise up. The very greatest can broaden & deepen their personality & their work in equal degree: [all a function of consciousness – . . .].³⁹

³⁶ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 10. The consistency and sustaining longevity of the ideas Kinsella developed in the late sixties can be illustrated with reference to the idea of communication he expressed at the 1973 Montreal panel discussion. In an interview with the present author in 2004 Kinsella said: 'The embodiment [of poetic material] needs to stand by itself, with the significant contents functioning in detail and form so that a reader can repeat the experience,' Fitzsimons: 80.

³⁷ Kinsella's view at this time of the symbiotic relationship between art and life can be adduced from the reply he gave to Philip Fried's question whether he saw art as having a 'healing function': 'That in the act of writing, in the artistic act, the artist is curing himself or herself of something . . .? I certainly did, very strongly,' Fried: 23.

³⁸ In 'The Choice' Yeats writes, 'The intellect of man is forced to choose/ Perfection of the life, or of the work,' Yeats 246. In his introduction to his selection of poetry from the 1930s in *Watching the River Flow: A Century of Irish Poetry* eds. Noel Duffy and Theo Dorgan (Dublin: Poetry Ireland 1999), Kinsella doubts the necessity of such a choice, in light of Yeats's 'success in managing both,' 63.

³⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. These notes are taken from Jacobi 25: 'Another widespread error is the supposition that in producing a complete, well-rounded work an artist is necessarily perfecting himself. For in order to derive actual benefit for the process of psychic differentiation from one's "dealings with the unconscious", in order to accomplish a desired development of the personality, one must humanly experience and understand the images, symbols, and visions that rise up from the depths; one must assimilate and integrate them *actively* or, as Jung says, "face the figures of the vision actively and reactively, with full consciousness".' The quotations from Jung come from 'The Relations between the Ego and the Unconscious' (1928) par. 342, in *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* Vol. 7 trans. R.F.C Hull. Bollingen Series XX. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966. In an earlier folder there is an abbreviated version of these notes: 'the figures of the vision – images, symbols

Though Kinsella derived the psychic import of the Faustian journey to the place of the 'Mothers' from Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*, the direct influence of Goethe's *Faust*, in terms of narrative and imagery can be seen from Kinsella's notes:

Faust gets a little key from Mephisto. It glows in his hand. He follows it down to the Mothers, to desolate loneliness. He feels appalled at the prospect/visit, but recognises that to feel appalled is the greatest gift of man (!) (he feels in his core, immensity.) He goes from created things into the realm of forms: drifting clouds of energy.

Down to a glowing tripod (make it floating, or a monopod?)[.]

The Mothers cannot see him: they are wreathed with all floating forms of what may be & see only shadows [.] He touches the tripod with the key & it comes with him (the Prize) back to the Hall where he will summon Paris and Helen from it.⁴⁰

The journey portrayed in *Faust* parallels Kinsella's pursuit of the Real in its demonstration of what Jung calls 'unquenched and unquenchable desire for the light of consciousness.'⁴¹ To bring repressed/hidden contents of the unconscious to light is an act of completion of the personality, and an increased encounter with reality. The goal of Kinsella's 'starting from scratch' is a Jungian completion of the personality, which is also an unblocking of the wells of creativity by confronting the dark side of the personality and the unconscious. This encounter with the dark elements of the self is also an attempt to grow toward an encounter with the Real: 'to confront the shadow. 1st st. [stage] in the process of individuation'⁴² This sense of a first stage, or first step as it becomes in Kinsella's subsequent notes, leads to the imagery of *NLD*: the eggs, birth and falling imagery parallels this first step.

The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no-one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge [. . .]⁴³

The return to childhood memories in *NLD* derives its impetus from the Jungian imperative for those approaching middle-age to 'confront the shadow,' which entailed as Kinsella noted 'a[n]

& visions that rise up from the depths: face them actively – assimilate, integrate, experience, u/std. [understand], Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

⁴⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16.

⁴¹ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 205.

⁴² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

⁴³ Jung, 'The Shadow and the Syzygy,' *Aspects of the Feminine* 165.

insular look at one's own nature.'⁴⁴ According to Jolande Jacobi, '[t]o confront the shadow . . . means to take a mercilessly critical attitude towards one's own nature.'⁴⁵ Jacobi's elucidation of the 'shadow' gives a further indication of the significance of the speaker's descent to the place of the 'Mothers':

The shadow stands, as it were, on the threshold of the realm of the 'Mothers', the unconscious. It is the counterpart of our conscious ego, growing and crystallizing in pace with it. This dark mass of experience that is seldom or never admitted to our conscious lives bars the way to the creative depths of our unconscious.⁴⁶

Recognizing the dark side of the personality as 'present and real' is in Jungian terms a creative act, which 'often coincides with the individual's conscious realization of the functional and attitudinal type to which he belongs.'⁴⁷ Kinsella's notes reveal that he saw himself as an 'intuitive,' one in whom the dominant function is to see the 'inherent potentialities of things.'⁴⁸ In recognizing his functional type, Kinsella also brings to conscious realization the inner workings of his own creative drive: 'the neglected sensation function of the one-sided intuitive type will compel him, often by seemingly incomprehensible onslaughts, to take account of hard reality.'⁴⁹ Kinsella's aesthetic adjustments take place as a result of the 'onslaughts of hard reality.' Through Jung he decides that to confront the actual requires him to get beyond the distortions of the ego and the distortions of personality type or risk the consequences in a distorted view of reality: 'The result of continued imbalance → the inferior function will start to claim its rights, & must be confronted. i.e. I must accept the actual: try to see things as they are and not otherwise.'⁵⁰

In Kinsella's new process he admonishes himself to '(i) discipline the psyche to be open: to receive (ii) actively permit the archetypes to irrupt.'⁵¹ Like the 'Mothers' themselves, the cauldron the speaker approaches is Faustian in origin and Jungian in import. It is an image of the matrix within which the archetypes form and irrupt. Kinsella's notes for *NLD* include a large section on *Faust* which include what he refers to as the thesis of the poem: 'Thesis [→ (via

⁴⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 5, folder 29.

⁴⁵ Jacobi 113.

⁴⁶ Jacobi 112. Kinsella notes on the shadow elaborate on this passage from Jacobi: 'my dark side, wh. [which] I reject . . . / it is in opposition to my conscious principles, or attitudes/(wicked meanness,/ hypocrisy/ ~~scrupulous~~ polishing of the shallow, the empty/ [my own repressed tendencies] / [— barring the way to the creative depths,' Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

⁴⁷ Jacobi 110.

⁴⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

⁴⁹ Jacobi 18. Kinsella quotes these lines in box 10, folder 21, a page on which he charts his own personality, '(me),(if normal),' in Jungian terms.

⁵⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

⁵¹ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

pain) → ambivalence → (pain) → ecstasy]⁵² Kinsella quotes the reaction of Faust and Helen to the death of their son Euphorion: 'Joy is but throned for pain to dethrone.'⁵³ This is part of the 'thesis' of *NLD*. Pain is both terrible, but also a source of potential joy. As in 'Sacrifice' and his notes to Faust's claim that '[t]o feel appalled is the greatest gift of man,' the active acceptance of the negative is a source of strength.⁵⁴

Growth is achieved and redemption found through the psychic and the actual forms of the feminine. Kinsella associates Faust's Helen with his wife's name 'Eleanor': 'Faust's Helena Eleanor confused with Selene – moon – & mother-goddess – connects erotic with redemption'⁵⁵

in the second [half of life] the essential becomes the psychic *coniunctio*, a union with the contrasexual both in the area of one's own inner world and through the carrier of its image in the outer world.⁵⁶

Eleanor is, in Jungian terms, Kinsella's 'soul-image,' and source of contact with the actuality of the feminine archetype. Jung says that some people, though they admit the existence of archetypes, 'treat them as mere words and forget their living reality.'⁵⁷ In the notes we see Kinsella quoting from himself, from his past poetry, from 'Baggot Street Deserta,' 'Downstream,' and 'Phoenix Park,' recognising intuitions that, read in the light of Jungian analysis, urge him toward the goal to 'release from the unconscious the power to grasp actuality directly (Eleanor, as my opposite, shd. [should] be the ideal 'clasp directly, qn. [question] fiercely').'⁵⁸ The self-quotation, from 'Phoenix Park,' shows the importance of the erotic and love in the achievement of totality.

The 'Tenor' in 'Daybreak and a Candle End' makes a journey of mythical import to 'unimaginable places/ and in the unimaginable pause when time was not'; in *NLD* the speaker makes a similar journey to the 'Land of the Dead.' This is also the place of the 'Mothers,' a link derived in part from Goethe's *Faust Part Two*, but first corroborated by Kinsella's reading of

⁵² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16.

⁵³ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16. Kinsella's notes are from Louis MacNeice's 1949 translation of *Faust Parts 1 and 2* 237.

⁵⁴ Faust says 'My welfare rests upon no rigid plan,/ To feel appalled is the greatest gift of man;/ Whatever the world impose as penalty,/ His core is moved to feel immensity,' *Faust Parts 1 and 2* 168.

⁵⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16.

⁵⁶ Jacobi 123. Jacobi sees Goethe's *Faust* as the quintessential imaginative expression of this process: 'In the first half Gretchen carries the projection of Faust's anima. But the tragic end of this relationship compels him to withdraw the projection from the outside world and to seek this part of his psyche in himself. He finds it in another world, in the 'underworld' of his unconscious, symbolized by Helen of Troy. The second part of *Faust* portrays an individuation process with all its archetypal figures; Helen is the typical anima figure, Faust's soul-image,' Jacobi 124.

⁵⁷ Jung, 'Approaching the Unconscious' 90.

⁵⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

Jung's *Symbols of Transformation*.⁵⁹ Indeed Jung's description in his memoirs of his attempts to bring to conscious awareness the contents of his unconscious resembles the lunar trajectory of 'Nightwalker' and subsequent descent to the Land of the Dead portrayed in *NLD*:

In order to seize hold of the fantasies, I frequently imagined a steep descent. I even made several attempts to get to the very bottom. The first time I reached, as it were, a depth of about a thousand feet; the next time I found myself at the edge of a cosmic abyss. It was like a voyage to the moon, or a descent into empty space. First came the image of a crater, and I had the feeling that I was in the land of the dead.⁶⁰

The deliberate nature and goal of Jung's descent is reflected in Kinsella's own version of this imaginative adventure. In *'hesitate, cease to exist'* as the speaker approaches 'the heart of the pit,' he sees 'through the gloom' the foaming cauldron. Within its 'vapour of forms' he makes out 'a ring of mountainous beings staring upward/ with open mouths – naked ancient women.' These women, the Faustian 'Mothers,' are images of frightening sterility, 'Nothingness silted under their thighs/ and over their limp talons.' The fearful speaker continues towards his goal, and in an image which prefigures and reverses the perspective of the egg's fall through the shore in 'Hen Woman,' raises his 'eyes/ to that seemingly unattainable grill/ through which I must return, carrying my prize.' Intermittent rhyme (the endings of the last seven lines are: thighs/ confess/ enterprise/ fear/ eyes/ grill/ prize) gives a sense of urgency and momentum to this passage, and demonstrates Kinsella's continued commitment to elements of formal measure and effects.

The 'key' that the speaker holds 'glowing' in his hand as his prize at the end of his terrifying descent, when seen in Jungian terms, is an evocation, prefigured in 'Leaf-Eater,' of the turn inward into his own sources. Eavan Boland recognised that in *NLD* Kinsella's change was a 'profound re-working of themes in a new light or darkness.'⁶¹ In her review of *New Poems 1973* she saw Kinsella returning to the image 'of the poet himself, on the edge of his journey

⁵⁹ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 204-6. The journey Kinsella presents, mixing Faustian alchemical phantasmagoria and colloquial idiom, corresponds to the first stage in the psychological attempt to differentiate the self from the mother, but is also a version of the Jungian confrontation with the shadow. The speaker's 'dive or 'drop' is also reminiscent of Jung's description of his own discovery of the inner world: 'It was during the Advent of the year 1913 – December 12, to be exact – that I resolved upon the decisive step. I was sitting at my desk once more, thinking over my fears. Then I let myself drop. Suddenly it was as though the ground literally gave way beneath my feet, and I plunged down into the dark depths.' On his descent Jung encounters a 'black scarab,' and recognizes that his vision is a 'hero and solar myth, a drama of death and renewal, the rebirth symbolized by the Egyptian scarab.' Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 179. The speaker in 'Hen Woman' also encounters the scarab beetle.

⁶⁰ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 181.

⁶¹ Boland, 'The New Kinsella.'

inwards.⁶² Boland cites 'Baggot Street Deserta'⁶³ as an early example of this image, and remarks that even at this early stage in Kinsella's writing it could be sensed that 'in the ironical juxtaposition of such words as "mathematic" and "passion" that one day Kinsella's poetry would reflect a struggle between its ability to abstract images and organise them in mathematic grace and his need to allow them passion.'⁶⁴ In *New Poems 1973* Boland believes 'emotional geometry has gone and passion has become a convincing victor':

How artless,
how loveless I was then! O dear, dear God,
the times I had in my disarray – cooped up
with the junk of centuries! The excitement,
underlining and underlining in that narrow room.

(*NP 1973 9*)

Boland's remarks and reference to 'Baggot Street Deserta' are perceptive. In the drafts for this section of *NLD* Kinsella refers directly to the Baggot Street period of his life.⁶⁵ Kinsella blends his own earlier Baggot Street self and Goethe's Faust, in the figure of a writer/chemist/insomniac 'getting quietly ready/ to go down quietly out of my mind' in deliberate and methodical derangement in a room which has the aura of both alchemical chamber and domestic scullery:

Many a time

I have risen from my gnawed books
and prowled about, wrapped in a long grey robe,
and rubbed my forehead; reached for my instruments
– canister and kettle, the long handled spoon,
metal vessels and delph; settled the flame,
blue and yellow; and in abstracted hunger,
my book propped before me, eaten forkfuls
of scrambled egg and buttered fresh bread
and taken hot tea until the sweat stood out
at the roots of my hair.

(*NP 1973 9*)

⁶² Boland, 'The New Kinsella.'

⁶³ Boland mistakenly says the poem comes from *Downstream*.

⁶⁴ Boland, 'The New Kinsella.'

⁶⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 16.

NLD returns to Kinsella in the act of creating the poetry of the 1950s, in which images welled-up unconsciously as discoveries out of the 'God knows what hole' of the imagination. Kinsella's key has the connotations Jung finds in its Faustian template: '[t]he insignificant looking tool in Faust's hand is the dark creative power of the unconscious, which reveals itself to those who follow its dictates.'⁶⁶ Kinsella's speaker at the end of his journey realises that this power had been in his possession all along: 'The key, though I hardly knew it,/ already in my fist' (*NP* 1973 10). The creative power of the key is phallic, yet also has the qualities of a pen, which like the pen in Seamus Heaney's well-known poem 'Digging' is a tool for an almost archaeological excavation of self.⁶⁷

In addition to Kinsella's childhood, *NLD* re-visits the sites of Kinsella's early poetry. The 'narrow room' of the Baggot Street flat in which Kinsella lived for most of the 1950s is a crucial reference point in Kinsella's personal and poetic development, and will become associated in *The Pen Shop* (1997) with the 'narrow cell' of the ancient Irish scribes:

It was a room where I did a tremendous amount of reading, writing and growing up. I think I was growing imaginatively then more than ever before or since, coming in contact with many important things for the first time. You come in contact with important things for the first time right through your life, but at that point, in my early twenties, a whole deluge, poured in.⁶⁸

The first scene of '*hesitate, cease to exist*' returns to the narrow room of 'Baggot Street Deserta.' Kinsella in this new setting, and with weighted mythological allusiveness, alters the emphasis of the 'thesis' of 'The Travelling Companion' to 'Hope + Time = Disappointment.' In *NLD* and later work, Kinsella adjusts to his disappointment with form by re-configuring the themes established by the early poetry rather than abandoning them. The dialectic between hope and disappointment, in which disappointment perennially emerges as dominant term, is evoked in '*hesitate, cease to exist*' in the phantasmagorical imagery of a hellish fall:

With what joy did I not hope, suddenly,
I might pass through unshattered
— to whatever Pit! But I fell foul at the last

⁶⁶ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 126.

⁶⁷ 'the *phallus*, . . . working in darkness, begets a living being; and the *key* unlocks the mysterious forbidden door behind which some wonderful thing awaits discovery,' Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 124.

⁶⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 35.

and broke in a distress of gilt and silver,
scattered in a million droplets of
fright and loneliness . . .

(*NP 1973 10*)

What is being described is Kinsella's process of imaginative creation. The scene is a 'second-order' imaginative exploration, evoking a previous descent into the imagination, perhaps even the composition of 'Baggot Street Deserta' itself. A reading reinforced by the Dantesque (and Eliotic) evocation that follows, of lost souls in ever-frustrated search, and an evocation, though at a remove, of the 'shreds of disappointment' the consequences of which the earlier poem had explored:

How tentative and slack our search
along the dun shore whose perpetual hiss
breaks softly, and breaks again,
on endless broken shells!

(*NP 1973 10*)

Yet hope remains, and the yearning for 'totality' yields occasional success, the discovery of 'a shell here and there' (*NP 1973 10*). The consolation evoked and repose offered by these few happened-upon instances of completeness is undercut by the vacuity that inhabiting such wholeness induces; a succinct criticism of the aesthetic consolation Kinsella himself had offered in 'Writer at Work.'

The order in which the poems appear in *NLD* also had Jungian origins. In its draft versions the first section ends 'on the count of snake.' In his notes Kinsella writes: 'Basilisk: a monster hatched from a rooster's egg by a snake,'⁶⁹ a mythological connection which leads from the first poem into 'Hen Woman.' The ouroboric serpent, the snake biting its own tail, is a symbol of self-fecundation, and according to Erich Neumann, 'is the archetype of the "hen to pan," the All One,'⁷⁰ giving the Greek phrase which Kinsella uses to comic English-language

⁶⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16.

⁷⁰ Neumann 10. Geert Lernout relates Kinsella's use of this Gnostic phrase to the 'pantheistic password used by Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin during their years at the Tübingen seminary.' He goes on to say that '[a]lthough the formula itself cannot be found in the pre-Socratics in whose work it was supposed to originate, nor in the neo-Platonists and not even in Spinoza, the philosophical theme resonates through all of Western philosophy, especially in Platonic and mystical varieties. The farmwoman's [sic] "It's all the one" and the poet's final comment "it was a simple world" carry distinctly Neo-Platonic overtones,' 'The Dantean Paradigm: Thomas Kinsella and Seamus Heaney,' in *The Clash of Ireland: Literary Contrasts and Connections*, eds. C.C. Barfoot and Theo D'haen, DQR Studies in Literature 4 (Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1989) 254-55.

effect in the poem. 'Hen Woman,' like 'hesitate, cease to exist,' and 'Survivor,' indeed like *NLD* itself, evokes the ouroboric stage of psychic growth, and in formal terms these poems portray this stage by using a later version of the speaker to describe a 'preliminary stage as its own past.'⁷¹ What Kinsella is also describing, though, is the desire to enter reality from a cocoon-like protected state. According to Neumann the ouroboric as a site of perfect containment and content is 'the image of a psychic stage of humanity, just discernible as borderline image. However much the world forced early man to face reality, it was with the greatest reluctance that he consciously entered into this new reality.'⁷²

'Hen Woman' was first published in the *Irish Press* in May 1968.⁷³ Though the poem went through substantial subsequent revision prior to its appearance in *New Poems 1973* the influence of Jungian ideas and the Omega point of Teilhard de Chardin discussed in Chapter 3, were even in this early version, part of the poem's procedure. In his interview with Ed Bomberger of the *Daily Egyptian*, Kinsella elaborated on his consistent preoccupation with the theme of inspiration and labour. The interview also gives an insight into the ideas influencing the theme and procedure of 'Hen Woman':

I think inspiration is the first realization that a cluster of experiences will make a poem. The subsequent process of producing the work of art is generally a laborious one of ensuring that the final work will contain all that is relevant in the original conception and be as free as possible of all irrelevances and have harmony in its structure that matches the harmony of its original perception.⁷⁴

In 'Hen Woman,' and 'Tear' and in other poems of *NLD*, Kinsella uses infantile memories in an attempt to integrate into the conscious mind the contents of formative psychic experiences: 'The recollection of infantile memories and the reproduction of archetypal ways of psychic behaviour can create a wider horizon and a greater extension of consciousness.'⁷⁵ The beginning of 'Hen Woman' portrays the aura surrounding this entrance into the wider world:

The noon heat in the yard
smelled of stillness and coming thunder.

⁷¹ Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XLII (1954; Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970) 12.

⁷² Neumann 16.

⁷³ *Irish Press* 4 May, 1968: 9. The poem was published on the *New Irish Writing* page, edited by David Marcus.

⁷⁴ 'A Poet's Concern with the Human Ordeal.'

⁷⁵ Jung, 'Approaching the Unconscious,' *Man and His Symbols*, ed. Carl Jung (1964; London: Picador, 1978) 90.

A hen scratched and picked at the shore.
It stopped, its body crouched and puffed out.
The brooding silence seemed to say 'Hush . . .'

(*NP* 1973 14)

Edna Longley agrees with Bedient on the 'tired literary fantasy' of the first section of *NLD* when she comments that the poem sometimes 'slip[s] into marshy portentousness.'⁷⁶ The scaffold that Kinsella creates she dismisses as a 'posturing apparatus,' and chides Kinsella for an 'habitual insensitivity to the possible cliché' citing 'the brooding silence seemed to say "Hush".'⁷⁷ Longley's criticism displays a preference for poetry of lyrical crystallisation and epiphanic shape, rather than Kinsella's non-transcendent intensities. Kinsella has said, indicating the influence of Gestalt ideas of form, 'My poems have a form which ought to be felt as a whole, rather than in, e.g., stanzaic expectations.'⁷⁸

Kinsella's 'posturing apparatus' in the framework poems of *NLD*, and *One*, are 'supplementary' in this Derridean sense: 'the supplement is added in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself.'⁷⁹ Without the historical, mythical, social working together the meaning of an event dissipates. These framework poems describe the formative matrix of meaning, out of which the essential experience has been gathered.

Kinsella's 'brooding silence' is deliberate cliché, accompanied by the meaning of 'brooding' as 'tapas,' the 'inward heat' which is 'the creative force with whose help everything is made.'⁸⁰ Brooding is the creative effect of introversion, 'the utterance of one sunk in himself,'⁸¹ like the coiled ouroboric snake and, like the speaker of 'Survivor,' this becomes a key image in the Peppercanister series.⁸² Kinsella notes that 'the Child is not the myth maker – he inhabits the myth world from wh.[ich] interpretive brooding adults have made myths – from

⁷⁶ Longley, 'Searching the darkness' 135

⁷⁷ Longley, 'Searching the darkness' 136.

⁷⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 108.

⁷⁹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) 103.

⁸⁰ Neumann 21.

⁸¹ Neumann 21.

