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## *Fragments of Identity: Thomas Kinsella's Modernist Imperative*

by ARTHUR E. McGUINNESS

KINSELLA'S poetry has obvious ties to what David Perkins has called the "High Modernist Mode" in poetry.<sup>1</sup> Perkins distinguishes as an essential element of "high modernism" an anxiety about the meaning of life, about the existence and stability of personal identity and of history. This crisis of identity is experienced as alienation and isolation. The writer desires coherence but does not expect to find it. Memory can provide only fragments of a personal and historical past. This fragmented sense of self and history leads to a poetry of fragments, of juxtaposition, a poetry composed in an extremely compressed style. Symbol, myth, and allusion, resources which provide the traditional writer links to the past into cultural and psychic values larger than the self, can be found in high modernist poetry, but usually as desired rather than possessed.

One needs no great acquaintance with Kinsella's poetry to recognize its fragmentary and compressed character. A poem by Kinsella seems almost deliberately inaccessible, almost as if the poet wanted to keep the non-serious reader out. His poems read more like diary entries, private bits of experience which the poet wishes to preserve for himself, rather than utterances to be shared with readers. The "private" character of Kinsella's poetry extends even to the publication of poems. Kinsella desires complete control of published poems, even going so far as publishing some of his poems privately in limited, signed editions which are only available from the poet himself.

Symbols and myths are present in Kinsella's poetry, but not in any coherent form. His poems about Ireland are desperately aware of the temporal gap which separates the twentieth-century reader from Ireland's cultural past. His poems about the formation of the psyche desire a fully-formed self, but acknowledge only random and occasional access to such

1. *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 565–602. See also Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson, eds., *The Modern Tradition: Background of Modern Literature* (1965); Erich Heller, *The Artist's Journey into the Interior* (1965); Irving Howe, ed., *The Idea of the Modern in Literature and the Arts* (1967); Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture* (1968); Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry From Romanticism to the Avant Garde* (1974); Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism* (1976); Gerald Graff, *Literature Against Itself: Literary Ideas in Modern Society* (1979); Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983); Michael Levenson, *A Genealogy of Modernism* (1985); Ricardo Quinones, *Mapping Literary Modernism* (1985); Monique Chefdor and Ricardo Quinones, *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives* (1986).

a stable psyche. As translator of the Irish epic *The Tain*, of *Poems of the Dispossessed*, and, most recently, as editor and translator of the *New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986), Kinsella is more familiar with the native Irish tradition than any other contemporary Irish poet, including Seamus Heaney. Kinsella seems determined on the one hand to become completely familiar with this tradition and, on the other hand, to sense his own alienation from this ancient cultural tradition. His translations have been praised for their sensitive rendering of the native Irish rhythms, vocabulary, and peculiar assonantal chiming. But his own poems record only occasional access to these roots. One perceives an ironic distance between self and world.

Kinsella's poems about understanding the self constitute a self-psychoanalysis. His self-exploration takes him to the deepest and most disturbing reaches of the psyche in the unconscious. Like Yeats, Kinsella longs for structure, for a system which will provide coherence and meaning in his life and in his poetry. His quest for this coherence becomes Kinsella's own version of the romantic quest, except that it is a very atypical romantic quest, because he does not believe very strongly in any sort of sustained vision. His problematic quest can be observed in the following poems and volumes: "Nightwalker," "Ritual of Departure," "Phoenix Park," *Notes From the Land of the Dead*, *One*, *A Selected Life*, and *Vertical Man*.

A more hopeful Kinsella emerges from another set of poems, including some of the poet's more recent efforts. This less pessimistic strain can be found as early as *Nightwalker* (1968), and continues to appear in *Notes From the Land of the Dead* (1972), *One* (1974), and subsequent volumes. In these poems, Kinsella seems less committed to the alienation of the psyche from the world and less obsessive about the fragmentary nature of experience. This set of poems ponders over the possibility of psychic structure. Poems about the formation of the psyche focus centrally on what Jung calls the "female archetype." At the root of the psyche, the male questor encounters a power described as the "female within," the power which the male ego must cope with in order to be fully formed or fully mature. The encounter with this female presence in the dark reaches of the unconscious begins as a terrifying contact with an alien power, but ends more hopefully, as the ego learns to surrender to the female-within.

Kinsella's ironic treatment of traditional romantic themes can be seen in a number of early poems, "Death of a Queen," "Test Case," "The Fifth Season," and "In the Ringwood." In "Death of a Queen" (1956), the queen has a modernist perspective, a morbid, incessant probing of the nature of existence which foreshadows Kinsella's own obsessive inner probings. Distracted from her tribal duties by memory and by despair over the fact "that life, late or soon, / Suddenly becomes, on the face, a jaded rouge," the queen loses touch with sustaining tribal ritual. She becomes death-centered rather than life-centered: "death was enticed / Out of the hands

that climbed about her.”<sup>22</sup> The queen experiences no consoling “romantic” or “visionary” moments. This uncompromising encounter with the void is vintage Kinsella.

The poet’s ironic treatment of the romantic vision continues in “Test Case” (*P&T*, p. 4), where a culture hero experiences the limits of his powers and is forgotten by his native village. The tragic hero in “Test Case” reminds one of Cuchulain, not as he appears in *The Tain*, an exuberant, boyish character, but rather as he appears in Yeats’s late plays and poems, a bewildered yet driven character whose exploits lead only to the depressing immortality of “Cuchulain Comforted” and *The Death of Cuchulain*. Kinsella’s hero experiences “elegiac weather,” a foreshadowing of endings. He accomplishes the tasks of his “heroic agenda, full of frightening / Things to kill or love or level down.” Approaching his final days on earth, he will soon “be torn to pieces” like Dionysus. After his death, none will remember him, not even his native village. And death itself offers no romantic visionary paradise, only oblivion.

