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"imprinted now/ into that world": Galway Kinnell's Poetics of Relationality

Ariana M. Lyriotakis

School of English

Supervisor: Prof. Stephen Matterson

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work. I confirm that the work has been completed in full compliance with relevant university policies, including the Academic Integrity policy, the Trinity Policy on Good Research Practice, and the guidance on AI and GenAI in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research.

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Summary

This doctoral thesis explores the poetics of relationality in late modern poet Galway Kinnell (1927-2014), tracing his developmental trajectory of creative affiliation and spatial idiolect. As the first sustained examination of his work posthumously, it brings Kinnell's literary practice foremost into its analysis, drawing upon new and critically elided primary source materials from recently established and existing archives. Through its appraisal, the study touches upon nearly 80 poems over the span of his career, in addition to Kinnell's only novel, *Black Light* and ethnographic writings.

Structured into four chapters, this project employs intellectual inheritance as a methodological scaffolding to locate complex geographical imaginations in his texts. Kinnell's heterogeneous relationships with inheritance—Transcendentalism and the American sublime; Walt Whitman's definitive idiom; Iran and the New Persian Poetry movement; and fellow contemporary poets—each come to bear on the materiality and the colloquy of his poetic practice in real and imagined spaces. Grounded in a critical apparatus that includes geocriticism, spatial literary theory, literary and human geography, and continental philosophy to guide its enquiry, the thesis argues for the significance of the geographical imagination, in material and psychogeographical imports, as both foundational to Kinnell's ethos and central to his body of work.

Chapter One ("My old hero. Should I be surprised?"—Kinnell's American Sublime) considers Kinnell's turn away from paradigms of New Criticism and towards a calibration of poetic self-development in a devolving landscape of alterity and anxiety. The chapter attends to Kinnell's negotiation with marginalisation and exclusion through socio-spatial dynamics of power and place, whilst foregrounding him vis-à-vis his Transcendentalist forebears of the American Renaissance: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Frederick Douglass. Key poems pertaining to geopolitical instability and nuclearity; social justice and the Civil Rights Movement; military conflict and the Vietnam War; as well as the riparian chthonic of "The Last River" are analysed to evince Kinnell's specific poetry of witness in personal and collective history.

Chapter Two (The Itinerant Bard—Ideas of Here, Ideas of There) scrutinises Kinnell's lifelong engagement with Walt Whitman, highlighting this relationship as one of crucial significance in Kinnell's arc as a post-1945 US American poet. It draws attention to Kinnell's shift from formal prosody to an interlocution with Whitman's techniques of linguistic and poetic structure, including such aspects as metapoesis, Keatsian negative capability, and elegy. Defined by geographies of sensorial witness (visual, aural, haptic, and spectral), Kinnell's ever-expanding geographical imagination is showcased in a selection of poems including "There

are Things I Tell to No One"; "The Poem"; "Memories of My Father"; "St. Francis and the Sow"; and "When the Towers Fell."

Chapter Three ("Paradise Elsewhere" —Tehran and Its Golden Allure) constructs Kinnell's relationship with cultural identity, literary production, and transnationalism, drawing upon the intensely formative period he spent in Iran as a university lecturer, expatriate, and photojournalist. The chapter centres on Kinnell's cross-cultural and linguistic expansion, with a particular focus on conceptions of identity in his geographical imagination. It attends to his working and socio-poetic engagements with a close circle of Persian modernists of *She'r-e Nimaa'i* such as Nader Naderpour and Forugh Farrokhzad, among others. Detailed evaluation of Kinnell's literary legacies from Iran features prominently, consisting of *Black Light*; "The Supper After the Last"; "Testament of the Thief"; and a quintet of poems entitled *Sheffield Ghazals*, marrying medieval ghazal and New England sensibility.

Chapter Four (Crying Oneself into Self-Knowing) takes as its subject Kinnell's 18-month self-imposed isolation, concentrating on geographical imaginations of the exilic, and his eventual literal and figurative extrication. Vital to the composition of *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone* is a sociological configuration of collaborative, poetic affiliation comprised of Kinnell's contemporaries including Sharon Olds, Hayden Carruth, Donald Hall, and Robert Bly. Close readings of preamble poems from the volume are highlighted, with a detailed analysis of Kinnell's engagement with lyric theory and the American sonnet, as demonstrated in the eponymous poem.

Finally, the conclusion reflects on Kinnell's engagement with the poetics of relationality, underscoring the profoundly social aspect of his literary praxes. It reinforces the conceptual framework of intellectual inheritance and the complex geographical imagination in evolving Kinnell's oeuvre, in addition to his own sense of literary genesis. Acknowledging his upcoming centenary in 2027, the thesis suggests indications for future scholarship and research possibilities in Kinnellian studies.

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Introduction

"Here, between answer/ and nothing I stand."

–Galway Kinnell, Section X: "Lastness"[1]

In 1969, Galway Kinnell's "The Shoes" debuted in the November issue of *Poetry*. The special edition was a tribute to Henry Rago, managing editor and revitalising saviour of the publication who featured poets of sundry schools and aesthetic description. Alongside texts by Gwendolyn Brooks, Stanley Kunitz, and Denise Levertov, Kinnell's modestly titled, five-strophe lyric seemed befitting of Rago's signature poetic simplicity. Two years later, Kinnell released a 100-copy chapbook run of "The Shoes of Wandering," circulated by subscription-only. Each collector's copy was set and printed manually, produced by bookmaker Walter Hamady for Perishable Press Limited, and signed in Kinnell's hand.

Since the initial release of the poem in *Poetry*, Kinnell had completed the substantial project of *The Book of Nightmares* (1971) by which an understanding of "The Shoes of Wandering," along with its greater enterprise, had taken shape through several clarifying emendations. In addition to a more descriptive title, Kinnell had also expanded the poem to seven strophes, with the inclusion of a wholly new stanza in the sixth:

> I long for the mantle
> of the great wanderers, who lighted
> their steps by the lamp
> of pure hunger and pure thirst,
>
> and whichever way they lurched was the way. (*CP*, 229-230)

The lyric speaker is compelled by itinerance, a mythological and spiritual proselytizing by which "the great wanderers," and their self-directed meandering, reveal the true path. Kinnell's prosody is markedly uneven in its metrical weight, placing the speaker within a context of pre-

[1] Galway Kinnell, *Collected Poems* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 272. All subsequent references to poems from this volume will be indicated by '*CP*' and placed in parenthetical citations after the verse quotation.

eminence whilst initiating a sense of engagement with legacies of the past. In this first line, spondaic rhythm is counterpoised by a trochee; however, as the verse perambulates, Kinnell toggles between enjambments and end-stops, lending a visual-verbal moment of oscillation.

Through the speaker's supplication, a desire for immersion within one's environs is initiated, as the seeming limpidness of the travellers' endeavours is assured by placelessness. Kinnell employs iambic pentameter to resolve the stanza, both rhetorically and rhythmically through a chiasmic line: "and whichever way they lurched was the way" (*CP*, 30). It is at this porous interface, where poetic fellowship and the geographical imagination fluidly transition and intersect, that this thesis builds its argument.

Devised as a single-author study over four chapters, this critical inquiry interrogates Kinnell's poetics of relationality, centring on the arc of his development through entanglements of creative affiliation and spatial idiolect. The project appraises Kinnell as a relational poet who develops his oeuvre through a nexus of heterogeneous associations and artistic relationships, querying how each comes to bear on the materiality and the colloquy of his literary practice. Through the scope of its analysis, the thesis reads Kinnell's engagement with intellectual inheritance[2] as structuring the poet's cosmography in real and imagined spaces, using it as a methodological framework by which to locate complex geographical imaginations in his works.[3] What were to Kinnell the towering figures of the American Renaissance (Frederick Douglass, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau); Walt Whitman's distinctive idiom; the changing regime of 1950s Tehran and *She'r-e Nimaa'i*; and the collaborative and constructive criticism of his fellow poets (Sharon Olds, Robert Bly, Donald Hall, Hayden Carruth), Kinnell's singular body of work reflects this assortment of heritage, global discovery, and literary community.

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[2] Gerhard Richter emphasises that intellectual inheritance requires a hermeneutical approach, one in which interpretation is inseparable from the active process of maintaining meaning and difference, as relates to both individual literary history and linguistic significance. See Gerhard Richter, "He Who Inherits, Interprets: 14 Theses," *MLN* 133, no. 3 (April 2018): 474-488.

[3] The expression of complex geographical imaginations, particularly as related to place, is identified as a feature of late modernist poetry. Neal Alexander, *Late Modernism and the Poetics of Place* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 10.

More expansively, this study contends that Kinnell's texts are undergirded by a range of geographical imaginations in four distinct areas: marginalisation and exclusion; sensorial witness; identity; and exile. In its attention to the application of relational poetics in spatially activated contexts, it argues for the significance of the geographical imagination and its implications, interpretations, and constructions—in both material and psychogeographical imports—as foundational to Kinnell's ethos and central to his body of work. Stephen Daniels notes that "[a]s an unconventional coupling (compared to say 'literary imagination') and for some a surprising one, 'geographical imagination' has the metaphorical capacity to reconfigure a larger conceptual field, to bring material and mental worlds into closer conjunction, to connect the mythical and the mundane."[4]

In addition to considerations of the complex geographical imagination vis-à-vis intellectual inheritance, the thesis undertakes particular attention to what categorises the range of Kinnellian poetics, including compositional scaffolding, genre, techniques, as well as the role of language in generating form, content, and the conveyance of meaning. At heart, Kinnell's emergence, development, and overall trajectory as a poet is paramount, along with recognition of his inherent consonances and contradictions. As an ever-shifting practitioner, Kinnell is a product of his interaction with both the cultural ecology of his lived experience, and with his substantial production and experimentation across literary mediums. This study, therefore, commits to fresh, substantive, and original readings of his work and textural landscape, striking a balance between narrative, poetic analysis, and creative output. Through a reliance on both newly available and previously elided primary source materials, it brings Kinnell's literary practice foremost into its examination whilst also suggesting new contexts for his role as a Cold War poet confronting an increasingly globalised and technological world.

The existing body of critical scholarship surrounding Kinnell began with his emergent works published in the early 1960s, reaching a pinnacle in the following decades, a period

[4] Stephen Daniels, "Geographical Imagination," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36, no. 2 (2011): 182.

during which he produced *The Book of Nightmares*, considered his master work, and later *Selected Poems* (1982), for which he won both a Pulitzer Prize and a National Book Award in 1983. Kinnell's corpus includes both poetry and prose: fourteen volumes of poetry (1960-2014); translations of French, German, and Farsi (including François Villon, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Hafez, among others); ethnographic articles and photojournalism in *The Tehran Journal* (1960); *Black Light* (1966); *Walking Down the Stairs* (1978), a book-length collection of revised interviews; *How the Alligator Missed Breakfast*, a picture book (1982); and *Essential Whitman* (1987). His critical essays and poetry have appeared in major publications, from *The New Yorker* to *The Atlantic* to *The Kenyon Review*, in addition to innumerable readings, lectures, workshops, galas, and appearances on global radio and television throughout his long-spanning and storied career.

Attempts to categorise Kinnell's poetry have largely been based upon its thematical underpinnings and dichotomies, a focus on constitutive binaries from religious, spiritual, and secular divides to love, sex, and family. Remarkably, both Harold Bloom and Christopher Ricks were content to dismiss any putative future for Kinnell in poetry after their acclaimed receptions of his extended, narrative poem "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," whilst Donald Hall marked this moment as an unequivocally logical starting point.[5] Bloom contended that Kinnell had fallen short of his promise, attributing his flaws to "a certain over-ambition that makes each separate poem too crucial an event,"[6] ceasing to review Kinnell's poetry after his critique of *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (1980) in *The New York Times*. Three years later, Kinnell was awarded the Pulitzer; Richard Tillinghast extolled *Selected Poems* in *Boston Review*, and the continued cultural relevance across Kinnell's literary oeuvre: "This book is proof that poems can still be written, and written movingly and convincingly, on those subjects that in any age fascinate, quicken, disturb, confound, and sadden the hearts

[5] Donald Hall, "Text as Text," in *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of Dying*, ed. Howard Nelson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 157.
[6] Harold Bloom, "Straight Forth Out of Self," *The New York Times* (22 June 1980): 4.

of men and women [...] When Kinnell is at the top of his form, there is no better poet writing in America."[7]

Within critical approaches to aesthetics and periodisation, Kinnell's placement has enjoyed a variety of contestation. In "Poetry Chronicle: 1970-71," Marjorie Perloff deemed Kinnell a poet belonging to the high-style tradition of Rimbaud, depicting an intensely lyric mode that is both oracular and visionary:

> Rimbaud's famous 'Je est un autre,' his 'C'est faux de dire: Je pense. On devrait dire: On me pense' could act as epigraph to the poetry of, say, Kinnell or Wright. In lyric poetry of this sort, language must be extraordinary, and sound must be fully orchestrated so as to convey the poet's all but inexpressible and momentous experience of otherness.[8]

In 2019, five years after Kinnell's death, Frank Lentricchia published an article in *Modernist Cultures* arguing that Kinnell is a "modernist" because of his originality in that he is "rigorously 'individual,'" and merits grouping with principal modernists such as Wallace Stevens, W.B. Yeats, and Marianne Moore.[9] Nancy Lewis Tuten pegs Kinnell as "firmly within the Romantic tradition in American Literature,"[10] devoid of anxieties of influence from Whitman or otherwise, with Edward Hirsch precising that he was a "post-romantic" (*CP*, xxix). Moreover, Poetry Foundation, perhaps one of the farthest-reaching mediums for US American poetry, places Kinnell in the Deep Image camp, flanking mid-century poets James Wright and Bly, through a convergence of narrative and experiential, concrete images engendering poetic meaning.[11] Finally, there is Kinnell himself, who maintained it was never his intention to subscribe to any movement or literary tradition, and subsequently, did not believe his work could be characterised by membership or belonging as such.[12]

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[7] Richard Tillinghast, "Books in Brief: *Selected Poems* by Galway Kinnell," *Boston Review* 8, no. 1 (February 1983): 36.
[8] Marjorie Perloff, "Poetry Chronicle: 1970-71," *Contemporary Literature* 14, no. 1 (Winter 1973): 98 and 118.
[9] Frank Lentricchia, "Modernist without a Handle: On Galway Kinnell," *Modernist Cultures* 14, no. 4 (2019): 398.
[10] Nancy Lewis Tuten, "The Language of Sexuality: Walt Whitman and Galway Kinnell," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 9, no. 3 (1992): 140.
[11] *The Poetry Foundation Glossary of Poetic Terms*, s.v. "Deep Image," https://www.poetryfoundation.org/education/glossary
[12] Galway Kinnell and Rebekah Presson, "Interview with Galway Kinnell," *New Letters on the Air* (November 1991), audio, 29:17. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 19). Houghton Library, Harvard University. Unless otherwise indicated, all transcriptions of audio and video are my own.

Most significantly, a prolonged focus on temporality and death suffuses the relatively few extant monographs and compendiums in Kinnell-devoted literary criticism, as Howard Nelson asserts, "time and mortality, Kinnell's obsessive theme."[13] These form a small core of focused works and sustained contributions completed in the 1980s and the mid-1990s, with the exception of Katarzyna Malecka's *Death in the Works of Galway Kinnell* (2008). Indeed, Kinnell's work has hitherto, through these analyses, been preoccupied with the temporal, as directly relates to his spectral consciousness of mortality. Cary Nelson devotes a chapter to Kinnell in *Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry* (1981) precising:

> [s]ince the beginning of his career, Galway Kinnell has been trying to create a poetics of death that is at once graphic, mystical, and sensual. In America, such a project is unavoidably overshadowed by Whitman's attempt to make death culturally specific, to redeem death in the guise of an American communality.[14]

Taking its title from Kinnell's "The Supper After the Last," Lee Zimmerman's *Intricate and Simple Things* appeared in 1987, as did Nelson's edited compendium *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of Dying*, which consolidated critical essays and articles from the preceding decade. Bridging biography and literary analysis, Richard J. Calhoun penned *Galway Kinnell* in 1992, arranging Kinnell's works in a chronological overview that argued for the prioritisation of his poetry in the American canon. Lastly, *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell* (1996) edited by Tuten anthologises criticism from earliest reviews to more contemporaneous essays commissioned for the volume itself. Grasped in this context, critical appraisals of Kinnell's corpus are dated and discernibly incomplete due to limitations in scope, mostly prioritising his earlier works. With the centenary of Kinnell's birth approaching in February 2027, paired with the full trajectory of his literary works and archives, it is likely that reinvigorated interest in Kinnellian studies will emerge in the next few years.

Indeed, much of this mortal fascination has been instigated by Kinnell himself, both through his own words in describing the harrowing feeling of being chased by time's faithful

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[13] Howard Nelson, introduction to *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of Dying*, ed. Howard Nelson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1987), 12.
[14] Cary Nelson, *Our Last First Poets: Vision and History in Contemporary American Poetry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 63.

and unwavering commitment to certain death, and through the consuming quality of its propagation throughout his poems as a central, psycho-ideological trope. In addressing time and death as thematic components in his corpus, Kinnell acknowledges having been brought, at least part-way, towards an acceptance of the passage of time, to examine it as a construct of inevitability:

> Time has always been a kind of a dreadful thing for me. I don't know why, or even if, me in particular. But I think *The Book of Nightmares* is certainly full of the terror of time [...] But I believe that in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*, well of course there's still the terror or there wouldn't be any point in writing about it. But there is also some kind of attempt to become...well, this is probably a tautology, synchronised with time. I suppose synchronised means 'with time,' so with 'timed with time' if that means anything, to sort of flow in the same wave patterns as time seems to flow in, so you, one, I, experience to a certain degree the happiness of time as well as its threat.[15]

Although Kinnell confronts mortality, ever cognisant of the fatality of existence on the horizon, he also internalises death, just as nature, as a great equaliser that is to be confronted: "I, like you, only sooner/ than you, will go down/ the path of vanished alphabets,/ the roadlessness/ to the other side of the darkness" (*CP*, 252-253). Whilst the metaphorical significance of death, mortality, and synchronic time remain essential to Kinnell's ethos, examining the scope of his body of work reveals conditions certifying an attention to polyspatiality through lenses of autobiographical narrative and cultural memory. In other words, Kinnell exhibits a commitment to space, place, and landscape affording us new methods of interpretation so that other motifs, interlocutions, and discursive inquiry may come to the fore, chronicling unmapped aspects of his vast body of work.

In 2017, three years after Kinnell's passing, Barbara K. Bristol and Jennifer Keller completed the editorial achievement of *Collected Poems*. Through the steadiness and rigour of its presentation and assemblage, the nearly 600-page volume—containing sixty-eight years of poems across all of Kinnell's published books, chapbooks, and broadsheets—also includes a short selection of seven uncollected poems from 2010-2014. As Bristol and Keller state of

[15] Galway Kinnell, Stan Sanvel Rubin, and Dale Davis, "Brockport Writers Forum: The Poetry of Galway Kinnell," 29 June 1982, video, 45:33. The Writer's Forum: SUNY Brockport Digital Repository. https://dspace.sunyconnect.suny.edu/handle/1951/83007

these remaining few, these are "the only poems that he [Galway] felt were finished enough to publish in magazines in the last eight years of his life" (*CP*, xliv). Indeed, the depth and the scope of Kinnell's writing is commendable; the sheer accumulation of texts in *Collected Poems* pays tribute to a prolific career in as comprehensive a published form as exists in Kinnell scholarship. Bristol and Keller bring Kinnell's interminable, lifelong revisions to light, proffering their approach to text selection:

> As a general rule we have chosen his final version of a poem. In those infrequent cases where we have not, we have been guided by his own editing of *The Essential Whitman* [sic]. There he chose thoughtfully from Whitman's many versions (and sometimes incorporated a preferred line from still other versions) in an attempt to present the work he loved in its strongest form (*CP*, xliii).[16]

In truth, Kinnell crystalised his reputation as a Whitmanesque, serial reviser, a self-reflexivity he had repeatedly addressed in interviews, and among his published volumes including *Essential Whitman* and *New Selected Poems* (2001).

Whilst there may be some debate as to whether these poems are the 'final' versions, or definitive representations given Kinnell's propensity for alteration depends on one's individual sense of Kinnell's authorial intention. Resultingly, evaluating Kinnell's work necessitates an awareness of the diachronicity of its form and content through his editorial amendments post-publication, and seemingly endless drafts, as the collections of his abundant archival collections attest. The alteration of his poems to reflect his ongoing revisions of lexicon, syntax, and structural rearrangement foster questions of textual eminence as well as reinforce shifts of structure, detail, and extensive alterations he employed. Identifying this hurdle in assessing Kinnell's work foregrounds the intricate stages of Kinnell's compositional process as somewhat problematic and present but certainly open to reconsideration. Accordingly, this thesis brings Kinnell's authorial intent into view, particularly in contexts of his major poems, and the evolving variance of his primary materials as a means of processing these revisions. Diachronicity itself demands a living or moving apparatus of structure and

[16] Given Kinnell's highly productive oeuvre, including innumerable drafts of individual poems, the work of Bristol and Keller is especially commendable in compiling his collected volume.

analysis whereby these textual amendments are activated. The complex geographical imagination, as a netting of abstraction in real and imagined spaces, lends itself to this necessity of mobility and agility of positioning, making it especially suited for thinking through and with Kinnell's emendations and refinements.

Finding its bearings in geocritical approaches to Kinnell's literary works, this thesis incorporates principles across spatial literary theory, literary and human geography, and continental philosophy (trauma theory; carnal hermeneutics) to assess the critical apparatus surrounding the development of his texts.[17] In charting a clearer and more comprehensive picture of his poetic topos, Kinnell's complex geographical imagination expands a late modern paradigm of preoccupation with place and landscape. These include limitless bounds of real and imagined spaces which further engage with socio-political and power dynamics; sensorial witness of mind and body; conceptions and configurations of identity; and ruptures of exile. Emphasis on material and psychogeographies are exacted from attention to and conversance with this specific lexicon, deriving from the four distinctive categories, as aforementioned, to which this study commits. It is from this same strain of spatial theorisation that Kinnell affirms his own idiolect across a rich array of poems, as well as in his novel, *Black Light*. Kinnell's material geographies include objects of permanence (pebbles, rocks, mineral elements); palimpsests; moonscapes; astral heavens; material and immaterial worlds; gulfs and fissures; haptic bodies; landscapes of water and desert; traces, erasures, and decay; and even conflagration. In Kinnell's capacious literary imagination, psychogeographies[18] are to be found

[17] This method recognises the multifocalization and polysensoriality espoused by Bertrand Westphal in his theories of geocriticism. However, it somewhat inverts Westphal's approach; whereas Westphal relies on multiple authors or "heterogenous points of view which all converge in a given place," this thesis relies on Kinnell, as a single author, amalgamating heterogeneous points of view, including his own, which merge in specific applications of the geographical imagination. See Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally, Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 122.