⁸² In *Godhead* (1999) the image recurs: 'Father, bent above Thyself/ still as at the beginning; reflecting on Thine own image/ – not yet perfect. Lost in the work' (*CP* 336). The use of 'brooding' also gives an insight into the co-ordinated nature of the poems in *NLD* and the fundamental consonance Kinsella found and created between his memories and myth: 'The hero who sets himself the task of renewing the world and conquering death personifies the world-creating power which, brooding on itself in introversion, coiled round its own egg like a snake, threatens life with its poisonous bite, so that the living may die and be born again from the darkness. The same idea is found in Nietzsche: "How long already have you sat on your misfortune?/ Give heed, lest you hatch me/ An egg,/ A basilisk egg/ From your long travail."/ The hero is himself the snake, himself the sacrificer and the sacrificed.' Jung,

their own memories of their experience of childhood.⁸³ Kinsella's writing assays again and again what he calls, in a slightly different context, the 'unique cliché' ('Artists' Letters' *One* 62). The word 'shore' is a word from Kinsella's Dublin childhood, a commonly used Hiberno-English term for a sewer opening. We are involved in a text that infuses the poetic present with the inarticulate self-consciousness of the poet's past. In an early draft for 'Hen Woman' he writes, 'I was not to know it then, but when the earth/ trembled that day, it trembled for me. It was/ that day – this moment! – that opened into such empire . . . such unhappiness and elation and boredom and scope.'⁸⁴ As with the Real, the location of the central meaning remains ungraspable: 'Was it a strangeness in the day/ or in the events/ (so many things happening at one)/ or a strangeness in myself?'⁸⁵

Longley's opinion of Kinsella's post-'Nightwalker' work is not exclusively negative. She praises his 'ability to pierce to the bone when confronted by actual sickness and death,' as in early poems such as 'A Lady of Quality' and 'Cover Her Face,' and in 'Tear' from *New Poems 1973* where '[n]o posturing apparatus intrudes between emotion and word, sight and insight.'⁸⁶ Yet certain negative characteristics persist even within this 'new tangibility of texture.'⁸⁷ In 'Hen Woman', Longley says, '[a] few hammy stage props linger on.'⁸⁸ Generalizing from the example of 'Hen-Woman,' she goes on to make some sharp pronouncements:

It may be that we have to accept all Kinsella's *oeuvre*, like this egg-poem, as being good in parts: brilliant passages robbed of their resonance and context by over-anxious manipulation, by a lack of instinct for what makes a poem, by uncertainty where to start or when to stop.⁸⁹

Kinsella has responded to such criticisms, with specific reference to Longley. In a 1988 interview with Philip Fried, the question whether he was 'satisfied' with the critical engagement with his work, provoked a mildly disparaging, yet in terms of his own aesthetic, illuminating response:

Others read what I do, or have done, with specific expectations; disappointment is the invariable outcome of that. The first of these I remember was an article by an [sic]

Symbols of Transformation 382.

⁸³ Kinsella Papers, box 4, folder 12.

⁸⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 13.

⁸⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 13.

⁸⁶ Longley, 'Searching the darkness' 135.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Longley, 'Searching the darkness' 136.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Edna Longley criticizing individual poems because they didn't come to an end with a sense of completeness – they didn't observe the unity of the space they occupied. It is long since I regarded a poem as coming to an end with the last line. It reaches out and keeps going and connects with other work.⁹⁰

The ending of 'Tear' deliberately 'refus[es] to permit the poem to fulfil its own form' and prefers to an ending which would achieve harmony, grace and proportion ('grace, beauty, charm, seductive rhythm – all those superficial things'⁹¹), one which, as in Gestalt theory, implies 'what hasn't been included'⁹²:

Old age can digest
anything: the commotion
at heaven's gate – the struggle
in store for you all your life.

How long and hard it is
before you get to Heaven,
unless like little Agnes
you vanish with early tears.

(*NP* 1973 28)

'Hen Woman,' like 'A Hand of Solo' and 'Ancestor,' demonstrates how in Kinsella's maturing style the descriptive, metaphysical and mythological can occur at the same time:

A beetle like a bronze leaf
was inching across the cement,
clasping with small tarsi
a ball of dung bigger than its body.

(*NP* 1973 15)

The dung beetle: the khepri, or scarab, is related to the cluster of images centred on the experiences of birth/death.⁹³ The organising principle is Jung's concept of the numinosity of

⁹⁰ Kinsella, Fried: 23.

⁹¹ Kinsella, Haffenden 103.

⁹² Kinsella, Haffenden 107.

⁹³ 'Because he rolls a ball of dung before him, this beetle was venerated as the sun-moving principle.

Even more significant is the fact that, his task completed, he buries the sun-ball in a hole in the ground and dies, and in the following spring the new beetle creeps out of the ball as the new sun, risen from

archetypal events. The 'value' of these events is precisely the charged aura which they mysteriously possess, which for Kinsella sanctions the material with communicative potential. In *NLD* Kinsella uses nuclear events in a story of experience and essence, the growth of a psyche, and he chooses events which have retained for him a numinosity, and so a legitimacy as poetic material. In the McGill University panel discussion on 'Myth and Reality in Irish Literature,' Kinsella described in Jungian terms the poetic process and the part played by myth:

There are a number of stages in the process. It begins with the ingestion of experience and continues as the imagination (or whatever the agency may be) sieves that experience for its significance. The significant experience, so ingested, spends a period in the depth of the mind, forming relationships with other material similarly collected and stored. And then it lies ready, in a kind of ever-saturating solution, to be 'crystallized out' at the moment of inspiration. At this point, a significant cluster – a structure of imaginatively processed reality – responds to some particular impulse (and the word 'particular' is important) and there is suddenly the possibility of a poem.⁹⁴

As Jung writes, '[t]here is no difference in principle between organic and psychic growth. As a plant produces its flower, so the psyche creates its symbols.'⁹⁵ Which in 'Hen Woman' becomes:

there is no end to that which,
not understood, may yet be noted
and hoarded in the imagination
in the yolk of one's being, so to speak,
there to undergo its (quite animal) growth,

(*NP* 1973 16)

The notes for 'A Hand of Solo' show the process of recovering significant memory. Kinsella sifts through the details of the memory of the adults' card game, naming the objects, and surrounding pieces that will conjure up the scene.⁹⁶ The poem is a notable example of Kinsella's stance toward the use of material fact as an aesthetic template, and myth as a resource

under the earth. He is thus the symbol of the "Self-Begotten" and is deemed "Creator of the Gods",
Neumann 236.

⁹⁴ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 8.

⁹⁵ Jung, 'Approaching the Unconscious' 53.

⁹⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 12. 'A Hand of Solo' was first published in the *Temple Faculty Herald* Vol 2 No. 9, 27 April 1973, 2. There were no substantial revisions for *New Poems 1973*.

to be used only when the circumstance, the 'actual case'⁹⁷ permits. As a child Kinsella enters the area of his grandmother's house in which a small neighbourhood shop is kept and buys a pomegranate:

Strings of jet beads wreathed her neck
and hissed on the black taffeta
and crept on my hair.

' . . . You'd think I had three heads!'
My eyes were squeezed shut against the key
in the pocket of her apron. Her stale abyss . . .

Old knuckles pressed on the counter,
then were snatched away. She sat down at the till
on her high stoll, chewing nothing.

The box of Indian apples
was over in the corner
by the can of oil.

(NP 1973 19-20)

This is an actual event from childhood, according to Kinsella. The event, however, responds also to mythological attention: the grandmother is a Hecate/Gorgon/witch figure, and the fruit is also accompanied by mythological significances. The mythological find is a bonus; what is primary is the event itself. Kinsella, speaking in 1980, said:

In 'A Hand of Solo' the fact that he buys a pomegranate with a penny is mere fact, and yet there is a great boldness of meaning in the pomegranate being in fact the fruit of life and death: it is full of seed and blood, and both of those aspects are taken care of in the poem. I was electrified and thrilled that after putting so much weight of memory on the pomegranate it also responded mythologically. . . . If the pomegranate had been a less allegorical fruit, that would have been quite all right.⁹⁸

'The High Road' had a number of different titles in draft, including 'Lonely' and 'The

⁹⁷ Kinsella, *Fried*: 8.

⁹⁸ Kinsella, *Haffenden* 108-09.

Pleasure of Loss,⁹⁹ and concerns a wilful childhood act: the throwing away of a mandoline sweet given by the grandmother. These drafts also show Kinsella conjuring the memory: the sweet is 'floating in my mind with the feel of my palm around it.'¹⁰⁰ Details in the drafts that do not appear in the published version show Kinsella's moving toward an essence as pregnant and as elusive of final meaning as experience itself. The wilfulness of the throwing away of the gift is mysterious, but exhilarating, the boy discovering an autonomy of action. 'The breeze gave a sigh;/ a small sin happened in my tummy.'¹⁰¹ In the published version this became: 'Above the far-off back yards/ the breeze gave a sigh: a sin happening . . .' (*NP* 1973 23).

A brief handwritten autobiographical sketch made during the preparatory stage of *NLD* gives an insight into material used in 'The High Road,' 'Ancestor,' 'Tear' and the other poems dealing with the grandmother figure. The portrait also offers an insight into the almost Victorian aura which surrounded Kinsella as a child, and which he evokes as part of Ireland's continuing inheritance in 'Nightwalker.' He refers to his father's mother as

a tyrannical old woman hawkfaced who sold sweets ill-temperedly to the children of the neighbourhood: she drank behind the counter Power's whiskey from small bottles & Guinness's stout from a milk can and, when ready for bed, moved the length of the counter, threatening and black in her many aprons, & vanished behind plush red hangings into the darkness of her room & her husband. I was her favourite grandchild & she spoiled me with sweets and prizes from the cardboard boxes in her shop. My mother's parents repeated, with only superficial differences for me, the same pattern, except that my grandmother did not spoil me: I knew that for her I was one of an irritating swarm of growing children.¹⁰²

Notes to 'Ancestor' show Kinsella exploring memories of the actual grandmother for mythological associations and also for correspondences with the primary stage of the individuation process: 'in her black heart/ confront the shadow/ blundering drunk down the corridor' 'original, undifferentiated dark . . . fruitful. Before the Fall (into Existence) The Sea – Magna Mater – full of eggs Hare Queen/Owl/Grandmother.'¹⁰³

In the drafts to 'Irwin Street' Kinsella writes, 'I am 12/3 he is 37/8'.¹⁰⁴ So, at the time of

⁹⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 19. It appeared in the *Irish Press* as 'The Back Road,' *Irish Press* 10 January, 1970: n.p. In the Kinsella Papers, box 9 folder 2 contains a cutting from the *Irish Press* with Kinsella's handwritten emendations, which reinforces the idea that he regards the first published form of a poem, including the Peppercanisters, as an opportunity for revisions.

¹⁰⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 19.

¹⁰¹ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 20. This draft is in typescript form.

¹⁰² Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 11.

¹⁰³ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 3.

¹⁰⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 23.

the poem's composition the poet would have been near enough his father's age at the time of the encounter which the poem imagines:

I turned the corner into the avenue
between the high wire fence and the trees
in the Hospital: under the leaves
the road was empty and fragrant
with little lances of light.
He was coming toward me – how
could he be here, at this hour? –
my maker, in a white jacket,
and with my face. Our steps
hesitated in awkward greeting.

(*NP 1973 29*)

In its earlier stages of development 'Irwin Street' concerned the diverse fates of father and son, 'on our different ways.'¹⁰⁵ The theme of gradual differentiation and establishment of personality that *NLD* explores was carried forward into this poem by its original ending: 'One last step (for ever)/ with my schoolbooks/ out of that dream.'¹⁰⁶ Like 'Hen Woman,' many of the drafts began 'Was it a dream?' at one stage during its composition the present ending was the beginning of the poem:¹⁰⁷

Wakening again, upstairs,
to the same wooden sourness.

I sat up on the edge of the bed,
my hand in my pyjama trousers,
my bare feet on the bare boards.

(*NP 1973 29*)

The whole effect of the poem has changed by putting this beginning to the end, and 'Irwin Street' becomes even more profoundly an evocation of bemused physicality and change, and contact with naked realities.

NLD moves from poems of personal memory into the area of cultural and historical

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 23.

– great raw wings, curled – a huge owlet-stare –
as a single drop echoed in the depths.

The imagery of the embryonic stage continues in 'Survivor.' The 'first home' is a cavern, 'subtly separate from the world' (*NP* 1973 35), and is presented in terms which blend the cavern's womb-like aura and its similarities to aesthetic form. The 'content' of this womb/cavern/aesthetic shell is another brooding figure, 'Curled in self hate,' and takes pleasure in the 'Deep misery' of his isolated condition. Divided into three sections, the poem is separated by asterisks. The first section is a narrative presentation of the cave. In the second and third the inhabitant of the cave presents his current condition and how he arrived there, though he finds his own explanation unsatisfactory ('I must remember/ and be able some time to explain' (*NP* 1973 38)).

It is to these poems that Calvin Bedient refers when he writes that Kinsella's 'new poems evince an extreme depression of his art and spirit.'¹¹² Kinsella's development toward 'looser' form indicates, Bedient argues, that the nihilism that had been held in check, disciplined by formal 'mastery,' had now 'soaked right through the forms and language.'¹¹³ Michael Hartnett recognised that Kinsella's formal development was an attempt to 'to find a truer art' but remarked that when 'the expression of a private world demands a private symbolism aesthetically speaking, the end results are two, magic and obscurity.'¹¹⁴ Hartnett found 'magic' the predominant effect of *NLD* but noted that obscurity was 'not lacking.' Like Bedient he saw Kinsella's forms as metonyms for despair: 'when a negative concept is to be expressed, the form of expression should not be allowed to acquire *too many* of that concept's attributes.'¹¹⁵

And yet as the use of intermittent rhyme in '*hesitate, cease to exist*' shows, and as the couplets of 'Nuchal' show, there remains an impulse towards the use of measure. The epigraph to *NLD* from 'Phoenix Park' consists of 4 lines of 11 syllables in length. Kinsella intended to continue '*hesitate, cease to exist*' in this measure and wrote on the worksheets: 'in Units of eleven syllables, no more nor less.'¹¹⁶ This instruction was at one stage included in the lines immediately following the epigraph:

. . . disappear, form again, dithering in
and out of the mothering liquid, welling
up, from God knows what orifice, in units

¹¹² Bedient 136.

¹¹³ Bedient 136.

¹¹⁴ Hartnett, 'New Directions.'

¹¹⁵ Hartnett, 'New Directions.' Hartnett's emphases.

¹¹⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 16.

of eleven syllables, no more nor less.¹¹⁷

Kinsella was clearly aware of the dangers the attempt 'to find a truer art' posed, and was conscious of the need for formal measure, if no longer willing to justify form on existential grounds.

Bedient sees in the apparently fragmentary narrative and the shard-like sections of 'Survivor' intimations of a profound crisis: '[Kinsella's] tenuous structures are the metonyms of a spirit on the verge of disintegration.'¹¹⁸

There is nothing here for sustenance.

Unbroken sleep were best.

Hair. Claws. Grey.

Naked. Wretch. Wither.

When Bedient cites these lines from 'Survivor' and calls it 'Kinsella's latest summa,'¹¹⁹ he presents it as an example of Kinsella's aesthetic weariness. Bedient's reading is paradigmatic of the problems Kinsella's work poses. Dillon Johnston citing this example extends Bedient a reprieve when he asks whether it would be reasonable to expect 'an American critic writing in 1973 [. . .] to recognise 'Survivor' as a loose rendition of an episode in the ancient myth of the settlement of Ireland?'¹²⁰:

I had a year under the Flood

In strong Tul Tuinde;

I found nothing for my sustenance

An unbroken sleep were best.

The speaker in 'Survivor' is Fintan ('Ocean'), whom Johnston calls the *ur*-poet of Ireland; the story of his escape from Cessair's group of fifty women as recounted in the *Book of Invasions*.¹²¹ The use of such a source is part of the themes and strategies of Kinsella's work as he tried to delve into his own experiential and imaginative origins. Johnston sees Bedient as

¹¹⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 16.

¹¹⁸ Bedient 138.

¹¹⁹ Bedient 119.

¹²⁰ Johnston 98. Johnston's quotation is from *Lebor Gabála Éirenn: The Book of the Taking of Ireland*, ed. and trans. R.A. Stewart Macalister, 4 secs. (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1938-1941) 3: 211.

¹²¹ For confirmation of Johnston's reading: in the Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 31, the speaker of the poem is referred to as Fintan in Tul Tuinde.

typical of those critics who 'supported Kinsella's early poetry'¹²² but who have been less enamoured of Kinsella's poetry after *Nightwalker*. Bedient's problem is typical, according to Johnston, in that it resides in a failure to recognise shifts in tone, in attributing the emotions of the poems to the poet rather than to the voices and speakers which Kinsella employs.

Johnston makes the point that Kinsella, unlike Yeats, does not provide external explanation of his use of sources. Titles in Kinsella allude rather than direct, and beyond a few occasions, there are no notes. In attributing the emotions of 'Survivor' to Kinsella, Bedient reads the text as a psychological and literary dead-end, the writing is 'washed-out, unwilling.'¹²³ In seeing its source in the *Book of Invasions* and the voice as that of Fintan, the eponymous 'survivor,' Johnston opens the possibility of seeing this as a period of creativity in Kinsella's writing. Kinsella's notes of this time, as I have argued, support this assumption.

Kinsella associates Fintan's situation with other poems in the sequence more recognisably part of familiar experience. There is psychological congruence between the isolated, female-haunted speaker of 'Survivor' and the grandmother-haunted speaker of 'Tear' and 'A Hand of Solo.' In 'Nightwalker' the speaker is implicated in the depredations of Ireland's Victorian inheritance, as Kinsella's note ('in me')¹²⁴ had indicated. In *NLD* the connection with Victoria is familial. In the drafts of 'At the Crossroads' Kinsella associates the 'black taffeta' of his grandmother with Queen Victoria: her mouth is open, like the 'naked ancient women' of the cauldron, 'coming starving, to eat/ devour us.'¹²⁵

'At the Crossroads'¹²⁶ takes place in what is a more recognisably contemporary world than the other poems in 'a single drop,' yet past violence haunts the crossroads as a residue, a 'sad disturbance under the branches' (*NP* 1973 39). Hecate, the moon/owl, ('She who succeeds from afar') is the malevolent controlling deity ('this is the Land of the Dead. Grandmother/ owl/ harequeen of it'¹²⁷). Kinsella's notes elaborate on Hecate's significance within *NLD*:

Hecate: the terrible Mother, lamia who devours men: the Moon, evil side of fem. [feminine] principle → madness, obsession & lunacy.

Attributes: the key (mystery, enigma, a task to be performed, & the means for it), the lash, the dagger, the torch

Crossroads (= union of opposites = mother (object and epicentre of all union)) sacred to 'triform' Hecate: at crossroads dogs were sacrificed to her, & the bodies of hanged

¹²² Johnston 98.

¹²³ Bedient 136.

¹²⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 13. See Chapter 3, 130.

¹²⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 5.

¹²⁶ 'At the Crossroads' once bore the title 'In the Land of the Dead,' Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 5.

¹²⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

men dumped.¹²⁸

According to Jung, among Hecate's symbols is 'the key,' as in Faust, where Hecate is 'guardian of Hades and divine psychopomp.'¹²⁹ She is also, in her guise as the 'deadly mother,' the 'triple-bodied goddess of dogs.'¹³⁰ To her, according to Jung, 'were dedicated junctions of three roads, forked roads, and crossroads.'¹³¹ As the moon, she 'swims with evil through the trees' (*NP* 1973 39); as the owl she watches 'in silent scrutiny/ with blackness in her heart' (*NP* 1973 39). Kinsella re-imagines the cauldron of '*hesitate, cease to exist*' as a 'Flux of forms/ in a great stomach' as the poem moves toward a meditation on necessity and predation and 'innocent cruel acts'¹³²

And all mouths everywhere so
in their need, turning on each furious
other. Flux of forms
in a great stomach: living meat torn off,
enduring in one mess of terror
every pang it sent through every thing
it ever, in shudders of pleasure, tore.

(*NP* 1973 40)

Kinsella orchestrates throughout the sequence imagery of 'drops' and 'dropping,' which accumulate in resonance and power and are imbued with the aura of involuntary memory, 'essences, disturbed from what/ profounder nothingness' ('Good Night' *New Poems* 1973 52). In 'At the Crossroads' the word 'drop' takes on a sinister, violent meaning, and the hunger for order of 'Phoenix Park' is re-cast as part of a ceaseless violent predatory instinct:

The choice –
the drop with deadened wing-beats; some creature
torn and swallowed; her brain, afterward,
staring among the rafters in the dark
until hunger returns.

(*NP* 1973 40)

¹²⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

¹²⁹ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 369.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 370-71.

¹³² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

Kinsella's notes from Jung's discussion of Hecate also inform the sequence of poems in 'a single drop.' The next poem, 'Sacrifice,' follows 'At the Crossroads' for specific reasons:

Where the roads branch off or meet, dog-sacrifices were offered to her, and there too were thrown the bodies of the executed: the sacrifice occurs at the point of union. Where the roads cross and enter into one another, thereby symbolising the union of opposites, there is the "mother," the object and epitome of all union.¹³³

The poem seems to have issued from a dream and is one of the most peculiar and disturbing in *NLD*.¹³⁴ Though the speaker is female and though Kinsella says that it concerns the 'incorporation of female potential',¹³⁵ the poem could easily refer to the imaginative processes Kinsella had forced upon himself: 'Never mind the hurt. I've never felt/ so terribly alive, so ready,/ so gripped/ by love' (*NP* 1973 41). The poem describes the transmutation of pain into ecstasy that Kinsella envisions the 'thesis' of *NLD* as performing, in this case through willing submission to the other:

We are each other's knowledge. It is peace that counts,
and knowledge brings peace, even thrust crackling
into the skull and bursting with tongues of fire.

(*NP* 1973 42)

Confrontation with the shadow reaches its climax in the third section of *NLD*, 'nightnothing.' In 'All is Emptiness, and I Must Spin' the Gestalt idea of total structure allows a poem seemingly made of fragments to function like a tune which breaks off unfinished but remains recognisable. A similar formal procedure connects the poem to 'Ely Place,' which concerns emanations out of the self that take on a life in, and from, the outer world:

Here matter is only flickering
up out of nothing, up invisible
into air, shimmering around a few
tentative beginnings, a few

¹³³ Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 371.

¹³⁴ Kinsella writes 'in some sunken amphitheatre, like a great crucible where fear & delight & searching and hunger & blood & satisfaction boil, boil ... a great ceremonial bowl sarcophagus of light and sun, where the souls of those before me have transmuted after death, & still their shades prowl, trapped under Hecate,' Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 29.

¹³⁵ Kinsella, Flanagan: 112.

tired endings, over and over.

In its draft form the poem begins with the line, 'Murder everywhere,'¹³⁶ and is a dark meditation on the desire to murder, to see '[h]ow it would feel.'¹³⁷ Kinsella said to Ian Flanagan in 1996:

I could make sense of ['Ely Place'] by falling back on Jung, if I wanted to [laughs] but I'm not going to. . . . The dream world is every bit as real as the other world that's going on and every so often, it erupts like this and I make no attempt to control or suppress it.¹³⁸

Kinsella's notes in preparation for *NLD* reveals this active engagement with the 'reality' of the 'dream world' as a deliberate part of his poetic transformation: 'let things (irrupt) rise up from the depths – whatever! - & confront them actively permit [. . .] & struggle with the shadow/ Mephisto/Devil no matter what.'¹³⁹ As he said to Ian Flanagan 'in a poem like that ['Ely Place'], the lid was lifted and things boiled out.'¹⁴⁰ The confrontation with the repressed elements of the self that such a poem evokes has equivocal rewards, in an ending which echoes the resignation of 'Baggot Street Deserta': 'After lunch/ a quarter of an hour at most/ of empty understanding' (*NP* 1973 47). In 'Good Night' Kinsella offers an alternative view of the reward for having travelled 'to a drowned pit/ clasping the astonished spectre of/ the psyche in its sweet wet' (*NP* 1973 51). The revealed reality is not 'truth' and 'certainty' but knowledge that the process of reality eludes categorical framing and is more powerful than both:

. . . Would you agree, then, we won't
find truths, or any certainties . . .

where monsters lift soft
self-conscious voices, and feed us
and feed in us, and coil
and uncoil in our substance,
so that in that they are there
we cannot know them, and that,

¹³⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 6.

¹³⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 9, folder 6.

¹³⁸ Kinsella, Flanagan: 111.

¹³⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 20.

¹⁴⁰ Kinsella, Flanagan: 112.

daylit, we are the monsters of our night,
and somewhere the monsters of our night are . . .
here . . . in daylight that our nightnothing
feeds in and feed, wandering
out of the cavern, [. . .]

that we need as we don't need truth . . . [.]