The quest poem in Kinsella is also anti-romantic, conscious of dread and mortality rather than the transcendent. In “The Fifth Season” Heaven “thumbed in ash over our eyes,” and the seekers feel hopelessness, fear, and “mild hysteric.” The object of the quest, a fleeting fair-lady, is an evil Nemesis. Belying its lilting cadence, “In the Ringwood” contains a flawed world, a world of fractiousness rather than fraternity. Political and domestic disorder cannot be blamed on particular men. It is part of the human condition. The Ringwood, close to historic places—Vinegar Hill, the Slaney River, where in 1798 organized Irish military opposition to England had its last desperate moments—is a place of mourning. The bride and groom who “rove out” to Ringwood are impatient and make no effort to nurture love. Each exploits the intimacy and vulnerability of the other. Such exploitation makes companionship impossible. Traditional elements of romantic love (raven hair, red lips, white cheeks) here produce shrieking, anger, grief, and despair.

I kissed three times her shivering lips.  
I drank their naked chill.  
I watched the river shining  
Where the heron wiped his bill.  
I took my love in my icy arms  
In the Spring on Ringwood Hill. (*P&T*, p. 22)

Kinsella’s scepticism about the romantic visionary poem, about sustaining connections with the world outside the self has drawn him more inward, towards the landscape of the imagination and the unconscious. For Kinsella, that landscape seems to be female territory. The journey inwards to one’s deepest self means coming to terms with this enigmatic female presence which can be dominating, consoling, or terrifying. The poet probes this inner landscape for signs of order. The external world

2. *Poems and Translations* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), p. 3.

cannot provide consoling vision, but perhaps one can find consoling vision within. This inner quest is slightly more hopeful than the abandoned search for order in the outside world. Kinsella's relentless inward eye finds much cause for grief, but there are occasional intimations of inner order. Kinsella's most recent poems have plotted the encounter with the dark female mysteries within the psyche as a journey from utter randomness to a growing sense of inner meaning. The encounter with the female-within is explored first in "Priest and Emperor," and is looked at from different angles in "First Light," "Another September," and "The Fifth Season." The search for a structure is alluded to in Kinsella's early poem "Baggott Street Deserta" and then made more central in his later volumes *Wormwood* (1966), *Nightwalker* (1968), *Notes From the Land of the Dead* (1972), and *One* (1974).

A primal female appears in "Priest and Emperor." Encounter with this female produces in the speaker uncertainty, fear, struggle, surrender, and transformation, all elements of psychic growth. The speaker claims to have both political and religious duties, to be both priest and emperor. His faithful subjects await his wise counsel, but he has encountered powerful and bewildering forces within himself. His conjuring right hand has been possessed by a guiding force which moves him toward the unknown: "one woman, / . . . strife in darkness, cold grouped stars" (*P&T*, p. 43). The female figure gradually becomes more visible; she has the "Breasts and hair" of a "great-eyed queen." The speaker senses psychic movement and design, which he expresses in apposite metaphors: "unwinding of the warping laurel-wood," "the blood's assuring drum," "my herded fingers." Eye-images chart a psychic movement inward: "ice eyes," "my great-eyed queen," "my eyes accomplish his stare," "the statuary eye." The bewildered priest-emperor is frozen in the dead of winter ("ice-eyes"). He wishes to encounter the eyes of the primal female, but has no confidence that even then his own psychic well-being would return. Nevertheless, he yields to the power of the "great-eyed queen." The speaker has a vague sense of purposefulness: "Gestures, implacable as the reasons they / Portend and purport, take the graded / Orders." The frozen wintry wastes of psychic paralysis can only change through further acceptance of the "pastor" who guides "my herded fingers," the primal female.

This complex mythic figure appears in other Kinsella poems. In "First Light," a goddess returns, but to an unnerving place. Menacing "omens," "darkness," and "calamity" threaten signs of hope: "crests of speech," "order," "shining syllable." Bewildered by such ambiguity, the speaker cannot respond to the mythic energy of the goddess. In "Priest and Emperor" discussed earlier, cosmic force flows into the hand of the Priest-Emperor, and guides it to make the appropriate ritual gestures. But in "First Light" such energy does not flow, the hand is unguided. "I find I am left / With an unanswerable dawn upon my hands" (*P&T*, p. 7). In

"Another September," the primal female is menacing rather than nurturing: "Bearing daggers / and balances . . . down the lampless darkness they came, / Moving like women: Justice, Truth, such figures." The figure becomes even more menacing in "The Fifth Season," where Kinsella links her to Wrong, Evil, Nemesis.

As noted earlier in this essay, Kinsella questions the traditional romantic view that man can find order in external nature. His scepticism about this romantic view is effectively presented in an early poem, "Baggott Street Deserta." In later poems he will turn inward for signs of order. An anti-romantic spirit runs through "Baggott Street Deserta." The speaker longs for order, but his "obsessed honesty" will not permit him to accept the illusion of order either past or present.

Looking backward, all is lost;  
The past becomes a fairy bog  
Alive with fancies, double crossed  
By pad of owl and hoot of dog,  
Where shaven, serious-minded men  
Appear with lucid theses, after  
Which they don the mists again  
With trackless, cotton-silly laughter. (*P&T*, p. 39)

One must face the present honestly: "Endure and let the present punish." While the present may not offer consoling structures, the speaker does not despair. Instead he desires to be fully alive to the mystery of life. Hints of cosmic structure exist and man must be satisfied with these: "a crawling arch of stars," "the mathematic / Passion of a cello suite," and the Liffey's mountain source which "Is sonnetting origins," the dreams of Dubliners which give no clear signals but function as "Adam's morse." One must keep alert to these many confusing signals, like scientists listening to radio waves penetrating the earth's atmosphere in the hope that they may one day be able to distinguish meaningful sounds. One must keep "Clear eyes staring down the miles, / The thousand fathoms, into sleep."

In *Nightwalker* (1968), Kinsella's perspective begins to shift inward to the landscape of the psyche. "Before Sleep," "Nightwalker," "Ritual of Departure," and "Phoenix Park" chart distinctive inward journeys. "Before Sleep" ponders movement inward. It begins in the external world of "cups and saucers," then looks inward. Mysterious water lures the speaker toward unknown inner regions.

The wall opposite is blank but alive  
— Standing water over against sunken currents.  
The currents pursue their slow eddies through the house  
Scarcely loosening as yet the objects of our love.  
  
Soon the Falls will thunder, our love's detritus  
Slide across the brim seriatim, glittering,  
And vanish, swallowed into that insane  
White roar. Chaos.<sup>3</sup>

3. *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (New York: Knopf, 1968), p. 41.