[18] Psychogeography, first coined by Guy Debord in 1955, has enjoyed reinvigoration as a rapidly developing area of study with ties to literary geography, geocriticism, and geopoetics. Emmanuelle Peraldo defines its traditional roots of "the spatial practice of psychogeography" as "individual explorations of (urban) space that reveal the reciprocal relationship of spatial surroundings and inner psyche." *Literature and Geography: The Writing of Space Throughout History*, ed. Emmanuelle Peraldo (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 10. See Guy Debord, "Introduction à une critique de la géographie urbaine," *Les Lèvres Nues* no. 6 (Sept. 1955): https://situationist.org/periodical/les-levres-nues/issue-6-1955/introduction-to-a-critique-of-urban-geography-98; also, Doreen Massey, "The Geographical Mind," in *Secondary Geography Handbook*, ed. David Balderston (Sheffield: Geographical Association, 2006), 46-51.

in psychosexual spaces characterised by desire and encounter; urban roving; music and sensuality; sound and memory; spectralities of witness; and aesthetic renderings of isolation and seclusion, among numerous others.

Through a qualitative, theoretical framework conceived around intellectual inheritance, this project distinguishes itself from Bloomian anxieties of influence and psychological melancholies which have commandeered literary theory over the last fifty years. In the context of this study, inheritance comports legacy and agency, as something that 'belongs' to the poet, as opposed to being 'on loan' from a precursor or elsewhere. Gesturing against "presuppositionless appropriation,"[19] it neither suggests replication of a parent-poem tradition such that texts become derivative or reductive, nor does it encourage texts dispossessed of intrinsic originality for the sake of literary immortality. Rather, it convenes a sense of the poet's abstract belongings, which comprise compositional tools and techniques, experiences, spirits of inspiration, translation or otherwise, in creative practice. Conceptually, intellectual inheritance functions as a methodological scaffolding for the geographical imagination, providing a specific lens for each chapter of this thesis. In turn, focal elements of his poetic ethos and topography negotiate within real and imagined spaces, locating modalities of material and psychogeographies.

Further, there are two factors in particular which have affected methodological selection, both of which required satisfying in tandem. Due to Kinnell's substantial collection of poems, one of the more exacting questions was how to curate the poetry so that it was not organised by specific volumes or dates, but by a schema that followed the linearity of his personal timeline. At the same time, this selection also needed to accommodate the fundamental flexibility required to fit Kinnell's stylistically 'spiral approach.' Much like those utilised in educational practices, Kinnell's lack of progressive arrangement thematically (as

[19] In this study, inheritance is representative of a larger intellectual project which re-ignites a critical dialogic between "unexpected challenge" and "enigmatic provocation." It neither comports nor is it complicit with transaction, acquisition, exploitation or extraction of value as cultural capital, forms, or lived experience. Richter, "He Who Inherits," 476 and 478.

identified by this study) is based around his initiation of a certain idea, and then his return to it, even decades later, often deepening its complexity in addition to his own sense of engagement. Employing intellectual inheritance as a framework follows a linear chronology of Kinnell's life events longitudinally, tracing definitive patterns through his poetic evolution, as opposed to sampling a cross-section at a given moment or stage in his development.

This thesis is the first sustained critical examination of Kinnell in nearly twenty years, and the first major posthumous study of his work. Through its inquiry, it posits a conceptual framework of the geographical imagination in Kinnellian poetics that metabolises his body of work within late modernism. Impetus for the project was initially sparked by an interest in demystifying a period of exile and misanthropy in Kinnell that has remained undetected, somehow eluding critical attention since the late 1980s. From this starting point of protracted isolation and Kinnell's volume *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone* (1990),[20] the project brings forward other areas of his work previously underappreciated by scholars and critics, with especial attention directed to Iran and Kinnell's creative outputs—*Black Light* and *Sheffield Ghazals*— to which Chapter Three is devoted.

As a somewhat serendipitous corollary, the establishment of several brand-new Kinnell archives coincided with the researching of this project, reinvigorating Kinnell's resonance as a major American poet. They have formed a primary coalition of archival resources from which to conduct textual and audio/video analysis in addition to close readings of poems and prose. These include radio and poetry readings, correspondence, unpublished manuscripts, as well as textual ephemera including pastiche, redactions, and detailed marginalia, offering increased clarity and insight into Kinnell's literary practice. The thesis, therefore, draws upon these major Kinnell archives, both recent and established: *The Galway Kinnell Recordings*, acquired by Harvard University in 2020, which feature over 365 audio and video recordings made by Kinnell and his peers between 1960 and 2015; *Anne Buchanan Crosby*

[20] Subsequent references to this volume will be denoted by *When One*.

Collection of Galway Kinnell Letters and Manuscripts 1957-2006, procured in 2021 by Princeton University; *Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran*, *1959-2013*, gifted to Harvard's Houghton Library by Kinnell's literary estate in 2023; together with *The Galway Kinnell Papers* at University of New Hampshire (established in 1982), and *Galway Kinnell Papers* (1936-1980) at Indiana University Bloomington.

Throughout his lifetime, Kinnell maintained that poetry was an organic, instinctual process, and could simply not be taught as a writer's craft; he pronounced that there is "no communicable technique," or "click of a box shutting."[21] However, as a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and a recipient of a MacArthur Grant, in addition to serving as founder and director of NYU's Creative Writing Program, Kinnell's promotion of such an idiosyncratic stance seems at odds with himself. His position as a Cold War poet of disarticulation and ambiguity connotes a sense of being unmoored whether it be cognitively, physically, or affectively constructed. As he avers, "My poems are more like the acts of one who is lost"[22] whilst concurrently that, "[p]lace gets into my writing, it gets into everyone's. I think eventually one gets to feel more at home on the globe itself."[23]

Kinnell's musings seem to echo Henri Lefebvre, who advances that "[t]he problem is that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about."[24] Lefebvre's commentary illuminates convolution and tensions in spatial production, in step with the measure of approach in parsing such applications. Underscoring its multivariant aspects points to the significance it generates in Kinnell's oeuvre, and the imbrication of the geographical imagination throughout his literary career. In the views of both Lefebvre and Kinnell, spatial practices reckon with

[21] Galway Kinnell, "Craft of Poetry," [n.d. 1977?], audio, 55:49. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 36). Houghton Library, Harvard University. Kinnell often quotes a similar line found in W.B. Yeats: "A poem comes right with a click like a closing box." William Butler Yeats, *Letters on Poetry from W.B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 24.
[22] Galway Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs: Selections from Interviews* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1978), 38.
[23] Galway Kinnell and Rob Wilson, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *Hawai'i Review: Special Poetry Issue* no. 12 (Fall 1981): 90.
[24] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 15.

constructs of subjectivity and reality, of "simultaneous perception"[25] plus physical embodiment, two principles emphasised by Kinnell's attention to the geographical imagination, and its related material and psychogeographies. These balances and counterbalances logically stimulate a number of questions to which this thesis responds through the projection of its inquiry.

Chapter One ("My old hero. Should I be surprised?"—Kinnell's American Sublime) situates Kinnell's poetic engagement with intellectual inheritance, foregrounding him vis-à-vis his precursors of the American Renaissance, evidenced through leading Transcendentalists Emerson, Douglass,[26] and Thoreau; each figure provides an essential calibration of Kinnell's moral and ethical compass, fusing the philosophical to the pragmatic. Kinnell's work is characterised by geographies of dislocation and uncertainty, supported by his commitment to complex geographical imaginations, and his view of the necessary occupation of poetry in an altered geopolitical landscape. Accordingly, this initial segment provides close readings of Kinnell's many poems of personal and collective history tracing his responses to the devolution of a mid-century world steeped in anxiety and despair: nuclearity and proliferation (World War II and Cold War); racial justice (Civil Rights Movement); and military conflict (Vietnam War). Through landscapes of marginalisation and exclusion, the chapter explores power dynamics, processing the collision of socio-political reforms, cultural memory, alterity, and protest that infuse Kinnell's poems, whilst attending to tropes of the riparian and the American sublime. Amid these imperatives, Kinnell encapsulates a poetic role of witness more fully, ultimately emerging as an activist poet of historical and intergenerational trauma.

Further examining the affordances of intellectual inheritance, Chapter Two (The Itinerant Bard—Ideas of Here, Ideas of There) explores Kinnell's relationship with Whitman

[25] Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 3.
[26] In recent years, the notion of Transcendentalism as a philosophical collective restricted to white thinkers has been challenged in favour of a multiracial restoration of the term, one which honours the mutual, participatory role of Black abolitionists as crafters of the movement. See Peter Wirzbicki, *Fighting for the Higher Law: Black and White Transcendentalists Against Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021); also, David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018).

as one of legacy, complication, and interrogation. Just as Emerson, Douglass, and Thoreau feature as compelling nineteenth-century figures in Kinnell's creative cosmos, so too, does Whitman. Whilst the Transcendentalists' idealist principles align Kinnell's negotiations with alterity and a democratisation of the sublime, Kinnell's lifelong, and often tensile, entanglement with Whitman shifts his literary practice,[27] ultimately positioning Kinnell as a major American poet. The chapter expands Kinnell's geographical imagination to space, place, and landscape closely allied with the individual self and ipseity, defined by the topographies and sensuous geographies[28] of sensorial witness: visual, aural, haptic, and spectral. By way of Kinnell's enduring engagement with Whitman, the growing complexity of Kinnell's methods of praxis, as well as his shifting perspectives of craft and textuality are identified. These include detailed assessments of metapoesis, Keatsian negative capability, elegy, and poetic constructions enhanced by Whitman's own definitive idiom.

Chapter Three ("Paradise Elsewhere"— Tehran and Its Golden Allure) interrogates the short but intensely formative period Kinnell spent in Iran (1959-1960) during the Pahlavi dynasty, both as a lecturer at the University of Tehran, and as a roving journalist. Through these different vocations and mixed literary/intermedial mediums (ex: poetry, prose, photography, ethnographic writing), Kinnell expanded his role as a poet in transnational and transhemispheric contexts, activating an Iranian inheritance which reaches its crescendo in *Black Light*. Showcased are his close involvement with notable literary and artistic circles of the New Persian Poetry movement, including modernists Nader Naderpour, Forugh Farrokhzad, Nosrat Rahmani, and Sohrab Sepehri, from which his collaborative translation is borne. The chapter probes geographical imaginations of identity, attending to Kinnell's

[27] "I think that everybody who writes now in whatever way in this country owes a great deal to Whitman. I feel I owe everything to Whitman, really." Galway Kinnell and Charlie Rose, "Celebrating Walt Whitman: Allen Ginsberg, Galway Kinnell, and Sharon Olds," *Charlie Rose*, PBS, 25 March 1992, video, 16:07. http://charlierose.com/videos/20510

[28] Term attributed to Paul Rodaway, who cites his text as an exploratory study devised "to excite interest in the immediate sensuous experience of the world and to investigate the role of the senses [...] in geographical experience." Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, sense and place* [e-book ed.] (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002): https://doi.org/10.4324/97802030825

experimentation with poetic form and narrative rooted in Persian verse, specifically the medieval ghazal, from which *Sheffield Ghazals*, Part III of *Imperfect Thirst* (1994), signifies an essential development in his oeuvre.

Lastly, Chapter Four (Crying Oneself into Self-Knowing) attends to Kinnell's 18-month self-imposed isolation, focusing on geographical imaginations of the exilic, and its examination of estrangement, rupture, and misanthropy in preamble poems, culminating in "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone."[29] Close analysis of the poem features prominently; Kinnell's engagement with lyric and genre theory, specifically permeability and the American Sonnet are scrutinised with regard to the eponymous poem, and generic placement within post-1945 US poetry, as well as within Kinnell's corpus more generally. Of additional investigation is Kinnell's "self-dissolution" (*CP*, 424) and "consciousness" (*CP*, 422), which comports his re-emergence from the spatiality of exile, and an inhabitation of real and imagined spaces from which his extrication would secure his poetic legacy. Vital to this rescue was a sociological framework of poetic affiliation, one crucial to his literary practice, and provided by an editorial confluence of his peers: Olds, Hall, Carruth, and Bly.

As a critical appraisal, this project allows the singularity of Kinnell's voice to be exhibited on his own terms,[30] tracing the contours of his poetic topography, and placing him as a poet in context. Intellectual inheritance imbues his literary praxes, giving way to complex geographical imaginations which stimulate lyric genre and permeability; poetic forms (elegy, ghazal, sonnet) and idioms; ontological dimensions of consciousness; corporeality; and the very structuration of space, place, and landscape that negotiate with uncertainty and disarticulation in the late modern era. Propelling our analyses across the breadth of Kinnell's given trajectory confers revitalising assessments through close readings, relevant literary

[29] Subsequent references to this poem will be denoted by "When One."

[30] Due to Kinnell's relatively recent death in 2014, we have many indications from his own words and speech. However, this proximity to Kinnell should also be regarded cautiously as a limitation or boundary, or even as an element of unwanted control. Fundamentally, this requires a change of register in keeping an academic detachment from his work, so that judicious scrutiny may be exercised, and his compositions processed through the account of an individual, critical reader.

criticism, contemporary methodologies, and other humanistic modes of inquiry. In turn, this establishes a legacy of scholarship for both readers and working poets; moving beyond considerations of verse culture, it opens his literary heritage to a multiplicity of interpretations and subjective responses for future and enlivening critical insight.

Chapter 1

"My old hero. Should I be surprised?"—Kinnell's American Sublime

> In its skin of light, the river
> bends into view, rising
> between the levees, flooding for the sky,
> a hundred feet down pressing its long weight
> silently into the world.
> We wander slowly homeward, lost
> in the history of every step. (*CP*, 183-184)
>
> –Galway Kinnell, "The Last River" (1967)

Kinnell's bardic impulse was not easily attended to by the 'orthodoxy,' a term Donald Hall employs to categorise the decades preceding the mid-century, during which time the "benevolent tyranny" of versification derived from T.S. Eliot and the New Critics.[1] Delimiting his poetic cosmography in contrast to formalist constraints advocating textual autonomy, or avant-garde experimentalism,[2] Kinnell's work often contemplates the distinctly social roles of prosody and poetic agency in the late modern literary era. Indeed, his poetic ethos stands in opposition to the modernist standard-bearing of Eliot, who defines the poet's responsibility to the people as subsidiary to the preservation, extension, and improvement of language. In the second iteration of his canonical essay "The Social Function of Poetry" (1945), delivered by lecture at La Maison des Centraux, Eliot expounds:

> It is true, I believe, that in a healthy society, the really great poet should be understood in part, and responded to, by compatriots of the humblest, as well as by those of the highest level of culture. But his most *general* social role will be in relation, not to his readers, but to his language as spoken by everyone. We may say, then, just as the first duty of a man *qua* citizen is to his country, so his first duty *qua* poet is to the language of his country.[3]

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[1] Donald Hall, ed. *Contemporary American Poetry* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 17.

[2] Charles Greenleaf Bell, Kinnell's mentor and friend, underscores that Kinnell did not "incline to that sort of avant garde precociousness," whilst at Princeton with fellow student W.S. Merwin, and poetry instructors R.P. Blackmur and John Berryman. Mary Emma Harris and Charles Greenleaf Bell, "Interview transcript," 12 January 1979. AC.564: The Mary Emma Harris and Black Mountain College Project, Inc. Oral History Collection, Special Collections Research Center, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina.

[3] Thomas Stearns Eliot, "The Social Function of Poetry," in *The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: Volume 6, The War Years, 1940-1946*, eds. David E. Chinitz and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 647. Eliot demonstrates a similarly misplaced intractability in his 1943 essay of the same title in declaring, "But it seems to me probable that if poetry—and I mean *all* great poetry—has had no social function in the past, it is not likely to have any in the future." Ibid., 436. Kinnell read Eliot in some detail, or as he states, "And yet I

Eliot situates poetry by categorising, in tandem, the measurable, and hierarchically arranged, cultural and societal value of poetics, as well as its attendant function. By this assessment, he detracts from the poet's function vis-à-vis social constructs, attributing a somewhat oblique didacticism[4] by adhering this structure onto poetry itself. Like Eliot, Kinnell contemplates the affordances of a people's *lingua franca*, instead differentiating it not purely as an universalised vernacular, but as a method to amplify suppressed and disregarded voices otherwise diminished within spatially activated power dynamics.[5] That is to say, the act of writing poetry, and its subsequent gesture towards meaning, cannot be decoupled from its social functionality, societal consciousness or achievements of purpose, in addition to its fundamental, ideological positions within moral and ethical contexts.

Kinnell's sense of purpose, therefore, relies on the collision of moments as a catalyst, not an incarnate precedent, as Eliot might prefer, rooting his compositions in his own deeply human, relationship-oriented politics. Kinnell posits that America has decentred historical change, and thus believes the "force of idealism" is required to re-focus poetry:

> I think poetry lives best in certain historic circumstances, when there's a tremendous force that disappoints it, so there's a tragic collision of forces […] And when the idealism goes, and we drift off into some eddy off to one side, the whole society is affected; poetry in particular loses its social reason for being.[6]

Within an altered geopolitical landscape, one characterised through a lens of bipolar hegemony in the Cold War period, he responds to "larger socio-spatial forces" and reshaped "conceptions and experiences of place" through the complexity of geographical imaginations expressed in his poetry.[7] Through these protracted reappraisals and uncertainties of space,

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did steep myself in Eliot." I would venture that these differences likely contribute to Kinnell's pointed counterargument. James J. McKenzie and Galway Kinnell, "To the Roots: An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *Salmagundi*, no. 22/23 (Spring-Summer 1973): 212.

[4] Eliot defines didactic as "poetry of moral exhortation," one whose purpose is "conveying information" through persuading the reader and incorporating satire. Eliot, *The Complete Prose*, 437.

[5] Romana Huk acknowledges the poet's role in "speaking for the oppressed or silenced against prevailing power structures, or even about language itself and its role in perpetuating those structures." See "Poetry of the Committed Individual: John Silkin, Tony Harrison, Geoffrey Hill, and the Poets of Postwar Leeds," in *Contemporary British Poetry: Essays in Theory and Criticism*, eds. James Acheson and Romana Huk (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 176.

[6] Quincy Troupe, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *River Styx* no. 27 (1988): 42.

[7] Alexander, *Late Modernism*, 9-10 and 202.

place, and landscape in the post-1945 era, Kinnell's poems confront historical and intergenerational trauma, expressing his urgent desire to bring the unremitting realities of marginalisation and exclusion to the fore. Of Kinnell's commitment to activism, Hirsch underscores that "[h]e was socially engaged and identified strongly with people in trouble, the fraught and suffering, the injured and dying, the wounded body politic" (*CP*, xxi). Kinnell's prosody thereby challenges institutionalised conceptions and the systems of warfare and social inequality they enact, an interlocution with the real and the imagined in his evolving poetic ethos.

As a World War II Navy veteran (1945-1946) and activist, Kinnell bears witness to the mid-century reckonings that would mark his generation of poets. Amid the fallout of nuclear deployment and its subsequent proliferation, coupled with the acute urgency of the Civil Rights Movement, and the onset of the Vietnam War, the modulations of the American Renaissance[8] appealed to Kinnell's sense of a democratisation of the sublime applied equally and interchangeably to all. Through their rhetorical stances of moral and ethical principles evinced by sustained public action, the philosophical collective of the Transcendentalists provides a valuable framework by which Kinnell mediates the tensions of the ideal and the practical. Alongside the familiar pairing of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the inclusion of Frederick Douglass as constellating Kinnell's intellectual inheritance imparts wider context for the marriage of idealist individualism and abolition, thereby delimiting an expansion of the Transcendentalist paradigm as a parent tradition.[9] In a devolving landscape of anxiety and alterity, Kinnell's ruminations on material and psychogeographies—interrogations of marginality and exclusion, encoded in both personal and collective history—offer us his unfolding, poetic self-development in a physical world.

[8] Although the term originates with F.O. Matthiessen, its usage in this chapter refers to the chronological period roughly between antebellum and the turn of the century. See F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).

[9] I draw this parallel from Carl Rapp's examination of William Carlos Williams and Emerson, helpful for thinking through resemblances and "numerous affinities." See Carl Rapp, *William Carlos Williams and Romantic Idealism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1984), 6.

Catalysts of an Unravelling Nuclear World, Post-1945

In the inchoate stages of Kinnell's poetic composition, *First Poems 1946-1954* advances a lyric speaker who bellows inquisitively in "Conversation at Tea,"[10] a verse which centres on the post-traumatic anxiety of World War II, "Who is it I am searching for tonight?/ What disembodied voice can I surround/ With flesh?" (*CP*, 21). Intimations of Emerson's idealist sensibility course through the stanzas, one which synthesises mind and spirit whilst directing it through the speaker's subjective experience. In "The Transcendentalist," Emerson defines an idealist as one whose "experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world, as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded centre in himself [...] and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence."[11] The ontological unfolding of being, namely apprehension and discernment, are judged against the significance of one's intuition, and its relationality to one's counterparts in the material world.

In Kinnell's distillation and harmonisation, embodiment gives vision and form to the reverberations of lost souls which constitute echoes in the speaker's consciousness: "Like calls of Puck there float/ Into my troubled memory the sounds/ Of all those voices mingling from the past—/ Who is it I am seeking in this waste?" (*CP*, 21). Through the speaker's grappling with his own apprehension, Kinnell underscores that although our senses can provide us with representations, they are not the final stage of perception. Rather, they are a merging of thought, will, and in the speaker's mind, the spectrality of memory.

Advancing through the speaker's cognitive quest, catalogued through a mind now metaphorically unnerved by recollection and ravaged by refuse, Kinnell's preliminary engagement with the geographical imagination begins to take shape. The poem highlights his persistence to seek emplacement for the lost, and to consider locality within associative contexts; to be lost, by its very definition spatially, refers to an inability to be found. Here, in

[10] The poem was originally titled "Conversation at Tea at Twenty," and was composed by Kinnell (aged twenty) in 1947. In *Collected Poems*, the title has been simplified to "Conversation at Tea."
[11] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, ed. George Stade (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics), 100.

this strange limbo of consciousness and isolation, the speaker is unsettled by voices shorn of physical housing, and yet ambiguous about his responsibility to repatriate those resonances to a configured whole. Kinnell's pursuit is thus developing a language of poetic approximations, and a view toward exploring the role of language to convey form and meaning, an attempt at both contemplating and situating the poet's function. Through the lyric speaker's self-reflexion, carried across nine sections united by a robust assortment of end and slant rhymes, the poem leans heavily on formulaic stanzas, a regularity of versification Kinnell would later abandon for Whitmanian free verse in his very first volume of poetry, *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960).[12]

Thematically, the poem is haunted by notable figures in literature who came to rather disconcerting ends, countering the here-and-now of a post-nuclear present with the annals of history. It references the Trojan "wan Troilus" (*CP*, 26)—the princely son of Hecuba and King Priam, murdered by Achilles—alongside other figures of Shakespearean tragedy such as King Lear, in all his profligate foolishness, and Hamlet:

> Who spoke those self-tormentings, were they yours,
> Or mine, or Hamlet's own? Whose voice
> Is no difference, what head invented
> Doesn't matter—the Prince of all of us
> Opened the pain of solitude and cursed
> The tyrant stars. Do not ask who said them first. (*CP*, 22)[13]

In these shadowy, whispered figures, the mimetic constant provided by the artifice of theatrical production is pitted against agents of combat, and the residual memory of battle. The lyric speaker, in all his bellicose ferocity, is compelled to decry, "If you are so insane/ As to wish—

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[12] Kinnell had originally intended to name his first volume *Maps and Rituals*, a title which accentuates his developing engagement with spatiality as well as with the sublime and the geographical imagination. This specific line is taken from "Alewives Pool": "how they memorize/ Love's never-studied maps and ritual" (*CP*, 49). Correspondence (1 June 1958); Anne Buchanan Crosby Collection of Galway Kinnell Letters and Manuscripts, C1680, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

[13] Kinnell's reference to "the Prince of all of us" may be discerned most broadly as Jesus Christ, but more particularly as Hamlet. However, this specific reference is problematic in that Hamlet himself never "cursed/ The tyrant stars" (*CP*, 22) but instead offers more poignantly, a love poem for Ophelia through Polonius. See also William Shakespeare's "Sonnet 14" which compares bearing a son with the proliferation of virtues: "Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;/ .../ And, constant stars, in them I read such art/ As truth and beauty shall together thrive." William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Vol. 2*, eds. W.G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1937), 1094.

how do you say? —soul-purge,/ By all means go to the theater/ But never fight a war" (*CP*, 20). In the sense of a collective "you," although never referencing them directly by name, Kinnell creates a dual engagement with both Allied and Japanese forces, each of whom entertained their own versions of expulsion and expurgation.[14] Kinnell lends canonical gravitas in the abstract projection and processing of a distant, atomic combat with Japan; through the extended metaphor of the theatre of war, he addresses the unleashing of nuclear capability and hostility for which there had been no precedent.