(*NP 1973 52-53*)

In various contexts the poems in the last part of the *New Poems 1973* enact the creative coming to terms with, and adjustment to, 'reality on reality's terms.'¹⁴¹ In 'The Route of the Tain'¹⁴² an initially hopeful enterprise offers brief persuasion that things are other than inevitably disappointing. The group who had worked together on the completion of the book, including the artist Louis Le Brocquy, who had contributed one hundred and thirty drawings, Liam Miller, the publisher and designer of the book, and Gene C. Haley of Harvard University whose work on the place names of Conaille and Cuailnge had helped towards the construction of a map of the route of the cattle-raid portrayed in *The Táin*,¹⁴³ set off 'cheerfully to celebrate our book' (*NP 1973 57*). The enthusiastic attempt to trace the movements of the armies of Connacht and Ulster soon gives way to irritation as they are frustrated in their task. The unified impulse disintegrates, and the individuals' 'own just function' in the enterprise is abandoned as they revert to their personal animal-like preoccupations. A sustained knowledge of the exhausting repetitiveness of the process of achievement against unfavourable odds, it seems, can occasionally elude even the hardened veteran:

We should have known it, by now:

the process, the whole tedious
enabling ritual! Flux brought to fullness
– saturated – the clouding over – dissatisfaction
spreading slowly like an ache: [. . .] (*NP 1973 58*)

The speaker of 'Worker in Mirror, at His Bench' also refers to the assembling of his work as 'tedious.' The poem allegorises the relationship between poet and audience, 'two worlds reaching back in to their darkness and coming together above a bright piece of ordered

¹⁴¹ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 15.

¹⁴² A variant title for the poem was 'Colptha,' Kinsella Papers, box 11, folder 13.

¹⁴³ *The Táin* 261.

perception,¹⁴⁴ but in fact began as part of *The Good Fight*. The political allegory of a descent into disappointment, as a golden age gives way to inferior kingdoms of silver, bronze, and iron, is still visible, as is its ultimate source in the story of Daniel's interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2: 37-45. In 'Drowning over the Arabian Knights' the book confirms that 'one hopes for too much' (*NP* 1973 65). The speaker reduces certainty to a quartet of realities: 'hunger,' 'sleep's airy nothing,' 'the moist matter of lust,' and 'the agonies of death' (*NP* 1973 65). 'St Paul's Rocks: 16 February 1832' variant title 'Los Imagos'¹⁴⁵ re-writes a scene from Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*¹⁴⁶ and resembles 'Ballydavid Pier' in its neutral observation of the realities of the life process. After the Darwinian notation, the deduction the speaker makes from the evidence is quintessentially Kinsellian in its emphasis on violence, the good as accident, and exhausted achievement against unfavourable odds:

In squalor and killing and parasitic things
life takes its first hold.
Later the noble accident: the seed, dropped
in some exhausted excrement, or bobbing
like a matted skull into an inlet.

(*NP* 1973 67)

'The Dispossessed' contrasts two kinds of peace: the 'established peace' of the pastoral past, which is superficially pleasing, but revealed as a source of stultifying contentment. A Christ-like prophet figure offers in its place a vision of peace as creative struggle and paradoxical achievement:

If a man choose to enter the kingdom of peace
he shall not cease from struggle until he fail,
and having failed he will be astonished,
and having been astonished he will rule, [.]

(*NP* 1973 68)

This struggle parallels the artistic process whose 'states of peace nursed out of wreckage' (*NP* 1973 60) Kinsella describes in 'Worker in Mirror, at His Bench.' The process is 'wasteful' but unlike 'A Shout After Hard Work,' inspiration now works in tandem with labour, in an

¹⁴⁴ Kinsella, Fried: 23.

¹⁴⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 11, folder 16.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. and abridged with an introduction by Janet Browne and Micheal Neve (London: Penguin, 1989) 47-49.

excavatory, exploratory process where form is a 'guardian structure' (*NP* 1973 60). The artistic process is 'pursuit at its most delicate,/ truth as tinkering,/ easing the particular of its litter' (*NP* 1973 61), whose parameters are informed by a knowledge that 'Time punishes – and this the flesh teaches' (*NP* 1973 61). The clear-eyed vision of art's work as a constant and careful response to the facts of dissolution is captured in 'Wyncote, Pennsylvania: A Gloss.' The poet, aware that another test of artistic will is approaching, knows what is required:

Another storm coming.
Under the copper light
my papers seem luminous.
And over them I will take
ever more painstaking care.

(*NP* 1973 75)

As W.J. McCormack writes, 'in formal terms, *New Poems 1973* is the first to display Kinsella's growing interest in writing a poetry which spreads outwards beyond the conventional structures of the self-like stanza, the psyche-identical poem.'¹⁴⁷ The Peppercanister¹⁴⁸ series of poems is the site of this continuing project, yet the first of the Peppercanister poems is, in formal terms, 'an oddity' in Kinsella's work.¹⁴⁹ The reasons for this seeming discrepancy derive from the circumstances which led to the poem's composition.

¹⁴⁷ McCormack, 'Politics or Community': 68.

¹⁴⁸ The Peppercanister Press gets its name from the nickname given to St Stephen's Church, Mount Street Crescent, Dublin. The Kinsella's house at Percy Place, where they lived in the 1970s and 1980s, had a view of the rear of the church. St Stephen's was designed by John Bowden and completed after his death by Joseph Welland. It cost £5, 169 to build and was consecrated in 1824. The site, with its vista along Merrion Square, makes the Peppercanister Church one of Dublin's familiar landmarks,' Douglas Bennett, *Encyclopaedia of Dublin* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994) 196-7. John Betjeman, who attended St Stephen's while living in Dublin, referred to the church as 'a focal point of the fair city of Dublin,' Donal Foley, ed. 'The Saturday Column: A Weekly Miscellany,' *Irish Times* 20 June 1981, Weekend: 14.

¹⁴⁹ McCormack, 'Politics or Community': 66.

On Sunday July 30 1972, British paratroopers shot dead thirteen unarmed Catholics during an illegal civil rights march in the Bogside in Derry.¹⁵⁰ The British government inquiry by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, 'exonerated the troops more or less, and managed to leave a suspicion of conspiracy hanging over some of the victims' (FD 54). The journalists Peter Pringle and Philip Jacobson, members of the *Sunday Times* Insight team which investigated the events and challenged the findings of the British government inquiry, succinctly describe both the inquiry's covert remit and the Report's shortcomings:

the Widgery inquiry was a propaganda exercise that ignored civilian evidence; failed to examine the circumstances of the fourteen who were wounded; was unwilling to allow examination of key army documents and never looked at crucial photographs, or examined shots fired by soldiers other than paratroopers. Widgery's lamentable conclusions were even contradicted by the evidence he did accept.¹⁵¹

Kinsella describes *Butcher's Dozen* as 'an angry kinetic response to an insulting event, to the Widgery findings even more than to the actual shootings in Derry.'¹⁵² As in 'A Country Walk,' and 'Nightwalker,' the speaker is a walker through the aftermath of violence. He moves 'with Anger at my heel/ Through Bogside of the bitter zeal' (FD 13),¹⁵³ encountering the shades, spectres and phantoms of the victims, who vent their anger at the circumstances of their deaths and the impugning of their innocence. The anger in *Butcher's Dozen* is of a different order to those earlier poems, and affected what Kinsella considered the aesthetically compromised form

¹⁵⁰ Peter Pringle and Philip Jacobson succinctly describe the significance of 'Bloody Sunday': 'In the grim array of atrocities committed in the name of Irish Republicanism and Ulster loyalism, the death toll on Bloody Sunday is not the highest for a single incident, but the killings stand apart. They were not random casualties from a terrorist bomb in a pub, the assassination of a member of parliament, or a sniper's shot at a policeman on patrol. The thirteen unarmed men, seven of them teenagers, were killed as part of a deliberate plan, conceived at the highest level of military command and sanctioned by the British government, to put innocent civilians at risk by authorizing the use of lethal force during an illegal civil rights march,' *Those are Real Bullets, Aren't They?* (London: Fourth Estate, 2000) 2-3.

¹⁵¹ *Those are Real Bullets, Aren't They?* 3.

¹⁵² Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 35.

¹⁵³ W.J. McCormack gives the background to Kinsella's walk in an anecdote which also reveals that the 'kinetic' force of the poem's anger partly lay in the emotional impact on Kinsella of his visit to the site of 'Bloody Sunday': 'Very shortly after the killings of 30 January 1972, Thomas Kinsella visited the city of Derry ostensibly to "do a poetry reading" which I had organized in Magee College. On arrival, however, his immediate demand was to be conducted through the streets where the Paratroop Regiment had attacked the marching crowd. (I am, therefore, identifiable perhaps as Anger who went at the speaker's heel [...] in the opening lines of the poem.) Kinsella did not speak much during the journey, apart from asking about the topography of the conflict and my own experiences of it. I left him at this hotel to rest before the reading. By the evening, however, he had clearly become so affected by what he had seen and heard as to find the routine of public performance virtually unbearable. After two or three wrong starts, he summoned an immense self-control, and read dead-pan. Throughout the prolonged prologue to the eventual reading, not a sinner in the audience moved,' McCormack, 'Politics or Community': 71.

of the poem. In 'Nightwalker,' Kinsella says,

The anger takes its place there with other things: it is a slower, more complicated, process. It would be nice to be able to write at full strength in a contemporary crisis, to have one's imagination and technique and invective *and* working together at their highest. But at the point of crisis I simply chose the doggerel route, and ran.¹⁵⁴

The mode of publication of *Butcher's Dozen* was also informed by circumstances, and in particular by the manner of publication of the findings of the Widgery Tribunal. The findings, Kinsella relates, sold 'for a few pence a copy; the evidence was published separately, at more than a hundred pounds.'¹⁵⁵ Kinsella's poem was 'finished, printed and published within a week of the publication of the Widgery Report' (FD 58), and sold for ten pence a copy, as if to counterweight the British administration's deliberate manipulation of commercial publishing to disseminate the 'official version' of events.¹⁵⁶

Butcher's Dozen is regarded as a pause in Kinsella's movement away from lyric and traditional form.¹⁵⁷ Yet in its reference to 'Persuasion, protest, arguments,/ The milder forms of violence' (FD 17) the poem is of a piece with the attitudes to form and rhetoric expressed in such a poem as 'The Force of Eloquence.' The poem's heroic couplets and satiric charge derive, Kinsella says, from the Irish *aisling* form, the political vision-poem which he adopted from its 'late, parodied guise' in Brian Merriman's *Midnight Court* (FD 58). Yet *Butcher's Dozen* also has antecedents in Kinsella's own work; it borrows lines from the drafts of the 'Prologue' to *Downstream*, as well as that poem's 'doggerel' form.¹⁵⁸ In the 'Commentary' to the poem when it was collected in *Fifteen Dead* (1979), Kinsella is disparaging of the poem's form but accepting of its rhetorical efficacy: 'One changed one's standards, chose the doggerel route, and charged . . .' (FD 58). In listing the criticisms levelled against the poem as an aesthetic object, Kinsella suggests his own fluid view of 'poetic propriety': 'It offended many *a priori* assumptions as to poetic propriety of one kind or another, as to the place of poetry in public affairs, etc.; it was unwise in its directness of response; it was not poetry at all' (FD 58).

Yet *Butcher's Dozen* is consistent with Kinsella's other work, not merely in the sense that as Brian John says, 'the same social sense that provoked "Nightwalker"¹⁵⁹ is at work. The

¹⁵⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 12, folder 35. Kinsella's emphasis.

¹⁵⁵ *Fifteen Dead* 54, in the 'Commentary' section on *Butcher's Dozen*.

¹⁵⁶ Derval Tubridy relates that the price covered production cost alone. The printer, Elo Press, was chosen for its cheapness, and distribution costs were kept to a minimum, Tubridy 15. The poem was reprinted in the *Sunday Press* 30 April 1972: 8, and in *Fortnight* 11 May 1972: 18.

¹⁵⁷ See McCormack, 'Politics or Community': 66-71.

¹⁵⁸ Compare 'More occasion for alarm/ Are dourness and a loss of charm,' Kinsella Papers, box 3, folder 3, with 'And though there's reason for alarm/ In dourness and a lack of charm,' (FD 19).

¹⁵⁹ John 143.

poem evinces the same dubious attitude toward rhetorical flourish and selectivity of perspective that pervades Kinsella's work, as well as being typical in its demand for an adequate account of 'the realities of human behaviour' (FD 57).¹⁶⁰ Kinsella's anger, as Michael Smith says, derives 'from a deeply rooted commitment to a complex and morally informed view of Irish society and culture.'¹⁶¹

Kinsella's criticisms of his own selectivity are instructive. *Butcher's Dozen* did not include reference to 'the culpable silence of the Catholic Church' about the inequalities within Northern Ireland before the outbreak of violence in 1969, nor did it properly evoke the intellectual cost the Protestant majority bore for their years of 'grim dominance' (FD 58). Yet the unfolding of events in the six years subsequent to publication lead Kinsella to say that for all the 'rage and haste' in which it was written, the poem required no 'serious revision (except possibly the happy ending)' (FD 56). The 'happy ending,' offered through the voice of one of the victims, is a vision of hope that with 'England's' withdrawal from Northern Ireland the divided communities would 'mix themselves in the common blood' and accept their intricately entwined fate:

'We all are what we are, and that
Is mongrel pure. What nation's not
Where any stranger hung his hat
And seized a lover where she sat?'

(FD 19)

The comment that such a vision of hope required revision in light of subsequent events again illustrates time as a source of inevitable disappointment. Yet the dialectic between hope and disappointment that Kinsella's work continually enacts, and which could easily give way to the futility evoked in the 'Prologue' to *Downstream*, sustains itself through what he calls 'a sort of calculus.' In reply to Eavan Boland question 'Is history this unending sequence of follies?' Kinsella offers a counter to the claim of an unrelenting negativity in his work: 'No. I think if we were to see it as such, we would all cease to do our best. There is a sort of calculus involved in which you pitch forward to a point in which you hope to break slightly more than even, otherwise the energy will dissipate.'¹⁶²

What the poem and the 'Commentary' also show is Kinsella's sense that origins are

¹⁶⁰ In the Republic of Ireland, following 'Bloody Sunday' and during the period of the Liam Cosgrave-led Coalition Government in the mid-1970s, 'Real issues . . . were narrowed or abandoned in an atmosphere of stylish debate and selective formulations uncaring of (it seemed, finally, unaware of) the realities of human behaviour,' (FD 57).

¹⁶¹ Michael Smith, 'Love and life find themselves precariously balanced,' review of *Thomas Kinsella: The Peppercanister Poems*, by Derval Tubridy, *Irish Times* 27 January 2001.

¹⁶² *Irish Times* 5 July 1974: 14.

inescapable, and that atavisms inform behaviour and attitudes in ways that a crisis reveals most clearly. The place that atavisms and identity held in Kinsella's thinking about his own work were outlined in a panel discussion in 1974, published over two days by the *Irish Times* under the title 'The Clash of Identities; A Roundtable Confrontation in Two Parts.'¹⁶³ As well as Kinsella the panel included three other writers: the Antrim-born, Dublin-resident Francis Stuart; the Dublin-born novelist James Plunkett, author of *Strumpet City*; the Belfast poet John Hewitt; and from different ends of the political spectrum, Ruairi Ó Bradaigh, described as 'President of Sinn Féin (Kevin Street),' and Thomas Lyttle and Jackie Scott, members of the loyalist Ulster Defence Association. The discussion was chaired by Eavan Boland, who had suggested the idea, based on a similar event during the Spanish Civil War.

In *Butcher's Dozen* Kinsella satirically expressed an analysis of the Northern Ireland situation in colonial terms through the voice of the 'joking spectre.' His comments during this discussion repeat that analysis as well as reiterating the hope that the poem expresses at its end:

We have inherited an absolutely diabolical mess on both sides. If I had to diagnose it one way, I would say that it was the residual shambles of a colonial enterprise which had neither succeeded nor failed. There are painful survivors on both sides, people who have honest, sincere, fundamental and very ancient claims on both sides now to the same piece of ground – the same wish to enjoy in peace and justice the life of a particular area.¹⁶⁴

In the discussion, ostensibly concerned with identity and the political situation in Northern Ireland, Kinsella's language and analysis reflect his poetic enterprise, and his poetic enterprise reflects his thinking about 'the countless painful ingredients in the whole situation.'¹⁶⁵ There is acknowledgement of the centrality to his work of his own atavisms, yet at the same time there is an urge to understand the different 'realities' of the participants. In reaction to Francis Stuart's statement that he would feel 'freer' in Antrim yet continues to live in the Republic, Kinsella says, 'I feel there's a reality there that I would like to understand'¹⁶⁶:

What's being investigated, if I'm working well, is a very significant complex of tone,

¹⁶³ 'The Clash of Identities; A Roundtable Confrontation in Two Parts,' transcript of panel discussion, ed. Eavan Boland, *Irish Times* 4 and 5 July 1974: 12, 14. The reference to Ó Bradaigh and the location of the Kevin Street, Dublin, offices of Sinn Féin derives from the existence of a rival Sinn Féin party whose headquarters were at in Gardiner Place, Dublin. Ó Bradaigh had refused to participate if members of this rival group attended.

¹⁶⁴ *Irish Times* 5 July 1974: 14.

¹⁶⁵ *Irish Times* 4 July 1974: 12.

¹⁶⁶ *Irish Times* 4 July 1974: 12.

emotion, of important information, intellectually grasped, which will employ as best I can all of my background as well as all of my foreground. In this context I may be able to make use, emotionally, of something taken involuntarily, from Egan O'Rahilly, from Tennyson if that happens. This would make me very careful to cherish any sense of a different foreground on the part of Tommy or Jackie. They have a heritage. It doesn't really matter how it was arrived at; it is their foreground and as a writer, as a poet, I would have to respect the minute particulars of difference in which importance actually lies, but always in the interest – and again I am forced to use empty-sounding words – of social justice, of justice of any kind.¹⁶⁷

Kinsella distinguishes between 'foreground,' the immediate circumstances in which heritage is expressed, and background, the contributory factors to that heritage. His own poetry attempts an articulation of both, in a personal version of the world which does not pretend to completeness but bases itself on the strengths and weaknesses of personal identity.

Fifteen Dead collected three other elegies, two written for the Irish composer and musician, Seán Ó Riada, *A Selected Life* (1972) and *Vertical Man* (1973), and *The Good Fight* (1973), which marked the tenth anniversary of the death of John F. Kennedy. All of these extended sequences explore waste, of creative potential in the case of Ó Riada, and the shattering of false political hope in the case of Kennedy's assassination.

A Selected Life has three sections: the first set in Galloping Green, Dublin, in May 1962, the second at Ó Riada's funeral at Coolea on the 6th October 1971, and the third later that same evening. The first section presents Ó Riada 'thin as a beast of prey,' and sets up the theme of art as both predation and measured response: Ó Riada strikes the *bodhrán* 'cruelly/ with his nails' and in body and mind responds with equivalent intensity to the 'arid bark' produced. Section II begins with 'things noted during a short walk away from the crowds in the Ó Riada household on the morning of the funeral – the rain, the crow, the coarse bell sounding across open country' (FD 71). It was only after writing this first part of section II that Kinsella realised the similarities to lines from Seán mac Bháitéir Breathnach's 'Marbhna Oiliféir Grás' which refers to a bell, a raven and death.¹⁶⁸ The crow continues the theme of predation, and as Brian John and Derval Tubridy point out, links creation with destruction.¹⁶⁹ In Celtic mythology the

¹⁶⁷ *Irish Times* 5 July 1974: 14.

¹⁶⁸ Kinsella quotes the lines in both Irish and English: 'Tá cling na marbh leis an ngaoith,/ Monuar! Is teachta bróin dúinn í!/ Tá an fiach dubh le glór garbh/ Ag fógradh uaire an duine mhairbh'; 'The clang for the dead is on the wind,/ our messenger of grief, alas!/ The raven with a rough voice/ announces the dead man's hour,' (FD 71).

¹⁶⁹ See John 151; Tubridy 28-29.

duplicious war goddess the Morrigan ('Great Queen' or 'Queen of Phantoms'¹⁷⁰) was a prophet of destruction and often appeared in the form of a crow. In *The Táin* she deceives the Connachtmen by falsely implying their victory over Ulster.¹⁷¹ In *A Selected Life*, in the tragic waste of his early death, Ó Riada is an emblem of the duplicity of art, which acts as friend and goad, but can lead to destruction.

The title conjures both the elected sense of Ó Riada as artist and also the inevitably incomplete nature of Ó Riada's experience and achievement. The form of the poem is fragmentary, the selected particulars do not strain toward a sense of completeness, as if the abbreviated nature of Ó Riada's life itself can only be seen in fragments:

– sundry musical effects: a piercing
sweet consort of whistles crying, [...]

– a lurid cabinet: fire's flames
plotting in the dark; hugger mugger
and murder; collapsing back in laughter. [...]

– a workroom, askew: fumbling at the table
tittering, pools of idea forming. [...]

(FD 25)

Vertical Man continues the elegy for Ó Riada and like the earlier poem is 'saturated in alcohol' (FD 71). The poems of *Fifteen Dead* are all in a sense 'occasional' poems, but although also an occasional poem, *Vertical Man* includes commentary on the continuing 'plot' of the mainstream of work initiated in *NLD*, and in its dissection of artistic process looks forward to the concerns and manner of *A Technical Supplement*. Kinsella here rejects the contorted version of artistic endeavour evoked in 'A Shout After Hard Work,' and in the 'strain of the rack' of 'Baggot Street Deserta,' for a version of artistic endeavour that has become infused with a pleasure principle that acknowledges both difficulty and uselessness:

That the days pass,
that our task arise, dominate our energies,
are mastered with difficulty and some pleasure,
and are obsolete. That there can be a sweet stir

¹⁷⁰ *Celtic Heritage* 36.

¹⁷¹ *The Táin* 238.

hurrying in the veins (earned: this sunlight
– this oxygen – are my *reward!*) and the ground
grows dull to the tread. The ugly rack: let it ride.

(FD 29)

The passage moves on to evoke the continuation and reconstitution of artistic endeavour. The realisation that “‘Ended and done with’ never ceases’ which had in ‘A Lady of Quality’ been an occasion for the demonstration of stoical acceptance, now offers opportunity for the creative appropriation of inevitable failure:

That for all you have done, the next beginning
is as lonely, as random, as gauche and unready,
as presumptuous, as the first,
when you stripped and advanced timidly
toward nothing in particular.
Though with a difference – there is
a kind of residue. [...]
[...] a residue in the timidity,
a maturer unsureness, as we
prepare to undergo preparatory error.

(FD 29-30)

The end of the poem returns to Kinsella’s description of Gerry Flaherty’s *sean nós* style from ‘The Shoals Returning’ and evokes again art’s origins in darkness, its function as articulation, and to mark Ó Riada as, like Ó Rathaille and Flaherty, an emblem of cultural loss:

From palatal darkness a voice
rose flickering, and checked
in glottal silence. The song
articulated and pierced.

(FD 33)

The final stanza recalls the holiday the Ó Riada and Kinsella families spent together in 1959 in Ballyferriter, West Kerry. It was here Ó Riada had ‘discovered’ Flaherty, and introduced Kinsella to his singing. The elegy ends on a note of concentration and collection, of intent and vigour. The last image recalls Kinsella and Reidy (as he then was) shrimping with their

children's pinkeen nets on the boatslip at Smerwyck. In his recollection of that summer Kinsella remembers Ó Riada saying during such a moment 'I feel as if I have never done anything else in my life' (FD 70):

We leaned over the shallows from the boat slip
and netted the little grey shrimp-ghosts
snapping, and dropped them
in the crawling biscuit-tin.

(FD 33)

The Good Fight continues both the link between creation and destruction ('life and doom in the same animal action' (FD 37)), and the dialectic between hope and disappointment. The optimism embodied in John F. Kennedy, and the despairing psychosis of Lee Harvey Oswald's isolation, are only partial versions of reality ('the one so "heroic",/ the other so . . .') which must be combined in any comprehensive and accurate vision of the Real: 'You have to/ wear them down against each other/ to get any purchase' (FD 49). The poem itself enacts this wearing down of opposites and is composed of texts drawn from sources as diverse as Kennedy's speeches, and interviews, Plato's *Republic* and *The Laws*, Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President 1960*, Henry Fairlie's *The Kennedy Promise* and Oswald's 'Historic Diary'.¹⁷² This complex intertextuality 'embodies' Kinsella's pursuit of the Real as 'structure, meaning, and harmony.'¹⁷³

The poem is ostensibly occasional, and Kinsella regards it as a detour from the general thrust inward and numerological 'plot' of his post-NLD work: '*The Good Fight*, I suppose, is an example of the numerological construct not working, accident is free to have its effect . . . Events like that [the Kennedy assassination] lie in wait, the unconscious is full of material that might become useful.'¹⁷⁴ As in *Vertical Man*, however, Kinsella continues in *The Good Fight* his disquisition on art and its relationship to 'reality.' The poem was initially begun shortly after Kennedy's assassination in 1963, but was only completed many years later. Some of the material rejected from it went into *Worker in Mirror, at His Bench*, and in its published form still resembles that poem:

(It sounds as though it could go on for ever,
yet there is a shape to it – Appropriate
Performance. Another almost perfect

¹⁷² See Kinsella's note to *The Good Fight* (FD 74-75).