Here movement leads to "Chaos," but chaos is preferable to stagnation.

Three long, meditative journey-poems, "Nightwalker," "Ritual of Departure," and "Phoenix Park," consider ways of fleeing from the depressing illusion of "now" into history, memory, imagination, and ultimately into the unconscious. All three poems reflect Kinsella's deepening awareness of self through the search for enduring, life-affirming structures. He finds the hints of structure in a dream about a crystal world ("Phoenix Park"), in close contact with the earth ("Ritual of Departure"), and in cosmic structure ("Nightwalker").

In "Nightwalker," "will that gropes for / structure" encounters an alien lunar landscape: "Rock needles stand up from the plain; the horizon / A ring of sharp mountains like broken spikes" (*Nightwalker*, pp. 54, 67). The speaker finds this disturbing place more meaningful than the terrestrial wasteland of television watchers; bureaucratic robots who judge everything in terms of "Productive Investment"; pragmatic politicians who, like De Valera, are "without principle" and who have betrayed the ideals of Parnell. (Kinsella himself was employed for some years in the Department of Finance in Dublin and so had first-hand experience of the emptiness of bureaucracy. He left the Civil Service in 1965, while he was writing "Nightwalker.") Kinsella retreats from these empty public surfaces into the privacy of his imagination, into resonant dialogue with Joyce/Yeats at Sandymount, where the darkness is "alive with signals" from the sea (*Nightwalker*, p. 61).

Potent female sexual images in "Nightwalker" lure the speaker further "downstream."

The Blessed Virgin smiles  
From her waxed pedestal, like young Victoria;  
A green snake wriggles under her heel  
Beside a vase of tulips. (*Nightwalker*, p. 54)

In the final section of "Nightwalker," female powers (wife, mother, virgin) draw him toward the moon:

Our mother  
Rules on high, queenlike, pale with control.  
Hatcher of peoples!  
Incline from your darkness into mine!  
I stand at the ocean's edge, my head fallen back  
Heavy with your control. (*Nightwalker*, pp. 66-67)

The final line, "Heavy with your control," suggests the surrender which must precede further psychic growth. Kinsella explores this idea more fully in later poems.

"Ritual of Departure" and "Phoenix Park" both deal with making significant moves in one's life: "A man at the moment of departure, turning / To leave" ("Ritual of Departure," *Nightwalker*, p. 69); "One stays or leaves. The one who returns is not / The one, etcetera. And we are leav-

ing" ("Phoenix Park," *Nightwalker*, p. 75). Kinsella left Ireland in 1965 to take up academic posts in America, first at Southern Illinois University, then at Temple University, where he currently teaches. In the first poem, on the brink of departure, Kinsella ponders urban and rural images which might provide spiritual renewal after he has left Ireland. He rejects the urban image ("Dublin under the Georges") and embraces the rural. Deeper understanding comes from contact with the earth, from the potato and its roots: "I scoop the earth and sense famine, a first / Sourness in the clay. The roots tear softly" (*Nightwalker*, p. 71).

In "Phoenix Park," Kinsella explores the theme of leaving as it relates to his own family. He and his wife take a nostalgic drive and recall important family events that have taken place in the Park: his wife's illness and confinement at St. Mary's Hospital, their daughter's First Communion, places where they roamed drunk and where they made love "naked by firelight." Their love has achieved what John Donne in "The Canonization" called "the Phoenix riddle," the profound level of intimacy which transforms two into one, male and female into a single being. This intense union requires the surrender of male will to the female "flame." Kinsella had not reached this level of psychic growth in "Nightwalker"; that poem ended in an arid Sea of Disappointment, with the speaker in a female environment but unable to yield his will. In "Phoenix Park" the requisite sum order of volition is made: "You approach the center by its own sweet light. / I consign my designing will stonily / To your flames" (*Nightwalker*, p. 79). The transforming agent in "Phoenix Park" is appropriately "fire" rather than "water." The darkness of isolation is brightened by the flame of love. In "Nightwalker" this redeeming light does not exist on the barren moonscape: "In the mind darkness tosses: / The light deceives" (*Nightwalker*, p. 67). But in "Phoenix Park" the light shows an affirming flame.

The inward journey toward primal female is explored in several ways in *Notes From the Land of the Dead* (1972), as a force in the unconscious forming the psyche, as a remembered grandmother, as mythic figures (Nuchal and Selene), and finally as family, when the re-formed psyche begins cautiously to surface out of the unconscious in the "Nightnothing" section of *Notes*. The journey toward a deeper understanding of the self is almost exclusively inwards in *Notes*. The speaker reaches an utterly self-absorbed psychic stage, one which takes him to mysterious places of origin in the unconscious. In these dark places, the female within each man must be encountered. Proper encounter with the female-within produces a psychic unity resembling yin/yang, a unity which Kinsella terms "quincunx."

The speaker alerts the reader at once in *Notes From the Land of the Dead* that this journey will be radically different from the one in *Nightwalker*, a psychic rather than a geographical journey. He proposes



"to go down quietly out of my mind,"<sup>4</sup> into a "mother liquid" emanating from some "hole." This will be a journey into the unconscious with obvious sexual overtones. The two long poems at the beginning of *Notes*, "hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again" and "Invocation," have different attitudes about this journey toward female.<sup>5</sup> "Invocation" has a more positive, upbeat, even comic tone and parodies the Yeatsian visionary quest poem. Like Fergus and Oisín, the male psyche is lured on by a gossamer-clad female asking him to "Come." (The word has both geographical and sexual meanings.) In "hesitate," entirely different circumstances exist; a terrified, lonely male falls toward a "ring of mouths" into a pit filled with "naked ancient women." Movement is efficacious in both poems. In "Invocation" mythic waters begin to flow; in "hesitate" the dazed poet returns to the surface of life with a dim sense of something having been accomplished, something he cannot fully express in words. Words fail him as well at the end of "hesitate" and one finds instead an intriguing line-drawing which appears to be a broken egg, or the uroboros, the mythic snake which swallows its own tail. The snake image brings the reader back to the opening lines of *Notes*: "A snake out of the void moves in my mouth, sucks / At triple darkness" (*New Poems*, p. 8).