Drawing on this proliferation of Shakespearean characters, and various thematic allusions to the plays, Kinnell adds a contingent of literary and Biblical referents, including Sampson,[15] Adam, Chaucer, and Cyrano de Bergerac. Employing the iconicity of larger-than-life heroes and their foibles, it is a displacement of bereavement, a diversion from processing of one's own grief through a character's articulation, both in speech and in gesture, of language that is artificially constructed, rehearsed, and performed. In a grand, psychological projection, as if a theatrical player himself, the speaker locates belonging through a myriad of associations and experiences:

> I have been all these hearts, and more,
> Heroes, criminals, frauds, and tortured fools,
> I have merged my spirit with the fair
> And with souls as dark as blood or bowels,
> And yet I know more of providence or fate
> Than who my heart is searching for tonight. (*CP*, 22)

As an interrogation of idealism, the speaker's uncertainty is made weaker and more delicate by his reluctance to justify the sanctity of his quest to recover lost souls.

Detecting the autonomy of an inner voice in amalgam with outward, physical utterances, Kinnell's poem elegantly suggests a distinction between material and immaterial

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[14] Under the command of General MacArthur, Allied Occupation forces conducted purges (delineated as 'red' and 'white,' respectively). In the aftermath of World War II, these targeted hundreds of thousands of individuals (war criminals, politicians, military, and other civil servants), ostensibly barring them from holding public office in Japan. See *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East, Volume VIII*, eds. John G. Reid and Herbert A. Fine (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1971), Document 113; also, Major James C. Stulz, *Planning for MacArthur: Harnessing the Complexity of Postwar Japan*, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS (22 May 2014).

[15] Kinnell uses the Greek transliteration 'Sampson,' as opposed to the biblical spelling of 'Samson' from the Hebrew.

worlds of the living and the deceased. Kinnell folds a sense of placiality seamlessly into the verse, deftly employing the verb "to surround." Just as he seeks to cocoon the orphaned voices, the speaker finds himself enveloped:

> What storms have blown me, and from where,
> What dreams have drowned, or half-dead, here
> Surround me, or whether I am old or young,
> I cannot find an answer on my tongue.
> Yet if you ask me to describe that dark, wild
> Winter of the eyes, then I
> Can speak, answer endlessly,
> For that look was not on me as a child. (*CP*, 25)

Spatial deixis permeates this stanza, through the wayward location of the speaker, and the nebulous derivations of the storms themselves. In this wandering, both the mind and the spirit play hosts to a fragmented psychogeography of unknown origins that quizzically implore a gathering of forces; the limitations of speech collapse upon themselves, inducing paralysis. As the materialisations of sight cannot be intimated, the onus is placed on the speaker to revive a sense of wholeness and perspective obtained by his witness to atrocities of oblivion.

In its pathos, particularly evident in the fourth and fifth sections, the poem addresses the speaker's compatriots who either suffer post-traumatically in the present moment, or have lost their lives, "Two friendships" which are "now a-tatter" (C*P*, 23). Kinnell's nimble alliteration and internal rhyme highlight the intensity of their relationship:

> Chris was one, whose fine fierce spirit spent
> Its up-pent fury arguing with me
> Who wandered worlds with him. One day he penned
> His testament and died. (*CP*, 23)

Perhaps most tragic of all is Gib, a man we assume has been shell-shocked, residing in the polluted aftermath of warfare:

> Another friend was Gib, who did not die,
> But wished to change the world, and found
> It would not change. His heart fell utterly
> To dust, though sometimes still he smiles around
> The corners of his mouth. I saw him ruined,
> He cannot therefore speak to me. (*CP*, 24)

Through Kinnell's allusion, Gib is strangely likened to a decaying monument, a metaphorical disintegration of a human being; in his ruination, Gib represents a living embodiment of memorial. More salient to Kinnell's attention is the significance of Gib's language, contrasted by the impassioned speech of his friend, Chris. Gib's loss of speech speaks to a silencing of side-lined voices, suggesting one of Kinnell's earliest interlocutions with marginality and exclusion in his published work. Through this dialogue, Kinnell establishes context for the discomfiting periphery of Gib's position, wedged within a lived existence of occupied purgatory, and his own developing sense of poetry, transcendence, and sublimity in a physical world.[16]

At this stage, essential queries vis-à-vis the capacities and adequacies of language are brought to the fore, specifically in light of expressing atrocity. Perhaps Gib's is a modern-day parrhesia,[17] similar in concept to that underscored by "Freedom, New Hampshire," Kinnell's elegy for his brother, Derry Stuart Kinnell, collected in *What a Kingdom It Was*. In the poem, the lyric speaker struggles with accepting the consequences of death, pronouncing: "When a man dies he dies trying to say without slurring/ The abruptly decaying sounds" (*CP*, 81). In essence, this is an attempt to clarify the singular song so that is not misconstrued or lost in its desire to confer meaning. Much like Gib, what the man has seen and lived is inherently preserved in the clarity of these final words as a singing prophecy. Kinnell calls upon his Transcendentalist forebears, particularly Emerson, who in "The American Scholar" decries a metamorphic transformation of the word, and the forward-thinking genius of "Man thinking" that bellows these vatic utterances into the infinite.[18]

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[16] Relying heavily on the poet's sight and experience, Kinnell's poetry is an enumeration of the physical world surrounding him. What he describes as the poetics of the physical world are constituted in the implicit elements of pain and death, grounded in flesh, which stand in opposition to the poetics of heaven in ethos and value. See Galway Kinnell, "The Poetics of the Physical World," *The Iowa Review* 2, no. 3 (1971): 113-126.

[17] Foucault's lecture series at the University of California at Berkeley (1983) can provide more texture and detail. See Michel Foucault, "*Discourse & Truth*" *and "Parresia,"* ed. Henri-Paul Fruchaud and Daniele Lorenzini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[18] Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, 53.

Indeed, Gib's thwarted idealism foreshadows the speaker's own perfectionism, which is revealed by his own spatial reality. It is a certain coming-to-terms with failed aspirations, with hopes and dreams which are not made manifest, the enormity of which he characterises through a material geography of enormous proportion: the unrelenting split of a "fissure," and the irreparable, foregone "gulf of emptiness":

> Each year I lived I watched the fissure
> Between what was and what I wished for
> Widen, until there was nothing left
> But the gulf of emptiness.
> Most men have not seen the world divide,
> Or seen, it did not open wide,
> Or wide, they clung to the safer side.
> But I have felt the sundering like a blade. (*CP*, 25)

There is a peculiar, tonal quality to this verse that stands triumphant amongst the other stanzas in its elemental pathos and regret. Although Kinnell's eight-line prosody is reminiscent of the cadenced *ottava rima* of Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Triumph of Time"— "Before our lives divide for ever,/ While time is with us and hands are free"[19]— ideologically, it subscribes to a Thoreauvian constant, one which contemplates a personal ordering of the world, and the inherent realisation that one is out-of-step, indeed on the outskirts.[20] In view of time and circumstance, the lyric speaker's somewhat disoriented alienation may be attributed as vestiges of World War II, a kind of fatalism derived from the binary divisions between Allied and Axis powers. More simply, it posits humankind into two opposing camps, with the dramatic effect of Kinnell's poetic lexicon in "sundering" (*CP*, 25) as both literal and metaphorical cleaving of real and imagined spaces. He conjures the sense that permeates the Transcendentalists' philosophical position, a means of isolating oneself from one's contemporaries, by the ability to see truth and to speak it aloud; in this particular instance, landscape becomes a wide-open "gulf of emptiness" (*CP*, 25) in which the other does not figure. In the overtness of the

[19] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads* (London: J.C. Hotten, 1866), 40.
[20] Some scholars have noted the affinity between Hamlet and Swinburne's poem about romantic rejection. This may account for the lamenting quality apparent in Kinnell's poem. See Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 514; also, Philip L. Elliott, "No Friends of Roses: Tennyson, Swinburne, and the Sad Young Man," *Victorian Poetry* 35, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 95-99.

speaker's expression, Kinnell renders a clear allusion to the opening lines of W.B. Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1920)—"Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ […]/ Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."[21] Here, Kinnell does not sing the praises of a revelation, but rather, falls to resignation.[22]

As heralded by Carlos H. Baker, "Conversation at Tea" is "a poem which combines […] one man's declaration of war against the world until the time, and he, are ripe enough to write the necessary peace."[23] Baker's assessment paraphrases the final stanza of the poem, by which the speaker proclaims:

> Now I must nurse my courage in a sling,
> I dream the ancient skies are ripening,
> That golden fruit shall form like summer clouds
> Demanding poet-men to sing like lords
> Of giant gods who pace
> The mountain-tops. Then I will write my peace. (*CP*, 26)

The first four lines of this stanza ambulate in iambic pentameter, punctuated by end-stopped commas which carry the rhythm, coddling "courage in a sling." The spring-loaded, single syllabic "sling"—which to the eye, appears as though unstressed, although it is not—advances a guttural 'g' to offset the dactyl of "ripening." Kinnell then unifies "clouds" through an optically illusive rhyme, inserting a wrenched and a homographic counterpart to "lords." In the final rhyme of "pace" and "peace," he then cleverly adds a single letter to engage in a word play suggestive of semantic rhyme, which act to counter each other in form and meaning. Most arresting is the "poet-men," a compound grouping to which Kinnell attributes the highest calling: "to sing like lords/ Of giant gods who pace/ The mountain-tops" (*CP*, 26), whispered it would seem, by the Transcendentalist spirit itself.

First impressions of Kinnell's earliest published poetry might settle on an anxiety-ridden psychosis as an emergent, thematic core of his work, one which considers subjectivity

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[21] William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming" in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry: Shorter Fourth Edition*, eds. Margaret Ferguson, Mary Jo Salter, and Jon Stallworthy (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 680.
[22] Juxtapose this verse with the simplicity, assuredness, and maturity of Kinnell's "Prayer" collected in *The Past* (1985): "Whatever happens. Whatever/ what *is* is is what/ I want. Only that. But that" (*CP*, 343).
[23] Carlos H. Baker, "The Literary Observer," *Daily Princetonian* (14 November 1947): 2.

and alterity in relation to both geographical location and placiality. Within Kinnell's oeuvre, considerations of these individuated bodies and spatial peripheries adhere to a linear chronology of his experience, tethered to the remote and to the particular. There are echoes of William Carlos Williams imbricated in Kinnell's wistful incantations, hardly surprising, considering Williams' own connection and interlocution with Emersonian idealism, a contemplation which pervades his poetic idiom (in addition to Williams' own mentorship of Kinnell). Similarly, Charles Tomlinson acknowledges Williams' "locality" and the sense of its origins in "somatic awareness, a physiological presence in time and space" of the arrangement of poetry on the page in his nascent works,[24] which points up these developing facets of Kinnell's own self-development as well.

In "Primer for the Last Judgment," Kinnell toggles between Jerusalem and Japan, in addition to a more generalised world of unrelenting loss, fear, and existential dread. The poem, featured in *First Poems 1946-1954*, acts as a companion piece to "Conversation at Tea" as well as an academic short-hand for a Christian notion of eschatology, drawing a distinction between an expected end-of-days contemporaneous with Jesus' crucifixion, and post-war, global instability. As though reflecting upon civilisational ruins, the speaker contextualises his present-day:

> And now with us: only a few
> Years back, at war's close, the sun
> Touching the Pacific found
> Two cities crumbled. And men
> World over asked, 'Has the end begun?'
> Maybe it has; maybe it shall come
> Exploding flesh off the innocent bones,
> Mechanized, official, and at once.
> Or maybe it has crueler ways—
> Dread of the body, the passion to subdue—
> Not to be announced until it is done,
> Which is each day from this day
> Until the last tomb clutches the last bone. (*CP*, 15-16)

[24] William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1985), viii.

Although Kinnell does not precisely identify Nagasaki and Hiroshima, they are implicitly and patently implied. Amongst his detailing of historical witness, he maintains a semblance of detachment, an enumeration of a process of the inevitable. In the nuances of Kinnell's text, the reader identifies the battlefield not simply as one of conflict and resolution but of tacit exception. In this way, the battlefield can be an extrajudicial space in which individuals suspend their personal moral and ethical stances in favour of rules of engagement. Considering the geographical remove of trauma in spatial contexts, Kinnell attends to what we may categorise as geospatial trauma, or trauma that touches upon its relationship with space, place, and landscape.[25]

Preliminary experiences of Kinnell's anxiety and despair reached a pivotal crisis when at the age of twenty-one, he began to interrogate a Christian thesis of the world. As a once-fervent Congregationalist, he had developed a number of ideologies related to faith, as he states, one of the most integral being that both poetry and religion "represented the promise of some other real world, somewhere else besides this tawdry one in which I suffered mainly."[26] Poetic text interlaced with the Word-Made-Flesh of Christianity,[27] through which Jesus assumes both humanity and divinity, thereby created a microcosmic escape, a strategy of dissociation and isolation, and one that enabled him a coping mechanism of retreat. Ultimately, Kinnell's gradual dissociation of institutionalised religion from poetry led to a renouncement of his faith altogether, and the first suicidal urges he would experience.[28] In "The Descent" (1960), he addresses this sense through a sudden seizing "by some thaumaturgic thirst" as one "earth-bird" breaks precedent and frees itself from the "flock"

[25] I am drawing upon Rachel Pain's conception of geotrauma as describing "multiscalar, intersecting and mutual relations between trauma and place [...] it highlights the common role of oppressive power relations in various collective forms of trauma." Rachel Pain, "Geotrauma: Violence, place and repossession," *Progress in Human Geography* 45, no. 5 (October 2021): 974.

[26] Galway Kinnell and unidentified correspondent 'Rose' [Rose Styron?], "Transcript of interview." June 1983, Box 29, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, USA.

[27] John 1:14 (KJV): "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

[28] Consequently, Kinnell deemed that "there was no God of that kind, that Jesus was not the Son of God, that we did not have our eternal lives to look forward to, and so forth…So, though religion had set my mind in a certain way, I then had to throw out, one by one, all the parts of it." Kinnell and Rose, MC 64. Both Kinnell's and Emerson's renunciation of Protestantism is of coincidental and anecdotal interest.

(*CP*, 73). Trading Jesus as shepherd, and the devout of his flock for a murmuration of birds, Kinnell employs rather overt metaphors depicting the Lord's act of forsaking:

> Shrill wings flung up the crow-clawed, burned,
> Unappeasable air. And then one turned,
> Dodged through the flock again, and burst
> Eastward alone, sinking across the trees
> On the world-curve of its wings. So it is,
>
> Mirrored in duskfloods, the fisherbird
> Stands in a desolate sky
> Feeding at its own heart. In the cry
> *Eloi! Eloi!* flesh was made word:
> We hear it in wind catching in the branches.
> In lost blood breaking a night through the bones. (*CP*, 73)

Of note is Kinnell's deliberate syntax, "flesh was made word," reversing the incarnation of Jesus, and effectively, erasing his humanity. The fisherbird commits an act of self-inflicted violence, recalling the prophecy of Christ: that he must submit to sacrificial death in order to absolve humankind of its sins, and to ensure everlasting life. "Feeding at its own heart," the bird's actions signify an explicit rejection of transubstantiation.[29] Kinnell's overt imagery disavows the nourishment of a saviour's body and blood, evincing that spiritual sustenance may be found well and truly within oneself, a view not unlike that queried in Stevens' "Sunday Morning" (1915): "And shall the earth/ Seem all of paradise that we shall know?"[30]

Kinnell's reappraisal of faith and devotional reform was not unlike the religious schisms of the American Renaissance, by which a rupture occurred between the ministerial clergy and the splintering off of the Transcendentalists from the Unitarians.[31] As his fabricated cosmos began to unravel, and post-Christian conceptions took hold, a future in which he saw only his unyielding desire to be a poet called him forth. In his literary practice, Kinnell

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[29] In this aspect, Kinnell's poem bears an interesting similarity to "Joyce's Ulysses" (1922) by Mina Loy: "The word made flesh/ and feeding upon itself/ with erudite fangs/ The sanguine introspection of the womb." Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Robert L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 89.
[30] Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, eds. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 54.
[31] Higher Criticism argued for the fallibility of human accounts in the Bible, a method of hermeneutics developed by German biblical scholars contemporary with the American Renaissance. As Joel Myerson enumerates, "Higher Criticism was seen by the young reformers as a new tool for interpretation, but by the older ministers as an attack on their religion and their scholarship. When dialogue was no longer possible—and after the pages of the established religious journals were closed to them—the Transcendentalists splintered off on their own." *Transcendentalism: A Reader*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xxviii.

confronted representations of his earthly life with neither the interwoven parameters of theology nor the guarantees of a spiritual afterlife to counter a sense of disorientation and disjunction made manifest post-1945:

> Most good poems address themselves to things that we all know about, and the only preparation we need, as readers, is a kind of paying of respect to our inner life, and to the feelings we have that are of no practical importance: the sense of strangeness and the hauntedness of existence; the fragility of our position on the globe, and the fragility of the globe itself; this very peculiar situation we're in, self-conscious creatures who know that we're lost in some kind of existence that we don't understand at all.[32]

The underlying values of Transcendentalism became an auxiliary replacement structure, an incorporation of principles which responded to the same impulses of questioning religious, moral, and ethical purity, and a way to reframe a greater metaphysical line of inquiry. As time wore on, their ideologies aided in remedying Kinnell's divided consciousness, through which his apprehension of the world found common ground in the mystic, and in exaltation of transcendent communion with nature.

As a corollary, it is important to reflect briefly on intellectual inheritance and presences in Kinnell's work that spur him to action or provide a point of difference and contestation, whilst also noting their limitations. In an 1838 address, Emerson deliberated on the history of war, and the accumulating, militarised apparatus sweeping across the globe, as he states that "one is scared to find at what a cost the peace of the globe is kept."[33] In his assessments, Emerson considers the epistemological underpinnings of absolute principles, such as war and peace, and our apprehension of them. He associates the violent instincts of war with those individuals in whom only one primary disposition, that of the animal, has been developed, and not that of a cultivated sensibility— "Because the speaker has as yet no other image of manly activity and virtue, none of endurance, none of perseverance, none of charity, none of the attainment of truth."[34]

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[32] Galway Kinnell and Jeffrey Mehr, "Writing Poems: The Thrill of Discovery," *Rochester Review* (1982): 12.
[33] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Wisest Words Ever Written on War* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1916), 6. https://www.loc.gov/item/16015342/
[34] Emerson, *War*, 4.

For Emerson, warfare and our abilities to enact it are concomitant with what he considered to be our basest impulses as human beings to torture and to kill, but could be counteracted by the exertion of agency: a greater love for humanity and a candid desire for peace.[35] Indeed, the twentieth-century 'achievement' of atomic weaponry harnessing nuclear fission was certainly not within his literary or oratorical imagination to conjure, nor the inescapable spectre it would impose. R.W.B. Lewis points to Emerson's insular thinking, the notion that he could never fathom anything harmful in the path of the self-reliant.[36] Outside the context of divine rapture, Emerson could find nothing capable of producing such a scale of indiscriminately destroying life and property; as Kinnell writes of the cataclysmic possibility of atomic holocaust, "to establish deathlessness it is necessary to eliminate/ those who die" (*CP*, 362).

That human nature manifests resemblance to the animal is a major preoccupation for Kinnell in his work, perceived in popular poems from his range such as "The Bear" (1968); "The Porcupine" (1968); "The Hen Flower" (1971); and "St. Francis and the Sow" (1980). Unlike Emerson's distinction, it is a characteristic of biophilic consciousness to be nurtured and celebrated, and one which Kinnell deploys as a counter to technological barbarism in "The Fundamental Project of Technology" published in *The Past* (1985):

> To de-animalize human mentality, and at the same time to purge it
> of unfavorable evolutionary characteristics, in particular
> the foreknowledge of death, which terrorizes the contents
> of skulls, is the fundamental project of technology (*CP*, 362).

Kinnell spirals back thematically to deepen his engagement with atomic events and humanity's inherent animalism, along with the existential threats of nuclearism and total annihilation. In

[35] "If peace is to be maintained, it must be by brave men [...] and stake it at any instant for their principle [...] men who have, by their intellectual insight, or else by their moral elevation, attained such a perception of their own intrinsic worth [...] if the rising generation can be provoked to think it unworthy to nestle into every abomination of the past, and shall feel the generous darings of austerity and virtue; then war has a short day, and human blood will cease to flow [...] here, we ask, Shall it be War, or shall it be Peace?" Ibid., 11.

[36] R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), 196.

his introductory remarks for the annual *Morris Gray Reading* (1983) at Harvard University, Kinnell speaks to the significance of this particular poem in his oeuvre:

> This next poem, which after years, actually three years, is now finished. It's probably the hardest poem I ever wrote from that point-of-view. I probably went through more drafts and more, sweated more over this than over any other thing. And, I don't think I need to say anything about it, except that I began writing it in Nagasaki.[37]

In the early 1980s, Kinnell's poetic zeitgeist was constellated by the proliferation of the Cold War and ever-expanding existential tension as relations between the US and the Soviet Union amplified. President Jimmy Carter's "Farewell Address to the Nation" on 14 January 1981 warned of an intensifying danger of non-disarmament and "nuclear conflagration" and "an all-out nuclear war" in which "[t]he survivors, if any, would live in despair amid the poisoned ruins of a civilization that had committed suicide."[38] Spurred by Tatsuichiro Akizuki's books *Concentric Circles of Death* (1972) and *Nagasaki 1945* (1981),[39] Kinnell draws on Akizuki's quote, "A flash! A white flash sparkled!" as both epigraph and resounding refrain throughout the poem.

In its controlled regularity of structure and narrative voice, divided into seven stanzas and composed of seven lines each,[40] "The Fundamental Project of Technology" situates us in present-day Nagasaki, pivoting between a lived experience of the atomic detonation in 1945 and a living present whereby a post-nuclear city, and its victims, becomes a touristic attraction. Rachel Pain's analysis contextualises geotrauma as consisting of "layered places," that is to say, "places not just as points where trauma has happened or has become fixed to in the past, but as active locations where trauma is renewed and reshaped."[41] Such ideological scaffolding allows Kinnell to compose verse which connects the schoolchildren of the blast as

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[37] Galway Kinnell, Morris Gray Reading, Harvard University (1983); my transcription. https://library.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/static/poetry/listeningbooth/poets/kinnell2.html

[38] Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb/edu/node/250691

[39] Tatsuichiro Akizuki, *Nagasaki 1945: The first full-length eyewitness account of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki*, ed. Gordon Honeycombe and trans. Keiichi Nagata (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 9.