¹⁷³ See John 157; Tubridy 42.

working model. . . But it gets harder. [...])

(FD 39)

Kinsella describes Oswald in terms which recall the similarity between writer and assassin evoked in the epigraph from John Clellon Holmes: 'Those who are imprisoned in the silence of reality always use a gun (or, if they are more fortunate, a pen) to speak for them' (FD 36).¹⁷⁵ Oswald is a nightwalker, who 'prowls' the city, his loneliness and isolation shadowing the earlier Kinsella of the Baggot Street flat:

A lonely room.

An electric fire

glowing in one corner. He is lying on his side.

It is late. He is at the centre of the city,

awake.

(FD 41)

In the traumatic aftermath of the assassination the unrealistic hopes engendered by Kennedy's image, and the rhetoric of his administration, causes the unleashing of various psychological disorders: 'Various forms of castration dreads emerged,' 'Anxiety was widespread, with apprehension/ of worse things to come':

It was unhealthy – a distortion of normal attitudes.

Things had been exalted

altogether out of proportion.

(FD 47-48)

The fourth section presents Robert Frost as a figure combining bewilderment, wisdom and proportion. In his notes Kinsella remarks that Frost's 'poetry [is] less straightforward than it seems.'¹⁷⁶ Frost with his dark knowledge is indeed more akin to Oswald than Kennedy: 'acutely sensitive, & used to a darkness deeper than any garret.'¹⁷⁷ Frost's wisdom carries the poem from the optimism of Kennedy's 'All reasonable things are possible' (FD 37) to the recognition 'That all *un*reasonable things/ are possible' (FD 49). Kinsella has admitted to an

¹⁷⁴ Kinsella, Flanagan: 110.

¹⁷⁵ Kinsella says that he borrows the 'psychological argument' of section II of the poem from John Clellon Holmes article 'The Silence of Oswald,' which was published in *Playboy*, November 1965.

¹⁷⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 6.

¹⁷⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 6.

identification with the figure of Frost,¹⁷⁸ who comes 'Not in judgement, and not/ in acceptance either./ Uncertain' (FD 49), which recalls the reality-imbued 'maturer unsureness' of artistic endeavour in *Vertical Man*:

it is we, letting things *be*,
who might come at understanding.

(FD 50)

The 'secondary world' of art Plato considered to be a 'double remove from the Real,'¹⁷⁹ but Frost's words evoke Kinsella's positive adjustment towards his own work as it was now developing, 'Reliable first in the direction/ and finally in the particulars of our response' (FD 50), with the hope now that poetry, chastened but relentless in its pursuit, can offer ultimate encounter with the Real:

one day we might knock
our papers together, and elevate them
(with a certain self-abasement)
– their gleaming razors
mirroring a primary world [.]

(FD 50)

The Good Fight offers the Kennedy administration as a period of unreasonable hope, with Oswald its nemesis, a personification of disappointment. The same arc formed by hope giving way to disappointment dominates the first section of *One*, which Kinsella describes as a 'sequel to Notes from the Land of the Dead.'¹⁸⁰ The appetite-driven snake of the prologue lengthens itself from a coiled zero into one: 'Up and awake. Up straight/ in absolute hunger' (*One* 9). The 'shreds of disappointment' re-appear in the driven pursuit of nourishment 'over/ fragments of old fights and furies' (*One* 9). The first three stanzas are written in direct, unmediated verb-propelled language in imitation of the instinct described. Ravenous consumption combines

¹⁷⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 110-11.

¹⁷⁹ John 162.

¹⁸⁰ Kinsella's note on 'Tentative Contents of Next Bks,' Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 26. *One* also has connections with the subsequent Peppercanister, *A Technical Supplement*. Early drafts of poems such as 'Blessed William' and 'Quietus' later appeared in *A Technical Supplement*, as poems I and IV respectively. In the drafts the italicised prologue is entitled 'Snake,' emphasizing the connection with *NLD*, Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 11. The second italicised page of prologue was originally called 'The Reader,' Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 7. Part of it, called 'Dicta,' which concerns 'creative work,' became section V, VII and XXI of *A Technical Supplement*, Kinsella Papers, box 15, folder 8.

necessity and pleasure, captured by Kinsella in the unhyphenated compounds 'whimswift,' 'Snapdelicious,' and 'Throbflutter.' The fourth stanza reflects on the process. The fulfilment of necessity leads to a 'falling off/ in the drive, the desire,' and like the contrasting, but functionally symbiotic figures of Oswald and Kennedy in *The Good Fight*, 'the two energies approach and come to terms,/ balance somehow, grow still' (*One* 9).

Kinsella presents an elaborate allegory of the creative drive, which is linked to predation and the unending process outlined in 'Phoenix Park': 'That life is hunger, hunger is for order,/ And hunger satisfied brings on new hunger' (*N* 77). Eating, and digesting, Kinsella believes, is 'an image of what goes on in the experience of reality': 'You are presented with the scraps, the disordered, and you absorb it, process it, and it is absorbed, with luck, in some relationship with an idea of order.'¹⁸¹

The clusters of related events: Kinsella's personal experience, Irish history, the *Book of Invasions*, *The Táin* work toward a composite view which might 'mirror a primary world' and grasp order out of experience. The Kinsellian process excavates the archetypes in his own experience in a dialogue between the actual and the ideal, as figured in *The Good Fight* and outlined in notes in which the actual ('I' and 'you') have their corresponding ideal versions ('he' and 'she').¹⁸² Jacobi offers both actual (Aristotelian) and ideal (Platonic) explanations of the origins of the archetype: 'An Aristotelian would say: The archetypes are ideas rooted in man's experience of his real father and mother. The Platonist would say: Father and mother grew from the archetypes, for these are the primordial images, the prototypes of the phenomena'¹⁸³; both sides of this same coin are relevant to Kinsella's practice. The Real in which Kinsella places his aesthetic faith, in a pursuit which he calls 'the purgatory of search among significances for order,'¹⁸⁴ is similar to Jung's 'archetypal content': 'it is neither one thing nor the other, but the unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate expression in all these similes, yet – to the perpetual vexation of the intellect – remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula.'¹⁸⁵ This 'unknown third thing,' Kinsella says, can be glimpsed in 'epiphanies of realisation – foresight; intimations of purpose & order in my life.'¹⁸⁶

The 1979 Dolmen edition of *One*, which also collected *A Technical Supplement* and *Song of the Night*, included a ten-line italicised poem which framed the sequence with the figure of a 'storyteller' around a fire. Alwyn and Brinley Rees offer a possible reason for Kinsella's adoption of the device:

¹⁸¹ Kinsella, Fried: 16.

¹⁸² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

¹⁸³ Jacobi 44-45.

¹⁸⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

¹⁸⁵ Jacobi 46-47. The quotation is from Jung's 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype' 157, 160.

¹⁸⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

An interesting feature of the storyteller's art, and a mark of its high antiquity, is the use made of stereotyped descriptive passages or rhetorical 'runs'. Archaic and obscure in diction, they are introduced when it is required to describe a hero setting out on his adventures, a battle being fought, or other recognized scenes. They serve to embellish the story and to impress the listeners while affording the narrator an opportunity to be ready with the next step of the story.¹⁸⁷

The uncoiled snake of the prologue is phallic, and *One*, as the next step in Kinsella's scheme, is a counterpart to the 'zero' stage of *NLD* in its exploration of male-figures from Kinsella's personal background and from the Irish past. 'Finistere' includes a version of the legendary first poem of Ireland, whose speaker Amergin Kinsella's notes link to the 'the fashioner, the finder' of the earlier poem 'Who is My Proper Art'; he is the 'genius, diviner,'¹⁸⁸ which also implicitly links him to Kinsella's description of himself as an intuitive Jungian type. Amergin voyages from the land of the dead and 'on the ocean of non-existence embodies the primal unity of all things.'¹⁸⁹ Kinsella's notes on Amergin's significance derive from Alwyn and Brinley Rees and, as Derval Tubridy has shown, H. D'Arbois de Jubainville's *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology* (1903). In a note from de Jubainville Kinsella writes of Amergin: 'coming from the regions of death, set his right foot for the first time on the soil of Ireland.'¹⁹⁰ Yet Kinsella's version of Amergin's poem significantly differs from the treatment in these sources and from its original in the *Book of Invasions*. He alters the declarative force of the series of 'I am' utterances typical of a 'creation incantation,'¹⁹¹ and instead poses the mysterious origins of creation:

Who
 is a breath
that makes the wind
that makes the wave
that makes this voice?

(*One* 15)

¹⁸⁷ *Celtic Heritage* 15.

¹⁸⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 13.

¹⁸⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 13. Kinsella's notes are from Alwyn and Brinley Rees's *Celtic Heritage*: 'Amairgen on the ocean of non-existence embodies the primeval unity of things. As such he has the power to bring a new word into being, and his poems are in the nature of creation incantations' 99.

¹⁹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 13. Kinsella's note comes from de Jubainville 140.

¹⁹¹ Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 13. Alwyn and Brinley Rees compare Amergin's poem to Śrī Krishna's declarations in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Celtic Heritage* 99.

Imperfection and dissatisfaction in Kinsella is the (recurrent) source of creative drive. Before the voyaging group land, Amergin 'sense[s] that minute imperfection again' and in another of the phallic images that will recur and amplify throughout the sequence 'A maggot of the possible/ wriggled out of the spine/ into the brain' (*One* 12). This drive toward creation and endeavour is mysterious, presided over in the primal imagination by a 'mild mother'

in whose yearning shadow
we erect our great uprights
and settle fulfilled
and build and are still
unsettled, [...]

(*One* 13)

The creative drive is unappeasable, but as in 'The Travelling Companion' biological in its relentlessness. In 'The Oldest Place' the unceasing necessity for onward advance is immemorial, driven by memory which is itself remembered. Kinsella combines different episodes of the landfalls in the *Book of Invasions* to evoke the archetypal pattern¹⁹² of quest and inevitable, foredoomed failure:

Year followed year.
The first skin blemishes appeared,
and it almost seemed we had been waiting for them.
The sickness and the dying began again.

(*One* 17)

As Brian John has written, mythological and personal history and Kinsella's 'persistent self-analysis' yield a knowledge no less dark than in *Wormwood*. The momentum of the achievement is toward adjustment to the revealed meanings and insights 'into the very processes of life itself.'¹⁹³ In '38 Phoenix Street' Kinsella combines four childhood memories: the first encounter as a baby with 'the other,' listening to a recording of John McCormack in that neighbouring boy's house (the house of the title), the neighbouring boy's father and his experience in World War I, and an overnight stay in the neighbour's house. The poem gathers details from earlier in the sequence, and the unity of the theme of 'sad fathers' and the

¹⁹² For a discussion of Kinsella's blending of the different invasions, see John, 'Imaginative Bedrock: Kinsella's *One* and the *Lebor Gabála Erenn*': 124.

¹⁹³ John, 'Imaginative Bedrock: Kinsella's *One* and the *Lebor Gabála Erenn*': 112.

image-clusters Kinsella orchestrates, imbues the ordinary with 'profound significance.'¹⁹⁴

Similarly, in 'Minstrel' the image of the creative power of coiled brooding recurs in a domestic scene in which Kinsella once again revisits his earlier self in the act of writing: 'bent like a feeding thing/ over my own source' (*One* 22). Poetry offers a momentary vision of earth ('eyes shutting and opening/ all over the surface') and the heavens in correspondence, 'A distant point of light/ winked at the edge of nothing' (*One* 23) but the vision dissipates with the father's knock on the window, an image of a more powerful and darkly nutrient source: 'My father looked in from the dark,/ my face black-mirrored in his' (*One* 23). 'His Father's Hands' follows this moment with conflict between son and father, mirroring each other again, this time in their obstinacy:

I drank firmly
and set the glass down between us firmly.
You were saying.

My father.
Was saying.

His finger prodded and prodded,
marring his point. Emphas-
emphasemphasis.

(*One* 23)

From the father's prodding finger the poem moves to memories of the grandfather's hands, at work and playing the fiddle. In the autobiographical sketch mentioned previously in connection with the preparatory stages of *NLD*, Kinsella's grandfather on his father's side is described as a 'bald, docile, stone-deaf man, playing a fiddle.'¹⁹⁵ The tune he plays is 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley,' and Kinsella incorporates these remembered details into 'His Father's Hands':

To his deaf, inclined head
he hugged the fiddle's body,
Whispering with the tune

with breaking heart

¹⁹⁴ John, 'Imaginative Bedrock: Kinsella's *One* and the *Lebor Gabála Erenn*': 124.

¹⁹⁵ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 11.

whene'er I hear
in privacy, across a blocked void,

the wind that shakes the barley.

(*One* 24)

Blood as a link with primal sources, as in 'Baggot Street Deserta,' is here part of both an impersonal biological and a personal psychological and social inheritance: 'The blood advancing/ – gorging vessel after vessel – / and altering in them/ one by one' (*One* 26). The memories and experiences out of which Kinsella forms '38 Phoenix Street' and 'His Father's Hands' in their relationship with the poems of primal experience in *One*, adapt what Jung describes as 'the secret of great art':¹⁹⁶

He who speaks in primordial images, lifts the transitory into the ever-enduring, transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, evokes the forces that have always enabled mankind to find refuge from peril and outlive the longest night.¹⁹⁷

The primordial is part of the matrix of 'significant reality.' Kinsella reads myth and sifts through personal experience for archetypal content. Mythic archetypes function as the fundamental source of meaning in Kinsella's pursuit of the Real: 'Archetypes = "the introspectively recognisable form of a priori psychic orderedness" → the way of detecting significance of an event or thing.'¹⁹⁸ In the Montreal panel discussion he elaborates on this note, and indicates how myth contributes to his drive to 'see things as they are and not otherwise':

I really only get interested in myth when it returns us to its fundamental roots in some kind of significant reality [...] a fiction which is ridiculous on the face of it may also

¹⁹⁶ *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* 82. Jacobi (24) also quotes this phrase.

¹⁹⁷ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17. Kinsella found this quotation from Jung in Jacobi 24. Jacobi prefaces the quotation by saying, 'As far as we can follow the creative process, it consists in activating the eternal symbols of mankind which lie dormant in the unconscious and in shaping and elaborating them to produce a finished work of art.' The Jung passage in full reads: 'Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthral and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever enduring. He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, and evokes in us all those beneficent forces that ever and anon have enabled humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night,' *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* 82.

¹⁹⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's note is from Jacobi 50, and is a quotation from Jung's essay 'Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle': 'The archetype is the introspectively recognizable form of a priori psychic orderedness.'

go back to the morality play, so to speak, that the psyche may have put on. Ridiculous that play may have been on stage but in fact it would be re-enacting a series of relationships and processes which are fundamental to our appreciation of reality on reality's own terms. [...] It is this kind of psychic root of the myth that is interesting, and seems to me still to function at precisely the same fundamental level in the creation of poetry, even in the modern world.¹⁹⁹

Myth helps toward the cultivation of the Real, which is a vision of 'reality on reality's own terms.' According to Jung, the archetypes 'represent or personify certain instinctive data of the dark, primitive psyche, the real but invisible roots of consciousness.'²⁰⁰ For Kinsella these 'roots' reach down into Irish pre-history: 'dark, primitive, the real invisible roots (Sen Mag).'²⁰¹

In *One* the series of phallic images are cumulative in effect and adapt 'the archetype's form [. . .] to the individual situation.'²⁰² At the end of 'His Father's Hands' the block of wood brings together the sequence's cluster of phallic images of standing stones, uprights and uncoiled snakes in a final irreducible image of hoarded and released imaginative and sexual vitality:

Extraordinary . . . The big block – I found it
years afterward in a corner of the yard
in sunlight after rain
and stood it up, wet and black:
it turned under my hands, an axis
of light flashing down its length,
and the wood's soft flesh broke open,
countless little nails
squirming and dropping out of it.

(*One* 27)

As an exemplum of Kinsella's Real, the image fuses personal memory with mythic consequence, the actual with the ideal: 'there's the allegorical level of the datum. And the block did exactly

¹⁹⁹ Kinsella, 'Ancient Myth and Poetry: A Panel Discussion' 14-15.

²⁰⁰ Jung, 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype' 160, quoted in Jacobi 41.

²⁰¹ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17. 'The Oldest Place' in draft form was called 'Sen Mag.' In a note Kinsella writes "Sen Mag – its opposite Mag Mell [?], the lonely plain," Kinsella Papers, box 14, folder 20. In 'The Oldest Place' these primordial sites are called the 'bare plain' and the 'stinking plain' (*One* 17).

²⁰² Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 17.

that as far as actuality is concerned – not that it matters, except to me.’²⁰³

A Technical Supplement (1976) contrasts art as entertainment and as instruction. As in *The Good Fight* appetite does not distinguish between moral values and sensory satisfaction, as the prologue from Denis Diderot puts it, between the work of ‘the philosopher and the flute player’ (*One* 30). As the title implies, *A Technical Supplement* guides the reader through a series of illustrations of art’s means and functions, as well as its various formal types, preceded as in *One*, with an italicised prologue evoking primal instinctual action toward an indeterminate but urgent goal.

The first numbered section presents the coercive methods of Enlightenment rationality as ‘insane.’ ‘William Skullbullet’ is the emblem of the artist who would impose rational structure on reality, and as Derval Tubridy has shown is based on the 18th century cartographer and anatomist William Petty. Ian Flanagan persuasively argues that this criticism of Enlightenment modes of categorization is an implicit criticism of Kinsella’s own former poetic methods.²⁰⁴ In Kinsella’s new paradigm of formal integrity, there is ‘no containing skin/ as we understand it’ (*One* 33); the parts are self-sufficient, discrete, but their role in the functioning whole is inviolable:

It would seem possible to peel the body asunder, [...]
Except that at the first violation
the body would rip into pieces and fly apart
with terrible spasms.

(*One* 33)

The connection between anatomy and poetry continues in section IV with the pain and damage of a knife wound, presented in a kind of close-up, a version of the psychic damage caused by the persistence of the pursuit of the Real. As early as ‘Clarence Mangan,’ Kinsella had presented poetry as self-surgery; here the reward for the endeavour is ‘true’ mimesis:

Persist.
Beyond a certain depth
it stands upright by itself
and quivers with borrowed life.

²⁰³ Kinsella, Haffenden 112.

²⁰⁴ Ian Flanagan, “‘Tissues of Order’: Kinsella and the Enlightenment Ethos,” in *Thomas Kinsella*, spec.

Persist.

And you may find
the buried well. [...]

(*One* 36)

Poem V presents an alternative to the same scene, with the penetration of the blade as tongue rendering the living body 'Inert' (*One* 37). The processing of living matter into other terms reaches its shocking peak as the speaker bids us 'enter this grove of beasts,' the abattoir of poem VI which bears the allusive name 'Swift's slaughterhouse' (*One* 37).²⁰⁵ The relationship between the literal and the figural is a crucial component of Kinsella's allegorical method. With regard to the slaughterhouse scenes, in which the tension between the literal and metaphoric is continually ready to tip over into the other, Kinsella remarked: 'And at the same time I hope it is more than what it is. The hideous detail is offered as it actually was, but the ending is also exactly as it was, where the extraneous matter is injected into the system of veins and arteries and the whole thing is transfused.'²⁰⁶

The speaker conducts the reader through the stages of the commercial preparation of meat. This unblinking presentation of the slaughtering process, with the animals 'dangling alive' even as they are stripped of hide, prompts in poem VII an ethical questioning of these brute realities and an art which would present them:

Is it all right to do this?
Is it an offence against justice
when someone stumbles away helplessly
and has to sit down
until her sobbing stops?

(*One* 39)

Eamon Grennan has written of the tonal sophistication of *A Technical Supplement*, the unobtrusive, colloquial phrasing and rhythms which allow the subject absorb the attention rather than 'signal[ling] their own presence as performance.'²⁰⁷ How language can register awful fact without crossing the nebulous line between delight and instruction is the 'technical' question addressed in poem VIII and indeed by the sequence as a whole:

issue of *Irish University Review* 31.1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 56.

²⁰⁵ Swift & Co, an American meatpacker based in Greeley, Colorado, was founded in the 1870s by Gustavus Swift. <http://www.willamette.edu/~fthompso/MgmtCon/McCallum.htm>

²⁰⁶ Kinsella, Fried: 19.

²⁰⁷ Eamon Grennan, "'Random Pursuit': Mining *One* and *A Technical Supplement*," *Thomas Kinsella*, spec. issue of *Tracks* 7 (1987): 56.

How to put it . . . without offence
– even though it is an offence,
monstrous in itself.

A living thing swallowing another.

(*One* 39)

Kinsella's technical achievement, as Grennan noted, is to register 'feeling that is without judgement,'²⁰⁸ in language that is 'always yearning to anatomise the actual.'²⁰⁹ In the second half of the sequence Kinsella presents various paradigms of technical procedure: acceptance of flaw (X) shaping and polishing (XI), 'hard attrition' and the value of adversity (XII), grinding, washing, sieving (XVIII). In XVI the pleasant retards real progress; advance entails

getting separated from one's habits
and stumbling onto another way. The beginning
must be inward. Turn inward. [...]

(*One* 45)

Kinsella in *Poems*, *Another September* and *Downstream* insisted that art 'forces' the recalcitrant world to yield to aesthetic manoeuvres. Section XXI evokes something of the later Kinsella's attitude to these earlier procedures:

The words

'Love', 'Truth', etc., offered with force
but self-serving, therefore ineffective.
A fading pose – the lonely prowl of the outcast.

(*One* 49)

The conventions of the earlier poetry derived from loneliness, which issued through other poets' voices: 'Borrowed glory/ his own despair' (*One* 49). The anatomical metaphors for artistic procedure climax in poem XXIII, in which the speaker describes the moment of encounter with the Real, a bodily knowledge of reality and its counterfeit forms, with which everything subsequent has been measured:

²⁰⁸ Grennan: 56.

²⁰⁹ Grennan: 57.

That day I woke
a great private blade
was planted in me from bowels to brain.
I lay there alive around it. When I moved
it moved with me, and there was no hurt.
I knew it was not going to go away.
I got up carefully, transfixed.

From that day forth I knew
what it was to taste reality
And not to; [.]

(*One* 51-52)

In *Peppercanister 7 Song of the Night* (1978), Kinsella's pursuit moves 'onward to the next shadow' (*One* 54). The sequence was going to be called 'Songs of the Psyche'²¹⁰ and as in the later *Peppercanister* which takes this title, the encounter with decisive experience with which *A Technical Supplement* ends, is the dominant theme. In the italicised introductory poem, a series of contrasts and contradictions are set up as the father figure carries the child home:

A stern moon-stare shed all over my brain
as he carried me, warm and chill,
homeward, abandoned, onward to the next shadow.

(*One* 54)

Kinsella imbues the ordinary with psychic overtones. The light of street lamps, the mother-moon, and Jung work together to create an atmosphere of portent, ominousness, and the deliberate drive toward understanding the dark environments of the Self conjured by the opening image of the first poem in the sequence 'C. G. Jung's "First Years": 'Dark waters churn amongst us/ and whiten against troublesome obstacles' (*One* 55). The encounter with 'troublesome obstacles' enlightens, a process illustrated in imagery drawn directly from Jung's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Kinsella uses Jung's first encounter with the anima figure, his nursemaid, a woman who became for Jung a symbol of 'the whole essence of womanhood,'²¹¹ to set up a poem which explores what Jung himself calls 'the vague uncertainties of the

²¹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 16, folder 15.