The inward journey in "hesitate" begins with the speaker alone at home lying on a couch, the classic Freudian position, and then going "down quietly out of my mind" (*New Poems*, p. 9). He senses himself falling toward the "ring of mouths" and feels either removed from the physical world ("No matter") or shattered into "a million droplets." These droplets become sperm ("wavery albumin bodies / each burdened by an eye") which instinctively seek the female egg to create a new life. Terrified by this metamorphosis, the speaker imagines this female destination to be a "ring of mountainous beings staring upward / with open mouths — naked ancient women" (*New Poems*, p. 11). The sperm/psyche's journey to the female egg is completed without any cooperation or comprehension on the part of the speaker: "I was a mere plaything." The drawing of the egg-shell pierced signifies male/female union, and the possibility of a new life.

A similar inward journey to fuller psychic awareness takes place in the poem "Invocation."<sup>6</sup> The poem also has a female ambience, but one more appealing than that of "hesitate," "a moist wood" rather than cistern, "Pit," "thick tunnel." The male/female encounter in "Invocation" is comic, a quality extremely rare in Kinsella's poetry. The male speaker echoes Leopold Bloom, the Bloom of the "Nighttown" phantasmagoria. Like Bloom, the speaker in "Invocation" enjoys being mastered rather than mastering: "dragged rude upright. / A man of my age." An invita-

4. "hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again," *Notes From the Land of the Dead*, in *New Poems* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1973), p. 9.

5. The poem "Invocation" is not included in the 1973 Dolmen Press *New Poems* or in the Dolmen Press *Poems 1956-1973* (1979), but is included in the 1972 Cuala Press *Notes From the Land of the Dead*.

6. *Notes From the Land of the Dead* (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1972), pp. 9-15.

tion to "Come" lures the speaker more deeply into an "old wood" both strange and familiar, an enticement back toward origins. The elusive female, with "gown of gold: veiled breasts," finally lures the speaker to "the lost glade" where they meet and mate in a Yeatsian dance. The speaker continues to make deflating comic comments about the whole affair: "There is something that is forever / taking a little of the spring / out of a person's step" (*Notes*, p. 12). At last he finds himself in a "seventh heaven" of climax. This sexual act causes light to move and water to flow. These elements move toward a mysterious organic destiny, the foundations of a "new self," a new organic being.

living particles —  
cells: eyes: tongues — drifting out  
in a cloud toward either bank, to meet  
the living blossoms clustering down in answer  
to the current  
— cells of ruby blood, jewels  
to kiss and melt; crystal eyes  
to fasten against, fluttering; pink tongues (*Notes*, p. 13)

Kinsella will return to this image of crystal in other poems in *Notes*. The creative power of the sexual act will be symbolized as the figure of "Quincunx" in *One and Other Poems*.

Following these two introductory poems, *Notes* is divided into three sections: "An Egg of Being," "A Single Drop," and "Nightnothing." The first two titles describe female and male sexual energies. The third title names the offspring of a symbolic sexual act which occurs deep in the psyche, an offspring which symbolizes the state of resignation necessary to form the new organic self first mentioned in "Invocation." Such creative resignation seems to be Kinsella's version of the "Dark Night of the Soul," the point of total surrender of will which precedes and then sustains psychic growth. In the final poem of the "Nightnothing" section of *Notes*, "Good Night," one learns that the difficult inward journey has in fact been a "felix culpa." Goodness, in the sense of enlightenment and creativity, flows out of the dark Night. Kinsella's poems after *Notes* suggest further positive developments from this "Good Night."

Fuller self-awareness is achieved not only by encountering the primal female in the fractured inner spaces of the unconscious, but also by coming to terms with one's most disturbing family experiences. Kinsella makes such an attempt in the "Egg of Being" poems which deal with his grandmother. Later in one of the Peppercanister poems, *The Messenger* (1978), he will attempt to come to terms with his father's death. The grandmother is another of the mysterious, often fearsome, female presences in Kinsella's life. He remembers times when he was close to her as a child, when he buried his face in her aprons ("Tear," *New Poems*, p. 25), or when she hugged him and gave him sweets ("The High Road," p. 21) or a pomegranate ("A Hand of Solo," p. 20). But as a female the

grandmother remains a stranger to the boy, a goddess-like presence in his life, linked to primal mysteries he intuits but does not understand.

One finds this goddess-like quality especially in "Hen Woman," the poem which contains the phrase "Egg of Being." The woman hurrying out to collect the new-laid eggs, not yet identified as the poet's grandmother, inhabits a sacred time and space: "time stood still. / Nothing moved." The hectic pace of normal life is slowed down in the poet's memory to a frame-by-frame slow motion where events can be more fully experienced. At the center of the poem, a mythic egg appears: "I had felt all this before" (*New Poems*, p. 14). But the birth process bewilders the boy/man.

As I watched, the mystery completed.  
The black zero of the orifice  
closed to a point  
and the white zero of the egg hung free. (*New Poems*, p. 15)

Two circles dominate here, the black circle of the hen's orifice and the white circle of the egg, described as "moon white." The goddess/hen-woman is associated with these female shapes. She emerges out of the cottage door which the speaker imagines as a "black hole."

Mythic elements can also be found in other poems from the "Egg of Being" section of *Notes*. In "A Hand of Solo" the goddess-grandmother presents a pomegranate to the boy. In "The High Road" she gives him a mandolin-shaped piece of candy and he climbs to a "big hole" into which he drops the human-shaped sweet. The grandmother's profile in "Ancestor" has a hunting-bird's shape. Coming close to his grandmother as she lies dying in the hospital, the terrified boy is reminded of a vaguely mythic scene, "a derelict place / smelling of ash . . . far off / in the vaults of a single drop / splashed" (*New Poems*, p. 27). One recalls here the male/female encounter in "hesitate," where male sperm falls into the female "vault."

Among these poems, "A Hand of Solo" has the strongest mythic character. The grandmother possesses serpent qualities.

Her eyes glittered. . . .  
Strings of jet beads ringed her neck  
and hissed on the black taffeta  
and crept on my hair.  
". . . You'd think I had three heads!" (*New Poems*, pp. 119-20)

Maurice Harmon interprets "three heads" as a three-faced Hecate figure.<sup>7</sup> The boy takes from the goddess-grandmother the offered pomegranate, a fruit associated with the Dionysian fertility rite and symbolizing rejuvenation, the liberation of new energies in the Spring.<sup>8</sup> The boy eats the fruit, first timidly, then with a sexual gusto.