[40] See footnote 96 in Chapter Three for Kinnell's explanation of his numerology.

[41] Pain, "Geotrauma," 980.

memorialised statistics, whilst in the future, their youthful counterparts wander as though oblivious and impervious to nuclearity:

> An old man, possibly a soldier back then,
> now simply somebody who will die soon,
> sucks at the cigarette dangling from his lip, peers
> at the uniform, scorched, of some tiniest schoolboy,
> sighs out bluish mists of his own ashes over
> a pressed tin lunch box well crushed back then when
> the word future first learned, in a white flash, to jerk tears.
>
> [...]
>
> If all a city's faces were to shrink back all at once
> from their skulls, would a new sound come into existence,
> audible above moans eaves extract from wind that smooths
> the grass on graves, or raspings heart's-blood greases still,
> or wails infants trill born already skillful at the grandpa's rattle,
> or infra-screams bitter-knowledge's speechlessness
> memorized, at that white flash, inside closed-forever mouths? (*CP*, 361-362)

As readers, we recognise the voices of "Conversation at Tea" re-emerging, although here, many decades hence, Kinnell creates a deeper engagement that graphically targets the visceral. His verse, which so often possesses great musicality of spirit and oracular pleasure, is replaced by a stilted poetic line peppered by alliteration and commas.

In its wake, Kinnell's poem preserves the distorted images of abomination: neo-nates requisitioning the death rattle; inaudible voices, mouths frozen; and currents of air washing over graves. Effectually, he arrests the momentum of the poem, instructing the reader to linger, and to painfully exhort his words. Within this commemorated landscape, the tenuous affordances of language and memory are mediated through a collective of faceless suffering. It is a strategic gradation of trauma in space and place where material geographies vanish; voices morph into intimations, whispers, and shrieks with neither physical embodiment nor a distinctly full picture of humanhood, "our dead, who will/ erupt into flower as soon/ as memory and human shape/ rot out of them" (*CP*, 351).

Sites of Witness, Testimony, Trauma, and Marginalisation

Kinnell's engagement with sites of socio-spatial division, specifically within the context of exclusionary and marginalising aspects of the American South, was sparked by his first trip to Black Mountain College in the summer of 1947, at the invitation of Bell, his Princeton mentor. Arriving in Asheville, Kinnell encountered formalised racial segregation for the first time, and was manifestly confronted by the inequities he witnessed, specifically as a Northerner.[42] His visit heightened his awareness of his own privilege of mobility to transgress socio-spatial boundaries, geographical and publicly delineated areas hinging on the positionality of his personal identity, both racial and social. As a young, contemplative poet, Kinnell was awakened by this experience to his naïve, and rather blissful ignorance of the deeply racist praxis and divisions arbitrated by federal and state law. The prevailing narrative of a bigoted, conservative South pitted against a liberal, sanitised North was in fact specious: systemic racism was nationally pervasive and all-encompassing, a denunciation he later evokes in "The Last River" (1968):[43]

> One day in Ponchatoula,
> watching the IC from Chicago creep
> into the weeds of the Deep South, and stop,
> I thought I saw three
> of my kinsmen from the North
> in the drinking car, boozing their way
> down to New Orleans,
> putting themselves across,
> selling themselves,
> dishing up soft soap,
> plump, manicured, shit-eating, opulent, razor-sharp...
> Then the train
> lurched and pushed on, carrying them off,

[42] Kinnell provides a description of the preponderant Jim Crow laws, and his first experiences in the South, which would open his eyes irrevocably to a national phenomenon of segregation. See Galway Kinnell and Daniela Gioseffi, "Part One: What a Kingdom It *Is*," [sic] *Big City Lit* (February 2002): http://www.nycbigcitylit.com/feb2002/contents/Interviews.html

[43] Kinnell's address of the widespread, systemic roots of racism and inequality is underscored by Douglass in "American Prejudice and Southern Religion: An Address": "Yet people in general will say they like colored men as well as any other, *but in their proper place* [...] But all this prejudice sinks into insignificance in my mind, when compared with the enormous iniquity of the system which is its cause [...] The slaveholding ministers preach up the divine right of slaveholders to property in their fellow men [...] God made one portion of men to do the working, and another to do the thinking; how good God is!" Frederick Douglass, *Speeches and Writings*, ed. David W. Blight (New York: Library of America, 2022), 4-5.

Yankee...egalitarian...grease
in the palm of their golden aspirations. (*CP*, 180)

Kinnell calls attention to the cajolery of language, the false aspects of the northern "Yankee" and the hypocritical "egalitarian" which are mimicked in kind by the tonality of his lines, through an employment of fricative consonants exemplified through "shit," "sharp," and "razor." He employs a litany of descriptive adjectives such as "plump," "manicured," and "opulent" to gesture towards the high-handed privilege associated with their geographical origins, and the disingenuousness of their enterprise: "grease/in the palm of their golden aspirations" (*CP*, 180).[44]

In January 1955, on the heels of the landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) which overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Poetry* published three poems by Kinnell: "Across the Brown River"; "Alewives Pool"; and "Lilacs." In keeping with Kinnell's evolving sense of exclusionary spaces and their critical appraisal, "Across the Brown River" is a nuanced text in which the lyric speaker ponders the inequality of socioeconomic class and racial divisions in conjunction with the power dynamic they encode.[45] As the two lovers of the poem dance giddily across the river on a "bridge of the crashed oak," they find themselves trespassing in a manicured "paradise":

It was a modern replica, built by the offspring of some
rich
Dog-like dowager—some son-of-a-bitch
Who liked formal gardens of paths and shaven trees,
Hedges in a maze and many elegant statues."[46]

Kinnell's specific diction of "dowager" suggests intergenerational wealth but is unusual in the context of American cultural lexicon, leading to some perplexity of interpretation. It is unclear

[44] Aldon Lynn Nielsen draws on Edward Said's theories regarding the interrelationship between hegemony and differentiation to underscore the importance of linguistics in establishing these terms of otherness: "The language of white thought has had to create the boundaries of its existence and to determine what will not be allowed inside. The white subject has spoken to itself, and in so speaking has created its own racial consciousness." Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Reading Race: White American Poets and the Racial Discourse in the Twentieth Century* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 4-5; also, Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
[45] See Megan Ming Francis, "Ida B. Wells and the Economics of Racial Violence," *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences* (24 January 2017): https://items.ssrc.org/reading-racial-conflict/ida-b-wells-and-the-economics-of-racial-violence/
[46] Galway Kinnell, "Across the Brown River," *Poetry* (January 1955): 210.

as to whether the specific implications of this word are appreciated by Kinnell, for there is veiled misogyny in eluding to a woman's wealth that is inherited and not earned. At the same time, Kinnell could equally be gesturing to a broader statement on settler colonialism or coloniality, more generally.

Kinnell employs conceit, utilising the therianthropic form of a statuary centaur to facilitate a commentary on unity and interracial relationships. Concurrently, he contests what David Sibley initiates as the "purification of space"[47] by which socio-spatial boundaries are enacted to discriminate, particularly against anything viewed as aberrant; more specifically, powerful dominance and homogenisation conjoin to create spatial practices of exclusion.[48] In Kinnell's appraisal, the lovers look upon the centaur with compassion—"a man pleading love"—only to find confrontation in their midst, castigated as "A visitor beside us grew incensed/ At miscegenation, and spoke out forcefully against."[49] Kinnell's reference is rather overt, pivoting around miscegenation, a pejorative term.[50] Through his conspicuous invocation of a historically racist, nineteenth-century lexical convention, Kinnell diffuses a subtext through which he couches references to lynchings and to extrajudicial killings, most often carried out by white mobs to induce terror or to deter Black men from interacting with white women.[51] This is mimicked in the poem by the extravagantly manicured gardens, an attempt to assert a command of control and relegation, and to harness the natural world through artificial subjugation and control. Kinnell's employment of an ecological boundary formed by a river, with two opposite banks, stands as an overt metaphor of codified apartheid within wider society.

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[47] David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.
[48] Dan Trudeau and Chris McMorran, "The Geographies of Marginalization," in *A Companion to Social and Cultural Geography*, eds. Vincent Del Casino, Mary Thomas, Paul Cloke and Ruth Panelli (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 441.
[49] Kinnell, "Across the Brown River," 210.
[50] Miscegenation came into parlance during the American Civil War. It was used controversially to undermine abolitionists and proponents of interracial marriage. George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row Press, 1971), 172.
[51] See Kathryn Schumaker, "'Unlawful Intimacy': Mixed-Race Families, Miscegenation Law, and the Legal Culture of Progressive Era Mississippi," *Law and History Review* 41, no. 4 (2023): 773-794; also, Amy Kate Bailey and Steward E. Tolnay, *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

The overall form of the poem, delivered in neatly appointed, sextet-stanzas abjures the capricious folly with which the lovers emerge in the first stanza, free of inhibitions. However, in crossing the river, they now trade "fatal attraction for the brutal half."[52] As the poem draws to a terse resolution, it pivots from the communal "we," returning to the lyric speaker's perspective. At once, the reader is brought into dialogue with an assessment of the prelapsarian, a pithy statement in trochaic meter paralleling the oft-prosodic style of Walt Whitman: "From the woods outside of Eden came/ a snake./ I found no principle of evil here."[53] There is a duality to the form of landscape Kinnell enumerates, as both a physical construct of geographical elements and structured interaction, as well as a more abstract, ideological one that inherently holds power.

Underscoring the implicit power dynamic of environment and terrain, Don Mitchell elucidates that "[i]n both ways, landscapes are acts of contested discipline, channelling spatial practices into certain patterns and presenting to the world images of how the world (presumably) works and who it works for."[54] Mitchell's assessment is useful in considering attendant human rights and civil liberties, along with their societal distribution, especially during times of ethical disunity. Such thinking also extends to theoretical landscapes, the implications of which are sites of injustice marked or defined by cultural and societal hierarchy. Constituted by institutional, structured power as well as discriminatory laws and vigilante mobbism, these polyspatial outlets are concomitant with psychological barriers, ultimately forging discrimination, segregation, and intimidation of communities. The pressing appeals for the abolishment of slavery by abolitionists and transcendentalists alike parallel Kinnell's outcry against mid-century US politics, both of which asserted individual and collective agency on behalf of the marginalised and the excluded.

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[52] Kinnell, "Across the Brown River," 210.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Don Mitchell, "The Lie of the Land: Migrant Workers and the California Landscape," in *The Cultural Geography Reader*, eds. T.S. Oakes and P.L. Price (New York: Routledge, 2008), 164.

For Kinnell, the enduring legacy of the Transcendentalists lies not simply in their philosophical idealism, but with their attempts to marry spirituality and intuition with ethical and moral principles, a fusion of enlightenment and pragmatism in personal and public life. Ron Callan promotes the view that "the focus on the world at hand" is what "gives American Transcendentalism its unique identity,"[55] an appeal that underscores Kinnell's turn to the American Renaissance as an ethical herald, a means of modulating transgressions and alterity. Similarly, Charles Greenleaf Bell attributed Kinnell's singularity to his relationship with the nineteenth century as a protraction of the previous century's "titanism":

> There is a sense in which Galway Kinnell has remained faithful to this heritage, though for a long time it handicapped him among those of a more oblique and verbal trend, poets who grew up as it were after Pound. Thus a review of *Body Rags* (*New York Review of Books*) spent most of its time complaining that Kinnell didn't write like Berryman—as if he hadn't had his chance at that and decided early against it.[56]

Kinnell's decision not to write in the fashion of John Berryman was indeed a deliberate one; he found his poetry as well as that of John Crowe Ransom and R.P. Blackmur to be of a similarly elaborate and intellectual strain, too implausible and removed from his own experience. In his estimation, their poems—and of the New Critics, more generally— lacked the urgency to transmit the reality he felt so inclined to express himself,[57] one that thematically included historical and cultural contexts as well as rhetorical strength in lyric poetry through the conceptualisation of first-hand witness, testimony, and the specificity of spatial imaginaries. These elements, derived from real and imagined spaces constructed by fear, trauma and lived experience, create a sense of survival literature in Kinnell's oeuvre. His ever-expanding geographical imagination thus draws from marginalised experiences of alterity or peripheries, including sites of war, protest, and mythologised hellscapes to reveal unfolding socio-spatial fragmentation in a growing era of neo-liberalism, destabilisation, and racial injustice.

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[55] Ron Callan, *William Carlos Williams and Transcendentalism: Fitting the Crab in a Box* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 1.
[56] Charles G. Bell, "Galway Kinnell," in *Contemporary Poets: Vol. 1*, ed. Rosalie Murphy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970), 603.
[57] McKenzie, "To the Roots," 212.

H.C. Goddard insists that the Transcendentalists endeavoured to achieve balance, an adherence to idealism whilst mediating the concrete events of their quotidian lives, or Emerson's "rough experience" that metaphysics must be "perpetually reinforced by life":

> The moment we are confronted with the plain facts of their lives, we realize that these men were not far enough from inhabiting a purely isolated and ideal realm […] They did not show, in their actual living, indifference to that evil whose reality they philosophically denied. They did not rest content with their creed, independent of its influence upon others, or unmindful of its dangers to themselves. In a score of ways—but pre-eminently in the slavery agitation—they came into vital contact with the great practical issues of the day.[58]

During the antebellum period, the single-most crucial issue controlling success or failure of the democratically constructed polity was the implications of the slavery question. Peter Wirzbicki corroborates and expands Goddard's early notions vis-à-vis the connections between Transcendentalism and abolitionism, proffering that they were "mutually re-inforcing" as well as forged through "intellectual and ideological alliances between antislavery reformers and Transcendentalist philosophers."[59] Thus, abolitionists and Transcendentalists held each other in an exchange of ideas whereby each achieved reinforcement and catalysation by the force of the others. Indeed, there seemed no literary figure better suited to exemplify Emerson's 'anti-slave'[60] or to sing of the empowerment through self-reliance than Douglass.

As Kinnell's mid-century America faced an onslaught of historical trauma in addition to calls for justice reform amid increasing civil and military conflicts, the Transcendentalists re-emerged as prominent ethical and cultural resources through text and strategic action. As a practitioner of civil disobedience and passive resistance, of "non-cooperation with evil" held firmly as "moral obligation," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. focused on the intellectual

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[58] H.C. Goddard, *Studies in New England Transcendentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1908), 181-182.
[59] "If Transcendentalism provided a language with which to understand a broad critique of antebellum American society, abolitionists, especially black abolitionists, helped aim that critique squarely at slavery and its Northern apologists." Wirzbicki, *Fighting for the Higher Law*, 3.
[60] "[H]ere is the antislave: here is man: and if you have man, black or white is an insignificance. The intellect – that is miraculous!" Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies: an Address delivered at Concord, Massachusetts on 1st August 1844* (London: John Chapman, 1844), 30. Additionally, Douglass epitomises "Man Thinking" as described in "The American Scholar"; in other words, he embodies "the zenith of white transcendental intellectualism." Emmy Dixon, "The World's Eye, the World's Heart: Frederick Douglass and the Transcendence from Slavery," *University of Georgia Journal of Undergraduate Research* 7, no. 1 (2018): 44.

inheritance bequeathed by Thoreau: "As a result of his writings and personal witness, we are the heirs of a legacy of creative protest. The teachings of Thoreau came alive in our civil rights movement; indeed, they are more alive than ever before."[61] Of renewed interest, Douglass' *Narrative on the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1849), was re-introduced to the country by Harvard University Press and Benjamin Quarles in 1960, "a requisite text on the evolution of American racial, cultural, and political identity."[62] Douglass' autobiographical text provided immediate guidance in its principles of self-reliance and endurance in the face of obdurate oppression; it would also satisfy an incalculable need of permitting the populace to rediscover the essential idealism required to re-centre history whilst seeking it in forewarnings of the past.

Through the authenticity of Douglass' abject dehumanisation, he possessed a singularity through which he established connection, both rhetorically and ideologically. On 1 October 1841, Douglass delivered a speech in Lynn, Massachusetts entitled, "I Have Come to Tell You Something About Slavery," one focused on his own physical embodiment of wounding and injury:

> When I came North, I was astonished to find that the abolitionists knew so much about it, that they were acquainted with its deadly effects as well as if they had lived in its midst. But though they can give you its history—though they can depict its horrors, they cannot speak as I can from *experience*; they cannot refer you to a back covered with scars, as I can; for I have felt these wounds; I have suffered under the lash without the power of resisting. Yes, my blood has sprung out as the lash embedded itself in my flesh.[63]

Douglass' mastery of rhetoric is both compelling and well-deployed, drafting a distinction between those empowered with resistance, and those excluded or marginalised. Through his oratory, he holds fast to his own experientiality as a testament of witness and testimony. The intentional specificity of his diction enumerates the difference that dissociates him from other

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[61] Martin Luther King, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1998), 14. Denis Donoghue corroborates Thoreau's iconicity as an "exemplary figure" of counterculture, although extends his view of Thoreau's co-option by many groups in the 1960s as a kind of tipping point of socio-cultural awareness. Denis Donoghue, *The American Classics: A Personal Essay* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 138.

[62] Dale Edwyna Smith, introduction to Frederick Douglass, *Selected Works* (New York: Fall River Press, 2021), xix.

[63] Douglass, *Speeches and Writings*, 1.

speakers on the Concord lecture circuit. As he states that the abolitionists "can give you its history" and "depict its horrors" is lucid in its attempts—a somewhat justifiable, visceral reaction—he de-values solely abolitionist narrations and descriptions, essentially depreciating knowledge which had been passed along and recounted second-hand.

Douglass calls attention to his own alterity through the visual impact and physical scarring of these wounds, dwelling on the authenticity of his experience through an arc of brutal enslavement and fugitive escape. Framing the generative, rhetorical impression of Douglass' wounds, Rob Goodman advances:

> But in testifying to his own scars, Douglass physically confirms that he is a fugitive slave, still liable to violence or kidnapping [...] In turning the mark of dishonor and enslavement into an occasion to command the respect of an audience, Douglass does not simply describe his scars: he negates their meaning. And yet, as I have suggested, this negation comes at a price: his rhetorical goals require him to make his own body into a persuasive, signifying, alienated object; his scars cannot be left to heal in peace.[64]

Such injuries, by extension, create their own embedded landscapes of material and psychological traumas contributing to a spatialising narrative; eyewitness and testimony of Douglass' enduring trauma is literally mapped onto his body, tantamount to a graphic cartography in and of itself.[65] Hence, by bearing witness to his bodily scars through public speech, Douglass 'stages' his disfigurement.

Consequently, this doubleness of encounter through witness and testimony is one that carries through to Kinnell's texts, a distinctive preoccupation with somatic experience, and the recurring dimension of trauma. These demonstrations, held in context amid suffering, acts of war, and oppression, are reflected in his poetic ethos, where ruminations on the past provide contrast, and may further illuminate the present. As Christina Zwarg advances, "trauma provides a vehicle for questioning the relationship between experience, memory and event,"[66]

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[64] Rob Goodman, "Slavery and Oratory: Frederick Douglass in the History of Rhetoric," *American Political Science Association* 117, no. 4 (February 2023): 1209.
[65] See Bethany Craig, "Scars as Cartography: Bodily Commemorations and Memorials." Master's Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2022. https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_gradthes/6417
[66] Christina Zwarg, "The Work of Trauma: Fuller, Douglass, and Emerson on the Border of Ridicule," *Studies in Romanticism* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 68.

and some of the earliest intimations of these multivalences are found in Kinnell's "Alewives Pool" (1955):

> But the child's mouth searches the mother's breast—
> He is all bruised by the shipwreck of birth—
> But when he sucks that milk he knows he tastes
> The heirloom griefs and glories of the earth,
> His future lighted in the burning past.[67]

Within the framework of the poem, we perceive a sense of time irrespective of standard linearity in which a child, "bruised by the shipwreck of birth," collides with "his future lighted in the burning past," lurching in the vague fissures between the pre-verbality of foetal life, and the uncertainty of survival through the birth experience. The inherent, intergenerational nature of trauma—"The heirloom griefs and glories of the earth"—is suggested through its connection to the maternal act of breastfeeding, passing one body's memories into another, as well as through the biological imperative of the mother's body to produce sustenance for its newborn kin; the baby's epistemic awareness is achieved through the suckling of milk, of foreknowledge.

Kinnell sustains ideas which highlight both experientiality and lineage. The birth of this child is not a pathologised one, but an universal event rooted in the totality of a specified somatic trauma, from which all of mankind emanates. "Alewives Pool" suggests there is a generational nature and contiguity to these temporal shifts, whereby things may be anchored in the past and possess a sense of its return upon the present, directed towards the future and conveying departure.[68] By returning to the "site of loss," trauma is thereby reiterated as a compulsive return or "a repetition compulsion or jouissance."[69]

A clear distinction in Kinnell's ethos connotes that trauma is also a shared experience, an interconnected way by which the ontological self, as lyric speaker, may process one's own aberration, simultaneously dysphoric and euphoric, both with and through the experiences of

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[67] Galway Kinnell, "Alewives Pool," *Poetry* (January 1955): 212.
[68] Zwarg, "The Work of Trauma," 74.
[69] Joanna Bourke, "Cruel Visions: Reflections on Artists and Atrocities," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 18.

another in the production of meaning. That is to say, the traumatic wound is not simply an object of self-reflexive knowledge, but one found in, and exchanged by, the self and the other. We might even go so far as to articulate that it too, figures as Kinnell's ongoing contemplation of the sublime. Ultimately, it is the redemptive nature of empathy, an entirely human liability, which manages to bridge horror and idealism.[70] By extension, Kinnell advances a critical belief in personal agency to acknowledge deeply felt pain in the other, and to underscore the radical departure of harrowing events from more idealistic constructs of societal consciousness.

In "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," Part VIII in *The Book of Nightmares* (1971), the lyric speaker professes:

> And yet I think
> it must be the wound, the wound itself,
> which lets us know and love,
> which forces us to reach out to our misfit
> and by a kind
> of poetry of the soul, accomplish,
> for a moment,
>
> […]
>
> that purest,
> most tragic, concumbence, strangers
> clasped into one, a moment, of their moment on earth. (*CP*, 258)

Here, the speaker describes a method of encounter with someone, "through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound,"[71] with especial attention given to empathetic awareness, and to the action incurred because of one's compulsion to seek connection. As readers, our attentions should be drawn to "the call" which initiates a relationship with a turn to the other, one which involves a paradigmatic shift that "compels us toward engagement rather than detachment, dialogue rather than moongazing."[72]

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[70] Bourke advances that the role of empathy "as a capacity of both imaginative and active embodiment reaches its outermost limit in the face of atrocity [...] In part, this is because it hurts to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the vulnerable body of atrocious violence." Bourke, "Cruel Visions," 17.
[71] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 8.
[72] Daniel Z. Sui, "Visuality, Aurality, and Shifting Metaphors of Geographical Thought in the Late Twentieth Century," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 2 (June 2000): 325.

However, this mindful recognition is contrasted by the arbitrariness and the non-specificity of the titular place, the "Valley of Not-Knowing," which localises us to the action of the poem. Kinnell's evocation underscores both the visual and the spatial uncertainties of place and space, as well as its accompanying corporeal and psychic dislocation. From a perspective of liminality, the speaker contemplates this interface of positive and negative space, cross-roads where two bodies fit into each other—one and other—to form a distorted whole.