²¹¹ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, rev. edn., recorded and ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (1973; New York: Vintage, 1989) 8-9. See Tubridy 95 for a useful discussion of the Jungian sources of this poem.

night.²¹² To details drawn from Jung, her 'intimate warm ear,' 'the sallow loin of her throat,' Kinsella adds the musical theme which the title poem of the sequence will explore more fully²¹³:

A nurses's intimate warm ear
far in the past; the sallow loin of her throat;
and more – her song at twilight
as she dreamily (let us now suppose)
combined in her entrails
memories of womanly manipulations
with further detailed plans for the living flesh.²¹⁴

(One 55)

The imagery of the second section derives from incidents which altered Jung's attitude to the Christian religion. In his memoir Jung recalls the 'vague fears at night' of his childhood, and the first encounters with death, and the constant 'muted roar' of the Rhine Falls: 'Certain persons who had been around previously would suddenly no longer be there. Then I would hear that they had been buried, and that Lord Jesus had taken them to himself.'²¹⁵ To ward off his fears, Jung's mother taught him a prayer which likened children to chicks in Christ's care: 'although Lord Jesus did not like the taste, he ate them anyway, so that Satan would not get them.'²¹⁶ Kinsella melds Jung's 'first conscious trauma'²¹⁷ and earliest remembered dream, a vision of an enthroned phallus²¹⁸:

A Jesuit – a witchbat –

²¹² Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 9.

²¹³ The 'song at twilight' Kinsella evokes is perhaps Bingham and Molloy's 'Love's Old Sweet Song,' the theme and imagery of which are pertinent to *Song of the Night*: 'Once in the dear, dead days beyond recall,/ When on the world the mists began to fall,/ Out of the dreams that rose in happy throng,/ Low to our hearts love sang an old sweet song,/ And in the dusk where fell the firelight gleam,/ Softly it wove itself into our dream. [Chorus] Just a song at twilight, when the lights are low;/ And the flick'ring shadows softly come and go./ Though the heart be weary, sad the day and long,/ Still to us at twilight comes love's old song,/ Comes love's old sweet song. [Second stanza] Even today we hear love's song of yore,/ Deep in our hearts it swells forever-more./ Footsteps may falter, weary grow the way;/ Still we can hear it at the close of day./ So till the end, when life's dim shadows fall,/ Love will be found the sweetest song of all,' Don Gifford, with Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated*, revised and expanded edn. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 77.

²¹⁴ 'While my mother was away, our maid, too, looked after me. I still remember her picking me up and laying my head against her shoulder. She had black hair and an olive complexion, and was quite different from my mother. I can see, even now, her hairline, her throat, with its darkly pigmented skin, and her ear,' Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 8.

²¹⁵ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 9.

²¹⁶ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 10.

²¹⁷ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 10.

²¹⁸ '[...] a dream which was to preoccupy me all my life,' Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 11.

toiled with outspread sleeves down
the path from a wooded hilltop . . .
A pillar of skin
stared up dumb, enthroned
in an underground room . . .

(*One 55*)

Jung had met a Jesuit priest who to the child ‘looked like a man wearing women’s clothes’²¹⁹ and was filled with fear. Jung’s dream of the phallus became associated for him with Jesus and with the Jesuit. The significance of the event and the significance for Kinsella resides in what Jung goes on to say about this event:

At all events, the phallus of this dream seems to be a subterranean God “not to be named,” and such it remained throughout my youth, reappearing whenever anyone spoke too emphatically about Lord Jesus. Lord Jesus never became quite real for me, never quite acceptable, never quite lovable, for again and again I would think of his underground counterpart, a frightful revelation which had been accorded me without my seeking it.²²⁰

In Jung’s imagination Christ is replaced by an image more real and powerful. Religious feeling is subsumed within an older, more powerful primordial instinct. The post-Christian theme in Kinsella, which in *Downstream* was fundamentally concerned with the problem of ultimate value, finds in Jungian psychology an explanatory narrative, more comprehensive than the Christian which it contains, as in section III of *A Technical Supplement*, which compensates for loss of religious faith by transforming faith into immemorial impulse. In this process the fear of the night embodied in the bat-like Jesuit ‘shrank like a shadow’ (*One 55*). Jesus, who earlier had eaten the dead, is himself consumed, ‘Since when I have eaten Jesus . . . // and have assumed the throne’ (*One 56*). Kinsella transforms the loss of religious faith into a Jungian narrative of psychological empowerment.

‘Anniversaries’ continues this use of significant memory, this time Kinsella’s own. The first two sections, ‘1955,’ ‘1956,’ revisit Kinsella’s wedding, and his time combining the roles of daytime civil servant and night-time poet. Night is the time of poetry and dreams, and the time when the work of the day, the ‘emanations of government’ begin ‘metaphysically to bite’ (*One 59*). The ‘alternate’ versions of ‘1975’ envision the married couple as ravens hunting together. In

²¹⁹ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 10.

²²⁰ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 13.

the first version the closeness of their bond is evoked in the synchronised way they alight on 'the same outer branch' (*One* 59) and in their appreciation of the cornucopia of potential food before them. In the second the 'wide wheatfield breathing/ dust-gold' has become 'stubble' (*One* 60), and the Jungian dark side emerges as the couple's 'shadows raced flickering' (*One* 60) over the abundant 'mouse-fruit' now become frightened and resentful potential victims.

'Artists' Letters' returns to the earlier stage in the love relationship. The speaker comes across old love letters and is first 'embarrassed' but then 'stirred' (*One* 61). The foolishness is a rite of passage, valuable for its thrashing against the barriers of linguistic convention, for its acknowledgement of 'futility and waste/ in all their importance' (*One* 61), and for the recognition that 'desperate times' require 'no style' (*One* 61).

In 'Tao and Unfitness at Inistogue on the River Nore' Kinsella refigures the divisions and the sense of removal from an authentic relationship with reality of the early poetry in terms of an 'unfitness' which derives from awareness of disintegrating process. The poem is in three parts, 'Noon,' 'Afternoon,' and 'Nightfall,' and is interspersed with Taoist self-admonitions which encourage an attitude of physical and mental surrender to nature's processes. The admonition to 'Move, if you move, like water' recalls Yeats's 'Move most gently if move you must' from 'Long-legged Fly.'²²¹ The speaker's presence disturbs the natural order; what is required is an approach to 'reality on reality's terms': 'Respond. Do not interfere. Echo' (*One* 63). Kinsella captures the difficulties of 'being external to the situation'²²² in this juxtaposition of advice and awareness:

Be still, as though pure.

A brick, and its dust, fell.

(*One* 65)

For Jung, Tao is an answer to the relativism of personal viewpoint.²²³ It functions psychologically, he says, as 'a conscious way to unite what is divided.'²²⁴ Yet the West, philosophically and culturally, lacks a counterpart to the Chinese Tao's 'union of opposites through the middle path.'²²⁵ For Western man the Taoist 'middle way' corresponds to the 'task of uniting the opposites, his inner and outer reality – of consciously striving, in awareness of the primordial forces of nature, to shape his personality as a whole.'²²⁶

Awareness in Kinsella, though, also includes an awareness of history. In its recollection of

²²¹ Yeats 339.

²²² Fitzsimons: 73.

²²³ See Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* 207-08.

²²⁴ Jacobi 140, quoting Jung's *Golden Flower*.

²²⁵ Jacobi 140.

²²⁶ Jacobi 139.

historical violence associated with place, the poem is related to earlier poems such as 'A Country Walk,' and *The Táin*. Kinsella alludes to Irish historical and mythic bloodshed associated with fords as the holidaymakers pass a group of locals in a 'little Ford.' The use of a brand name in an epigonic relationship with a significant past is typical, as in 'A Country Walk' and *A Technical Supplement*.

Most specifically the association between place and violence continues the theme established in *One*. The holiday is haunted by the speaker's awareness of the struggles for possession of the place, and by what had occurred there. The village itself, 'perfectly lovely' though it is, in its 'sullenness' seems informed by the same awareness. The ruins of Woodstock ['once home of the Tighes' (*One* 64)] recall the 'vestigial chill' of 'King John's Castle,' which Kinsella evokes in a 'no-style' of seemingly pure notation:

A sapling, hooked thirty feet up
in a cracked corner, held out a ghost-green
cirrus of leaves. Cavities
of collapsed fireplaces connected silently
about the walls. Deserted spaces, complicated
by door-openings everywhere.

(*One* 65)

In the last section, 'Nightfall,' the 'drift' of the punt echoes and develops the drifting of the skiff in 'Downstream,' which was seized by the current and carried along. The tide and the river's flow cancel each other in a moment of fullness and calm:

We drifted, but stayed almost still.
The current underneath us
and the tide coming back to the full
cancelled in a gleaming clam, punctuated
by the plop of fish.

(*One* 66)

Yet as Brian John has noted, Kinsella's 'commitment, for all his being drawn to Taoist stillness and order, is to the incoherent and destructive nature of the temporal world.'²²⁷ This commitment is demonstrated by the avidity of observation Kinsella evokes as the speaker's attention moves to the water, and the intensity of its visible and invisible life:

²²⁷ John 188.

[...] the mayfly passed in a loose drift,
thick and frail, a hatch slow with sex,
separate morsels trailing their slack filaments,
olive, pale evening dun, imagoes, unseen eggs
dropping from the air, subimagoes, the river filled
with their nymphs ascending and excited trout.

(*One* 66)

The speaker's alienating awareness contrasts with the poacher who is 'in tune with the flow, handling the stream,' an intimate part of the processes of flow and decay and history. The speaker's awareness of these processes makes him unfit, if only 'marginally' so.²²⁸

Song of the Night, like 'Tao and Unfitness . . .' is set, for the most part, during a family outing, a camping holiday to Connemara. It begins in Philadelphia, however, in a prelude in which the sounds of the city are rendered in terms of an oceanic music 'without wave-rhythm/without breath-rhythm' (*One* 68). As if to release the 'terrible pressure' of the city's noise, the speaker reaches for 'the great atlas on the desk' and the far side of the Atlantic. The second part of the poem, 'Carraroe,' begins with sustained description of the tidal approach of the actual Atlantic, and the movement of water over a granite erratic. Observation, attention, is its own reward here; like the phenomena observed, the description is 'alive and in movement' (*One* 69). At night, as detail recedes, the water takes on a different character, it 'lap[s] at itself,' and the night-work of the ocean, another of Kinsella's images of erosion, 'applie[s] long leverage to the shore' (*One* 69).

Night requires artificial light, and the lamp the children and parents use as they perform the camping trip chore of washing dishes surrounds them in a halo described in the biological terms which recall the 'cell of nightmare' of the epilogue to *One*. Detailed description gives way to rhapsodic evocation in the last section of the poem. Though Derval Tubridy sees the music evoked in this passage as Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*, the direct reference is to Mahler's Symphony no.7, sometimes referred to as the 'Song of the Night.' The third movement of this symphony is titled 'Schattenhaft' ('like a shadow'). The music combines doubleness and singularity, reminding of Kinsella's bi-located life in the United States and Ireland, and the life of man and wife enduring and changing through the years together:

A new music came on the wind: string sounds hissing
mixed with a soft inner-ear roar

²²⁸ Fitzsimons: 73.

blown off the ocean; a persistent
tympanum double-beat (– ‘darkly expressive,
coming from the innermost depths. . .’) That old
body music. *Schattenhaft*. SONG OF THE NIGHT . . .
a long horn call, ‘a single note
that lingers, changing colour as it fades . . .’

(*One 71*)

As in *The Good Fight*, there are no interpretive passages appended to descriptions. The descriptions, and the quoted appraisals of Mahler’s music, assess even as they conjure the natural scene: ‘The bay – every inlet – lifted/ and glittered toward us in articulated light’ (*One 71*). *Song of the Night* does not end on this note of fullness. Typically, the end of the poem emblematises the onset of unease, and division, the return of hunger captured by the harsher music of a bird breaking off from the dark mass.

A part of the mass
grated and tore, cranking harshly,
and detached and struggled upward
and beat past us along the rocks,
bat-black, heron-slow.

(*One 71*)

Yet Kinsella’s poetry has by now prepared for the purposeful reception of this moment. It is the re-establishment of disorder as part of the unceasing cycle of loss and creative recuperation.

Chapter 5

And I always remembered/ who and what I am

Song of the Night ends with an emblem of the re-establishment of 'the minute imperfection' which drives the creative process. In *The Messenger* (1978), Kinsella's elegy for his father, the creative process as recuperative reaches its most sustained expression and its most redemptive meaning. The poem concerns the effect of the continuous thwarting of the father's 'high and punishing ideals,'¹ and in this respect echoes and has bearing upon the son's experience as an artist. The theme is established in the introductory poem, as the speaker describes the effect of the father's death in the immediate aftermath of the funeral: 'For days I have wakened and felt immediately/ half sick at something' (BF 3). The unease derives from 'more than mere Loss,' and regret for 'what [the father] missed,' which are 'natural' reactions. More disturbing is the intimation of 'Something to discourage goodness' (BF 3). The father's experience of frustrated ideals produced a debilitating foreknowledge of failure. In an italicised section of dream-like vision the father's quashed goodness becomes visible as the squalor of the conditions within which it persisted assumes a finished pattern: '*A dead egg glimmers – a pearl in muck/ glimpsed only as the muck settles*' (BF 3).²

In his reading of *The Psychology of C.G. Jung*, Kinsella was drawn to a footnote which is significant for *The Messenger* (1978), *Songs of the Psyche* (1985) and *St Catherine's Clock* (1987): 'The crystalline lattice determines what forms are possible; the environment decides which of these possibilities will be realized.'³ *The Messenger* embodies the expanded scope of the poetic act in Kinsella in its inclusion of the social and historical issues and forces surrounding a 'given human being'⁴ from the past. It explores and illustrates how the social tenor of the 1930s and 1940s in Ireland impinged in a particular and personal instance, and provides an insight into the familial and social origins of Kinsella's disappointment, against which the artist offers the countermeasure of his poem.

The first of the poem's two parts recollects John Kinsella's last political struggle, with the 'impulse/ at its tottering extreme' (BF 4). Alongside this, Kinsella weaves memories of the 'thoughtful delegated word' of a mourner at the funeral ('"His father before him . . . Ah, the barge captain . . . / A valued connection. He will be well remembered"' (BF 4)), and the 'half

¹ PBS Bulletin 17.

² In draft form the introductory poem is even more explicit in its treatment of the theme of disappointment: 'For days I have wakened and felt immediately/ Half sick for something's sake: a remote worry/ In my own meat. Hour follows hour/ but my shoulders are chilled with/ expectation of disappointment or insult,' Kinsella Papers, box 17, folder 13.

³ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. The footnote is in Jacobi 43, and concerns the similarities between Jung's theory of the development of the archetype and the quoted sentence, from J. Killian's *Der Kristall*.

⁴ Kinsella, Haffenden 102.

fierce force' of John Kinsella as he confronted the setbacks he eventually had to 'stomach.' In the decades before and after Independence in 1922, life for the majority of Dublin's working class was a precarious mix of desultory male employment and female financial resourcefulness in both providing and managing the limited family funds. As the passage quoted suggests, at a time when neither the pawnshop nor the St. Vincent de Paul Society were ever very far from the door,⁵ both Kinsella's grandfather and, in turn, his father, managed to secure what were regarded among the local community as enviable positions with Guinness's Brewery. The grandfather worked as a barge-pilot on the tugs that ran between the brewery jetty and the sea-going vessels in Dublin Port; John Kinsella, found work as a cooper.⁶

This first section communicates the energy and commitment which led to John Kinsella's founding of the first union in 'that good family firm,' the 'hitherto impregnable fortress of Guinness's,'⁷ shortly after the Second World War, and the spirit-sapping, barely tolerable consequences which the collusion of clerical and managerial interests eventually forced upon him:

In his own half fierce force
he lived! And stuck
the first brand shakily

under that good family firm,
formed their first union,
and entered their lists.

Mason and Knight
gave ground in twostep,
manager and priest disappeared

and reappeared under each other's hats;
the lumpenproletariat
stirred truculently and settled;

⁵ Kevin C. Kearns, *Dublin Tenement Life: An Oral History* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1994; paperback edition, 1996) 29-30.

⁶ Kinsella, Haffenden 100.

⁷ Workers Union of Ireland description of Guinness's quoted in Sarah Ward-Perkins, ed., *Select Guide to Trade Union Records: with details of Unions Operating in Ireland to 1970* (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1996) 112. Kinsella's note expresses how ludicrously late in Labour politics this was: 'in the 1940s!' Kinsella Papers, box 17, folder 8.

in jigtime, to the ever popular
Faith of Our Fathers, he was high and dry.
And in time he was well remembered.

(BF 4-5)

The cover of the original Peppercanister edition of *The Messenger* appropriates the public emblems of these conflicts for a private settling of accounts and pays tribute, as both Seamus Heaney and W.J. McCormack have noted, from the artist/son to the worker/father, replacing exactly the pious iconography of the Irish Catholic magazine *Sacred Heart Messenger* (papal keys, Church insignia, the figure of Jesus) with the symbols of the altogether different affiliations of Kinsella son and father (the Guinness harp, the plough and stars of Irish socialism, the figure of Mercury/Hermes, messenger of the gods).⁸

John Kinsella's struggles and combative persistence, and the heart disease which killed him, are presented at the end of the first section in a heart-shaped concrete poem of the Kinsella 'family crest, with motto'⁹, an emblem which presents the poet's own determined artistic struggle with disappointment as an inherited part of a family legacy:

A brave leap	On bright prospects
in full heart	sable: a slammed
into full stop.	door

Vaunt and check.
Cursus inter-
ruptus.

(BF 6)

The disappointment Kinsella explores in *The Messenger* has social origins, but the effects are evoked in Jungian terms. Unrealised potential and inevitable disappointment results in a self-protective 'turning away' (BF 7) from even potentially positive experience. The frustrations forced upon John Kinsella by social and political circumstance find artistic echo in Kinsella's own 'turn[ing] away in refusal' from the 'limited' art characterised in *Littlebody* (2000) as the 'hissing assemblies./ The preference for the ease of the spurious/ – the measured poses and stupidities' (CP 352).¹⁰ Kinsella refuses the compromised vision of reality offered to the artist

⁸ Seamus Heaney, 'A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on the Irish Literary revival,' *Irish Studies* 1 ed. P.J. Drudy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980) 18-19. McCormack, 'Politics or Community': 75.

⁹ Tubridy 109, quoting correspondence with Kinsella.

¹⁰ These lines were first used in *Madonna* (Peppercanister 16, 1991) 13.

by an audience seeking confirmation rather than challenge¹¹:

I turned away in refusal,
holding a handful of high grass
sweet and grey to my face.

(CP 352)

The gesture reveals its full tragic import, and source in Kinsella's disappointment with the artist's fate in a society unresponsive to art's prerogatives, when his comments on Ó Rathaille's fate and response to that fate are recalled: Ó Rathaille, Kinsella says, 'turn[ed] away from an impossible present' (DT 33). The 'turning away' in *The Messenger* results in an absorption of disappointment. Kinsella follows Jung's description of the formation of a 'Cannibal'/Caliban-like familiar in which dormant, frustrated ideals become a shadow-figure who 'haunts' the self, and occasionally erupts as testiness and ill temper. Yet the 'eggseed Goodness' (BF 8) within John Kinsella persists, and the son movingly acknowledges this inheritance, and attempts in (and through) the elegy to carefully 'ease [the father] of it' (BF 8).

Fundamental 'decency' is inviolable, incorruptible, and Kinsella associates it in *The Messenger* with his father's political activism and struggle for social justice. An early example of Kinsella's concern with issues of social and political justice occurs in a review of a radio play by James Plunkett about the labour leader Jim Larkin. Kinsella wrote, '[t]he last Beatitude is the most triumphant: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice for they shall have their fill." It is Justice, no mere abstraction but something worth starving for, which is the "Hero" of 'Big Jim'.'¹² The beatitude evoked is in his poetry shown to be perpetually undermined by experience, which teaches that the impulse toward good though 'valuable,/ . . . is of no avail' (BF 5). Despite this, 'nothing can befoul' (BF 15) the pearl of goodness and decency, as manifested in John Kinsella on the campaign trail for the Labour Party in the 1930s¹³:

Goodness is where you find it.
Abnormal.
A pearl.

¹¹ In 'Complaint,' and 'Echo' in *Citizen of the World* (2000) Kinsella lists the fundamentals and imperatives of literary endeavour, and the context which has created the need for them: 'The times were bad/ and we were in bad hands./ There was nothing to be done,/ only record'; 'Thou shalt not entertain,/ charm or impress;/ consider the response/ or the work of others; confirm viewpoints/ satisfy expectations,/ leave crucial issues confused,/ or impose order' (CP 342).

¹² Kinsella, 'A Play about Big Jim,' review of *Radio Éireann* broadcast of *Big Jim*, by James Plunkett, *Irish Press* 12 May 1956: 6.

¹³ Kinsella's image of the pearl here once again recalls Eliade's analysis of this symbol as 'ultimate reality.' See Chapter 1.

A milkblue
blind orb.

Look in it:

It is outside the Black Lion, in Inchicore.
A young man. He is not much more than thirty.
He is on an election lorry, trying to shout.

(BF 9)

The achievement of political independence had not affected to any substantial degree the socio-economic circumstances of working-class areas such as Kilmainham and Inchicore. The separatist movement had, in the main, viewed the ills of Irish society as having their *fons et origo* in the connection with England.¹⁴ Energies which had been directed toward the redress of this primary imbalance had, during the first years of the Irish Free State, concentrated upon the establishment of a stable, viable political entity rather than on any re-thinking or overhaul of social structure itself. Such priorities reflected not only the volatility of the times but also the essential conservatism of the political grouping, Cumann na nGaedheal, which had formed the first decade of governments in the Free State, as well as the social outlook of those sections of Irish society from which it drew support, not least among these, the Catholic Church.¹⁵ The accession to power in 1932 of Eamon de Valera and the Fianna Fáil party did little to change this particular aspect of Irish life.

The Labour Party and the trades unions, which most obviously represented the interests of those sections of society eager to gain from an organised commitment to issues of social justice, had, for a number of reasons, found themselves marginal to the nascent state's major preoccupations. Labour had subsumed, under the general thrust towards the separatist goal, its distinct social objectives and, in order that unambiguous views be expressed on the question of national self-determination, had abstained from participation in the 1918 Dáil elections. Such sacrifices in the name of 'the national question' had profound long-term effects on Labour's ability to contest future elections. When Labour did perform well, in 1922, for instance, internal disputes concerning the precise nature of the Labour standpoint and inheritance ensured that such success was a temporary phenomenon.¹⁶ Furthermore, the *de facto* acceptance of the

¹⁴ Peter Berresford Ellis, *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972; second edition, Pluto, 1996) 243-246. See also Donald Akenson, *A Mirror to Kathleen's Face: Education in Independent Ireland 1922-60* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975) 25-26.

¹⁵ Brown 35-37.

¹⁶ Brown 91-92.

Treaty, when Labour entered the Dáil in 1922, had the effect of alienating a substantial constituency potentially amenable to a Labour vision of society. Donal Nevin has made the point that the partition of Ireland, consequent to the terms of the Treaty, also played a significant role in the diminution of the force of the socialist presence in Irish politics. With Belfast and its environs the main industrial location on the island, the political division significantly reduced the size and the potential influence of the working class electorate.¹⁷

Even allowing for the effects of such disadvantages, Labour would not have been the automatic party of choice for much of this supposedly amenable populace, and for reasons quite divorced from the politics of either the Independence struggle or the Civil War. *The Messenger* illustrates the influence the Catholic Church wielded in the new state, contributing to organised labour's failure to harness potential support, whether as trades unions or as the Labour Party itself, among a piously observant working class:

The Oblate Fathers was packed.
I sat squeezed against a cold pillar.
A bull-voice rang among the arches. [...]

and the angry words echoed among
the hanging lamps, off the dark golden walls,
telling every Catholic how to vote.

He covered my hand with his
and we started getting out
in the middle of Mass past everybody.

Father Collier's top half in the pulpit
in a muscular black soutane and white lace
grabbed the crimson velvet ledge

– thick white hair, glasses,
a red face, a black mouth
shouting Godless Russia at us.

(BF 9-10)

¹⁷ Donal Nevin, 'Labour and the Political Revolution,' in *The Years of the Great Test 1926-39*, ed. Francis MacManus (Dublin: Mercier Press, 1967; 1978) 55.