7. *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1974), p. 84.

8. J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 134.

went at it with little bites,  
 peeling off bits of skin  
 and tasting the first traces of the blood . . .  
 I sank my teeth into it . . .  
 I drove my tongue among the beads. (*New Poems*, p. 20)

The boy is unaware of the sexual implications of his behavior, but the mature poet understands these symbolic actions.

The second part of *Notes From the Land of the Dead*, a group of five poems titled "a single drop," continues the mythic and psychological themes of "hesitate" and "Invocation." All five poems trace the encounter with the female-within and react variously to this encounter. The ambiguous title, "a single drop," can mean a falling movement, a sperm (the male "drop" required to create new life), and the aridity in the land of the dead before the rebirth of life. Two of the poems in "a single drop," "Nuchal" and "Endymion," have female speakers, an unusual perspective for Kinsella. These "female" poems have more serenity, more acceptance about them. Females participate in mythic rituals they understand intuitively. In two other poems, "Survivor" and "At the Crossroads," the anxious, resisting male perspective of "hesitate" reappears. These two poems show little psychological insight; the terrified male still moves inexorably toward the monstrous Hag. But the inclusion of poems from the female perspective creates an ironic, judging distance between the poet and his anxious male persona.

"Nuchal" is a spring described in the Gaelic saga *Lebor Gabala Erenn* as the Spring of Paradise from which four rivers flow.<sup>9</sup> In the poem a woman lies by the spring with her arm in the water. But she does not look into the water and become enamored with her own reflection. She does not look outward at all. She dreams and her dream causes cosmic power to flow into the water of Paradise, dividing it into four parts to flow in four directions toward the four seasons and ultimately to "th'encircling sea" (*New Poems*, p. 33). The short poem "Endymion" has the perspective of the moon-goddess Selene, who moves toward sleeping Endymion and kisses his eyelids. Selene's gentle contact with male Endymion produces "a single drop," the sign of creative power.

The two male-centered poems in "a single drop," "Survivor" and "At the Crossroads," repeat familiar Kinsella themes, the frustrated quest, the fear of yielding, of being consumed by the primal female. In "Survivor" the male protagonist glimpses Paradise ("promontories beautiful beyond description," *New Poems*, p. 37), but soon returns to "a land of the dead" where he struggles to preserve his ego against the insatiable Hag eager to devour him. "At the Crossroads" has an equally shocking landscape with "A dog's / body zipped / open and / stiff in / the grass" (*New Poems*, p. 39). The terrified male persona fears "a phantom dagger." An omnivorous female stalks her prey: "Flux of forms / in a great stomach: living

9. *The Poetry of Thomas Kinsella*, p. 87.

meat torn off, / . . . some creature / torn and swallowed; her brain, afterward, / staring among the rafters in the dark / until hunger returns" (*New Poems*, p. 40).

The poems in the "nightnothing" section, the final section of *Notes From the Land of the Dead*, have in general a more hopeful, less terrified attitude toward the encounter with the primal female. The word "nightnothing" connotes chaos, the absence of light and the dissolution of identity ("no thing"). In terms of a journey into the depths of self, the speaker in "nightnothing" has reached the point where further descent would mean a loss of identity in the randomness which precedes the original formation of self. The falling movement stops in "nightnothing" and two other movements take its place, a circular movement ("all is emptiness and I must spin") and a linear movement upwards from the brink of psychic annihilation to the social surfaces of normal life ("Ely Place"). The tone of these poems is more serene, more optimistic. Fear of being consumed by the female persists, but does not incapacitate. Especially in "Good Night," one finds an opportunity for new psychic growth. Kinsella has learned by this descent into the land of the dead that "Self" can never be immutable, but that it participates in the eternal rhythms of the universe.

The first poem in "nightnothing," "All is Emptiness and I Must Spin," dramatizes the psychological exhaustion of the male ego which has finally yielded to the powerful cosmic energies around it and within it. The dislocated ego seems like a puppet dangling in alien space. The terror of the unknown, so prominent elsewhere in *Notes*, has now become a more tranquil acceptance of the radical transformation of Self: "How bring oneself to judge, or think, / so hurled onward! / inward! . . . / I was lying in utter darkness / in a vaulted place" (*New Poems*, pp. 44-45). Will is powerless. The condition mimics death, but is not death, for death means the end of existence. The attenuated Self in "All is Emptiness" realizes that this death-like condition too will pass. He calls the condition "Night." Indeed, even as the speaker names this outer boundary of the psyche, this dark night of the soul, changes are taking place, a cooling and wetting which foreshadow further psychic growth: "tears of self forming" (*New Poems*, p. 45).

The title "Good Night" prepares the reader for the more serene and accepting tone of this final poem in *Notes*. Psychic growth in this poem requires integration of private and public worlds, of the unconscious and the domestic. Words like "peaceful" and "relax" imply a more accepting tone: "Relax, and these things / shall be" (*New Poems*, p. 51). The mature self must be able to cope with sudden manifestations of the unconscious.

the sounds of the house are all  
flowing into one another and turning  
in one soft-booming, slowly swallowing  
vertige most soothing and pleasant

down this suddenly live  
brinegullet  
to a drowned pit  
clasping the astonished spectre of  
the psyche in its sweet wet. (*New Poems*, p. 51)

The idea of being consumed now does not terrify the persona as formerly, but intrigues him as a means of encountering "the psyche in its sweet wet." How distant this affirming line seems from the resistance of "hesitate": "A cistern his . . . A thick tunnel stench" (*New Poems*, p. 10).

"Good Night" concludes on a serene note of acceptance of forces which "feed us / and feed in us." The wiser speaker can understand the positive quality of darkness. A mature psyche, one which has journeyed to the land of the dead and returned, can accept the paradox of existence, the darkness in light, the simultaneous presence of the monstrous and the beautiful.

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 feeds, wandering  
out of the cavern, a low cry  
echoing — Camacamamac . . .

that we need as we don't need truth . . .

and ungulfs a Good Night, smiling. (*New Poems*, p. 53)

Repetition of "Camac," the name of a Dublin river, signals a return to the public world of Dublin. River flows, a Good Night is ungulfed, and the psyche bathes "smiling" in its "sweet wet."