David Kleinbard likens the pain of the open wound to "the consciousness of being fragmentary, incomplete and insufficient,"[73] and it is likely this lack which encourages the search for completion. In conversation with Jim Schumock, Kinnell expounds upon this notion, clarifying that his position that poetry is "all-gendered […] a way of filling in the emptiness in one's self, whether man or woman, with a way of knowing and a way of feeling for the other."[74] The traumatic, self-referentiality of the wound is thereby mitigated through a tenderness and an overt sensuality, as so often his poems are, "into the last,/ coldest room, which is memory—" as he articulates in "Dear Stranger Extant in Memory by the Blue Juniata," Section IV of *The Book of Nightmares* (*CP*, 232). The sense of partition or split connoted by Kinnell's line is echoed by Geoffrey H. Hartman who, like Cathy Caruth, seeks a confluence of theory marrying words and trauma to help us "read the wound" through literature. Hartman alleges that there are two contradictory elements which contribute to the knowledge of trauma, and that "[o]n the level of poetics, literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of cognition."[75]

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), a monograph Kinnell consulted with some frequency for his public lectures, Sigmund Freud ruminates on intersecting models of

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[73] David Kleinbard, "Galway Kinnell's Poetry of Transformation," *The Centennial Review* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 50.
[74] Galway Kinnell and Jim Schumock, "Interview with Galway Kinnell," *Across My Desk*, audio, 22:14. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 8). Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[75] Geoffrey H. Hartman, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 537.

melancholy and loss, and the relegation of traumatic memory into recesses of the brain difficult to access or to activate.[76] His psychoanalytic conception of "traumatic neuroses" likens a wound to the mind existing outside of time—'timeless' such that they cannot be ordered temporally; in essence, "time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to them."[77] Traumatic neuroses is especially applicable to dream sequences in which victims relive their horrifying experiences at unspecified moments, emphasising 'the factor of surprise' as opposed to pre-conceptions of fear, and the anxiety arising out of unpreparedness.[78] Caruth's seminal work reiterates Freud's reading of trauma as caused by a breach in the mind, essentially the psyche's functional responsiveness to life imperilled; ill-prepared for the arrival of the stimulus or threat, the psyche processes it only once it is too late, failing to attain the direct experience, which stimulates a repetition of the traumatic nightmare.[79]

Whilst the specificity of Kinnell's title, *The Book of Nightmares*, enters summarily into dialogue with the underpinnings of literary trauma theory, and its putative psychoanalytic dispositions, his preoccupation with mortality is succinctly brought to the fore. In "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight," which comprises Section VII, he decries: "And yet perhaps this is the reason you cry,/ this is the nightmare you wake crying from:/ being forever/ in the pre-trembling of a house that falls" (*CP*, 252). The poem interrogates spatial metaphors of the mind which hold us captive due to an inescapability of circumstance and recurrent trauma: "a house that falls," and a death that will most assuredly be guaranteed in all its physical and neurological impact as the body becomes incapable of sustaining life.

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[76] War trauma was a new subject of study for Freud, who had hitherto been preoccupied with theorising the Oedipus complex; accordingly, he turned to the collective consciousness of World War I combat veterans, and a reassessment of his prior dream theories.

[77] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, ed. Jim Miller (Garden City: Dover Publications, 2015), 22.

[78] Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 7.

[79] Caruth articulates, "If 'fright' is the term by which Freud defines the traumatic effect of not having been prepared in time, then the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream, but in the experience of waking from it. It is the surprise of waking that repeats the unexpectedness of the trauma […] It is the incomprehensible act of surviving—waking into life—that repeats and bears witness to what remains un-grasped within the encounter with death." Cathy Caruth, "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival," *intervalla platform for intellectual exchange* 2, "Trauma, Abstraction, and Creativity" (2014-15): 22-23.

Forever dangling, we bide our time in the "pre-" by which we muster preparedness amongst the tensions of spectral foreknowledge, recalling the anxietal uncertainty and precarity of "Alewives Pool": "Now on the trembling pulse let death and birth/ Beat in the self as in the April grass./ The sudden beauty that the air flames forth/ [...]/ Stand on the pulse and love the burning earth."[80]

In the fifth strophe of "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," the speaker recalls a distressing event in his personal history. The direct trauma of an encounter with imprisonment is one laid-bare, depicted as a disembodied experience of austere, carceral space by which materialities (including the body and its autonomy), are lost, disregarded, and irredeemable:

> Of that time in a Southern jail,
> when the sheriff, as he cursed me
> and spat, took my hand in his hand, rocked
> from the pulps the whorls
> and tented archways into the tabooed realm, that underlife
> where the canaries of the blood are singing, pressed
> the flesh-flowers
> into the dirty book of the
> police-blotter, afterwards what I remembered most
> was the care, the almost loving,
> animal gentleness of his hand on my hand. (*CP*, 259-260)

Even the speaker's hands are conceived in terms of place and space, with the imprint of his fingers and palms committing acts of transgression, physically crossing over "into the tabooed realm." In his confined spatiality, the speaker is thrust into "the harshness of that cubicle/ in hell where they put you/ with all your desires undiminished, and with no body to/ appease them" (*CP*, 260). As if to induce further punishment, the affective, mental, and physiological processes continue to pound through his physical presence without the prospect of recourse or possibility of fulfilment.

Roger Luckhurst advances that trauma is "a piercing or breach of a border that puts inside and outside into a strange communication."[81] In this instance, the speaker-as-prisoner

[80] Kinnell, "Alewives Pool," 213.
[81] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 3.

is bound by the material and the psychological, from the physical constriction of a gaol cell, to "that underlife/ where the canaries of the blood are singing" (*CP*, 260). Kinnell's diction connects this poem, the eighth section of *The Book of Nightmares*, with "Under the Maud Moon," the first poem of the sequence, creating an intertextuality through his usage of the term "underlife." The confinement of prison, and its incursion of inside and outside in Section VIII, is countered by the sheltered concealment of the baby before birth in Section I, as it 'breaches the border,' moving from interior to exterior worlds, trading extracorporeal life for symbolic death, and back to seizing life again:

> and she skids out on her face into light,
> this peck
> of stunned flesh
> clotted with celestial cheesiness, glowing
> with the astral violet
> of the underlife. As they cut
>
> her tie to the darkness
> she dies
> a moment, turns blue as a coal,
> the limbs shaking
> as the memories rush out of them. (*CP*, 215-216)

Kinnell's stanzaic break mimics the moment when Maud's umbilical cord is cut, contravening the boundary between maternal existence and "touching the world/ with the underglimmer/ of the beginning" (*CP*, 217). Kinnell reaches a formidable emotional pitch, impressing a duality and a doubleness floundering between birth and death, tempered by equal parts humanity and horror. Most notably these moments confound when even life, fresh in its newness, is a "passage" to the end, a terminus of the finite counting down with every heartbeat (*CP*, 214).

> When
>
> they hang her up
> by the feet, she sucks
> air, screams
> her first song—and turns rose,
> the slow,
> beating, featherless arms
> already clutching at the emptiness. (*CP*, 216)

The tempo of the stresses here, such as the sluggish, end-stopped caesuras, the amphibrach of "featherless," and the hard stress of "arms" mechanically puts us through the paces of a newborn struggling to draw her first breath.

In "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," the speaker reminisces with especial fondness about the vulgar sheriff who pressed his fingertips, and those of countless others, "into the dirty book of the/ police-blotter, afterwards what I remembered most/ was the care, the almost loving,/ animal gentleness of his hand on my hand" (*CP*, 260). Kinnell employs a disarming volte-face; whilst our instinctual sympathies are allied with the imprisoned, the speaker elicits compassion for the officer, wondering if he, too will be witness to his own recurring trauma as he dies, allayed by the human dimension of the other:

> And when he himself floats out
> on a sea he almost begins to remember,
> floats out into a darkness he has known already;
> when the moan of wind
> and the gasp of lungs call to each other among the waves
> and the wish to float
> come to matter not at all as he sinks under,
>
> is it so impossible to think
> he will dream back to all the hands black and white
> he took in his hands
> as the creation
> touches him a last time all over his body? (*CP*, 260)

In the poem, the realms of the living and the dead are connected by Kinnell through spatially defined geographies of waves and sea. Language punctuates the interstitial landscape,[82] lapsing across an interval caught between sinking and floating, in both literal and metaphorical imports, through the breath of the natural world, and the intake of air in our lungs. In a poignant moment of sympathy, Kinnell imbues this poem, as much of his poetry, with these simple, inflected moments of human interaction. He turns the ordinary into demonstrations of attachment, where the cost of anguish or grief is eased by palpable connections, bringing a certain tension and veracity rippling through the work. Helen Vendler asserts that the

[82] "In yet one more passage conflating regression to the beginning of life with the moment of leaving it, the sheriff too is incorporated (or lets himself go) into the unifying element beyond our reach." Lee Zimmerman, *Intricate and Simple Things: The Poetry of Galway Kinnell* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 173.

artfulness of poetry thrives on these variations, the notion of poetic shape giving way to "hearing a melody twice, the first time in the major key, the second time in the minor."[83]

As readers, in our engagement with the text of "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," in conjunction with Douglass' attestations, we become participants in a dynamic of writer-witness/reader-witness, such that it telegraphs information through literary texts by disseminating information as testimony. Shoshana Felman elaborates the duality of witness and its inextricable, paradoxical complexities:

> Since the testimony cannot be simply relayed, repeated or reported by another without thereby using its function as a testimony, the burden of witness—in spite of his or her alignment with other witnesses—is a radically unique, noninterchangeable and solitary burden […] And yet, the *appointment* to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* others and *to* others.[84]

However, in testifying, one must convey the candour of experience through witness, either for oneself or for social and historical traumas more broadly. Both Felman and Dori Laub insist that the witness in literature is "the one who (in fact) *witnesses*, but also, the one who *begets*, the truth, through the speech process of the testimony."[85] Whilst their discourse is borne distinctly from acts of reading and writing as relates to the Holocaust, Felman and Laub's broader traumatic theory hinges upon knowledge of an event and its harrowed rendering.[86]

Addressing poetic witness and its applications within "the social," Carolyn Forché draws upon the observations of Walter Benjamin to parse poetry from its implicit designation of traumatic immediacy:

> In fact, the poem might be our only evidence that an event has occurred: it exists for us as the sole trace of an occurrence […] To talk about a poem as the sole trace of an event, to see it in purely evidentiary terms, is perhaps to believe our own figures of

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[83] Helen Vendler, *Poems, Poets, Poetry: An Introduction and Anthology* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1997), 37.

[84] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3.

[85] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 16.

[86] Czesław Miłosz's reflections on poetics and testimony deepen our comprehension of Douglass' plight. He elaborates thus: "Mankind has always been divided by one rule into two species: *those who know and do not speak; those who speak and do not know*. This formula can be seen as an allusion to the dialectic of master and slave, for it invokes centuries of ignorance and misery among serfs, peasants, and proletarians, who alone knew the cruelty of life in all its nakedness but had to keep it to themselves. The skill of reading and writing was the privilege of the few, whose sense of life was made comfortable by power and wealth." Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1981-82* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 66-67.

> speech too rigorously. If, as Benjamin indicates, a poem is *itself* an event, a trauma that changes both a common language and an individual psyche, it is a specific kind of event, a specific kind of trauma. It is an experience entered into voluntarily […] One has to read or listen, one has to be willing to accept the trauma. So if a poem is an event and the trace of an event, it has, by definition, to belong to a different order of being from the trauma that marked its language in the first place.[87]

Forché's observations, coupled with her view of poetic elucidation and engagement as a voluntary act, strike synonymity with Kinnell's literary ethos. For Kinnell, it is the role of the poet to confer the truth of bearing witness, an objectivity transmitted through the instantaneity of his own conscious, societal awareness, as he maintains, "To me, poetry is somebody standing up, so to speak, and saying, with as little concealment as possible, what it is for him or her to be on earth at this moment."[88]

As the civil rights movement gained traction,[89] Kinnell's desire to be an active participant, and to be close to the events as they unfurled, acquired a place of prominence in his personal and professional lives. Beginning in 1963, he served as a fieldworker in Hammond, Louisiana for the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Kinnell writes in his personal correspondence:

> I'm in Louisiana in the civil rights movement for the summer [...] It is a happy time. I love these people here. One would fight for their rights anyway, but it helps you to be less afraid if you feel this brotherhood. I preached in a country church this morning, trying to arouse the old people out of their terror so they'll let the young join us. We are 'expecting' to go to jail so it wouldn't catch us by surprise. None of us know whether we will. I suppose it's being put in a jail with other whites that I'm really afraid of.[90]

Shortly thereafter, amid registering Black voters, Kinnell was arrested, leading to his five-day imprisonment. This experience did little, however, to quell his ideological and ethical fervour.

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[87] Poetry of witness applies to both the personal and the political, and a suggested third term, "the social" which is "a place of resistance and struggle, where books are published, poems are read, and protest disseminated." Carolyn Forché, introduction to *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness*, ed. Carolyn Forché (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 31. Forché's anthology contains two poems by Kinnell: "Another Night in the Ruins" and "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond."

[88] Daniel Lewis, "Galway Kinnell, Plain-Spoken Poet, is Dead at 87," *The New York Times* (29 October 2014): 29.

[89] During his time lecturing abroad at Université de Grenoble, Kinnell recalls: "I read about the Freedom Riders and thought, 'My God, at last something is being done!' As soon as I got back, I sought out CORE—which I'd heard or read was going to do a voter registration drive. I realized that here was an opportunity to do something instead of merely stewing about it." Kinnell and Gioseffi, "What a Kingdom it *Is*," online.

[90] Correspondence (30 October 1963); Anne Buchanan Crosby Collection of Galway Kinnell Letters and Manuscripts, C1680, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

In March 1965, accompanied by his students from Juniata College, he joined voting rights marches from Selma to Montgomery. Whilst marching with Dr. King, Rev. Hosea Williams, John Lewis, and throngs of other peaceful demonstrators against voter suppression and exclusion, Kinnell and his group were violently confronted at the Edmund Pettus Bridge by mounted law enforcement, segregationists, and other vigilante hate groups.

Harriet Richardson Michel, Kinnell's student, testifies that a police officer with a billy club started beating Kinnell, confirming that, "He was, in my view, trying to poke his eye out."[91] Candid images of a bloodied-up Kinnell—a white man—being consoled by Michel—a Black woman—were broadcast across major news outlets that very evening, sending a message of solidarity to the nation.[92] Vievee Francis' fourth volume of poetry, *The Shared World* (2023), bears this historic photograph of Kinnell and Michel on its cover, crystalising their joint empathy and witness in her poem, "1965":

> In Selma that day. The photograph. The way she is looking at him. Not his name. His pallor. Not the city nor the event, not even the blood on his neck. When I saw the picture I realized someone cared enough to take it. There was only one lens. Then, the entire world wasn't always watching. She pressed that cloth to his neck as intimately as a kiss whispered into the channel of an ear. Spontaneously [...] Galway's eye to Harriet's, brown as mine. Look at the way he looks at her. Like a sun rising twice to be Galway that day looking into the face of the tender after terror. See, the grace of gratitude. He being there. She being her.[93]

In our assessment of Kinnell's expanding and complex geographical imagination, we find that its inherent polyspatiality is extended by spaces of social justice, politicised acts, and even terror,[94] as Francis aptly ignites in her poem. Areas of protest and dissent are functionally exclusionary sites borne from extrajudicial spaces, tantamount not merely in the context of social activism, but also with American transgressions enacted from plantations to battlefields whereby violence can be enacted upon the body without restriction or impending punishment.

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[91] Lauren Aratani, "Bloody Sunday remembered: civil rights marchers tell story of their iconic photos," *The Guardian* (1 March 2020): https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/01/bloody-sunday-remembered-civil-rights-marchers-tell-story-of-their-iconic-photos

[92] Photographer Charles Moore's images of Kinnell and Michel were also featured in *Life Magazine* (26 March 1965): 36-37. Newly elected, President Lyndon Johnson swiftly announced a drafting of federal legislation to protect voting rights, signing it into law on 6 August 1965.

[93] Vievee Francis, *The Shared World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2023), 11.

[94] It is perhaps coincidental, and yet unsurprising, that both Kinnell and Francis use the word 'terror' to underscore the acute horror of these experiences.

These notions of social spaces as polemical, and more specifically, sites of geospatial trauma, create an entanglement of experience for Kinnell, in turn complicating his relationship to space, place, and landscape, and the solemnity he sought in the lifeworld.

Sublime Analogues

In the fourth section of "The Homecoming of Emma Lazarus,"[95] published in *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* (1964), Kinnell pens:

> Facing the Old World the Green Lady Whispers, 'Eden!'
> Seeing her looking so trim in her American verdigris
> They thought she was saying how it was here.
> Seeing her gazing out to sea we read it as pure nostalgia.
> Vacuumed in the wind from the Dry Cleaning Store
> She may, herself, have wondered which she meant. (*CP*, 111)

Kinnell trades the idyllic for the expanse of New York Harbour, as the poem riffs on the predominant, mythologised aesthetic of the Emersonian self-appointed "plain old Adam, the simple genuine self against the whole world"[96] essayed in "Self-Reliance," grown obsolete. A certain irreverence pervades Kinnell's verse, highlighting misplaced optimism along with a strong sense of irony, ultimately criticising the false, self-generated paradigm of American exceptionalism, and Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* (1871)— "Who else, indeed, except the United States."[97] Through its invocation of the nineteenth century and a Transcendentalist past, the poem provides a purposeful dialogue, drawing an arc of distinction between Old World, European predecessors, and a twentieth-century present. Kinnell's usage of Lady

[95] Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) famously wrote the sonnet "The New Colossus" (1883) to raise money for the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty; the poem is inscribed on its plaque. Kinnell notes she was gifted Thoreau's compass by William Ellery Channing whilst visiting Emerson in Concord— "Thoreau's pocket compass had been her keepsake" (*CP*, 110)—a subtle allusion to her finding a moral and ethical centring in Thoreau as a north star. See Esther Schor, *Emma Lazarus* (New York: Schocken Books, 2006).
[96] See Emerson's journal entry of 12 March 1833. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson with annotations (1833-1835)*, eds. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), 62.
[97] Walt Whitman, *Democratic Vistas* (New York: Smith and McDougal, 1871), 3.

Liberty, "Mother of Exiles,"[98] as an allegorised and anthropomorphised figure, serves as an extension to the marginalised and the excluded against the backdrop of the American Sublime.

Tracing its aesthetic derivations, Harold Bloom articulates that "the sublime in literature has been associated with peak experiences that render a secular version of a theophany: a sense of something interfused that transforms a natural moment, landscape, action, or countenance."[99] Fleshing out Bloom's observation, we perceive a notion of 'shock and awe,' or as he notes more precisely, "an excursion into the psychological origins of aesthetic magnificence."[100] His assessment of the sublime as a tensile balance between hyperbole and ambivalence is illuminating in the context of Kinnell's poetic creation, along with his developing sense of the geographical imaginary.

Deriving inspiration and received wisdom from his Transcendentalist precursors, Kinnell discovered an extensive body of knowledge responding to nature and the sublime, in both their common and philosophical imports; these included principles of the foreworld such as intuition and divinity of a universal spirit. Solitude, for example, figures prominently in Transcendentalism, in particular the relationship it manifests in its ties to sublimity and to consciousness. Both Emerson and Thoreau are precise in their approaches as to what it constitutes, such that the sublime is a collision of worlds, between the inner dimensions of emotional consciousness and of nature itself. Although Emerson's view seems more obtuse and transactionally aesthetic, Thoreau's thinking is not dissimilar; however, there is an underlying sense that he takes the theoretical substance and abstractions of Emerson, enacting them practically and pragmatically. Indeed, solitude is sought in the natural world, with the individual placed in proximity to the elements, and the immediacy of the landscapes contained therein. In Thoreau's view, this is a closer point of experience, a reification in context with one's direct surroundings.

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[98] Emma Lazarus, *The Poems of Emma Lazarus Vol. 1: Narrative, Lyric, and Dramatic*, ed. Susan L. Rattiner (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2015), 202.
[99] Harold Bloom, *The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and The American Sublime* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 5-6.
[100] Bloom, *The Daemon Knows*, 29.

F.O. Matthiessen advances that Thoreau's encounters with nature were more profound than Emerson's, indicated by the specificity of Thoreau's language where "every phrase is expressive of acute sensation."[101] Accordingly, we may discern Thoreau's wish to bring physicality and tactility, to be steeped in nature so wholly and fully such that a "desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant."[102] Philip Coleman's observations expose a politicising dimension of Thoreau's interlocution with local vegetation and landscape. Referring to "Autumnal Tints" (1862) Coleman states, "Thoreau's emphasis on the third-person plural in this passage— 'our leaves,' 'our trees and shrubs'—is crucial to his ideological project. What he is proposing, taking his cue from Emerson, is nothing less than a radical reimagination of American identity."[103]

Similarly, Douglass sought to create a renewed identity, one which was not thrust upon him through the bondage of slavery, but generated through his ever-changing relationship to the environment, and to accumulating freedoms. Although enslaved interactions with the landscape, and the lifeworld more essentially, are complicated by forced inhabitation and labour, Douglass' rootedness in place contrasts the implicit mobility of freedom, as argued by Tony C. Perry:

> For Douglass, the pronounced restrictions on their movement rendered slaves fixtures in the world, people who then had to choose whether to embrace this world, that is 'take root' in the hostile environment of the plantation, or forgo any such anchoring, electing rootlessness [...] Douglass maintained that enslaved people's attachment to the land, however conditioned by bondage, afforded unique opportunities to tap the environment's capacity to support self-determined acts, that is its liberatory potential.[104]

Perry's assessment makes clear that liberation and sublimity are intertwined and mutually reinforcing principles. These notions of permanence and fixture retained access to the sublime

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[101] Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 165.
[102] Henry David Thoreau, *Essays: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 273.
[103] Coleman continues that Thoreau's essays "insist that the United States be represented and spoken about henceforth in a language unique to the literal ground of the nation's own historical and cultural experience." Philip Coleman, "Old World Shadows in the New: Europe and the Nineteenth-Century American Essay," in *The Cambridge History of the American Essay*, eds. Christy Wampole and Jason Childs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 105.
[104] Tony C. Perry, "Environment," in *Frederick Douglass in Context*, ed. Michaël Roy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 270-271.

as unattainable, and therefore, beyond the cognitive and affective purview of marginalised or excluded peoples to fully behold its aesthetic glory beyond pictorial or imaginative renderings.[105]

Much like Douglass, Kinnell longs for another identity through the natural world, one predicated on wilful itinerance. In a letter to Anne Buchanan apprising her of his teaching contract in Tehran, he stipulates:

> But out of some perverse hunger for nothingness, and an intellectual desire to see the other side of the world, I am going to Iran via the Pacific [...] I slept out on North Pack Monadnock Mtn in New Hampshire a few weeks ago. Watching the world get dark while the stars come out seems to me like dying, passing into the universe, & I think of the life 'back on the earth.'[106]

Kinnell's "The Seekonk Woods" (1985), the final poem in *The Past*, manifests these very sentiments, centring on an earthen attachment that spurs profound visceral and bodily connection. Kinnell's engagement with the Transcendentalists reverberates through the poem; his figurative language and tone reaffirms the heady, hyperbolic tendencies of their blissful renderings, deepening and enriching his prosody with a fervid voracity:

> I want to crawl face down in the fields
> and graze on the wild strawberries, my clothes
> stained pink, even for seven years
> if I must, if they exist. I want to lie out
> on my back under the thousand stars and think
> my way up among them, through them,
> and a little distance past them, and attain
> a moment of absolute ignorance,
> if I can, if human mentality lets us.
> I have always intended to live forever;
> but not until now, to live now. The moment
> I have done one or the other, I here swear,
> no one will have to drag me, I'll come
> but never will I agree to burn my words. (*CP*, 370-371)

In the speaker's impassioned plea to comprehend life, and its sublimity by experience, Kinnell's connection to Seekonk Woods demonstrates a clear and enduring imprint of

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[105] In Douglass' handwritten note "Niagara," (1843) he recounts experiences of sublimity and freedom. See Mattias Klestil, "Introduction: African American Environmental Knowledge at Niagara," in *Environmental Knowledge, Race, and African American Literature* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2023), 2-3.