According to J.H. Whyte, such condemnations from the pulpit were a prominent feature of Catholic Church pastoralism during the 1930s. This was provoked not only by the Church's fundamental antipathy to socialism, but also by a perceived need to respond to events outside Ireland amid fears of what the discontent fomented by the worsening effects of the worldwide Depression might portend.¹⁸ An ingrained piety and deference to authority, particularly Church authority, proved anxieties about the susceptibility of an economically disaffected Irish working class to communistic or socialistic influence unfounded.¹⁹ Austin Clarke, in his second volume of autobiography, *A Penny in the Clouds*, evoked the spirit of the times:

The new Penal Age had begun. During the late 'Twenties and 'Thirties Catholic Action spread rapidly and the religious minority was impugned as non-Catholic. The names and addresses of all Freemasons were published threateningly in a Catholic periodical. Much, also, was done to widen the differences between North and South because the tariffs were bringing quick fortunes to industrialists. Inflamed by a sermon given in the Jesuit Church, at Gardiner Street, a Dublin mob marched through the streets to Liberty Hall, the Labour Headquarters, singing 'Faith of our Fathers'. [. . .] Sometime later, a group of young Leftists, not more than twenty in number, were denounced weekly in a religious newspaper. Old women and children knelt in prayer on the pavement outside the railings of the basement in which the offenders held their meetings.²⁰

Church influence, however, did not only come to bear upon the decisions of the politically non-affiliated members of society and on zealous defenders of the Faith such as Catholic Action,²¹ it could also penetrate to the heart of organised labour itself. In a wider discussion of the Left's failure to gain a firmer foothold in the politics and life of the Irish Free State, the historian F.S.L. Lyons, after noting the effects of Civil War politics, makes note also of 'the unwillingness of working-class leaders to fall foul of the Church by openly espousing socialist doctrines.'²²

¹⁸ J.H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923-1979*, 2d ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980; paperback, 1984) 89-91. Reverend Dr. Collier, bishop of Ossory, in a New Year's pastoral in 1933 said that 'no Catholic can be a communist; no communist can be a Catholic.' Akenson 94. The context of Akenson's use of the quotation from Rev. Collier being that nobody thought it beyond a bishop's competence to make such a comment.

¹⁹ For a discussion of the 'authoritarian strain' in Irish culture see Whyte 21-23; and Brown 13-20.

²⁰ Austin Clarke, *A Penny in the Clouds* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1968; Dublin: Moytura Press, 1990) 62.

²¹ Kinsella evokes the continuance of the moral monitoring of this organization in *One Fond Embrace* (1988): 'Catholic Action next door:/ the double look/ over the half curtain' (FCC 1).

²² F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1963; 1985) 673.

Fianna Fáil, after its entry into the Dáil in 1927, and most especially with its victory in the general election of 1932 and the absolute majority gained in the snap election of 1933, proved itself more capable of mobilizing electoral support from among the state's disadvantaged, as Joseph Lee remarks successfully 'capturing [. . .] the emotional resentment of the excluded underdog.'²³ The potency of the Fianna Fáil agenda in the 1930s, Kieran Allen maintains, lay in the conjunction of the 'vague aspirations' of anti-partition rhetoric with the economic nationalism which promised 'to increase industrial growth and to provide housing, social welfare and education benefits for all.'²⁴ Allied to this, Fianna Fáil policy strongly reflected the party's deeply Catholic ethos, and the belief that 'the fusion of Catholicism and Irish nationalism could produce a unique society constructed around social justice.'²⁵ To illustrate his point Allen quotes Eamon de Valera's refutation of the charge of communist sympathies within the Fianna Fáil agenda: 'There was an Irish solution that had no reference to any other country; a solution that came from our traditional attitude to life that was Irish and Catholic. That was the solution they were going to stand for as long as they were Catholics.'²⁶

Part of the 'emotional appeal' of Fianna Fáil during the 1930s has been located by Joseph Lee in precisely this aspect of 'moral uplift' which its avowedly Catholic justifications gave to material strivings: 'A secret of de Valera's success was his uncanny ability to caress the feelings of his followers in so feline a way that they could, to crudely adapt [Seamus] Heaney, "Talk Christ and think money".'²⁷ With de Valera at its helm, Fianna Fáil was to remain in power until the election of 1948, giving, in Kinsella's words, 'a total colour to my beginnings.'²⁸ In its journey backwards through John Kinsella's life, *The Messenger* literally visits these beginnings, presenting his own conception:

It is an August evening, in Wicklow.

It is getting late. They have tussled in love.

They are hidden, near the river bank.

They lie face up in the grass, not touching,

head close to head, a woman and her secret husband.

A gossamer ghost arrows and hesitates

²³ J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989; 1995) 183.

²⁴ Allen 8.

²⁵ Allen 23.

²⁶ Allen 23-24, quoting de Valera in the *Irish Independent*, 5 October 1931.

²⁷ Lee 542. Professor Lee is adapting Heaney's 'My people think money/ And talk weather.' From 'Triptych' section II, 'Sibyl,' *Field Work* (London: Faber, 1979) 13.

²⁸ Kinsella in *One Fond Embrace*, Ó Mórdha documentary.

out of the reeds, and stands in the air above them
insect-shimmering, and settles on a bright
inner upturn of her dress. The wings

close up like palms. The body, a glass worm,
is pulsing. The tail-tip winces and quivers:

I *think* this is where I come in . . .

(BF 11)

The significance for Kinsella's poetry of the 'colouring' given by the conditions into which he was born and reared, comes when we try to account for the fact that, from *Nightwalker* on, Kinsella's poetry is replete with Irish social and historical detail. The poetry he produced nearer to the time of the actual conditions portrayed and examined in the later work, however, the Ireland of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s is remarkable for its attempt to achieve a kind of authorless anonymity, and its almost total disregard for the Irish social moment.²⁹ Yet as I have shown, disappointment as a theme pervades the poetry Kinsella produced in the 1950s. In *The Messenger*, *Songs of the Psyche*, *St Catherine's Clock* and *Out of Ireland*, Kinsella portrays the onset of this disappointment within the conditions prevailing in the particular section of society into which he was born, the 'omphalos of scraps' into which he found himself 'dropped.'³⁰

The Messenger attempts a redress to the effect of predictable disappointment, the doomed foreknowledge of failure. In the poem the separateness of the family and community, and the knowledge of their perpetually frustrated potential, can give a sweetness to the victories achieved against the prevailing darkness. In its chronologically backward 'progress' into the past Kinsella's father becomes again a young man in the uniform of his first job; for a moment the dark 'shut off' nature of the family's life does not matter and the world seems to beckon:

Deeper. The room where they all lived
behind the shop. It is dark here too – shut off
by the narrow yard. But it doesn't matter:

It is bustling with pleasure.
a new messenger boy
stands there in uniform, with shining belt!

²⁹ Think of Kinsella's comment to Peter Orr in 1962, 'I suppose my favourite poet is in fact Anon.,' Kinsella, Orr 108.

He is all excitement: arms akimbo,
a thumb crooked by the elegant pouch,
shoes polished, and a way to make in the world.

(BF 14)

The poem's form acts as a counter to the power of disappointment, and to the conditions the father endured, working backward toward hope, with the father a young man, like Stephen Dedalus at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Kinsella says, 'poised for flight.'³¹ The chronology is 'hoodwinking, ambivalent'³² and the figure of Mercury who presides over the poem captures this ambivalence. Kinsella's notes on Mercury/Hermes describes an 'impish, teasing, diabolical, wily god of revelation (Hermes), hoodwinking, droll, inexhaustibly inventive; insinuations, intriguing ideas and schemes, ambivalent, malicious; BUT also with highest spiritual qualities.'³³ Like the story of John Kinsella's life as it unfolds backwards, 'Mercury is the serpent that fertilizes, kills & devours itself, completing a circle, and brings itself to birth again.'³⁴

As *The Messenger* reveals, John Kinsella's political convictions ensured that his eldest son was aware, from an early age, of the dominant forces in Irish life and the events taking shape in the world at large. As Kinsella later recalled:

My father was a very great reader, a very concerned person. He was a member of the Left Book Club, and had all the lively books of the thirties. It would certainly be impossible in his company to miss what was going on, that a world war was developing and that social issues of various calibres were involved.³⁵

Yet perhaps it is from this larger sense of things, evoked retrospectively in this description of his father, that Kinsella's view of Irish subjects as 'limiting' derived, as well as from the particular social realities of the Ireland of his childhood. The contrast between the macrocosm and the microcosm which emerges ironically in the 'Settings' section of *Songs of the Psyche*:

In the second school we had Mr Browne.
He had white teeth in his brown man's face.

³⁰ Kinsella, Fried: 9.

³¹ Kinsella Papers, box 17, folder 13.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kinsella Papers, box 17, folder 13.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Kinsella, Haffenden 101.

He stood in front of the black board
and chalked a white dot.

‘We are going to start
decimals.’

I am going to know
everything.

(BF 19)

The images in *Songs of the Psyche*, and throughout *Blood and Family*, resonate with their previous incorporations in Kinsella’s work: the white dot recalls the zero and egg imagery of *NLD*; the child-Kinsella rolls plasticine (‘marla’) into a snake, recalling *NLD* and *One*. ‘Invocation’ captures the imaginative challenge Kinsella sets himself: ‘we implore – the subsequent/ bustling in the previous’ (BF 23), a line which echoes the preparatory drafts for *NLD*: ‘each previous thing remains inside the subsequent.’³⁶ *Songs of the Psyche*, like *NLD* and *One*, offers the child’s vision from the adult’s perspective. The connection with *NLD* is reinforced when considering that in its Peppercanister version the sequence was prefaced by a near-quotation from ‘hesitate, cease to exist’: ‘By the five wounds of Christ/ I struggle toward/ I had never been/ so deeply uplifted . . .’³⁷

In ‘Invocation’ judging and judgement are both reprehensible and necessary. Kinsella evokes Matthew 12: 36 in an appeal to the tri-formed muse/goddess, the ‘enabling feminine’ who once more presides over things: ‘Judge not./ But judge’ (BF 23). This paradoxical request for un-moralising discrimination captures the passionate detachment that *Songs of the Psyche* achieves. Both the irony and the emotional charge in the child’s ‘I am going to know everything’ derives from the ‘subsequent’ perspective, by what Peter Denman calls ‘the overall retrospective perception which has arrived at an accommodation with its ignorance.’³⁸ The accommodation is also with the disappointments accrued with the experiences, historical and social, related in the poems which follow, such as ‘Bow Lane.’

In the twentieth century the Kilmainham area, and Kilmainham Gaol in particular, played a significant role during the turbulent years of the Rising, War of Independence and Civil War; the Gaol serving as both prison and place of execution. In the vicinity of Bow Lane, John

³⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 16.

³⁷ *Songs of the Psyche* 6. See John 203.

³⁸ Peter Denman, ‘Significant Elements: *Songs of the Psyche* and *Her Vertical Smile*,’ in *Thomas Kinsella*, spec. issue of *Irish University Review* 31.1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 103.

Kinsella's childhood home, on Easter Monday morning, 1916, four Irish Volunteers under Lieutenant William O'Brien engaged an advance party of the 3rd Royal Irish Regiment of the British Army. As part of the assault on the South Dublin Union – a 52 acre enclosed site which in former times had been occupied by James's Street Workhouse and which today (2005) is occupied by St. James's Hospital – Eamonn Ceannt, a signatory of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic and a Commandant in the Irish Volunteers, had ordered O'Brien and the four men to position themselves at the corner of Old Kilmainham/Mount Brown and Brookfield Road. After the initial exchange the British Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel R.L. Owens, deployed troops inside the Royal Hospital Kilmainham (the oldest public building in the city after Dublin Castle), which was at the time the headquarters of the British Commander-in-Chief. Under fire from a Lewis gun on the roof of the Hospital, which passed over the houses of Bow Lane, the insurgents were forced to retreat.³⁹ In the Kinsella house in Bow Lane, coincidentally also in 1916, the uncle for whom Thomas Kinsella is named died of cancer:

They kept Uncle Tom's painting
hanging in there, in a black frame
– a steamer with three funnels,
and TK painted on the foam.

He died in here in 1916
of cancer of the colon. My father heard him
whispering to himself: 'Jesus,
Jesus, let me off.' But nothing worked.

(BF 22)

Brian John's point concerning Kinsella's use of details from childhood and past experience in the second of the 'Settings' poems, 'Phoenix Street,' applies as much to 'Bow Lane' and elsewhere in *Blood and Family*, with the details 'implying the inevitability of disappointment and loss.'⁴⁰ For Kinsella poetry is 'a form of significant reality processed in advance for the understanding.'⁴¹ In interview, prose, and the poems themselves, he consistently refers to the 'facts' and 'particulars.'⁴² In *The Messenger*, *Songs of the Psyche*, and *St Catherine's Clock*, the poems of Kinsella's mature aesthetic, 'facts' and 'particulars' are based

³⁹ Max Caulfield, *The Easter Rebellion* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1963; 1995) 50-53, 76-78.

⁴⁰ John 202.

⁴¹ Kinsella, Haffenden 113.

⁴² See Haffenden, Fried, O'Driscoll.

on 'significant memory, on data that refuse to go away,'⁴³ with 'significant' glossed as that 'which will bother us all equally.'⁴⁴ Peter Denman remarks that Kinsella's Peppercanisters as individual units proceeding toward a larger whole owe a debt to Pound's *Cantos*, but argues that William Carlos Williams is the most prominent formal influence on the sequences collected in *Blood and Family*.⁴⁵ Though Denman notes the experiential differences between the two poets, the similarities reside in the use of short lines, and 'the sense of a continually invented form.'⁴⁶ The 'particular' as invoked by Kinsella has the same functional importance as in Williams's *Paterson*, the means through which wider significance can be made:

To make a start,
out of particulars
and make them general, [. . .]⁴⁷

Kinsella speaks of Williams as, along with Pound, 'having opened up particular lines of style.' He gleaned from Williams's style an attitude to material reality and systematic ordering which informs the vision of history in *Out of Ireland* and *St Catherine's Clock*. Williams revealed, he says, the importance of 'a kind of creative relaxation in the face of complex reality' and of 'remain[ing] open, "prehensile", not rigidly committed.'⁴⁸ The language of Kinsella's mature style is, as David Lloyd has written, 'characterized by extreme compression and an irony that infuses almost every line,' an astringent aesthetic that 'hint[s] at reserves of meaning underneath.'⁴⁹ In *Blood and Family* these reserves are, among other things, historical and social. In 'Bow Lane' the historical significance of the date '1916' is not remarked upon in any discursively explicit way; the year of the Easter Rising alone is considered enough to enfold the private tragedy within the public. Such aesthetic reserve permeates *The Messenger*, *Songs of the Psyche* and *St Catherine's Clock*; which revisit the 'established personal places'⁵⁰ of the Kilmainham/Inchicore of his childhood. The familial and social settings and circumstances in the poems abound with instances where the private and the public mingle silently, allusively and undemonstratively.

⁴³ Kinsella, Fried: 7.

⁴⁴ Kinsella, Haffenden 113.

⁴⁵ Denman: 101.

⁴⁶ Denman: 101.

⁴⁷ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems* ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions, 1985) 259.

⁴⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 106.

⁴⁹ David Lloyd, review of *Citizen of the World* (Peppercanister 22) and *Littlebody* (Peppercanister 23) *World Literature Today* 1 Jan. 2002; 23 January 2005

<http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc1.asp?docid=1G1:86170583>

⁵⁰ *Personal Places*, Peppercanister 14 (1990) 25.

The charge of solipsism, of the merely private and personal concern which Kinsella had attempted to overcome through the apparent objectivity provided by a formalist aesthetic, is guarded against in these poems by the principle of the 'absolutely essential data,'⁵¹ and by Kinsella's belief that behind the entire process of excavating 'significant detail,' the Real within experience, there is an 'allegorical' impulse at work: 'The obsession with fact, with specific individual data, wouldn't seem to me to make much sense unless it had some allegorical drive behind it. Experience by itself, however significant, won't do.'⁵²

In the sequences collected in *Blood and Family* and *From Centre City* (1994) the pursuit of the Real is 'allegorical.' The response to 'all the significant circumstances of his time and place,'⁵³ as he remarked of Aogán Ó Rathaille, is contingent upon the wider significance of what Kinsella calls 'the plot,' the drive to understand the 'point of the [life] process.'⁵⁴ In this work he explores the potential inherent in details from the everyday-familiar world, the world of family and friends, of school and work, to reverberate across the personal and social and historical dimensions into the ghostly dimension of the word 'familiar.' Work such as *St Catherine's Clock* and *Poems from Centre City* (1990) conduct this exploration not in a self-conscious Derridean free play of signification,⁵⁵ but in ways crucial to Kinsella's own sense of what the artist is here for in the first place. The function of the artist, Kinsella says, is to find an adequate response to actuality, to what he calls 'the facts,'⁵⁶ 'the particulars' of the time and place in which, as a result of 'accident,' the artist happens to find him or herself.⁵⁷ This response to the 'facts' of his own circumstance includes, for Kinsella, the historical dimension: 'that body of interlocking accident'⁵⁸; and is not only the key to a reading of Kinsella's work but also an ethical stance which functions as a structural device enabling the work to be achieved. In Kinsella's pursuit of the Real, however, the integrity of accident *as* accident must be maintained. Art, as described in 'A Portrait of the Artist,' is 'A jewel of process' in which the fleeting and 'fugitive' is 'held fast, exact in its 'accident' (FCC 29).

The limit required for what would otherwise be an unmanageable superabundance is provided by 'reality on reality's terms.' Despite the privileged position given to 'accident,' the parameters guiding the work are not arbitrary and are justified by Kinsella on the grounds that they derive from the choices made by perceptive processes, consciously and unconsciously, through the different stages of life:

⁵¹ Kinsella, Fried: 17.

⁵² Kinsella, Haffenden 104.

⁵³ Kinsella, *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 402.

⁵⁴ Kinsella, Fitzsimons: 75.

⁵⁵ See Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,' *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 280.

⁵⁶ Kinsella, Haffenden 102-3.

⁵⁷ Kinsella, Fried: 9.

⁵⁸ Kinsella, Fried: 9.

When you are young and staring intently at things, there is a choice afoot, as to what you are staring at. Ninety-nine percent of the universe is edited out of existence, so that you can relate intensely to what you are learning. [. . .] but the process of existing, of passing through the various stages, exerts a certain orderly control over the whole thing.⁵⁹

Despite the self-governing Kinsella ascribes to the process, *Songs of the Psyche* shows the forces exercised over consciousness by external powers. The 'staring intently' in 'Settings' is circumscribed by the specific external orderings of the Ireland of his upbringing:

I sat by myself in the shed
and watched the draught
blowing the papers
around the wheels of the bicycles.

Will God judge
our most secret thoughts and actions?
God will judge
our most secret thoughts and actions
and every idle word that man shall speak
he shall render an account of it
on the Day of Judgement.

(BF 20)

The rhetorical reserve of the mature Kinsella aesthetic is infused with an historical sense, which can embrace accident, coincidence and the serendipitous detail, as well as a sense of social grievance for the 'lives bitter with hard bondage' of the community into which he was born. Kinsella's practice finds analogy in the work of Paul Ricoeur. The individual subject, Ricoeur believes, 'finds itself in a world whose meaning largely precedes its own voluntary initiatives [. . .] the subject's retrieval of itself and of meaning requires a 'detour' through the objective structures of culture, religion, society and language.'⁶⁰

Ricoeur's 'detour' (which must be made through the pre-existing, objective structures with which the human subject has been presented in order that an authentic and satisfying

⁵⁹ Kinsella, Fried: 15.

⁶⁰ Richard Kearney, Prefatory note to an interview with Paul Ricoeur, in *Dialogues with Contemporary*

relation to self and to the world can be achieved) echoes a statement Kinsella made in 1988:

If we are dropped into some ‘omphalos of scraps,’ we can make the best out of it, if we are able. But as to where it happens or what it consists of, we have no choice. That is where I believe the historical sense takes on importance. It is something that came late in my own case. We have to look back and make sense of that body of interlocking accident, back as far as possible into the detectable past.⁶¹

Kinsella adds the ‘body of interlocking accident’ of history to Ricoeur’s idea of ‘objective structures.’ In the process of ‘making sense or no sense’⁶² of the already living scene into which he has been ‘dropped,’ history offers a potential source of meaning. Yet Kinsella’s use of history is, as David Kellogg writes, ‘intended to *authenticate* the poet’s search for meaning’ not to ‘*authorize* the past as a site of meaningfulness.’⁶³

Carol Christ’s explication of the implications of Pound’s development of ‘the method of Luminous Detail’ is suggestive when it comes to Kinsella’s use of history and frequent reference to ‘significant detail.’ Pound’s method has the effect of reducing his narrating presence and creates a poetry in which ‘significant facts are sufficient carriers of their own meaning.’⁶⁴ Discovering these ‘facts’ is difficult, Pound says, but ‘[a] few dozen facts of this nature give us intelligence of a period – a kind of intelligence not to be gathered from a great array of facts of the other sort. [. . .] They govern knowledge as the switchboard governs an electric circuit.’⁶⁵ In finding these ‘facts’ and presenting them, the need for interpretation has disappeared and the poet, according to Christ, becomes ‘like the scientist.’⁶⁶

Through the method of the luminous detail, Pound ‘make[s] the facts speak for themselves,’⁶⁷ and the ‘collage of appropriately selected images will carry their own significance, imply general laws.’ In Kinsellian ‘significant detail’ the poet ‘settle[s] for the facts and let[s] them speak *among* themselves.’⁶⁸ Both methods are similar in their ultimate enabling of impersonal speech. As Christ suggests, the poet overcomes ‘the burden of self-presentation

Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1986) 15-16.

⁶¹ Kinsella, Fried: 9.

⁶² Kinsella, Fitzsimons 75.

⁶³ David Kellogg, ‘Kinsella, Geography, History,’ *Ireland and Irish Cultural Studies*, spec. issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95.1 (Winter 1996): 161.

⁶⁴ Carol T. Christ, *Victorian and Modern Poetics* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984): 124.

⁶⁵ Pound, ‘I Gather the Limbs of Osiris,’ quoted by Christ 124-5. Quotations from Ezra Pound *Selected Prose: 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973) 21-3.

⁶⁶ Christ 125.

⁶⁷ Christ 125.

⁶⁸ Kinsella, Haffenden 103. Emphasis added.

and the distortions of vision it implies,'⁶⁹ a point which echoes Kinsella's desire to 'try to see things as they are and not otherwise.'⁷⁰

Yet Kinsella also uses this method in a poetry of self-presentation. Kinsella's 'detour' involves such backward looks and probings into the 'detectable past,' the personal heritage of the 'given,' like the conception scene in *The Messenger*, and investigations into what Ricoeur termed the "'objective" structures of culture, religion, society and language.' The backward look explores the circumstances which pertained in a society which, at the time of his birth had only recently (1922) gained Independence, and whose 'objective structures' and institutions were forming and solidifying around a core of specific social, cultural, religious and linguistic convictions:

One day he said:

'Out into the sun!'

We settled his chair under a tree
and sat ourselves down delighted
in two rows in the greeny gold shade.

A fat bee floated around
shining amongst us
and the flickering sun
warmed our folded coats
and he said: 'History . . . !'

(*BF* 19-20)

Kinsella related to Seán Ó Mórdha that at school the nationalist light (the 'greeny gold shade') thrown on Irish history was 'total,' qualifying the statement that with a history like Ireland's a nationalist slant was almost 'unavoidable.' Nevertheless, he is critical of the nationalist selectivity that left out, among other things, the fact of a significant French-speaking population in Southeast Ireland in the 13th century.⁷¹ At the Model School the matter of Ireland had been presented to Kinsella for the first time. At St. Canice's, as seen in 'Nightwalker,' Kinsella entered an institution which had played a significant part in the fomenting of a national consciousness and love of Ireland, and which took pride in the role of its past pupils in the public life of the State. As David Fitzpatrick has shown, in the Christian Brothers exploitation of history in the service of Irish nationalism teachers were exhorted to dwell 'with pride, and in

⁶⁹ Christ 125.