The idea of psychic transformation, so central to *Notes*, is further developed in *Vertical Man* (1973), in *One* (1974), and in *The Messenger* (1978). A new self, forming in *Notes* as crystal in the cave of mother earth ("Good Night"), emerges fully formed from its maternal cave in these poems and is cast into the sky to become part of a cosmic structure symbolizing male and female unity, a structure Kinsella calls "Quincunx." But such arcane psychic processes are for Kinsella only one way of reaching a fuller understanding of the self. Tribal and family memories can also contribute to psychic growth. In *Notes*, "The Route of the Tain" and the grandmother poems complement "hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again," and "all is emptiness and I must spin." In *One*, Kinsella reflects on the migration of the Sons of Mil, the Milesians, who battled against the Tuatha de Danaan for possession of Ireland ("Finistere," "The Oldest Place"). A matriarchal Celtic culture supports Kinsella's acceptance of female dominance in the structure of his own psyche. Family memory inspires several poems in *One* ("38 Phoenix Street," "Minstrel," "His Father's Hands").<sup>10</sup> In these poems, as well as in *The Messenger*, Kinsella attempts to understand his father.

10. *One and Other Poems* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979).

In *One* and *Vertical Man*, one finds hints of a vision of psychic and cosmic order as radical and arcane as Kinsella's vision of psychic fragmentation in earlier volumes. One learns that there is a further stage of psychic transformation which can be reached only after the surrender of the male ego to the primal female. The will-less ego has lost its own form and becomes part of a cosmic process culminating in a moment of transcendence which Kinsella calls "Quincunx" ("Vertical Man").<sup>11</sup> In the "Prologue" to *One*, the psychic/cosmic transformation has four stages. The dreamer first experiences himself sprawled out in the heavens, a missive sent up from Mother Earth. In the second stage a physical metamorphosis occurs: "in a cosmic grip . . . / my body aged, the skin loosened" (*One*, p. 10). The dreamer is being "digested" by the heavens, "a process of absorption." The third stage has the order which Kinsella in "A Vertical Life" will call "Quincunx." The digested dreamer becomes two stars (male and female): "Two discs of light in the heavens / trembling in momentary balance" (*One*, p. 10). Sadly for the dreamer, no cosmic state endures forever. The fourth stage moves the dreamer from harmony to conflict: "During the last part I am coiled in combat / with giant particular forces among the stars" (*One*, p. 10). The conflict will move the dreamer back to fragmentary beginnings, back to the place where "all is emptiness and I must spin."

Kinsella uses the term "Quincunx" to symbolize a moment of completeness in the psychic and cosmic process. This momentary balance is the third stage of the cosmic process in "Prologue," where "I saw / —I was—two discs of light in the heavens / trembling in momentary balance" (*One*, p. 10). The stage is explored more fully in "Vertical Man," where Kinsella first introduces "Quincunx" as a newly formed heavenly constellation:

At the dark zenith a pulse beat,  
a sperm of light separated wriggling  
and snaked in a slow beam down  
the curve of the sky, through faint  
structures and hierarchies  
of elements and things and beasts. It fell,  
a packed star, dividing  
and redividing until it was  
a multiple gold tear. It dropped  
toward the horizon, entered  
bright Quincunx newly risen,  
beat with a blinding flame, and dis-  
appeared. I stared, duly blinded.  
An image burned on the brain  
—a woman-animal: scaled,  
pierced in paws and heart,  
ecstatically calm. It faded  
to a far-off desolate call,  
a child's . . . (*Fifteen Dead*, p. 30)

11. *Fifteen Dead* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1979), p. 30.

"Quincunx" is a structure shaped like a Greek "chi" (X) having five points, the fifth being the center. The structure can be observed on the cover of *Fifteen Dead* (1979), where the Roman numerals for fifteen (XV) can also be read as quincunx and vertical man. A study of traditional symbols describes quincunx as "The Cosmic Center, the four cardinal points meeting at the fifth point, the Center; it is the meeting point of Heaven and Earth."<sup>12</sup> Kinsella probably got the idea of this shape and its relation to human order from Jung, who borrowed it from Plato's *Timaeus*, "where the demiurge joins the parts of the world-soul together by means of two sutures, which form a chi (X)."<sup>13</sup> Thomas Browne also makes an elaborate analysis of the quincunx in his book *The Garden of Cyrus*. Taking his lead as well from Plato, Browne describes the quincunx as the "fundamental figure," and says that "all things are seen quincuncially."<sup>14</sup> Browne most regularly finds this shape in gardens and in landscape.<sup>15</sup> The perfection of Quincunx is "momentary"; even as it formed, "It faded." Kinsella remains intensely aware of mutability.

As noted earlier, Kinsella is interested in another kind of movement in *One*, the Celtic migrations which are part of Ireland's mythic consciousness. He presents his own version of these migrations in "Finistere" and "The Oldest Place." His versions of the ancient Celtic past are never idealized. The Celtic adventurers struggle onward toward the unknown with a vague sense of hope that they are part of an ultimately meaningful action. The going is never easy and the visionary moments rare. Kinsella empathizes with the speaker of "Finistere" and "The Oldest Place," a character Maurice Harmon has identified as Amorgin, one of the Sons of Mil, who in about 2000 B.C. migrated from Spain to a new "land's end" in Ireland. The Celtic Sons of Mil battled the entrenched inhabitants, the Tuatha de Danaan. These tales are found in the *Irish Book of Invasions (Lebor Gabala Erenn)*.<sup>16</sup> Kinsella's empathy with the speaker Amorgin is established in the first two words of "Finistere": "I" and "One." The words have both numerical and pronominal meanings, the number "1," the personal pronoun "I," and the impersonal pronoun "One." Kinsella and the Celtic explorer/poet Amorgin can be seen as "one," that is, as the Irish Everyman.

The migration in "Finistere" is filtered through the stream-of-consciousness of Amorgin. Symbolic cultural images fill his mind and he prays to mythic matriarchal powers. The cultural images of coil and spiral evoke the great tumuli at Newgrange and elsewhere, the rings of standing

12. J. C. Cooper, p. 136.

13. C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 266.

14. Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici and Other Works* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964), pp. 131, 167. I am grateful to Professor Thomas Hanzo for this link of quincunx to Browne.