[106] Correspondence (19 July 1959); Anne Buchanan Crosby Collection of Galway Kinnell Letters and Manuscripts, C1680, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

Thoreau's *Walden* (1854).[107] However, true to his own poetic sensibility, there is a quailing, beating quality to Kinnell's verse, through his usage of the interrogative and its extension of subordinating clauses throughout the strophe, as though he must hedge his bets in the fulfilment of his desires against material and psychological figments: "if I must"; "if they exist"; "if I can"; "if human mentality lets us" (*CP*, 370). The lyric speaker, scraping and clambering across verdant pastures, assures us by this pictorial metaphor that he will come to death willingly, an inevitable concession to which he is bound to capitulate.

More saliently, the nature of language, and its preservation as a principal apparatus of poetic and aesthetic production, is immutable. The sublime, to which Kinnell subscribes, connotes an access to an inner realm of emotional consciousness, an intuitive processing of the natural environs in absolute serenity. But it also comports a direct and specific sense of a geographical imagination which harnesses a relationship with material and psychogeographies of the world, including the astral heavens. This is precisely isolation as elevation,[108] the underlying theme that gives spirit to the philosophical collective, a vehicle of transcendence in our intuitive framework of the world. Home is not simply a local, physical abode, but also an interior housing of the body and the spirit, and the compelling psychogeographies which accompany this aesthetic rendering; inside one's soul, all questions of ontology relate back to the self. In this way, the soul cannot be decoupled from its inextricable link with the self and acts as a means of grounding us.

Of Thoreau's interrelationship with home and placiality, Peter Blakemore affirms:

> His play on thankfulness, fulfillment, and blooming represents the kind of significant discovery Thoreau believed one could make by keeping track of home. This relocation through time and space becomes grounded and meaningful because it does not simply happen in the abstract, in any time or any space, but in *place*—and in the *home* place, to be specific. Thoreau knows that the human imagination must lie at the center of

[107] Conceptually, Kinnell's poem bears intertextuality with one of Thoreau's most iconic excerpts: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived [...] I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life." Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*, ed. Jeffrey S. Cramer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 88.

[108] Emerson expresses this directive stating, "But your isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*, ed. Stanley Appelbaum (Mineola: Dover Publications, 1993), 30.

> knowledge. The phenomenal life-worlds Thoreau sees and his archaeological sense of experience and human, floral, and faunal emplacement reveal for us, as it did for him in his time, the value of place itself.[109]

Much like Thoreau, Kinnell's spatial awareness, and its attributions of high value, contributes to impressions of the sublime; these moments tucked away in the woods are a source of grounding and balance in which the magnitude of the forest affords communicative and comforting engagement with the lifeworld. It comports an inherent spatial form and placiality achieved through the subjectivity of isolation, by which he positions the non-human as the 'basic context' of human existence and accords a grandiosity to it as a conduit, as he states, "When in the presence of wind, or the night sky or the sea, or less spectacular instances of the nonhuman—including its revelation through the human—we are reminded both of the kinship and the separation between ourselves and what is beyond us."[110] The environment factors as part of our cognition, for consciousness and memory are shaped by whole-body experiences of self-awareness. As such, Kinnell signals his attempts to re-orient the self in its uncertain position by seeking embodiment or "emplaced experience"[111] in a distinctive landscape.

Returning to "The Descent," collected in Part III of *What a Kingdom It Was*, in which Kinnell's interrogation of a post-Christian world seizes its hold:

> (Anyway
>
> I thought it was holy. No one
> Had told me heaven is overhead.
> I only knew people look down
> When they pray.)
>
> [...]
>
> Heaven is in light, overhead,
> I have it by heart. Yet the dead
> Silting the darkness do not ask
> For burials elsewhere than the dusk.
> They lie where nothing but the moon can rise,

[109] Peter Blakemore, "Reading Home: Thoreau, Literature, and the Phenomenon of Inhabitation," in *Thoreau's Sense of Place: Essays in American Environmental Writing*, ed. Richard J. Schneider (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 119.
[110] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 88.
[111] Alexander, *Late Modernism*, 207.

And make no claims, though they had promises. (*CP*, 71-72)

Hall confirms this doubleness and ambivalence in Kinnell "who understands that we live by emptying ourselves [...] It is typical of Kinnell, in any of his incarnations, that this image of horror is glorious—having it both ways."[112] Lee Zimmerman supplants Hall's postulation, advancing that the poem is anti-transcendental, "impelled by the interplay between ascension and descent, the way down, as it usually does for Kinnell, finally subsuming the way up."[113]

Yet in "The Descent," and for Kinnell's poetry more elementally, correspondent transcendence does not bear directionality; it is a marriage of the sacral and of the secular; of star-gazing and soiled fingernails; of burials, rituals, and earthen blessings. Indeed, the sublime compulsion of 'shock and awe' produces a kind of democratising impulse found in these spaces, through a commonality that touches all in existence: death. In Kinnell's manifestation, he declares "*the wages/ of dying is love*" (*CP*, 255), a phrase that is at once as keenly cryptic as it is simplistic, lifted straight from Emerson: "Life only avails, not the having lived."[114]

In revisiting the notion of mortality, we see this as Kinnell's great reconciliation, an ever-emerging sense of the geographical imagination in concert with an omnipresent, spectral demise, to create a jarring juxtaposition; agency and idealism are catapulted into a realm of dislocation and severance, an impetus of fight or flight in the astral heavens, localised by a dutiful, earthly contingent in Part III's "The Schoolhouse" (1960):

> And we are here, under the starlight. I
> Remember he taught us the stars disperse
> In wild flight, though constellated to the eye.
> Now I can almost see the night in its course,
> The slow sky uncoiling in exploding forms,
> The stars that flee it riding free in its arms. (*CP*, 66)

[112] Hall, "Text as Test," 166-167. Hall's words evoke the concept of kenosis, or Kenotic Christianity, which Jesus exemplified as "emptying" himself of his divinity to achieve an incarnate life. See C. Stephen Evans, ed. *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); also, 'askesis' (self-purgation) in Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence, 2nd ed.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 115-136.
[113] Zimmerman, *Intricate and Simple Things*, 26 & 29.
[114] Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, 125.

Moreover, Kinnell internalises loss of life, just as a nature, as a great equalising force that is to be confronted. He addresses his young daughter, Maud in "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight":

> You cry, waking from a nightmare.
>
> When I sleepwalk
> into your room, and pick you up,
> and hold you up in the moonlight, you cling to me
> hard,
> as if clinging could save us. I think
> you think
> I will never die, I think I exude
> to you the permanence of smoke or stars,
> even as
> my broken arms heal themselves around you.
>
> [...]
>
> Yes,
> you cling because
> I, like you, only sooner
> than you, will go down
> the path of vanished alphabets,
> the roadlessness
> to the other side of darkness,
> your arms
> like the shoes left behind,
> like the adjectives
> in the halting speech of old men,
> which once could call up the lost nouns. (*CP*, 251-253)

Kinnell's diction is significant, elaborating spatio-temporal configurations to convey the disappearance, and ultimate inadequacy, of language. In his stylistic approaches to the poetic line, Kinnell thoughtfully mimics the tensions to create a prosody whose engagement with sublimity does not artificially repress his composition for the sake of making neat, poetic parcels or isometric stanzas. Rather, he introduces nuance and scant language to indicate where we should linger, and longer lines to fit the cadence or to carry a thought to completion.

In "Spindrift," which features in his 1964 volume *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, Kinnell enumerates experience and gives it temporal boundaries, breaking it up by natural phenomena through his deployment of material geographies drawn from elements of the physical world and inevitable decay. The poem is especially sparse in parts and deliberately so;

Kinnell affords an entire line to the single-stressed word "pluck" (*CP*, 145) in the second strophe, pausing the momentum of the poem. Throughout this text, we find competing elements of nature's supreme and unyielding powers, water and wind, both entwined and disparate, producing the "spindrift" from gales and gusts passing over the crests of waves. The lyric speaker enumerates each part of the scene for us, from the vantage point of sitting on hollowed-out driftwood and "its tangle of roots/ Letting the wind go through," to the "sea-mud still quivering" (*CP*, 144). This is a marine landscape that is pulsing with life far and wide, a bystander to the relentless cycles of life and death.

Shades of Emerson weave through the poem, rather distinct overtones that collocate polarities in the law of nature and spirit[115] with the ebb and flow of the sea. Whitewashed from the sun, the driftwood is "worn/ Down to the lost grip it always essentially was" (*CP*, 145); beaten by the powerful waters, it has broken its deep bond with the earth, its own rooted source of stability and longevity. "Spindrift" recalls the relentless renewal of nature, the permanence and impermanence heaving through our apprehension of infinite, natural renewal in its destructive magnificence: "—or the geologic changes: —all gone, like the shells which sprinkle the sea-beach with a white colony to-day, forever renewed to be forever destroyed."[116]

In a reversal, employing extended metaphor to detail a hunter relentlessly stalking a bear to its death in *Body Rags* (1968), Kinnell constructs a metaphysical, inter-creatural experience in "The Bear":

> And I set out
> running, following the splashes
> of blood wandering over the world.
> At the cut, gashed resting places
> I stop and rest,
> at the crawl-marks
> where he lay out on his belly
> to overpass some stretch of bauchy ice
> I lie out
> dragging myself forward with bear-knives in my fists. (*CP*, 205)

[115] Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, 58.
[116] Ibid., 112.

The hunt is drawn out over several days, pushing the hunter to the brink of starvation as he skulks through a barren and forbidding landscape. After the bear succumbs, its insides torn asunder from ingesting a wolf's rib, the hunter rips him "down his whole length" and climbs inside (*CP*, 206).[117] Once more, Kinnell dispenses his language in fits in starts; the "halting speech of old men" (*CP*, 253) is now countered by verb fragments and gerunds spliced between lines: "I set out/ running, following"; "wandering"; "I lie out/ dragging" (*CP*, 205). It is there that the hunter (as lyric speaker) finds himself dreaming vividly from the perspective of the bear, transformed by an inner consciousness in "a parabola of bear-transcendence," and a "dance of solitude" (*CP*, 206) which can only be closed by the individual alone, unifying spiritual and physical experiences; as Kinnell elucidates in reference to the hunter, "perhaps he then becomes whole."[118]

Hall's observation is particularly apposite in our readings of Kinnell's more popular range, such as "The Porcupine," "The Bear," as well as his Vietnam-oriented texts, poems which straddle a swinging pendulum of grandeur and atrocity. Kinnell continued to experiment with compositions addressing political upheaval and social unrest: in essence, tableaux of discordant confrontation. This impressionistic and sensorial style of poetry in which he deploys unequivocal precision and dexterity of diction in accounting for grim details, would become an enduring signature of his work.[119]

Kinnell recounts his visits to a frog pond near his home where he often felt "totally alive and totally existing"[120] in his body in "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond" from *Body*

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[117] It is worth pondering the subtext and/or intertextuality of Kinnell's title choice. Perhaps it is an allusion to the famous short-fiction piece "The Bear" from William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses*, a statement on miscegenation, abrogation, and slavery in the American South. "Bear" by Merwin was published in the 1955 issue of *Poetry*, the issue which also featured Kinnell's "Across the River," "Alewives Pool," and "Lilacs."

[118] Galway Kinnell, Gregory Fitz Gerald et al., "'Deeper than Personality': A Conversation with Galway Kinnell," *The Iowa Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 1970): 127.

[119] In conversation with *Los Angeles Times*, Kinnell reveals: "I've tried to carry my poetry as far as I could, to dwell on the ugly as fully, as far and as long, as I could stomach it. Probably more than most poets. I have included in my work the unpleasant because I think if you are ever going to find any kind of truth to poetry it has to be based on all of experience rather than a narrow segment of cheerful events." "Galway Kinnell," in *I Would Lie to You if I Could: Interviews with Ten American Poets*, ed. Chard deNiord (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 34.

[120] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 2-3.

Rags, a poem which centres on the Vietnam War, in the early stages of US military intervention. In conversation with William Heyen and Gregory FitzGerald, Kinnell speaks to Vermont's significance as a personal enclave in the North, with its green mountains and domestic sanctuary, so removed and dissimilar from the Southern experience: "Then I looked up and saw the vapor trail of a Strategic Air Command bomber, a terrible defilement. I had recently come up from the South, a land then full of violence. Vermont had been for me a retreat from the rest of America; that day I felt its sanctuary was destroyed."[121]

> The old watch: their
> thick eyes
> puff and foreclose by the moon. The young, heads
> trailed by the beginnings of necks,
> shiver,
> in the guarantee they shall be bodies.
>
> In the frog pond
> the vapor trail of a SAC bomber creeps,
>
> I hear its drone, drifting, high up
> in immaculate ozone. (*CP*, 160)

The lyric speaker details Strategic Air Command (SAC) bombers cutting through the sky, contaminating the serenity of the bucolic landscape. It is at once a desire to be exclusionary and marginalised vis-à-vis the geopolitical onslaught of America, but by the same token, a barbed reminder of a new reality whereby life has been changed irrevocably. As the stanzas progress, the speaker envisions the atrocities of war, a vicarious witness to the images of dogs eating "flesh flung into the air," and the "guarantee" of "bodies" (*CP*, 160-161).

Kinnell intended the second strophe to be a parody of Whitman's "I Hear America Singing" (1860),[122] a juxtaposition of the calls of prosperous workman "Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,"[123] with the experience of the agonised, enlisted soldier. Despite the affordances of war-themed poetry to explore more contentious, polemical aspects such as geopolitical positioning or affiliations, Kinnell centres his vision around the

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121 Ibid., 3.
122 Ibid.
123 Walt Whitman, *The Complete Poems of Walt Whitman*, ed. Stephen Matterson (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2006), 12.

interrelationship which defines us all, and the putative futility of violence; whether politician or poet, he states "we are all related—as Etheridge Knight says in one of his poems,[124] 'I am all of them, they are all of me.'" As he continues, Kinnell's sentiment regarding Vietnam, much like Whitman's during the Civil War, is that the "best poems about this war [...] have been those whose outrage does not cause the author to forget that he and his enemy are brothers."[125] "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond" is not a reproach for peace, but does interrogate alterity found in the common experience of war; the existence of enemies somehow fades in comparison to the wages of combat coupled with congruities and synonymities of horror. Like "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," it is a deeply felt sense of commonality with the other, an attempt to find a means of identity and communication, united by the ravages of soul and land.

Memories of transgression, atrocities, and acts of warfare continue to recur in Kinnell's work evoking an acute, spatial consciousness which he describes as "the membranes, effigies, etc., the memories of itself left on the earth by the human race, which is imagined to have destroyed itself."[126] "The Olive Wood Fire" (1985) recounts the panic-stricken screams of a tormented bomber pilot who appears to Kinnell in a lacuna between dreams and reality, made manifest through psychogeographies of real and imagined space: "I thought I heard a scream/—a flier crying out in horror/ as he dropped fire on he didn't know what or whom,/ or else a child thus set aflame—" (*CP*, 336-337). These poems, in their thorough and deliberated iterations, tend to intensify, adopting greater forcefulness in their stances, portrayed at times by Kinnell from the side of nihilistic villainy or callous disrepute. In "Conversation at Tea" a young Kinnell alludes to the theatre of war, passing from literary character and reference in an academic fashion. However, in these later poems, he attends to

[124] Kinnell is referencing one of Knight's most revered poems, "The Idea of Ancestry" (1968), which Kinnell often read publicly at poetry readings. The pair shared a close relationship as friends and peers, each writing poems for the other. See "A poem to Galway Kinnell," in Etheridge Knight, *The Essential Etheridge Knight* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986), 74-75; also, Kinnell's "Brother of my heart" (*CP*, 288).
[125] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 3.
[126] Ibid., 109.

their inhabitation in quotidian life, offering poems of spectrality and recurring trauma. His prosody addresses past images, revenants, and imprinted memories, as well as their collective resonances for the future.

Composed as Kinnell's response to accumulating horrors and destabilisations of the Vietnam War, and at a particular level, the ultimate testament to a body politic of marginality and exclusion, "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible," Section VI of *The Book of Nightmares*, is a triumph of excoriation. Studs Terkel draws a distinction between this poem and "The Bear," countering that here "Galway punches with both hands."[127] Considering imports of timbre and tonality of this poem, now some fifty years since its initial public reception, it still holds currency and resonance through its potential for lyrical interpretation and permeability.

As a poetic apostrophe countered by its almost anodyne and cold-blooded enumeration of events, the poem exacts revenge on individualised groups, one-by-one. In the fourth strophe, the lyric speaker swears of his intended holocaust:

> In the Twentieth Century of my trespass on earth,
> having exterminated all I could of heathens,
> heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, mystical seekers,
> Asians, black men, and white Christian brothers,
> every one of them for his own good,
>
> a continent of red men for living in community
> and having spiritual relations with the land,
> one billion species of animals for being sub-human,
> and ready to take on the bloodthirsty creatures from the other planets,
> I, white Christian man, groan out this testament of my last will. (*CP*, 245-246)

Kinnell's lexicon is purposefully incendiary, loosening the bounds of propriety through the anti-sublime rantings and ravings of a madman whose imperialism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide are unapologetically for his own self-interest. The simple, re-arranged syntax of "this testament of my last will" underscores the dual meanings of "will" as both a distribution of property and a metric of personal resolve.[128] Additionally, the poem carries a stream of voices

[127] Galway Kinnell and Studs Terkel, "Galway Kinnell in Conversation with Studs Terkel," WFMT-Radio, The Chicago History Museum, 12 October 1989, audio, 44:14. The Galway Kinnell recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 16). Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[128] The poem is a pre-text for "Testament of the Thief" which figures as part of Chapter Three and Kinnell's poetic legacies of Iran.

interrupting the flow of the primary speaker's fanatical list-making; these italicised sections are interspersed throughout the poem, disembodied vocalisations that address the speaker directly. The intimations and whispers of incorporeal voices in "Conversation at Tea" once straining to be heard, have now reached fever-pitch.

Kinnell borrows from 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (KJV) to build his counter of Western notions of Christian narrative: "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." In its litany of property distribution and appraisal, the poem's ironic reversal denounces humankind's woeful destruction amid its thirst for racial extermination, earthly collapse, settler colonialism, avaricious capitalism, and mass consumption, filtered through the taxonomies of transactionally accrued body parts until nothing remains. From tongues, stomachs, and souls to crooked backbones, eyelids, and even chromium testicles, once everything has been allotted, we will "kneel/ on the scorched earth/ in the shapes of men and animals:/ *do not let this last hour pass*,/ *do not remove this last, poisoned cup from our lips*" (*CP*, 248-249).

Kinnell brings us full circle, to a point where his geographical imagination touches a sublime of his own making. Returning us to the Edenic garden of which he was so critical in "The Homecoming of Emma Lazarus," knowledge of our own original sin and mortality has us clinging to materiality, and to time, preferring to live in agony rather than not at all, "who pray for earthly existence to continue no matter how painful or empty it has become."[129] The figures of the lifeworld are retained as macabre artistic impressions, material geographies that create a series of reversed, sunken relief within the larger confines of the physical world, conceived of by its own attachment to reality.[130]

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[129] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 109.

[130] Kinnell emphasises that entities "can become physical only through an attachment to reality." Galway Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," in *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song*, eds. Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom, and Dan Campion (Duluth: Holy Cow! Press, 2014), 316.

Writing the Riparian Hellscape: "The (Last) ~~Mystic~~ River"

The intertwining of physical and cultural landscapes, and the geographical imaginations they sustain in both psychological and material imports, form the basis of a fluvial preoccupation in Kinnell's work. These poems, which include "Island of Night" (*First Poems 1946-1954*); "Across the Brown River" (1955); "Easter" (1960); "Seven Streams of Nevis" (1960); "The River That is East" (1964); and "The Homecoming of Emma Lazarus" (1964), to cite a representative grouping, centre themselves thematically around the topos of river and waterways, reaching their inevitable apogee in his long poem "The Last River,"[131] a masterwork of the chthonic and a channel for national poetic consciousness.

Kinnell's exploration of the riparian carves out and designates a precise geography of the US, all of which contribute to a loco-specificity of purpose, historical placement, and his own autobiographical rapportage, often focusing on rivers of Manhattan (Hudson and East), as well as those dominating the South. In this way, he considers physical cartographies and riverine boundaries not merely in terms of geographical features, but also through imagined spaces of margin, exclusion, and retreat. Such delineations and boundaries depend on an antithetical scaffolding of natural and human-induced border relationships. In Kinnell's poetic imaginary, this too consists of mythologised waterways serving as boundaries between the demonic world of the dead and the tangible world of the living. Building upon the trope of the river as a source of might, spiritual renewal, and enigmatic prowess in the actualisation of lived human experience, Kinnell engages with a tradition of poetic descendance emanating from a Transcendental preoccupation with these bodies of water.

Among Douglass' most eminent speeches, "What to a Slave Is the Fourth of July? An Address" (1852)[132] is a rousing discourse by which he chides the youthful, immaturity of the

131 In *Selected Poems*, he omits strophes 6, 7, 8, 9, 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, and 24. Galway Kinnell, *Selected Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), 78-87.

132 Douglass delivers his address in Rochester, New York on 5 July 1852 in lieu of a "4th of July oration," for which he was originally slated. "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim [...]

US, and the celebration of American ideals vis-à-vis independence. Douglass creates a distinction between his fellow-citizens and himself, referring to the US and its National Independence to be one that is "your nation," representing "your great deliverance," and marking "another year of your national life,"[133] the second-person pronoun deliberate in its intention to underscore the enduring marginality of his position, though now free,[134] and the exclusion of slaves from democratic rights, self-determination, and dignity, in the national consciousness. In framing the substantive, rhetorically centred argument of his narrative, Douglass too, incorporates a distinctive metaphor pertaining to rivers. Through their evocation, he holds context within the geological passage of time, and likens the young nation-state to a manoeuvrable stream which wears-in its path, equal parts propitious and bleak, destined for either resplendence or doom through its own agency:

> Great streams are not easily turned from channels, worn deep in the course of ages. They may sometimes rise in quiet and stately majesty, and inundate the land, refreshing and fertilizing the earth with their mysterious properties. They may also rise in wrath and fury, and bear away, on their angry waves, the accumulated wealth of years of toil and hardship. They, however, gradually flow back to the same old channel, and flow on as serenely as ever. But while the river may not be turned aside, it may dry up, and leave nothing behind but the withered branch, and the unsightly rock, to howl in the abyss-sweeping wind, the sad tale of departed glory. As with rivers so with nations.[135]

Douglass' suggestion that a river could assert its own autonomy, or influence its course inherently, underscores his recognition of it as a liminal space, a notion to which Kinnell, too subscribes through his explorations of delimitations, boundaries, and thresholds. Rivers, therefore, in their capacity, serve as transitional conduits which occupy an in-betweenness, marking a beginning and an end.