⁷⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

glowing words on Ireland's glorious past, her great men and her great deeds.'⁷² Though Fitzpatrick remarks that the 'moral fervour of educational administrators' focused mainly on the Irish language crusade, the teaching of history was also recognized as an essential element in the fostering of a national spirit. As the First National Programme of Primary Instruction put it:

One of the chief aims of the teaching of history should be to develop the best traits of the national character and to inculcate national pride and self-respect. [. . .] by showing that the Irish race has fulfilled a great mission in the advancement of civilization and that, on the whole, the Irish nation has amply justified its existence.⁷³

Kinsella's later work implies that the early work's avoidance of Irish subject matter and the intellectual imposition of conventional modes of ordering upon a fragmentary, ungraspable reality, are inadequate responses to the actual. As I argued in Chapter 3, Kinsella's first artistic style owed its origin to a 'dissociation of sensibility,'⁷⁴ a breach, deliberately cultivated between his intellect and his emotions, which derived in part from the socio-cultural complement to this divided condition as represented by Irish education.

Donald Davie suggests that the 'dissociation of sensibility' is a version of that 'imaginative necessity' which craves 'belief in a calamitous Fall, an expulsion from some historical Eden.'⁷⁵ Kinsella's work within the area of the 'dual tradition' of Irish literature – writings in both Irish and English – as translator, as anthologist, and as poet using Irish-language sources, does not (in its nature as 'imaginative necessity') crave belief in the existence of a Gaelic, pre-English Eden, nor does it have as its ultimate aim the revival of the Irish language. In Kinsella there is no Eden. It is the Fall which propels creative accomplishment. In 'The Oldest Place,' he conflates diverse stories from the *Book of Invasions* to reveal one immemorial tale of sin-haunted endeavour (*One* 16). In *Her Vertical Smile* art requires the awful in order to fulfil its function: 'it was only in the excesses of our minds and art/ that we need to undergo/ the outrage we appear to find essential' (*BF* 48).

Kinsella writes poetry, and translates from Irish, out of an (increasingly) complicated sense of the factors making up the complicated present, not out of a cultural nationalist agenda. It is here that the pursuit of the Real is at its most crucial. Kinsella's poetic is fundamentally

⁷¹ Ó Mórdha, *One Fond Embrace*.

⁷² David Fitzpatrick, 'The Futility of History: A Failed Experiment in Irish Education,' *Ideology and the Historians*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1991) 169.

⁷³ Education Documents 94.

⁷⁴ T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 Oct. 1921. In *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. with an Introduction by Frank Kermode, (London: Faber, 1975), 64.

⁷⁵ Donald Davie, 'The Rock-Drill Cantos' in *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1964). Reprinted in *Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism*, ed. John Hollander, (London: Oxford UP, 1968), 447.

informed by Ireland, but not in the sense that he could be called, as one contemporary has called him, ‘a kind of de Valera of Irish poetry.’⁷⁶ Irish circumstances and conditions provide the authenticity and order that the circumstances of any life, in any place provide. Contingent circumstance is accepted as the imaginative starting point, the degree zero, which protects against an otherwise debilitating sense of disorder: ‘But you can’t actually manage disorder either; the process of growing, of being alive and passing through the various stages, means that your psyche or your entity, whatever the organism is, chooses on the basis of what it is.’⁷⁷

Derval Tubridy offers an illuminating reading of the thirteen-poem sequence *Songs of the Psyche* as a version of the Celtic *imbas forosnai* ritual, the ‘process of understanding by which the individual accesses the *anima mundi* and, by corollary, understanding of his own spirit or soul.’⁷⁸ Kinsella himself refers to this ritual in *The Táin* in the episode in which Scáthach the female soothsayer chants a *rosca* ‘through the *imbas forosnai*, the Light of Foresight,’⁷⁹ and tells Cúchulainn ‘of his future and his end.’⁸⁰ The poems do form a narrative of sorts, which the last poem in the sequence describes as a ‘a dream,/ or a system of dreams’ (*BF* 31). The narrative thread is visible in the phrases ‘It is time’ (I), which announces the speaker’s readiness to undergo fundamental experience; ‘It was time’ (II), which offers a present perspective on the past experience; ‘It is time’ (XII), as the approach of dawn brings the experience to a close. The interior journey adumbrated by the poems resembles the descent into the self in *NLD*, and there are frequent references to that earlier sequence. Where *NLD* was an initiation into the depths of the unconscious, *Songs of the Psyche* is the descent of an older, damaged man, with a more provisional conclusion. Kinsella’s comes to terms in these poems with the breakdown of the numerological scheme, accepts the clarity which this ‘failure’ offers in a philosophic adjustment towards disappointment and the unfulfilled:

Why had I to wait until I am graceless,
 unsightly, and a little nervous of stooping
 until I could see

through these clear eyes I had once?
 It is time. And I am

⁷⁶ John Montague, ‘A Strategic Snarl,’ in *Poetry Ireland Review* 47 (Autumn/Winter 1995): 34.

⁷⁷ Kinsella, *Fried*: 15.

⁷⁸ Tubridy 125.

⁷⁹ ‘Some form of divination or supernatural enlightenment. One interpretation of the word “imbas” suggests that the method involved the use of the palms, but another simply means “great knowledge”,’ *The Táin* 272.

⁸⁰ *The Táin* 34.

shivering as in stupid youth.

(BF 24)

In a typical gesture, the scheme itself, and the idea of an artist constructing a scheme becomes absorbed into the subject matter of the work, as Kinsella writes in the drafts, 'Let us write the poetry/ of the collapse of plan.'⁸¹ In *Songs of the Psyche* XIII Kinsella conjures the entire Jungian 'plot,' incorporating images from *One* (the upright on a flat plain), 'His Father's Hands' (block of wood), and *A Technical Supplement* (the Cross):

an upright on a flat plain,

 a bone stirs

in first clay

and a beam of light struck

 and a snaked glittering across a surface

in multi-meanings and vanishes.

Then stealers of fire;

 dragon slayers; helpful animals;

and ultimately the Cross.

Unless the thing were to be based

 on sexuality

or power.

(BF 31-32)

In the last three lines, Tubridy says, Kinsella presents an 'alternative to [. . .] traditional world-views.'⁸² Kinsella, she continues, 'strips away the narratives which make sense of our world and posits instead an understanding based on basic (yet all embracing) animal impulses.'⁸³ Yet rather than presenting sexuality and power as explanations with greater force than 'traditional' views, Kinsella is here acknowledging the possibility that Jung provides an

⁸¹ Kinsella Papers box, 10, folder 18. Kinsella described this process of incorporating the 'failure' of the scheme to Dennis O'Driscoll, '[The numerological scheme] has fallen back into its position as part of the material I am trying to write about – a person locked in a scheme of that kind. The real sin is to impose order, but if the order is there and can be found, that is very important,' Kinsella, O'Driscoll: 61-62.

⁸² Tubridy 128.

⁸³ Tubridy 128.

inadequate account of reality by comparison with Freudian and Adlerian alternatives. A reading reinforced by reference to Kinsella's notes to Jacobi:

Freud basing everything on sexuality

Adler " " " power

Jung " " " fourbodiedness (tetrasomy)⁸⁴

The images in Song XIII are drawn from Kinsella's notes to Jacobi, in which he lists examples of archetypes from the collective unconscious. He divides these into Jacobi's categories of 'process,' the symbolic representations of fundamental psychic experiences, and 'motifs,' the symbolic figures which represent the 'contents of the collective unconscious,'⁸⁵ and includes in the former 'Prometheus stealer of fire,' and 'Heracles dragon slayer,' and in the latter category 'helpful animals' and

The Cross (tetrasomy: "archetypal character of the quaternity")

Number Four (adds 'corporeity' to No. Three & psychic wholeness)⁸⁶

Kinsella's poem is a (provisional) account of the movement from the '*in potentia* all things' (*BF* 31) to 'corporeity,' the ultimate reality of 'physical creation' symbolised by 'the Cross.' The provisional quality derives from the knowledge of failure and disappointment ('the quality of the Fall' which must constantly be borne in mind) and is established by the poem's alternative opening tercets, both of which derive from literary (science fiction and Dante) rather than real experience. Maurice Harmon points out that Kinsella's dramatic method relativises attempts at comprehensive explanation. Brian John sees Kinsella's qualification of the Jungian account as 'less a product of doubt than of the poet's openness, his unwillingness to be constricted by a system.'⁸⁷ No single account of reality is comprehensive. After this admission of possible

⁸⁴ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's notes derive from footnote 2 in Jacobi 47-48.

⁸⁵ Jacobi 47

⁸⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21. Kinsella's notes derive from footnote 2 in Jacobi 47-48. The reference is to Jacobi's discussion the dominant archetype in Jung's teaching, the 'quaternity': 'Another archetype is the number three, which from time immemorial, and particularly in the Christian religion, has been regarded as a symbol of the 'pure abstract spirit'. Beside it Jung sets the four as an archetypal expression of the highest significance for the psyche. With this fourth term the 'pure spirit' takes on 'corporeity' and a form adequate to physical creation. Along with the masculine spirit, the father principle which represents only one half of the world, the quaternity comprises the feminine and bodily aspect as its opposite pole – the two are needed to form a whole, 'Jacobi 48.

⁸⁷ John 206.

failure Kinsella turns, in the sequence of eight poems entitled *Notes* with which *Songs of the Psyche* closes, to new beginnings:

God is good but
He had to start
somewhere out of the ache
of *I am*

and lean Himself
over the mothering pit
in faith
thinking

a mouth
to My kiss
in opening

let there be
remote

(BF 33)

'A New Beginning' derives from notes Kinsella made during his reading of Jaobi's book on Jung. This poem implicitly connects god-work with the Jungian 'coming to consciousness' of *NLD*:

the differentiation of the ego from the "mother" is the beginning of every "coming to consciousness !" Creation of awareness, formulation of ideas = logos= father: struggling out of the wombworld. e.g. 'Let there be light' = logosfatherdifferentiating from original dark mother; then both continue differentiating to the end of the world.⁸⁸

Kinsella's faltering scheme provokes a questioning of the arrogance of an overreaching artistic enterprise: 'Who are we to look for/ harmony and fulfillment?'⁸⁹ In the published version of this draft, 'Brotherhood,' Kinsella replaces the line to add a Biblical dimension to the necessity for chastened and realistic artistic purpose, which emphasizes my earlier point concerning

⁸⁸ Kinsella Papers, box 10, folder 21.

⁸⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 18, folder 6.

Kinsella's artistic endeavour: 'we must bear in mind/ the quality of the Fall' (*BF* 35).

Her Vertical Smile offers an example, through the musical achievement of Gustav Mahler of an art cognisant of discouraging realities, but capable of harnessing disappointment to creative ends. In notes on Mahler for *Her Vertical Smile* Kinsella writes: 'Why am I the one? How come I am so driven? Single-minded, single-bodied. Out of where? Into where? That this direction was chosen, into close pursuit of which it appears I am fated, and born.'⁹⁰ *Her Vertical Smile* answers some of these questions. The artistic drive emerges 'out of nothing' and moves 'into' nothing; the artistic task is adjustment towards this nothingness. That Kinsella uses the figure of Mahler to explore his own position as artist can be seen in the early drafts of 'Das Lied Von Der Mahler' which contained a quotation from Schoenberg on Mahler's Ninth symphony: 'It almost seems as though this work had another, concealed author, who was merely using it as a mouthpiece . . .'⁹¹

The poem's two main sections are prefaced by an Overture, and the poem also contains an Intermezzo, which versifies a December 1914 letter from Thomas Mann to the Berlin poet Richard Dehmel, and a bathetic Coda, which places the poem's themes of artistic response to calamity within comic and perspective-enhancing parentheses. The 'she' of the Overture, the 'great contralto,' is another of Kinsella's self-engendering creatives, 'dwelling upon herself' (*BF* 43). To the self-absorption, which again recalls the Kinsella of 'Baggot Street Deserta,' the poem adds a recognition of art's ultimate groundlessness:

A butt flung into a dirty grate.
Elbows on knees, head bowed
devouring an echo out of nothing.

(*BF* 43)

In the 'Prologue' to *Downstream* the poet looked at himself at thirty, in *NLD* at forty, so in *Her Vertical Smile* Kinsella at fifty examines himself as artist through the prism of Mahler ('aetat fünfzig') conducting the first performance of his Eighth symphony (the 'Symphony of a Thousand,' which incorporates a setting of the final scene of *Faust Part Two*) in 1910. Mahler is as daemonic, and driven an artist as the Kinsella of 'Baggot Street Deserta'⁹²:

[. . .] the force of will

⁹⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 20, folder 12.

⁹¹ Kinsella Papers, box 18, folder 8.

⁹² Recall the lines 'We fly into our risk, the spurious' (*AS* 29), and 'I nonetheless inflict, endure,/ Tedium, intracordal hurt' (*AS* 31).

we find everywhere
in his strange work:
the readiness to embrace risk,

tedium, the ignoble,
to try anything ten times
if so the excessive matter can be settled.

(BF 44)

The void out of which creation emerges and into which it returns is evoked in sexual/musical imagery: 'every rhythm drained/ into nothing, the nothingness/ adjusting toward a new readiness' (BF 44-45). The readiness is required to confront the awful ordeals of life, the dark matter of war, and violence from which 'our most significant utterances/ have been elicited' (BF 46). Artistic order may be temporary, but valuable for all that, if the artist can 'fold the terms of the curse/ back upon itself' (BF 47).

In part II Kinsella re-figures the terms of aesthetic advance with a picture of Mahler on the conducting podium: 'A step forward and a lesser/ step back' (BF 51). Yet even major artistic achievement offers no peace: 'But why is there no ease?/ For something magnuscule has been accomplished' (BF 51). The creative impulse is instinctual, with mysterious motivations and impulses of its own, an accompanying force as in 'The Travelling Companion'

– teeming everywhere
with your aches and needs

along our bloody passageways,
knocking against one another
in never ending fuss [.]

(BF 52)

This 'never ending fuss' is 'propped upon promise/ implying purpose,' but Kinsella in a comic gesture, 'wag[ging] his pale finger' warns that this inward impulse and fuss which makes of hope a potential index of meaning is shadowed by an 'outer carrion,' as uncooperative and distant as the Real in 'Baggot Street Deserta':

bone-walking in a dream bedlam,
half lit, idling

and Ó Riada's) goal:

forest murmurs; a tired horseman
drinking in friendship and farewell;

voices blurred in longing;
renewal in Beauty;
Earth's pale flowers blossoming

in a distance turning to pure light
shining blue
for ever and for ever.

(BF 55)

This renewal is centred on the power of mental and physical love which Kinsella sees as 'the element of life putting new flowers forth, unsuspected.'⁹³ As with the ending of *Faust Part Two* and Mahler's Eighth Symphony, in which 'the eternal feminine/ leads us aloft,' Kinsella's poem ends with an affirmation of the necessary actuality and mysterious privacy of the 'enabling feminine'⁹⁴:

And central to the song's force
an awareness
(in the actual motions of the mouth,

the intimacy of
its necessary movements)
of her two nutrient smiles:

the one with lips pouted soft
in half we love
in earnest of

⁹³ Kinsella Papers, box 10. folder 21.

⁹⁴ *The Dual Tradition* 85. Kinsella reads Joyce's work in terms which evoke his own Jungian quest: 'The form of the *Portrait* is a circuit, is search of art and the enabling feminine. It closes with a sequence of entries in Stephen's diary. The last entry commits his career to the father and storyteller who opened the book. In the second-last entry his mother takes charge of his setting out. Following the ending of the *Portrait*, at the beginning of *Ulysses*, there are many mothers: the ocean; Stephen's mother; Mother Grogan; Mother Ireland; and the *cailleach* delivering milk at the tower in Sandycove, [...]'

that other,
dwelling upon itself for ever,
her vertical smile.

(BF 55)

After this rhapsody, the Coda offers a comic/sexual (considering the phallic use of 'baton' earlier in the poem) scene which reminds of the need to 'bear in mind/ the quality of the Fall' when the greatest contributor to the 'enabling elements/ in the higher crafts' is 'Luck':

I lift my
baton and my
trousers fall.

(BF 56)

As Maurice Harmon recognised, these later poems are cognisant of the 'harsher side of experience.' Kinsella's development is marked by the 'increasingly comprehensive manner' in which opposing forces are allowed dramatic space.⁹⁵ The method of *The Good Fight*, in which the contraries of hope and disappointment were worked against each other to provide a composite view which would better offer a vision of the 'primary world' of the Real, is developed in *Songs of the Psyche*, and in particular in *Out of Ireland* to 'provide a set of challenging ideas, none of which fully answer the problems of existence, or the question of an adequate, artistic response.'⁹⁶ Kinsella's development is marked by the adjustment the work enacts in reaction to inadequate renderings of the Real.

Out of Ireland is set in St Gobnait's Graveyard, Ballyvourney, and Kinsella provides detailed notes on the setting, and the contexts within which the poem is to be read. The notes indicate the themes and modes of the poem, and the relevance of the past to accounts of the present. The first of the sequence's seven poems, 'Entrance,' offers the apparent confusion and disorder that the reader has been primed by the preface from Giralduus Cambrensis to read as bearing a concealed and sophisticated artistry and hidden reserves of meaning. The preface and the notes link this sophisticated textual art to polyphony, and Kinsella juxtaposes and blends a number of sources in what the original Peppercanister edition describes as a 'A metaphysical

⁹⁵ Maurice Harmon, 'From Basin Lane to Old Vienna: Place, Transcendence and Counterpoint in Thomas Kinsella,' in *Thomas Kinsella*, spec. issue of *Irish University Review* 31.1 (Spring-Summer 2001): 83.

⁹⁶ Harmon, 'From Basin Lane to Old Vienna: Place, Transcendence and Counterpoint in Thomas Kinsella,' 84.

love sequence.’ The title, derived from Yeats’s ‘Remorse for Intemperate Speech,’ suggests origin, emergence, exile and final riddance, all of which find a place in the dramatic narrative that emerges out of Kinsella’s merging of diverse sources.

The five poems which follow ‘polyphonically’ weave elements which culminate in an ‘Exit’ which pictures the dead waiting for Eriugena’s last day, when ‘the world’s parts,/ ill-fitted in their stresses and their pains,/ will combine at last in polyphonic sweet-breathing union,’ and in a ‘dance of return’ to God’s light Man ‘gather[s]/ stunned at the world’s edge/ silent in a choir of understanding’ (‘Harmonies’ *BF* 61). ‘Exit’ counters Eriugena’s vision with the here and now of this world, with the ‘Lidless, lipless, opensocketed’ dead, ‘dumb’ rather than ‘silent,’ and ‘with suspended understanding,’ who in the completed arc of their lives offer ‘our best evidence’ (*BF* 65). The dance in this world ‘is at our own feet,’ and by invoking the seventeenth century Irish air ‘Tabhair dom do lámh,’ the speaker beckons the reader and the beloved to join him, in saying farewell to the ‘land of loss/ and unfulfillable desire,’ which is also a farewell to the debilitating effects of language loss (‘that outstuck/ tongue’), in an acceptance of the ‘goat-grey light’ of reality:

The dance is at our own feet.

Give me your hand.

A careful step

together over that outstuck

tongue, and shut this gate

in God’s name

behind us, once and for all.

And reach me my weapon

in the goat-grey light.

(*BF* 65)

The meaning of the title of the sequence becomes final riddance, a farewell to the effects of being, as the Yeats poem from which it derives says, ‘maimed from the start.’ This getting out of Ireland combines with a resolve to address reality, with the pen as weapon. *Out of Ireland* perfects a method Kinsella will use in *The Pen Shop* where meaning arrives, and derives, from the accumulated elements and details. The stone slab as tongue, the ‘dainty, unbothered feet’ of the goats, revealed by the ‘goat-grey light’ of the last line to be emblems of a reality benignly

undisturbed by metaphysical quandaries,⁹⁷ assemble into a narrative of significant elements which contribute to an ultimate meaning the sequence adumbrates.

Kinsella's proprietorial attitude to the Irish tradition has been noted by Bernard O'Donoghue and Peter McDonald, among others. O'Donoghue calls Kinsella, 'the sombre and intense poetic keeper of the Gaelic/English "dual tradition",' and refers to him as 'a kind of self-appointed conscience of the whole poetic tradition.'⁹⁸ The point is just, but underappreciates how Kinsella's tone, and his argument, in *The Dual Tradition* and in his introduction to the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, derives from the consonance between the vision of the tradition he evokes and the pursuit of the Real in his own poetry. In his funeral address at the death of Liam de Paor, Kinsella spoke of de Paor's work in terms which evoke his own: 'The same care for completeness marked his feeling for Ireland and its people – accepting them as they are; with their mixed origins, in Irish and in English, in harmony and in confusion – never selecting as it might suit.'⁹⁹ De Paor's work, Kinsella says, 'guarded [the humane] values, of integrity and justice, more realistically from his preferred vantage point: of watchfulness at the margin, recording and commenting.' The emphasis on the 'realism' of a marginal viewpoint is important. Though the margin is Kinsella's preferred position, it is a position dictated by circumstance rather than choice. Though I have argued that Kinsella's disappointment takes part of its colouring from the social circumstances of his background, there is also a disappointment which derives from the irrelevance to the life of society of the artist and his obsessions. Occasionally in the poetry signs of the tragic nature of Kinsella's situation emerge: as in the envy expressed in *Her Vertical Smile* for Mahler's art and its effect on the audience at the first performance of the Tenth Symphony:

From his captive hearers
 (though we can scarcely
contain ourselves)

not a cough,
 not a shuffle [.]

(BF 45)

⁹⁷ It is useful here to recall that Kinsella uses 'grey' as a metonym for reality in the gesture of 'refusal' quoted earlier in this chapter: 'I turned away in refusal,/ holding a handful of high grass/ sweet and grey to my face' (CP 352).

⁹⁸ Bernard O'Donoghue, 'Helping us to be modern,' review of *The Minotaur and Other Poems*, by Anthony Cronin; *The Familiar* (Peppercanister 20) and *Godhead* (Peppercanister 21) by Thomas Kinsella, *Irish Times* 10 July 1999, Weekend: 10.

⁹⁹ Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 12. For a report on this funeral, including reference to Kinsella's eulogy, see *Irish Times* 17 August 1998: 12.

And in 'Self Release,' in which there is a glimpse of the personal cost for the relentless integrity of Kinsella's pursuit of the Real:

Possibly you would rather I stopped
– uttering Christ curses
and destroying my nails down the wall
or dashing myself to pieces once and for all
in a fury beside your head?

(BF 38)

In notes for a commission from Edition Monika Beck in Germany entitled 'From My Desk, May 1981'¹⁰⁰ Kinsella described the genesis of 'Wyncote, Pennsylvania: A Gloss': the poem 'was written in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, in 1970, on a morning when I was working on the "scheme" for a sequence of poems which I have been writing for some years. Interrupted by the mocking bird in our garden, I suddenly remembered those ancient scribes interrupted at the tedious tasks they had set themselves, and wrote the lines quickly on the page in front of me.'¹⁰¹ Kinsella goes on to write of the 'scheme': 'The scheme, such as it is, is as exploratory as the poetry I am trying to fit to it, and is unlikely to be fulfilled. But it has become a fixture on my desk: it "affects" everything I try to write [.]'¹⁰²

Kinsella's awareness of the impossibility of the scheme emerges first in *Songs of the Psyche*. His adjustment to the failure of the scheme coincides with a move toward a poetry of detail and momentary beauty: 'great distance of time and space, fluttering together in the thicket of my scheme, and present in their momentary beauty . . . They will certainly outlast all schemes [.]'¹⁰³ This turn toward detail and experience rather than scheme, establishes in the work a dialectic between 'the detail and the whole' ('Undine' *Citizen of the World* CP 350).¹⁰⁴

The method used in the structure of the study programme Kinsella developed for Temple University mirrors the dialectic in his poetic activity, and illustrates his 'impulse to unify everything.'¹⁰⁵ The idea of 'significant detail' and the attempt to 'elicit order from experience' informed his teaching life, as can be seen in his annual report on the activities of the *Dublin*

¹⁰⁰ Kinsella Papers, box 62, folder 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Kinsella Papers, box 62, folder 1.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ In giving reasons for giving up the scheme, Kinsella said: 'I suppose the final reason for abandoning this scheme of the five steps can be explained in very simple terms: ordinary experience began to take over,' Flanagan: 108.