15. Arthur E. McGuinness, "Bright Quincunx Newly Risen": Thomas Kinsella's Inward 'I,' " *Eire-Ireland*, XV:4 (Winter, 1980), pp. 122-23.

16. Harmon, pp. 103-04; O'Rahilly, T., *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1964), p. 198. R. A. S. Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 30-32.



stone and the characteristic carvings on stone: "Our thoughts full of passages / smelling of death and clay and faint metals / and great stones in the darkness" (*One*, p. 13).

poolspirals opening on  
closing spiralpools  
and dances drilled in the rock  
in coil zigzag angle and curl  
river ripple earth ramp  
suncircle moonloop . . . (*One*, p. 14)

Kinsella implies that this ancient Celtic culture had a matriarchal character. As they cross the sea from Spain to Ireland, the Celts are threatened by a storm and pray to "mild Mother." In her honor the "great uprights," the rings of stone, are raised. She is the terrifying shape found carved on Celtic stones, "whose goggle gaze / and holy howl we have scraped / speechless on slabs of stone" (*One*, p. 13). There is some ambiguity about ultimate power in the last third of the poem, when a prayer begins: "Our Father."

"Our Father . . .", someone said  
and there was a little laughter, I stood  
searching a moment for the right words.  
They fell silent. I chose the old words once more  
and stepped out. At the solid shock  
a dreamy power loosened at the base of my spine  
and uncoiled and slid up through the marrow.  
A flow of seawater over the rock fell back  
with a she-hiss, plucking at my heel. (*One*, p. 15)

After these lines, "Finistere" concludes with a series of unanswered questions about ultimate creative power, questions which begin with "Who?" The quoted lines reveal a continuing matriarchal power rather than the beginning of patriarchal power. The spoken "Our Father," which produces laughter and makes no life-force flow, foreshadows patriarchal Christianity, the historical "Fathers" who will come to Ireland and attempt to suppress the indigenous Mother. But in the legendary time of "Finistere," the "Our Father" has no efficacy. So the speaker returns to the "old words," invocation of the Goddess. After they are spoken, power begins to flow, the coil begins to uncoil: "A dreamy power loosened at the base of my spine / and uncoiled and slid up through the marrow." The presence of the Goddess is manifest in an audible "she-hiss." The answer to the question posed at the end of the poem about "who" controls the cosmos is clearly "She."

"The Oldest Place" continues the tale of the first Celtic migration to Ireland, with an outcome far different from the relative good fortune of the voyagers in "Finistere." In "The Oldest Place," the Goddess is present in a different form, as a fearsome, inscrutable power which permits suffering and death. The poem begins as the Celtic settlers approach the Irish shore. A "sin" is mentioned, but not explained. The new settlement has a

short life. A wasting plague-like disease soon begins to decimate the colony until only the speaker is left. He approaches "the great stone," but receives no coherent directions from it. The poem ends with the speaker describing the black stone as a "complex emptiness" with "coils of restless metal piled about it" and a dangling shawl at the top.

This puzzling poem becomes clearer when one considers it from the matriarchal perspective of "Finistere." The "sin" mentioned in line 5 may be that casual "Our Father" tossed off in jest in "Finistere," which constitutes a betrayal of the Goddess. Appropriate punishments for such blasphemy are the loss of faith, loss of vision, disease, suffering, and death which fill "The Oldest Place." Sinful Celts can no longer pray with efficacy at the "great stone," no longer have a clear vision, nor comprehend any longer the significance of the coil. The "great stone" is the omphalos, an emblem of the Mother Goddess; the navel, which marks at the center of the world, "the oldest place." The sinful Celts can only see a "draped black shaft" with a shawl on top. The Goddess has clouded their vision.

Another way of looking at the sin and subsequent darkening of vision is through the "old words" which Amorgin tries to recite. If one compares this prayer with the original version of Amorgin's song in the *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, one notes significant differences.<sup>17</sup> The original text in the *Lebor Gabala* is mainly declarative ("I am") with a set of six questions at the end, while the passage in "Finistere" is entirely interrogative ("Who is?"). The speaker in "Finistere" retains only a flawed recollection of the "old words." Lines are recited out of order and are not exact versions of the Gaelic text. This confusion dramatizes the speaker's claim that "My tongue stumbled" (*One*, p. 15). He cannot address the Goddess, the "I" repeated in the lines of the *Lebor Gabala*. This "I" appears at the beginning of the poem "I / One" and is the cover design for the Dolmen Press edition of *One and Other Poems*. The only "I" which the guilty speaker in "Finistere" can speak is limited to his own darkened being: "I went forward, reaching out" (*One*, p. 16).

The theme of sin and its consequences is looked at in personal rather than tribal terms in two poems about Kinsella's father, "His Father's Hands" (*One*) and *The Messenger* (1978). His father died in 1976. Both poems are detailed and moving evocations of the father's life and death. John Kinsella, a cobbler and onetime employee in the Guinness brewery, has heroic moments. He opposed the exploitation of workers by employers and the tacit cooperation of the Catholic Church in this exploitation. He approved of the Socialist movement and acquainted his son with Marx and Engels.

Fathers in Ireland today must still answer for the ancient sin of reject-

17. In *The Secret Languages of Ireland*, Macalister discusses many secret codes which the Celts constructed out of their "ogham" script, a system of writing made entirely out of a series of straight lines. He says that the "Song of Amorgin" is virtually the only "literary" text extant in the ogham style.

ing the Mother Goddess in favor of a "Father" God. In "Finistere," the sin, a jokingly introduced "Our Father," is a blasphemy against the Mother, who darkens the vision of the Sons of Mil. Kinsella ponders another imposition of patriarchy, namely, the introduction of Christianity into Ireland and the continuing dominance of this father-centered faith. Celtic Christians have for this reason lost the matriarchal vision. An engraving of Hermes placed at the beginning of *The Messenger* comments ironically on losing faith in the Mother. Robert Graves connects Hermes with worship of the Mother: "Hermes, (Zeus's) son by the rape of Maia—a title of the Earth-goddess as Crone—was originally not a god, but a totemic virtue of a phallic pillar or cairn. Such pillars were the center of an orgiastic dance in the goddess's honour."<sup>18</sup> The "messenger" in Kinsella's poem is only a boy delivering telegraph messages for the Post Office in Dublin, and not a mythic "messenger" like Hermes/Mercury. "His Father's Hands" and *The Messenger* include pillars, the cobbler's bench in "His Father's Hands," and "the round shaft" pillar in a Catholic Church, but these pillars carry no power. Vision does not flow from them.