Attuned to a nineteenth-century sensibility, poetical expressions of rivers expound upon progress and its inherent potentiality, in an age of industrialised growth where labour

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There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour." Douglass, *Speeches and Writings*, 166 and 178.

[133] Ibid., 167.

[134] Douglass obtained his freedom on 3 September 1838.

[135] Douglass, *Speeches and Writings*, 167. In framing his metaphorical narrative, Douglass incorporates Psalm 137 (NIV) which states, "By the Rivers of Babylon we sat and wept/ when we remembered Zion./ There on the poplars/ we hung our harps, / for there our captors asked us for songs,/ our tormentors demanded songs of joy;/ they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" Ibid., 175.

modalities were altered by the powerful infrastructure constellating the riverbanks. For writers such as Emerson and Thoreau, the concept of the river (and water, more generally) in all its purity, reified an idealism in the unadulterated, integrity of the waterway as an element of the natural world, through which one beheld its sublimity and connected to its endemic forces. Emerson himself proffers two poems, including "The River" (1827) which appears in his journals, and "Two Rivers," published in *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1867). "The River" is an early meditation by which he waxes about the geographical origins of his boyhood nostalgia— "here the blue river,/ The same blue wonder that my infant eye/ Admired."[136] In "Two Rivers," Emerson unveils an interest in the forcefulness, grace, and enduring power of the river, it possessing strength to hewn jewels from rocks. Contemplating its larger mystery, he pens:

> Thou in thy narrow banks art pent:
> The stream I love unbounded goes
> Through flood and sea and firmament;
> Through light, through life, it forward flows.
>
> [...]
>
> So forth and brighter fares my stream, —
> Who drink it shall not thirst again;
> No darkness stains its equal gleam,
> And ages drop in it like rain.[137]

Emerson himself entertained a simple fascination with the river and its more metaphorical applications. He derived the notion of it, itself exemplative of "the flux of all things"[138] as possessing a certain chimeric quality of changeability and adaptability. Referring to rivers as a "mystic stream,"[139] he connects it to the great ontological mystery and unknowability of being, and a certain sense of spirituality, a descriptor Kinnell shares in his initial drafts of the poem,

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[136] This poem is most readily identified by its first line, "Awed I behold once more/ My old familiar haunts." Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Collected Poems and Translations*, eds. Harold Bloom and Paul Kane (New York: Library of America, 1994), 316.
[137] Emerson, *Collected Poems*, 188-189.
[138] "Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour, and is not reminded of the flux of all things." Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, 22.
[139] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Natural History of Intellect And Other Papers: Vol. 12* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 16.

provisionally entitled "Mystic River." Whether an overt allusion or not is difficult to determine, but it does suggest shared thinking about mythological rivers and their symbolic significance.

Thoreau's text, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" (1849), famously parodied by Herman Melville in "Cock-A-Doodle-Doo" (1853)[140] prefigure a preoccupation with these bodies of water, for reasons he describes as:

> Rivers must have been the guides which conducted the footsteps of the first travellers. They are the constant lure, when they flow by our doors, to distant enterprise and adventure, and, by a natural impulse, the dwellers on their banks will at length accompany their currents to the lowlands of the globe, or explore at their invitation the interior of continents [...] I had often stood on the banks of the Concord, watching the lapse of the current, an emblem of all progress, following the same law with the system, with time, and all that is made [...] and at last I resolved to launch myself on its bosom, and float whither it would bear me.[141]

Thoreau's preoccupation with the river is logical and consistent with his more ecocritical enterprise, yet there is an especial preoccupation with tributaries and waterways in American letters whereby environmental and economic historiography is told through harnessing their wayward power, mercurial aspects, or their metaphorical forces of renewal and self-discovery. That the river becomes an enduring trope in US poetry, specifically one that resonates with Kinnell, is evidence to the endurance of its metaphorical significance, and its wider implications for interdisciplinarity amongst its material and psychogeographical implications. However, it is also evident of the adaptability by which Kinnell, as a post-1945 poet, reappropriates and imbues locative boundaries and landscape to deepen his engagement with the geographical imagination.

A culmination of trauma, experience, and self-indictment, "The Last River" is a visionary narrative, pivoting between Kinnell's memories of imprisonment, amatory relations, and an imaginary labyrinthine journey through a mythologised, Grecian purgatory. This is Kinnell's depiction of an antechamber to hell, "a hundred feet down pressing its long weight/

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[140] See Egbert S. Oliver, "'Cock-A-Doodle-Doo!' and Transcendental Hocus-Pocus," *The New England Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (June 1948): 204.
[141] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 12-13.

silently into the world" (*CP*, 183); it constitutes the ultimate space of exclusion and marginality, the interstitial in-between of limbo, of literal and figurative purgatory. The intertwining of rivers, in all their various complications of form and meandering, underscore their importance as spaces of jurisprudence, personhood, and most saliently to our discussion, liminality:

> A river's very being is premised on historicized boundaries that measure its watery ambit from riverbed to riverbank. Still, rivers elude a final, clearly defined, and uncontroversial description. As a result they inhabit a liminal space, one that is at the same time geographically bounded, yet metaphorically transcendent, physically shifting, and culturally porous.[142]

The poem opens referencing a ferry, and with this image of gravitas, engages with the precursive work of Whitman's seminal poem, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856). In Kinnell's text, the ferry is authentic to the speaker's narrative regarding his imprisonment, as he quotes after Lord Byron, that "liberty" is "brightest in dungeons" (*CP*, 181).[143] The impetus for the poem draws directly on Kinnell's personal experience, an incident, as he explains to Schenker, by which he had refused to accept segregated waiting rooms on a ferry, and was subsequently jailed "for creating a disturbance and endangering life on the Mississippi River."[144] To an extent, the river serves as a kind of no-man's land, an extrajudicial space much like battlefields and plantations, as explored previously in this chapter. Kinnell's spatial awareness of poetic truth is an ongoing processing through his own cognisance and responsiveness to structures of power.

Thematically, in "The Last River," the notion of grace and the tensions surrounding its benevolence emerge as a central inquiry of justice. Kinnell attempts to resituate a depiction of disorientation and displacement to anchor the poem, employing an impressive toponymy

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142 Cristy Clark, Nia Emmanouil, John Page, and Alessandro Pelizzon, "Can You Hear the Rivers Sing? Legal Personhood, Ontology, and the Nitty-Gritty of Governance," *Ecology Law Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019): 787.

143 Kinnell misattributes this line to Percy Bysshe Shelley. In "The Last River" Kinnell writes: "liberty, said Shelley, being/ 'brightest in dungeons.' (*CP*, 181). The actual line is Lord Byron's "Sonnet on Chillon": "Eternal Spirit of the chainless Mind/ Brightest in dungeons, Liberty!" Lord Byron*, The Prisoner of Chillon* (London: W. Chubb, Fetter Lane, 1824), 16. It is perhaps the allegorical nature of Byron's poem, and its pervasive themes of captivity and freedom, which appealed to Kinnell as a parallel point of reference.

144 David Schenker, "Galway Kinnell's 'The Last River': A Civil Rights Odyssey," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1990): 209. Schenker's article is supported by a personal letter from Kinnell who was able to provide more salient details about his personal experience forming the basis for this long-form poem.

of names. These are mostly autobiographically derived, highly personal settings and locations that follow the trajectory of Kinnell's life experience. As such, there is a clear sense that his attention to loco-specificity enacts particularities of place as counteractions to placelessness, in the unfolding experientiality of abstract hell inhabited by the irredeemable and disregarded (*CP*, 178-194).[145]

The poem's deep connection to rivers reaches its apogee in Section 14, echoing Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921)[146] which metaphorically links African American history and collective experience to a collision of ancient and modern worlds united by the riparian. In Hughes's short lyric, dedicated to W.E.B. Du Bois, he accounts a masterfully concise exegesis of the Black experience:

> I've known rivers:
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
> went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
> bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
>
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.[147]

In Kinnell's strongly intertextual version, he details in Strophe 14:

> All my life, of rivers
> I have heard
> the longing cries, the rut-roar
> of shifted wind
> on gongs of beaten water:

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[145] Louisiana 1, Amite, Tickfaw, Independence, Albany, Ponchatoula, Chicago, Deep South, North, New Orleans, America, Plaquemine, Point Coupee, Wall Kill, Terre Haute, Stillwater, Alcatraz, Ten Mile River, Seekonk Woods, Pawtucket, Ten Mile of Hornpout, Ruknabad, Passumpsic, East River of Fishes, the Gulf, Tangipahoa, Tallahatchie, Pearl.

[146] Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, a branch of the New York Public Library in Harlem, has Hughes's ashes interred beneath "Rivers" (1991), a public art installation and peace memorial created by Houston Conwill. The cosmogram features an inscription of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."
https://www.nypl.org/locations/schomburg

[147] Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2021), 33.

the Ten Mile of Hornpout,
The Drac hissing in its bed of sand,
the Ruknabad scribbled over by nightingales,
the Passumpsic breaking up all down its length in spring,
the East River of Fishes, the more haunting for not having a
past either;
the Mississippi coursing into the Gulf through the silt of all its days,
the snake-cracked Tangipahoa, lifting with a little rush from the hills
and dwindling in the undernourished greenery. (*CP*, 184-185)

Though "The Last River" has not been considered an homage to Hughes's poem, it is almost reproductive in its quality and attention to textual detail, and through Kinnell's evocation of riparian landscape. Kinnell's verse draws upon that of Hughes by employing the same specificity of cataloguing to enumerate each riverine place.[148]

Moreover, in Section 24 of the poem, Kinnell directly quotes from Knight's "Idea of Ancestry" (1968)— "just took off and caught a freight (they say)" (*CP*, 191) in verse which speaks directly to the injustices levelled at the Black community:

We pass
victims of the taste for blood
who were hanged by the mob
just as the law was about to hang them,
we pass victims of justice
hanged by the mob for having obtained
stays of execution, executive pardons, fair trials,
we pass victims of prohibitions against glancing at a white woman,
who cover, as we approach, the scabs at their crotches.
Here and there stray
'unknown persons'
killed for 'unknown reasons'
at the hands of 'persons unknown,' including
those who 'just took off and caught a freight (they say).' (*CP*, 190-191)

Kinnell's stylistic choices read as vibrant and deliberate allusions, selections by which he could create intertextuality with defining poems of the Black experience in America, as a means of honouring those histories through essential texts. As such, the effect is a convergence of his own 'rivers of experience' which give shape and delineation to the geographical bounds of his imagination. Drawing on a mythologised underworld to elicit the realities of increasing mid-

[148] These locations include Coos County, Oregon; Grenoble, France; Shiraz, Iran; the North Country of Vermont and New Hampshire; The East River (NYC); and Louisiana.

century crises, Kinnell catalyses his poem into a dimensionality which considers alterity and the wound of suffering through a deeply humanistic lens.

In Section 16, Kinnell invokes Thoreau explicitly, "My old hero. Should I be surprised?" (*CP*, 192) employing him as a central figure who will accompany the lyric speaker through the remaining verse. Kinnell affirms that the boy singing, Henry David, is a Black child named after Thoreau, as well as his own spiritual guide:[149] "He steps out of the mist,/ he says his name is Henry David,/ he takes my hand and leads me over the plain of crushed asphodels" (*CP*, 186). As he invites Kinnell to join his pirogue, we observe that the ferryman's limbs are "tied on with knots and rags" (*CP*, 186), which may be interpreted as the tattered semblance of a person (Thoreau himself) or as an allusion to the young boy being lynched. Despite initially floating along what we may assume is the River Styx, through the arc of the poem, we discover that Kinnell and his guide are actually heading toward another body of water, the River Lethe:[150]

> We come to a river
> where thousands kneel, sucking up
> its cloudy water.
>
> 'The Mystic River,'[151] Henry David says,
> 'the Healing Stream free to all
> that flows from Calvary's Mountain…the liquor
> that makes you forget.' (*CP*, 191)

Emerson refers to the Lethe in "Self-Reliance" (1841), a salient parallel in detailing imprisonment. But whereas Kinnell's version is enumerated and encapsulated within physical constructs, Emerson's is rooted in the metaphysical, a transcendental approach to consciousness elucidated by the non-conformist:

> But the man is, as it were, clapped into jail by his consciousness. As soon as he has once acted or spoken with éclat, he is a committed person, watched by the sympathy

[149] Peggy Parris, "Rags of His Body: Thoreau in Galway Kinnell's 'The Last River,'" *The Thoreau Society Bulletin* no. 161 (Fall 1982): 5.
[150] Noting progress and futurity exemplified by the American West, Thoreau states that the Atlantic is "a Lethean stream, in our passage over which we have had an opportunity to forget the Old World and its institutions. If we do not succeed this time, there is perhaps one more chance for the race left before it arrives on the banks of the Styx; and that is in the Lethe of the Pacific, which is three times as wide." Thoreau, *Essays*, 255.
[151] The Mystic River is in fact two rivers (each of which bear this name), the largest being the one that flows into Boston Harbor, and the other, an estuary in Southeastern Connecticut.

> or the hatred of hundreds, whose affections must now enter into his account. There is no Lethe for this.[152]

As is customary with Kinnell, an incessant reviser, the editorial changes to the poem highlight the transition between textual fluidity and finalised text, taking on numerous alterations of lexicon, syntax, and titular changes. First presented as "The River" on Paul Blackburn's radio show in 1964,[153] then published as "The Mystic River" in *Poetry* (1965), the poem reached its penultimate form as "The Last River" in *Body Rags*, having been revised once again, and excerpted in *Selected Poems* (1982). Whilst Kinnell's on-air presentation of the poem is affecting in its orality, its utility allows us to parse the differences between the initial drafts and its final configuration, giving us superior insight into the interpretation of the poem. True to his editorial compulsions, modifications to this poem are numerous, especially where the rearrangement of the structure of the poem and the addition or removal of lines themselves are concerned. Kinnell's revisions often tend to, for better or worse, omit specificities that were previously included; as a result, it can feel as though there is a loss of clarity and nuance.

In "The River" version, Strophe 23 exemplifies this, showing partial diminishment from the radio version to the later publication. From Kinnell's reading, we are provided some extra details, such as the characterisation of the man with a blackboard as "earnest, well-meaning, and liberal […] I hear he got a shock on finding out this place is run by logicians. He's signing restrictive covenants like he did in life […] "Come on," I say sweating, "for I know him."[154] In examining Kinnell's diction, this familiarity would suggest that this man is Emerson, confronting Materialists as the rulers of Kinnell's imagined hell.

As such, Emerson (and Kinnell's heroic Thoreau, by proxy) becomes a useful parallel for eliciting a contrast by which Kinnell chides Transcendental elitism, acting as a foil to draw out his occupation of "a philosophy of the material" of "really what should be called visceral,

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152 Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 21.
153 Galway Kinnell and Paul Blackburn, "Galway Kinnell Reads His Long Poem 'The River' on Paul Blackburn's 'Contemporary Poetry' Radio Show," 24 August 1964, audio, 31:10. Paul Blackburn Audio Collection, Special Collections & Archives, 1919-1971 (MSS 4) UC San Diego, La Jolla.
154 Kinnell and Blackburn, MSS 4.

what can be held in your hands."[155] One of Emerson's remarkable failings is his disbelief that a poet could be simultaneously an idealist and a materialist. His myopic and often disparaging view heralding intellectualism offsets one of the more compelling aspects of Kinnell's poetry: the integration of principled constructs with a privileging of the physical world. Rather than depicting these concepts in tension with one another, Kinnell treats materiality as a form of sacred worship, "as good a dose of religion as one can get from a church."[156]

Keenly focusing on the consonance of tenderness and human connection that we observe throughout his texts, Kinnell brings "The River" to a resolute close as the speaker bids farewell to this realm of shadowy acquaintance. Assurances are found in the last bits of vitality of the earthly world, even as death intercedes:

> My last goodbye is to the old man who teaches voter registration in his shanty under the levee./ I see his ancient face stretch and start to tear/ [...]/ He laughs gently. I receive his love./ He states, "Money is so old we both know this is truly goodbye."/ The air glitters as though ashes of lightning bolts had been scattered in it./ What is it then can make the human face,/ bit of secret, lighted flesh/ open up the whole earth.[157]

In terms of literary achievement, Carruth declared the poem, "the strongest single piece of writing the [Civil Rights] Movement has produced so far,"[158] and Schenker pronounced it concomitant with a "Civil Rights Odyssey," arguing that it remains the premier work on the subject by a white poet.[159] Here, we may note the significance of Kinnell's voice during a period when there was a scarcity of poems about social justice or civil rights being written by white poets, compared to their overwhelming response to the Vietnam War. One can only theorise that many, despite their support for the civil rights movement, stood along the side-lines; those who were 'pro-integration' were often associated with, and derided as Communists, and as such, efforts to enact limitations on free speech were put forth. As evidenced by Thoreau during abolition, the lack of real and quantifiable actions by fellow

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[155] Kinnell and Schumock, *Across My Desk*, MS Am 3277.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Kinnell and Blackburn, MSS 4. From this audio version of "The River," I have given my best guess at the transcribed line-breaks where the tone of Kinnell's voice has indicated.
[158] Hayden Carruth, "Review: Making It New," *The Hudson Review* 21, no. 2 (Summer 1968): 404.
[159] Schenker, "A Civil Rights Odyssey," 208.

citizens as demonstrations of passive resistance can become a point of contention and polarisation, one over which he freely admonished his fellow citizens: "They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. They will wait, well-disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret."[160]

Despite his achievements in composing one of the most historically significant poems in his oeuvre, Kinnell came to realise the fraught intersection of his literary practice with his own lived experience. In conversation with Daniela Gioseffi to promote *A New Selected Poems* (2000), Kinnell revealed that he had intended the poems in *Body Rags*, including "The Last River," to be a departure from *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, less in a pastoral vein and "more into the flesh and mortal life."[161] Evaluating his own abilities to encapsulate his role as a poet of encounter more fully, Kinnell addressed his omission of "The Last River" in his newest collection, an editorial choice, as he explained to Gioseffi, that proved confounding to readers. He admitted his overall dissatisfaction with the completed form of the poem, blaming the missed opportunity to record the events during the civil rights movement as they unfolded moment-by-moment, "to be as informative as possible through poetry or any form of writing my pen might have taken."[162] At the time, he "thought it would be unseemly to 'use' the situation down there as material for art," and characterises this marked disappointment as "ignorant idealism."[163] Responsible in speaking *for* and *to* others, Kinnell's personal view reaffirms moral and ethical imperatives articulated at the threshold of witness, the very appointment Felman appraises as solitary burden.[164]

Yet Forché maintains, more generally, that a poet's consciousness must be "open to transformations, felicitous accidents, and an intuitive response to language generating meaning

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160 Thoreau, *Essays*, 151.
161 Troupe, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," 36.
162 Kinnell and Gioseffi, "What a Kingdom It *Is*," online.
163 Ibid.
164 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 3.

and music."[165] In this way, writerly distance from the work is preferable—even necessarily removed—to create a comprehensive experientiality:

> In many poems read as witness, there is an affirmation, a fullness of life. The poet writing in the mode of witness is never within the trauma. The poem is marked by it and bears the remains of what has been endured. In this sense, it might produce 'more life,' more of what life is. It isn't subject matter that makes a poem witness; poems are not what they are 'about.' If they were, they would be paraphrase and not poetry.[166]

Forché's suggested "mode of witness" is demonstrated in such texts as Muriel Rukeyser's "The Book of the Dead" in *U.S. 1* (1938) chronicling the devastating Hawk's Nest Tunnel disaster in Appalachia: "Voices to speak to us directly. As we move./ As we enrich, growing in larger motion,/ this word, this power."[167] Rukeyser's long poem is written based on her journalism of the tragedy, and fuses elegy with a multimodal, narrative style. Kinnell would later find renewed purpose and achievement in "When the Towers Fell," composed as a poem of catastrophic witness chronicling the unfolding of 9/11 whilst tendering a national elegy. The poem, which converges around threnody and spectral witness in Chapter Two of this study, departs from the visionary, mythical lyricism of "The Last River" for a style closer to that of Rukeyser's sobering verse. For Kinnell, poetry's 'social reason for being' derives idealism through soft power, one co-optive in the strength of its protestation yet grounded by its empathy, solace, and consolation.

It is said that whilst Thoreau was on his deathbed, succumbing to tuberculosis, that a friend and fellow abolitionist named Parker Pillsbury came to visit with him. Pillsbury said, "You seem so near the brink of the dark river that I almost wonder how the opposite shore may appear to you." "One world at a time,"[168] Thoreau uttered in reply. Lewis corroborates that Pillsbury believed Thoreau to be a seer, who might have some divinatory insight into the

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[165] Carolyn Forché, "The Lost and Unlost: Poetry and the irrevocable past," *Poetry* (1 May 2011): www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/articles/69689/the-lost-and-unlost.
[166] Forché, "The Lost and Unlost," online.
[167] Muriel Rukeyser, *The Collected Poems* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978), 105.
[168] Lorraine Loviglio et al., "One World at a Time: Remembering Henry David Thoreau on the 150th Anniversary of His Death," *The Concord Saunterer* 19/20 (2011-12): 257.

next life.[169] Over time, the story has appropriated a kind of mythological folklore and has served as an intuitive guide in this chapter. But it bears greater import as a compelling metaphor for Kinnell in his engagement with the immediacy and actuality of human experience in spatialising contexts, as well as the democratisation of the sublime within his developing poetic cosmography.

Kinnell has often mused about how influence works, if one may discern a resemblance in the more recent work to the original. For example, he inquires, "Do we take in various influences and then grow in a different direction and leave them behind? Or do we gradually transform raw influence into something more and more like our real being until to someone else the influence becomes invisible—though never invisible to the person to whom this happened."[170] In pursuing his self-development as a poet, Kinnell openly acknowledges his preoccupation with the tenets and discursive writings of the Transcendentalists.[171] His pursual of this line of inquiry acted upon his unfeigned desire to communicate a direct experience conveyed by language, and a spirit which was not overtly intellectual or expertly gnomic, amongst mounting tensions, conflicts, and Civil Rights struggle.

The contemplative, meditative aspect of the Transcendentalists, in conjunction with their confrontation of socio-political events as both literary and oratory abolitionists align with Kinnell's post-Christian, post-Puritan outlook, and the critical engagement he sought whilst negotiating the poetic instability of witness. More significantly, the pre-eminence of individualism through self-reliance and non-conformity for which the Transcendentalists are perhaps best known as a group, is largely the role of the poet who is perceived as one who discerns and protects truth. In "The Poet" (1844) Emerson professes, "The poet has a new

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169 Lewis, *The American Adam*, 22.

170 Galway Kinnell, "'Strong is your hold': My Encounters with Whitman," in *Leaves of Grass: The Sesquicentennial Essays*, eds. Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 424.

171 Kinnell admits that he spent the first half of his life in an iconoclastic vein, asserting that his ideas of transcendence originated with the New England collective, particularly Thoreau. Sherman Hawkins, "Galway Kinnell: Moments of Transcendence," *Princeton University Library Chronicle Special Issue: Seven Princeton Poets* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1963): 63. Of Thoreau, Kinnell states: "He was an evolutionary mutation, a new man we have yet to catch up with, who sickens in the presence of the will to detach, objectify, and dominate." Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 18.

thought; he has a whole new experience to unfold; he will tell us how it was with him, and all men will be the richer in his fortune. For, the experience of each new age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet."[172] Although scholarly consensus attends to Whitman taking up this mantle and following Emerson's directives, the salient point Emerson delivers is the potential such creative engagement extends to further generations. It is the amalgam of these principles, in conjunction with social justice and reform that are most connected to Kinnell's moral and ethical centring, and the geographical imagination which pivots in tension around dynamics of power structure and place as context and contestation.