¹⁰⁵ Kinsella, Gillespie.

Program: The Irish Tradition (Spring 1981) to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Temple University:

The entire Irish tradition is covered as a continuum of history, literature and historical geography, with contributions from the very best scholars in their various fields. The method of the Program, of concentrating on significant detail in the formal lectures and eliciting order from this in a process of continuing discussion [.]¹⁰⁶

Peter McDonald in an essay entitled 'Anglo-Irish Accommodations' refers to Kinsella as the 'mid-Atlantic embodiment of the Irish literary tradition.'¹⁰⁷ McDonald quotes Kinsella's introduction to the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* which argues against seeing poets such as Derek Mahon and Seamus Heaney within the context of a 'Northern Renaissance.' Kinsella's favoured context places these poets within 'a dual responsibility, toward the medium and toward the past.' In teasing out the identity politics behind Kinsella's statements, McDonald writes:

A 'responsibility . . . toward the past', for Kinsella, could only mean a responsibility towards the correct version of the past, and anything else put in place of this was part of mere 'contemporary careers' and thus complicit with the 'journalistic'. As with the campaign against historical 'revisionism', the reflexes played upon here are those of identity: *my* version of the past is consistent with who we are; *your* version of the past belongs nowhere, and is no more than the unmeaningful data of journealese.¹⁰⁸

McDonald has a point. As Kinsella himself has remarked: 'It is all a question of identity, and it's in a larger structure like that that I would question what I am.' Yet Kinsella, as the poetry reveals, does not deny the validity of any other version of identity. *St Catherine's Clock* shows Kinsella questioning *any* version which would claim privileged access to the past. The ultimately ungraspable gap between the present and a past which nevertheless continues to inform present realities is embodied in the poem's form: 'the poem is not a statement but an embodiment of the different angles of what is going on.'¹⁰⁹

The larger structure within which Kinsella questions his identity is revealed in *St Catherine's Clock*, which does not evoke a version of the past, but questions all versions, and the human need to create versions of the past. 'From a non-contemporary nationalist artist's impression,' in its almost ventriloquistic use and conflation of several versions of Robert

¹⁰⁶ Kinsella Papers, box 71, folder 20.

¹⁰⁷ Peter McDonald, *Mistaken Identities: Poetry and Northern Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997) 209.

¹⁰⁸ McDonald 209.

¹⁰⁹ Kinsella, Deane: 88.

Emmett's speech from the dock,¹¹⁰ evinces Kinsella's distance from the limitations and rhetoric of nationalism:

The torch of friendship and the lamp of life
extinguished, his race finished,
the idol of his soul offered up,

sacrificed on the altar of truth and liberty,
awaiting the cold honours of the grave,
requiring only the charity of silence,

he has done.

(BF 72)

As David Kellogg has argued, the title Kinsella gives to the poem reflects the questioning of ideological and aesthetic renderings of phenomenological event. The poem is, he says, an 'impression of an impression [which] highlights its own impossible distance from its subject.'¹¹¹

Kinsella in his work explores Irish history, the Irish literary tradition, and his Inchicore background, the goal of which is 'the detection of the significant substance of our individual and common pasts and its translation imaginatively, scientifically, bodily, into an increasingly coherent and capacious entity; or the attempt to do this, to the point of failure.'¹¹² This pursuit of the Real attempts to overcome a sense of belatedness both existential and cultural. In *St Catherine's Clock* Kinsella says 'Family history and some of the bloody history of the early 19th century are tangled together in the area, and time is marked by the Church clock.'¹¹³ In the section entitled '1792 Jas. Malton, del.,' an eighteenth century James Malton Dublin print¹¹⁴ resonates with what is both a public but also intensely personal topography:

Right foreground, a shade waits for her
against a dark cart humped man-shaped
with whipstaff upright.

¹¹⁰ For details of the different version used by Kinsella, see Kellogg: 169, note 43.

¹¹¹ Kellogg: 158. Tubridy relates that Kinsella took the title, as well as other material in *St Catherine's Clock*, from an engraving depicting Robert Emmett's execution on 20 September, 1803, from an educational pack issued by the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Tubridy 157.

¹¹² Kinsella Papers, box 61a, folder 8.

¹¹³ Kinsella, Deane: 87.

¹¹⁴ Kinsella uses a version of this print on the cover of *Blood and Family*. The image is taken from *A Descriptive View of the City of Dublin (1792-1799)*, published in 1799, and republished by Dolmen in 1984, Tubridy 159-60.

Set down to one side
by unconcerned fingers, a solitary redcoat
is handling the entire matter.

Past the Watch House and Watling Street
beyond St James's Gate, a pale blue
divides downhill into thin air

on a distant dream
of Bow Lane
and Basin Lane.

(BF 73)

Yet it is up to the reader to complete these acts of potential historical and personal, even recondite, communication. The artist, according to Kinsella 'offers' an act of communication, initiates a circuit which must be completed by the reader.¹¹⁵ The artist who made the engraving, however, 'set down' his details 'with unconcerned fingers.' Kinsella as artist, on the other hand, is implicated in the scene, not only because of the personal topography, but also by his concern to offer a rendering of detail true to a larger story. The poems framing Malton's 'unconcerned' scene of Georgian Dublin's splendour, depict the violence of the 1803 rebellion, implying 'that Malton's engravings specifically, and picturesque renderings of Ireland more generally, glossed over the brutality of colonial rule.'¹¹⁶

An engagement with Kinsella's entire writings inevitably reveals intertextual and historical dimensions. As when the figure of Jonathan Swift as *cailleach* is revealed in this enigmatic scene, entitled '1740,' from *St Catherine's Clock*:

About the third hour.

Ahead, at the other end
of the darkened market place
a figure crossed over

out of Francis Street

¹¹⁵ Kinsella, Fried: 15.

¹¹⁶ Kellogg: 158.

reading the ground, all dressed up
in black, like a madwoman.

The material that Kinsella explores in the Peppercanister poems entailed also what might be called an 'archaeology' of the speech patterns of his social milieu, and also, therefore, a stylistic re-evaluation of his own poetic. Kinsella mimics the Dublin vernacular in those poems in which he re-inhabits his childhood, like the 'Settings' section of *Songs of the Psyche* (1985) and in *St Catherine's Clock* (1987):

Sometimes it sounded like she was giving out
but she was really minding us.

I know I was not bold
even if I did terrible things.

I was not a barefaced liar
or a thick-ah or a go-boy, or a pup.

I never went with the cur next door
or those gets down the street. [. . .]

And I always remembered
who and what I am.

(BF 79)

The epithets for the various childhood miscreants ('thick-ah', 'go-boy', 'pup', 'cur', 'gets') are remarkable enough, but it is the precision of the Dublinese use of the verbs 'giving out' 'minding' that convinces, and the rhythm of the recovered voice, half-child half-adult, that is both accurate in its essentials and strangely moving ('Sometimes it sounded like she was giving out/ but she was really minding us'). It is in such a moment that, as Seamus Heaney rightly says, 'a whole spiritual world for which the revival writers could never have found the proper language begins to emerge into Irish poetry and continues to find its deepened, darkened expression.'¹¹⁷

Kinsella's poems are written for their closest audience, for the closest possible audience; the reader is an integral part of a dynamic process of understanding. It is apposite to quote here

¹¹⁷ Seamus Heaney, 'A Tale of Two Islands: Reflections on The Irish Literary Revival,' 14.

what Kinsella writes of Joyce and the later poetry of Yeats in *The Dual Tradition* (1995). Yeats and Joyce address themselves, he writes: ‘toward a primary audience sharing the facts of experience intimately with the writer – an audience that may not exist, an ideal audience, a projection of the self – allowing an actual audience to appear as and when it can.’¹¹⁸ ‘Significant detail’ is an aid to Kinsella in overcoming doubts about the communicative ability of potentially recondite personal and historical matter, and in this Joyce is an example. According to Kinsella, *Finnegans Wake* is ‘A splendid example of a person staking their all on peculiarities and making it all function. It’s all done with significant detail again. The lesson is to be content, to be as odd as you have to be, and all manner of things will be well again.’¹¹⁹ The connections Kinsella makes in writing the poetry find correspondence in connections it is hoped the reader will make: ‘there’ll be no spoonfeeding – being content to demand the maximum from the audience will be part of it. In any act of communication, if you plunge totally into anything, no matter how odd, you make connections down in the basement.’¹²⁰

Kinsella’s recourse to details from his personal life yields a cumulative resonance. Throughout the work images, events occur and recur, reverberate with each other, take energy from each other; poems are the ‘precedents’ (*BF* 86) for further poems. There is self-quotation, refinement of position, reversal, and self-correction. The poems undergo a scrutiny which echoes with previous work. The poems answer each other not as separate instances of poise and balance, as ‘momentary stays against confusion,’ an aesthetic position rejected, regretfully, in “‘To Autumn”,’ but as part of one impulse; the poet ‘driven toward a totality of response’ (*FCC* 36).

The totality of response is focused by the ‘significant detail’ of Kinsella’s background and his role as artist, and his awareness of the processes common in both. Imagery of process and waste dominate in Kinsella’s later poetry, particularly that poetry written subsequent to the abandonment of the scheme. In *From Centre City* the imagery of process and waste recycles the dialectic of hope and disappointment, but in a language now of declarative statement urging wider recognition of fact:

Discern process. You know that,
mangled by it. We are all participants
in a process that requires waste.

(*FCC* 6)

Where there had been anger at the ‘Abject. Irrecoverable’ (*FD* 31) waste of talent and life in

¹¹⁸ *The Dual Tradition* 92.

¹¹⁹ Kinsella, Gillespie.

Seán Ó Riada's early death, Kinsella's poetry now turns toward an acknowledgement of waste and disappointment as necessary and vital parts of the process of reality. The image recurs in 'Apostle of Hope' as the speaker remembers visiting Derry in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday:

The impulse, ineradicable,
labours into life. Scrutiny;
manipulation toward some kind
of understanding; toward the Good.
The Process as it hath revealed
its Waste on high.

(FCC 14)

Kinsella implies that as artist he is possessed of this 'ineradicable impulse.' 'At the Western Ocean's Edge' contrasts the 'the warrior marked by fate, who overmasters/ every enemy in the known world' with 'one, finding the foe inside his head,/ who turned the struggle outward, against the sea' (FCC 26). The heroic artist, like Ó Rathaille, combines both. The end of the poem assumes Kinsella into this company, echoing Amergin's arrival in Ireland and Auden's praise of the 'nameless heroes' whose dedication and lack of materialist desire advanced the cause of civilization¹²¹:

As who can not confirm, that set his face
beyond the ninth shadow, into dead calm.
Dame Kindness, her bowels torn.
The stranger waiting on the steel horizon.

(FCC 26)

The ostensible matter of *The Pen Shop* (1997) is a walk from the General Post Office (GPO) in O'Connell Street to the eponymous shop on Nassau Street, a journey of less than a mile which traverses the commercial centre of the city of Dublin. The very fact of the walk recalls 'Nightwalker' and 'A Country Walk' and, another type of journey, 'Downstream.' Kinsella's 'implied reader' remembers these poems as the poem being read unfolds its particular stage of the impulse. Pound's methods again offer an analogy. Donald Davie writing of Pound's use of Chinese characters in Canto 85 illuminates the reading process required by the method:

¹²⁰ Kinsella, Gillespie.

¹²¹ Where should we be but for ['the nameless heroes'/ unmaterialistic worker]?/ Feral still,
un-housetrained, still// wandering through forests without/ a consonant to our names,// slaves of Dame
Kind, lacking/ all notion of a city,' 'Sext,' Auden 326.

'Of course the ideal reader whom Pound envisages will no longer be blank in front of the Chinese characters; he will have learned from *The Unwobbling Pivot* to recognize such old acquaintances as the characters for 'the total light-process' and for 'tensile light.'¹²²

Kinsella, like Pound, demands 'ideal pupils.' He does not serve up cut-and-dried 'traditional sanctity and loveliness.'¹²³ M.L. Rosenthal, an early non-Irish champion of Kinsella, to the memory of whom *The Pen Shop* is dedicated, characterized the technical legacy of Pound in terms which could apply to Kinsella's practice. Referring to Pound's use of the 'Odyssean model' he wrote:

It takes us into all the implications of significantly open process – the risks of sailing into the unknown, using images and other radiant centers as points of reference ("periplum") rather than relying on conventional narrative or logical structure. And it uses the past as a living pressure and presence [.]¹²⁴

The motif of the walk in Kinsella is invariably an occasion for movement through time as well as space, for rumination upon 'the past as a living pressure'; and often these ruminations have resulted in condemnation of the state of Ireland, in every sense of that phrase. *The Pen Shop*'s itinerary leads Kinsella through central Dublin, in daylight, from the GPO to Nassau Street. In 'Nightwalker,' the walk passed through the seaside suburbs of south county Dublin, after dark. The satire and disillusion of 'Nightwalker' added an almost metaphysical dimension to the bathetic post-revolutionary Ireland the poet had encountered on a previous poem-walk, 'A Country Walk,' which had worried whether the mercantile Lemass Republic had 'exchanged/ A trenchcoat playground for a gombeen jungle' (*D* 47).

Cúchulainn in *The Pen Shop* continues the association between the artist and hero. He is primarily the familiar, in the usual meaning, statue passed as one goes about one's business, yet is also 'familiar' in the second meaning: the shade that accompanied Pearse through the GPO in 1916; the figure of the rejuvenated Gaelic nation; the man 'violent and famous'¹²⁵ Yeats believed could 'engross the present and dominate memory.'¹²⁶ Yet this gloss is only present *in potentia* to the reader: the historical/mythological dimension, the otherworldly familiar, does not overwhelm the actuality of the statue which is, like the pomegranate in 'A Hand of Solo,' inviolate.

Similarly on the statue and, therefore, in the poem, *Cúchulainn* is attended upon by his

¹²² Donald Davie, 'The Rock-Drill Cantos,' *Ezra Pound: The Poet as Sculptor* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1964). Rpt. in *Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism* ed. John Hollander (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1968) 450.

¹²³ Yeats, 'Coole and Ballylee, 1931,' 245.

¹²⁴ M.L. Rosenthal, *Sailing into the Unknown* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978) 207-08.

¹²⁵ Yeats, 'Cuchulain Comforted,' 332.

¹²⁶ Yeats, 'The Circus Animals' Desertion,' 347.

own familiar, the bird which alights upon the shoulder of the dying hero. In *The Pen Shop* this bird is referred to as 'the harpy perched on his neck': who is the Morrígan, the goddess of war and image of sterility and of chaos, and who features on the cover of *Collected Poems* (1996), in a drawing by Louis le Brocqy taken from his illustrations to *The Táin*.

Kinsella has used this figure, in bird and human form, throughout his poetry. The figure drew its power over Kinsella's imagination, he has said, from the potential it had to respond to much of what was in his own personal experience. In the *cailleach* figure of Irish myth, the hag who is 'the embodiment of sovereignty,' and 'the repository of Spring' who 'when you marry her, grows young,'¹²⁷ Kinsella found a correspondence with female figures from his personal past: the grandmothers on both sides of the family, who feature prominently in *NLD*, and who recur in various guises throughout the work of the Peppercanister series. Yet in a sense Kinsella's use of the Morrígan here is, as in *Out of Ireland*, a farewell and good riddance to past obsessions. In the first section of the poem, the prelude to the walk has the speaker in the GPO posting a letter to a woman who has obviously provoked an irritated response. 'Another cool acquaintance' (CP 323) ends this preparatory section. The situation is fraught with privacy, and the circumstances behind the posting of this letter are not revealed, nor the identity of the addressee. Yet the woman's dubious character, her 'fierce forecasts,' her readiness to welcome crisis and her scavenging 'among the remains' reveal Morrígan-like traits, which are confirmed in the quotation Kinsella uses from *The Táin*: 'Rage, affliction and outcry' (CP 323).¹²⁸

Such self-reference and the obscure nature of the detail in some of Kinsella's poems have contributed to a perception of the work as a whole as forbidding and unwelcoming at best, incomprehensible at worst. Yet in five decades probing and questioning self, society and the Irish tradition, Kinsella has, in Denis Donoghue's words 'taken possession of virtually the whole range of Irish literary, religious and historical experience.'¹²⁹ Fuelled with an acute need to comprehend the nature and purpose of the artistic impulse, and its responsibilities, late-Kinsella has forged, painstakingly, a coherent system of images whose signs reach across the ranges of his experience in an attempt at 'understanding of some kind'¹³⁰ of the complex nature of the Real. Taken on its own terms, Kinsella's work delivers a velocity and range of reference which is at times astounding in its simplicity and its implication:

I turned aside

¹²⁷ Kinsella, Fried: 8.

¹²⁸ 'Now it was that the Morrígan settled in bird shape on a standing stone in Temair Chuailnge, and said to the Brown Bull: [. . .] affliction and outcry/ and war everlasting/ raging over Cuailnge,' *The Táin* 98. Kinsella also uses this passage in the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* 20-21.

¹²⁹ Denis Donoghue, *We Irish: Essays on Irish Literature and Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 16.

¹³⁰ Kinsella, Haffenden 113.

into the Pen Shop
for some of their best black refills.

The same attendant in his narrow cell,
over alert all my life long
behind the same counter.

(CP 327)

A simple, commonplace scene, and yet with Kinsella in that 'narrow cell' which recalls the 'narrow room' of Baggot Street, he is back not only buying the required refill for the fading ink at the beginning of the poem, he is also renewing energies at the origins of written literature in Ireland, among the monks 'all alone in [their] little cells'¹³¹ composing, transcribing what Kinsella describes as the oldest vernacular literature in Europe.

The refiguring of images from earlier work continues in *Godhead*. In 'High Tide: Amagansett' the image of the wave as emblem of a reality which must be countered, as in 'Death of a Queen,' 'The Shoals Returning' and 'Apostle of Hope,' gives way to a vision of waves as the reality of relentless process, a ceaseless advance, waste and withdrawal broken by intervals of calm. *Godhead* explores the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost in a style of compressed, barely audible meaning. In 'Trinity' the three figures have performed and are continuing to perform their appointed tasks, evoked as a suspended drama awaiting final culmination. 'Father' imagines the creator as an absorbed maker of a work in progress. With a fellow-feeling mixed with supplication the speaker begs:

Be mindful of us, who were among
the last of Thy thoughts, and who also know
how it is possible to grasp completely
while remaining partly incapable.

(CP 336)

God responds, 'not in the sound of thunder/ or in the voices of angels' but 'bodily, with a palpable tongue/ trafficking in carnal things' (CP 336). Kinsella's poem now moves into a version of the encounter between God, in the form of the burning bush, and Moses, who requires God to offer signs of his existence in order for the children of Israel to believe Moses as his messenger. Kinsella's version varies only slightly from Exodus 4: 6-7:¹³²

¹³¹ From 'A Selection of Monastic Poems,' *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* 28.

¹³² The draft in the Kinsella Papers, box 25, folder 2 mistakenly says the poem is based on Exodus III.

I put my hand in my bosom
When I took it out
Behold, it was leprous as snow.

And the father said: *Put thine hand
In thy bosom again.* And behold
It was turned again as my other flesh.
(CP 337)

Kinsella compresses the Biblical narrative, with Moses' expression of verbal inadequacy for the task of carrying the divine word and God's angry response, rendered succinctly and with ringing finality:

And his anger was kindled against me.
And He said:
Who hath made thy mouth?
(CP 337)

This finality contrasts with the context within which this particular God works. The unfinishedness of God's creation is reflected in the unfinished prayer the speaker now offers up, which is itself a work in progress and a declaration of the 'incompleteness' of the 'begotten' condition, a gesture which paradoxically offers a completion of Kinsella's adjustment to the incompleteness against which his poetry has struggled

The fundamental drive behind Kinsella's poetry, the impulse to find an adequate response to the depredations of time and to what he calls the 'tempest of particulars' (FCC 26) has not altered, despite the major formal adjustment the work has undergone. In Kinsella's early poems what is included, or what is fit to be included in poetry, had been verified by previous example, 'the best of his race' had shown the poet not only how it should be done but what to include. Artistic form set up a dichotomy between the world that Kinsella knew around him and the world as presented in poetry. Kinsella's aesthetic development has been characterised not by an overhaul of what he believes to be the function of the poet, but instead by a growing awareness that the particulars of a specific time and place demand inclusion if the artist would truly perform this function.

Gerald Dawe in his review of *Citizen of the World* and *Littlebody*, noted the lack of a

‘governing master narrative,’¹³³ the poems driven instead by ‘the complex accidental moment of the here and now.’¹³⁴ Kinsella’s poetry, as Dawe recognized, with the abandonment of the scheme, is bolstered by detail. Kinsella’s conflation of history into the detached and detailed observation and description of place, the ‘classical surface’ of ‘A Country Walk,’ and similarly, the inclusion of the local and familial in *NLD*, the detailed memory of a figure from his past in ‘Dick King,’ and the analysis of socio-political predicaments in *Nightwalker*, derive from an aesthetic claim upon the poet as well as from feelings of social responsibility and historical grievance. The desire to witness, whether for the underprivileged and dispossessed of his working-class Dublin background or for the lost causes of Irish history, is not the primary impulse behind what became the ‘unavoidable’ nature of Kinsella’s engagement with ‘Ireland.’ Rather the presence of Irish material is coincident with the aesthetic shift Kinsella made in his attempt at ‘responsibility toward actuality.’

Kinsella’s review of *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* supplies a powerful epigraph to the arc of his own work: ‘the Ideal exists not in our achievement of it but in our aspiration toward it.’ To recast his own view of Pound, Kinsella’s poems ‘embrace’ the disappointing discrepancy between Ideal and achievement and ‘lodge the poet and his impossible aspirations *in* the poem, and gather artistic success out of the shambles.’¹³⁵ Kinsella’s artistic success is premised on the continual replenishment provided by a pursuit of the Real, perpetually shadowed by disappointment.

¹³³ Gerald Dawe, ‘Poetic Maps of Real Places,’ review of *Citizen of the World* (Peppercanister 22) and *Littlebody* (Peppercanister 23), *Irish Times* 21 April 2001
<http://www.ireland.com/newspaper/weekend/2001/0421/archive.01042100194.html>

¹³⁴ Dawe, ‘Poetic Maps of Real Places.’

¹³⁵ Kinsella, ‘So That.’

Bibliography

The archive material upon which this thesis is based can be found in the Thomas Kinsella papers (MSS 774), Special Collections and Archives Division, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

The papers cover the period 1951-2001 and are contained in 88 boxes, 5 OBVs, and 95 OP folders. OP signifies unbound oversized material; OBV an oversized bound volume. The box reference generally indicates the standard Hollinger box, containing approximately 20 to 25 folders. The size of the Kinsella archive is 44 linear ft.

The papers contain manuscript drafts of poems from each of Kinsella's published collections, beginning with his earliest chapbooks and continuing up to his *Collected Poems* (Carcenet), published in 2001, as well as containing unpublished poems and drafts. The papers also contain files related to his translation of Irish-language texts, *The Táin, An Duanaire*, and the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, as well as drafts of *The Dual Tradition*. The collection also has clippings, scrapbooks, and a small number of photographs.

The archive reproduces, as closely as possible, the characteristics of Kinsella's own organization of his materials. It is arranged into four series:

- (1) Writings by Thomas Kinsella, 1952-2001, which is in turn organized into five subseries:
 - (1.1) Poetry, (1.2) Translations and anthologies, (1.3) Critical writings, (1.4) Other writing, and (1.5) Unfinished projects.
- (2) Printed Material, 1952-1993, which contains newspaper clippings and periodical articles of work by Kinsella, reviews of his publications, biographical and critical profiles, as well as printed promotional materials related to the Peppercanister series. This is organized into three subseries: (2.1) Clippings, (2.2) Scrapbooks, and (2.3) Peppercanister Press publicity materials.
- (3) Photographs, ca. 1950-1997.
- (4) Correspondence and Miscellany, 1958-1998, which contains correspondence from and to Kinsella, as well as various miscellaneous items. Organized into two subseries: (4.1) Correspondence and (4.2) Miscellany.

An extensive description of the Kinsella Papers can be found at <http://irishliterature.library.emory.edu/tamino-delmas-kinsella774CUNE.d12e1>

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