"His Father's Hands" recalls three periods connected with Kinsella's "father," his own childhood when he watched his father at the cobbler's bench, an earlier time when the Kinsella family joined in the Croppies cause against the English, and the legendary time when his Celtic forebears attempted to colonize Ireland. All three memories contain loss of vision following an "original sin," mocking and denial of the Goddess. Like Amorgin, all fathers since have lacked clear vision. Kinsella's father attempts to sing a song similar to "Amorgin's Song," but remembers nothing beyond the first image of wind: "the wind that shakes the barley." Irish history since this "original sin" has been full of violence and displacement. The "Men Folk," the "fathers," have sent their families to "dispersals and migrations" (*One*, p. 25). The cobbler's bench or "rude block" serves in no way as a tribal omphalos. It has a phallic shape, "wet and black," but it has no power. When the son tips up the father's "big block," it disintegrates before his horrified eyes: "the wood's soft flesh broke open, / countless little nails / squirming and dropping out of it" (*One*, p. 27).

The world of *The Messenger* is similar to the world of "His Father's Hands." It has lost its intimacy with the Mother and is a place where maleness rules, a maleness of anxiety, incompleteness, frustration, competition. As Catholics, the Kinsellas are subject to the local parish Fathers, designated representatives of the Roman patriarch. Kinsella's father is employed by the mercenary and exploitative Guinness brewery. Kinsella himself recalls his first job, as a "messenger" for the Post Office. The drawing of Hermes/Mercury comments ironically on such a mun-

18. *The Greek Myths*, Vol. II (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955), p. 56. See also *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), p. 126.

dane "messenger." The "fallen" world of fathers has lost touch with divine messengers. Male members of society cannot grasp their alienation. Only death can bring clearer vision. As Kinsella's father nears death, "His mother's image settled on him."<sup>19</sup> The poet, who has made the journey to the land of the dead, who has encountered the Mother in her various aspects, both terrifying and nurturing, who has come to an understanding of his own cultural and psychic history, pities the blindness and frustration of those like his father who have not made this journey.

Loss of vision is documented in Section I of *The Messenger* through a series of questions which are a corrupted version of the "Song of Amorgin." The questions and images are confused and have no ritual shape, no ritual power. The references are entirely mundane, clichés rather than parables: "Who has a skeleton in *his* meat cupboard?" "Who flings off in a huff / and never counts the cost?" Modern man is even further removed from vision than those ancients who humorously invoked "Our Father." Kinsella's final image in this part of *The Messenger* evokes a loss of power, an inability to fly. Unlike the winged Hermes/Mercury, the Irish male ego has "wings down at heel" and in attempting flight "fell on its face" (*Peppercanister Poems*, p. 125). The "I" is only the human ego and not the "I" of the transcendent, the "I" of "Finistere" and the "Song of Amorgin."

The egg image found in the "egg of being" poems in *Notes From the Land of the Dead* recurs in *The Messenger*. The egg symbolizes the unity which can exist when the male ego yields to the primal female. But the father-dominated Irish world has lost this unity. At the beginning of *The Messenger*, patriarchal forces block the egg's passage: "A dead egg glimmers—a pearl in muck / glimpsed only as much settled. / The belly settles and crawls tighter" (*Peppercanister Poems*, p. 119). However, Kinsella does not completely lose hope for his own father. At the end of Section I, the speaker imagines his dying father producing a viable egg, the egg of Goodness and Decency, an unconscious passing on of the values of the Goddess.

And have watched my hand reach in under  
after something, and felt it  
close upon it and ease him of it.

The eggseed Goodness  
That is also called  
Decency. (*Peppercanister Poems*, p. 126)

In section II, the egg image appears for a final time, this time in the utterance of the Goddess-Mother herself: "Hurry! / says the great womb-whisper. / Quick! / I am all egg" (*Peppercanister Poems*, p. 129). That last sentence, "I am all egg," echoes the ritual cadences of the "Song of Amorgin." But the mood is declarative rather than interrogative. The

19. *Peppercanister Poems 1972–1978* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest Univ. Press, 1979), p. 121.

speaker understands the Mother's centrality to the psyche and to culture.

The most essential aspects of Kinsella's vision have been psychological and cultural. He has pursued the phantom of Self to the land of the dead and back. Encounter with the female (Lover, Devourer, Mother, Goddess) has been an unvarying theme. From a feeling of terror in the presence of a female perceived as devouring, Kinsella has come to understand that surrender does not mean annihilation. The integration of male and female energies can produce a "new self" which rises to the psychic-cosmic condition of "quincunx," a state of harmony which offers consolation despite its brief duration. In more recent poems Kinsella has been returning to the cultural themes which first absorbed him in *The Tain*. Among his latest efforts have been the translation of a hundred Celtic "Poems of the Dispossessed" in 1981, and all of the translations from the Irish in *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* (1986).<sup>20</sup> He believes that the psyche is formed not only from individual experience, but also from tribal memory which goes back to ancient Celtic myths. His sense of the primacy or at least priority of the Female in psychic formation becomes in his poems about ancient Celtic cultures an awareness of the primacy and priority of the Mother Goddess. In a startling and brilliant revision of the Myth of the Fall, Kinsella traces man's anxiety and guilt back to a rejection of the Mother Goddess, and to an embracing of "Our Father" by the ancient Celts. Christianity simply overlaid its patriarchal structure on a race which already experienced itself as fallen. But again, Kinsella does not despair over the burden of this Original Sin. Life permits the sensitive and dedicated poet to "see into the life of things," to regain some of the vision blurred in those ancient times, to have a dim understanding of the Goddess's most compelling utterance: "I am all egg."

20. *An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1980). *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse*, edited, with translations, by Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986).