[172] Emerson, *Essays and Poems*, 217.

Chapter 2

The Itinerant Bard—Ideas of Here, Ideas of There

> Fixed form, in our time anyway, seems to bring you to a place where someone has been before. In a poem you wish to reach a new place. And this requires pure wandering—that rare condition when you have no external guides at all, only your own, inner impulse to go, or to turn, or to stand still: when the sound of the word on which a line ends does not limit the direction of the next line, when the voice does not subjugate speech, but conforms to its irregular curves, to the terrain itself.
>
> –Galway Kinnell, "The Poetics of the Physical World" (1971)[1]

> ...the fluency of their speech—their delight in music, the sure symptom of manly tenderness and native elegance of soul...these too are unrhymed poetry. It awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it.
>
> –Walt Whitman, The Preface to the First Edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855)[2]

Kinnell and Whitman's relationship is one of interrogation, legacy, and complication, marked on the one hand by enthusiasm and dialogue—sustained through Kinnell's responding or 'talking back'[3] to Whitman—finding its origins in the lyric, itinerant bard in "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" in *What a Kingdom It Was*, and evident through to the intertextuality of his last published volume, *Strong is Your Hold* (2006), in which he reclaims the title and the epigraph from the closing tercet of "The Last Invocation": "Tenderly—be not impatient,/ (Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,/ Strong is your hold O love.)"[4] (*CP*, 491). On the other, their congruity is dispelled by tension and critique; what

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[1] Kinnell, "The Poetics of the Physical World," 113-114.

[2] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 494.

[3] Ed Folsom contends: "So palpable is Whitman's presence that it is difficult for an American poet to define himself or herself without direct reference to him. At some point in the lives of most twentieth-century American poets (and, increasingly, poets from other countries as well), some encounter with Whitman takes place [...] And that moment is often a highly charged encounter that forces the poet to define his or her role as a writer in America." Jim Perlman, Ed Folsom, and Dan Campion, eds. *Walt Whitman: The Measure of His Song* (Duluth: Holy!Cow Press, 2014), 21-22.

[4] Perhaps a double-entendre, not solely as a literary allusion to a particular Whitman poem that held great value for Kinnell, but also gesturing (consciously or subconsciously) towards the powerful impact of Whitman over American poetry more generally, and over him, specifically, in resolving human consciousness of death. In reference to "The Last Invocation" (from the *Whispers of Heavenly Death* section of *Leaves of Grass*), Kinnell writes that "it shows that Whitman at last can accept deathx [sic] without giving in to it too soon [...] So it is a poem which accepts death in its time, as the other animals do, as part of the life cycle." Galway Kinnell, *Essential Whitman* drafts, 1987, Box 21, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

materialised as Kinnell's early infatuation would later ripen into disenchantment, earning deeper assessment and reproach of Whitman as Kinnell matured as a poet.

Further examining the critical affordances of intellectual inheritance and how they inform Kinnell's relational practice, Kinnell's singular position in his continuous engagement with Whitman is of crucial import. Over the arc of his career, Kinnell enacted interlocutions with him through poems, essays (both commemorative and editorial), lectures, and most notably in *Essential Whitman* (1987), a sensitively curated selection of his favourite poems stitched from various editions of *Leaves of Grass*.[5] Through these texts, he maintains an indispensable point of access and encounter with Whitman's oeuvre; how this comes to bear is significant not solely in context within the landscape of post-1945 US poetry, but as a central and ongoing course of inquiry in which Whitmanian threads are considered, and by what means this interplay enhances or alters our reception of Kinnell's work. Acting as a metric or method of recalibration for Kinnell, Whitman serves as both an intuitive guide and a foil to the interpretation of Kinnell's creative practice.

Shifting Kinnell's composition away from formal prosody, one of Whitman's foremost contributions positions Kinnell's writings in terms of linguistic and poetic structure. The effects of his strict break with accentual syllabic metrical tradition, and his consequent transition to free verse, are evinced by his preoccupation with the hermeneutics of poetry venturing beyond mimesis. Kinnell explores metapoesis in conjunction with its consideration of craft, textuality, and self-involution; Keatsian negative capability and the dissolution of boundaries between subject and object; and lastly, constructions of prosody appropriated from Whitman's definitive idiom, texture, and characteristic stylistic techniques.

Moving from the methods of literary praxis to the sensibility of the body's apprehension, the second contribution demonstrates how the evolution of Kinnell's relationship with Whitman remedies his divided consciousness, rooting his geographical

[5] "I have made this attempt to consolidate the very best of all Whitman's efforts out of respect for his desire for perfection." Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, MC 64.

imagination in sensorial witness.[6] Refuting religiosity, of a union between Christian faith and the written word, Kinnell replaces it with language of the body deriving from Whitman's capacious and "idolatrous love of the actual world."[7] Through a shifting of perspective initiated by his entanglement with Whitman, Kinnell turns from solely the hierarchical matrix of ocular-centrality and the primacy of the visual, to aural soundscapes and music, to tactility and the haptic, and ultimately to spectrality as a reconciliation of sensorial witness.

Pivoting from trauma, witness, and socio-political reform, as examined in Chapter One, we move to the expansion of Kinnell's geographical imagination from spatial partitions of marginalisation and exclusion to places and spaces more closely allied with the individual self and ipseity: those rooted and defined by the sensuous geographies of mind and body. His engagement with Whitman acts at a juncture by which we identify the growing complexity of these imaginations along with his thickening relationship with intellectual inheritance, at a significant inflection point in his poetic career. Whilst the Transcendentalists, imparting idealism, and ethical principles, acted as a moral compass for Kinnell to negotiate instability in a poetic role of witness, Whitman's role as a predominant and discernible figure—not simply an intimation or presence — in Kinnell's poetic topography underscores a key and binding relationship; fundamentally, Whitman brings him into his own as a poet, and remains a touchstone, permanently altering the course of Kinnell's body of work.

Song of Two Selves: Whitmanian Dialogic and the Metapoetics of Composition

[6] "Humans are the most miserable animals on earth because of our consciousness that we will die. The story of the Garden of Eden is the story, the myth, that describes this consequence of consciousness, this primal and unbeatable trauma." Galway Kinnell, "Lecture at St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM," 1976, audio, 47:26. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 9). Houghton Library, Harvard University. Of note, Kinnell channels pure Yeatsian sentiment from "Death": "NOR dread nor hope attend/ A dying animal;/ A man awaits his end/ Dreading and hoping all;/.../Man has created death." William Butler Yeats, *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 198.
[7] Kinnell and Rose, "Celebrating Walt Whitman," video.

Launching headlong into the fifty-two sequences that comprise "Song of Myself" (1881), Whitman fetes his own selfhood, a solipsistic romp enfolding the reader into his experiential musings in the opening lines, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself,/ And what I assume you shall assume,/ For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."[8] The title itself, nonetheless, is a misnomer, as Whitman deflects instantly outward from his own self-promotion and projection to more universalising principles of connectivity with "you," the reader. In the second section, he probes:

> Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth
> much?
> Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?
> Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?[9]

To which the fifth strophe of Kinnell's "The Poem" (1968) seemingly responds in turn:

> Here is a fern-leaf cementing *utter* to *illume*,
> here is *unfulfilled* reflected as *mellifica* along the feather of a crow,
> here is a lightning-split fir the lines down its good side becoming ever
> more whitmanesque and free,
> here is a hound chasing a mate in trochaic dimeter brachycatalectic,
> here are the pits held up by clothespins composing *emptiness* in
> khaskura,
> here is a fly convulsing through the poisoned labyrinth of this hand-
> writing,
> here is an armful of last-year's-snows. (*CP*, 175)

Taken in concert, these excerpts exemplify the specificities of dialogue enacted between Kinnell and Whitman concerning the creative act of writing, artifice, and literary composition. This dialogisation is expanded, an intra-generational triangulation articulated through an exchange between querying poet, responding poet, and reader. Whitman's direct address involves the reader's participation from the outset of the poem, a moderated invocation of poetic apostrophe realised more fully as tropes in poems such as "O Captain! My Captain!" (1865) and "Apostroph" (1860).[10] Through the countering stance of "The Poem," Kinnell

[8] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 24.
[9] Ibid., 25.
[10] Whitman's proclamations call to mind the more Romantic notion of direct address (i.e. William Blake's Introduction to the "Songs of Experience" in his invocations to the Soul, the Earth, and the reader): "Hear the voice of the Bard!/ Who present, past, and future, sees." William Blake, *The Poetical Works of William Blake*, ed. John Sampson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), 81.

engages with the conversation articulated through "Song of Myself"; in his carefully crafted response, he gestures to himself as occupying several roles: an active reader of Whitman; an interlocutor; an interpreter; and a critic. Juxtaposed with one another in this manner, Kinnell and Whitman can be said to closely mimic deeply ingrained cultural forms within American poetry and folksong, such as the call-and-response poetry of Native Nations, and the African American spiritual.[11]

What follows from Whitman's verse is prescriptive, giving the reader a way into a cardinal knowing, not simply a tacit understanding of the poem in the early stanzas, but of the creative act of poetry itself in which knowledge is derived from immersive praxis. He offers an imperative in its process: "Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,/ [...]/ You shall no longer take things at second or third hand [...]/ You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self."[12] But what he describes through his brash accompaniment—a unique insight into the process of metapoesis— encouraging the reader to discover new perceptions and dispense with tradition, is steeped in generalities. Kinnell, by contrast in "The Poem," moves from the abstraction of Whitman's verse to the particular, addressing the reader directly through an articulation of deictic phrases: "here is" and "here are." As 'at' locative adverbs, these semantic units rely on the specificities of the poem itself, using these linguistic registers for temporal context, emplacement, and frames of reference.[13]

Although "The Poem" features in *Body Rags*, its first iteration debuted in *Poetry* in 1966.[14] Over the course of two years, Kinnell's revisions provide a superior composition in numerous ways, helping to iron out some of the more cryptic elements that are difficult to discern or perhaps reflect forcing an idea that had not fully reached fruition. These

[11] Set up in this manner, these methodically, and somewhat traditionally, situate the structure of a mentor and a disciple. In recent years, Joy Harjo's "Advice for Countries, Advanced, Developing and Falling: A Call and Response" is exemplary in its reproduction of transcribing oral forms into written language, as well as in evolving the form to reflect a dialogue between the colonisers and the Indigenous peoples they oppress. Joy Harjo, *An American Sunrise* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2019), 79-80.
[12] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 25.
[13] Kinnell revisits his preoccupation with deictic phrases as a framework for "The Road Between Here and There" in *The Past*.
[14] Galway Kinnell, "The Poem," *Poetry* (July 1966): 217-221.

improvements contribute to its shorter length as well as its more digestible format. The 1966 version has ten sections, reduced to seven in 1968, with stanza numbers replaced by glyphs to demarcate each verse paragraph. In this later version, Kinnell has also adjusted the sensitivity of his language, having replaced lines such as "here is a hound who foots it after his bitch"[15] with "here is a hound chasing a mate" (*CP*, 175).

Thematically, in both versions, the irony and the self-reflexivity[16] of "The Poem" initiates composition, erasure, and removal as central editorial processes to the act of writing. Interrogating the artfulness of poetry, and the apparatus surrounding its construction, Kinnell advances the notion that "The poem too/ is a palimpsest, pinked/ with erasures, smelling/ of departure and burnt stone" (*CP*, 174). By conjuring the metaphorical image of a palimpsest, he initiates the notion that poems are ever-changing and fluid, that transmutations of thoughts and ideas will give rise to renewed text; whether obfuscated, stained, or imbued by the text preceding it or underneath it, the slate of poetic composition is re-used, re-inscribed, re-composed, and transcripted.[17]

Through this ambulation of a poem's life cycle, time can be said to take on a physical presence, likening itself to material geographies.[18] That is to say, it can be visually measured by what tactile layers are posed and subsequently applied upon the palimpsest over a linear chronology which measures duration and space; in the context of more diachronic elements, Kinnell's observation pivots our thinking about traces of poems which remain, with the palimpsest emblematic of these residual texts which emerge and re-emerge over time. The

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15 Kinnell, "The Poem," 220.

16 Dorothy Zayatz Baker popularises the term "self-reflexive" to describe poetry which "mirrors and examines itself." See Dorothy Zayatz Baker, *Mythic Masks in Self-Reflexive Poetry: A Study of Pan and Orpheus* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 3.

17 H.D.'s first novel *Palimpsest* (1926) metaphorically engages with this concept of layering. For more surrounding the hermeneutics of traces as presences or absences, see "Chapter 4: Strategies of Reading" in Dirk Van Hulle, *Genetic Criticism: Tracing Creativity in Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). Taxonomies of lines and traces are discussed at length in Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007).

18 Nancy Holt's "Sun Tunnels" (1970-76) are site-specific installations of visual art, which experiment with the concept of time in the desert but are equally applicable in their import to considering markings of time and physicality in Kinnell's poetry. "For the time being, in the interim, in the course of time, from day to day, from hour to hour, until, in due time, and in the fullness of time, time endures, goes on, remains, persists, lasts, goes by, elapses, passes, flows, rolls on, flies, slips, slides, and glides by." Nancy Holt, *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 9, *Special Issue: Robert Smithson* (May 1978): 144.

stones—"as/ the face/ drifts on a skull scratched by glaciers" (*CP*, 174)—assume a place of prominence in this trajectory. By holding kindling and preventing fire from spreading, the poem is presented as both a spatial and a metaphorical antidote to conflagration: resisting embers, it may be resurrected anew.

As a metapoetic text, "The Poem" expands our reading strategies to consider whether involution, as an appraisal of origin and interpretation, could be used as a co-narrative strategy of metapoesis to assess the sources of poetry and its textual product. More pointedly, by examining how a poem infolds or draws in upon itself, new values of meaning and significance can be achieved through superimpositions of text devoid of rigid structure, and beyond palaeographic artifact. John Pizer elucidates that "[s]patially, 'involution' is also the antonym of evolution, implying an infolding, the drawing into itself of an object."[19] In turn, we consider tensions between past and future elements, mutability of text, and ancient or pre-existing wisdom that was left for us but which we cannot access. Kinnell successfully isolates this schematic in the third strophe of the poem, locating it in a composed call-and-response structure of his own. The speaker rattles off a profusion of famous verses and texts which have tumbled into loss or relative obscurity. Imploring with the same usage of locative adverb what amounts to a parallel of linguistic registers, this time in the form of "where," the speaker cries out:

> Where is 'The Apocalypse of Lamech'?
> Where is the 'Iliupersis'?
> Where is the 'Khavadhaynamagh'?
> Where is the 'Rommant du Pet au Deable'?
> Where is 'The Book of the Lion'?
> Where is the servantose of the sixty girls of Florence?
> Where are the poems Li Po folded into boats and pushed out on
> the river?
> Where are the snows that fell into these graves? (*CP*, 174-175)[20]

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[19] John Pizer, "Involution in *The Great American Novel*: Reflections on Williams and Walter Benjamin," *William Carlos Williams Review* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1987): 10. Williams ponders the concept of involution in his satiric volume, *The Great American Novel*. See also Joshua Schuster, "William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All*, and the Anthropological Imaginary," *Journal of Modern Literature* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 116-132.

[20] In a public reading of "The Poem," Kinnell clarifies for the audience that "the poems which are mentioned in the third section are all poems which, whose names we know but which themselves have never been seen." Galway Kinnell, Poetry Reading at the YM-YWHA, New York City (January 1965), Digital Collections, University of Buffalo Libraries. https://digital.lib.buffalo.edu/items/show/55246

In this third strophe, Kinnell moves from questions pertaining to the Dead Sea Scrolls; the sacking of Troy; the Eastern region of the Roman Empire; François Villon's text "Rommant du Pet au Deable" (lost, except for the title); and to Richard the Lionheart's Crusade in the Holy Land. There is a sense of dislocation, coupled with an urgency on the part of the lyric speaker to recover purpose, location, and perhaps to salvage time itself, measured by the many winters of "the snows that fell into these graves" (*CP*, 175). Snow reinforces the physical presence of time, which erases itself; once it has melted, one would never perceive its existence, except for the cyclicality of the seasons which tenders its return. As a corollary, Kinnell revisits this concept in "Goodbye" featured in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* (1980), where the profound knowledge of grief is defined by spatial parameters:

> Tears have a history of falling. Gravity
> has taught them a topographical understanding
> of the human face. At each last embrace
> the snow brings down its ragged curtain.
> The mind shreds the present, once the past is over. (*CP*, 305)

Both individual stanzas showcase Kinnell's distinctive paradigm, and use snow as a metaphorical demarcation, bridging uncertainty and loss whilst seeking knowledge at the in-between boundaries that fuse inclusion and exclusion, the past and the present. In "The Poem," in which the speaker inquires "where are the snows" (*CP*, 175), the existence of time is highlighted as a physical entity, especially when elements of nature are concerned. We understand the ephemerality of a physical presence itself, for surely snows within graves cannot last, and the present begins to disintegrate once the past is firmly concluded. Accentuating the transitory aspects of text, Kinnell affirms an inescapable cycle that likens poetic composition and livelihood to the same trajectory as mortal life.[21]

I would assume that "the servantose of the sixty girls of Florence" pertains to dowries, or to domestic, indentured servitude, although this specific reference remains unclear. Li Poe died in 762; whilst boating, he reached out to grab a moonbeam, consequently falling in and drowning. W.S. Merwin's "River" in *Garden Time* (2016) addresses this event. See also Julius Kirshner and Anthony Molho, "The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence," *The Journal of Modern History* 50, no. 3 (September 1978): 403-438.

[21] "Under the Maud Moon" conveys a similarly placed affirmation: "The raindrops trying/ to put the fire out/ fall into it and are/ changed: the oath broken,/ the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit, broken,/ to be sworn again,/ over and over, in the clouds, and broken again,/ over and over, on earth" (*CP*, 213).

This element is further elaborated in Section 5 (1966 version) where the cycle of decomposition is woven through intonations of human conquest and folly, imprinted with the spatial deixis of 'here' and 'there':

> On fields littered with
> fistbones unclasping from pistol and club,
> funnybones oozing with blood,
> wishbones aching with fatalism at last,
> astrologi from which the butterflies have flown off
> innominate bones of the noisy,
> sacrums the eucharist platters of kites,
> luz-bones dead of non-resurrection,
> we hunt,
> the wild hummingbird, who nests,
> we still believe, in those
> pokeweed-sprouting, pismired
> ribcages dumped down here and there.[22]

The words "we hunt" and their usage in the stanza as single-stressed words which interrupt the flow of descriptive, nearly flowery language, heighten our synaesthetic experience, drawing attention to Kinnell's greater conclusion that "we still believe"; it is an insistence we maintain, despite our knowledge of the contrary, which could just as easily be substituted with the words 'we still *create*.' This would also suggest an unmitigated and even unavoidable duty of composition, a capacity by which we (re)create despite the inevitability of our collective fates. Kinnell gives us an irresistibly sonic line through a series of trochees— "in those/ pokeweed-sprouting, pismired/ ribcages dumped down here and there"[23]—not only connoting the cleaved state of these ribbed skeletons, but of language itself, festooned with style and rhythm.

More pointedly, this connection carries through to the heart of Kinnell's ethos in literary practice, one which suggests that earlier traces and writings are neither fully lost, nor fully recoverable, but are, essential components in the (re)issuing of text. Kinnell explains:

> You might, after writing a poem, ask questions and be skeptical about some parts of it and rewrite them, but if you really had some kind of new understanding you'd write a new poem. Because no poem has the authority of settling things for you; it's just one step along the way. Every poem revises the poem before it.[24]

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[22] Kinnell, "The Poem," 219.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Galway Kinnell, Cynthia Atkins, and Jeanne Beaumont, "Being with Reality: An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art* no. 14 (1989): 171.

Whilst a fresh draft of a poem could at any time be obtained by beginning anew on a clean piece of paper, Kinnell's predilection for pastiche and collage as mutualistic approaches to revision demonstrates the importance of previous versions in the renewal of texts. Ultimately, what is produced is his own version of a palimpsest (Appendix 1), layered with text, similarly obfuscated by inky corrections, scribbles, and glue-mounted strips of paper to engender something wholly new: "the flame/ rises off the bones,/ the hunger/ to be new lifts off/ my soul" (*CP*, 267).

However, rather than answer his own questions directly and in the moment, Kinnell draws the arc of the poem away from these queries, blurring them by the gaps between them, and the response portion. There is the sense that he is vacillating or attempting to extend time; subsequently, his dwelling in a critically formative stage of composition remains in flux. In the first iteration of the poem from 1966, Kinnell has five intervening stanzas, whereas in the 1968 version, he retains only one: an evaluative interlude in which he draws upon the intertextuality of Stevens' early poem "The Comedian as the Letter C" (1923), most explicitly Section VI (And Daughters with Curls):

> By apparition, plain and common things,
> Sequestering the fluster from the year,
> Making gulped potions from obstreperous drops,
> And so distorting, proving what he proves
> Is nothing, what can all this matter since
> The relation comes, benignly, to its end?[25]

Continuing to its suggestion in Kinnell, the sixth section of his 1966 version reads:

> On a branch
> in the morning light,
> lying on its back at the tip of an icicle,
> the letter C
> comes into being—trembles,
> to drop? or to cling?
>
> A roman
> carapace glitters all over it:
> 'icicle' nails
> itself the fourth stroke in.[26]

[25] Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 37.
[26] Kinnell, "The Poem," 219.

Kinnell then revises and truncates this section, presenting it later as:

> In morning light, at the tip
> of an icicle, the letter C
> comes into being—trembles,
> to drop, or to cling?
>
> Suddenly a roman
> carapace glitters all over it (*CP*, 175).

Stevens' long, narrative poem bears similarities with Kinnell's peripatetic flâneur; Crispin himself is a "general lexicographer" and "an introspective voyager"[27] on a rambling sea quest that is at once chaotic and overwhelming but forms the immediate environs of his psychogeographical exploration. Here, Kinnell invokes intertextuality as a nod to Crispin's awareness in the creative processes of his art; however, the resolution is decidedly gentle as Crispin inexorably, and predictably, gives up: "what can all this matter since/ The relation comes, benignly, to its end?"[28]

Using Crispin as an assumed persona of his future self, Stevens lacks the intensity and directness of Kinnell's lyric verse in its metapoetic exploration—Eliot's iconic "Not with a bang but a whimper."[29] However, Louis Renza situates this Whitmanian echo as a "reference to a poetic mode identified with a certain type of literary public expectation that Stevens attempts to finesse rather than deny."[30] In "The Comedian as the Letter C," his lines verge on absurdity but retreat inward toward resignation, lacking Kinnell's determinedly ironic staging. Nevertheless, this is not to be levied as a criticism, however, but rather to distinguish curious ways in which two major American poets interlocute with the metapoetic substructures of Whitman. In "The Poem," Kinnell's c-shaped icicle somewhat contemplatively writes itself into existence, an associative self-reflexivity turned mundane on Avenue C: "Icicle-shaped

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[27] Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 22-23.
[28] Ibid., 37.
[29] T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," in *The Norton Anthology of Literature, 4th ed.* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 1285.
[30] Louis A. Renza, *Edgar Allan Poe, Wallace Stevens, and the Poetics of American Privacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 243.

carrots" (*CP*, 91) and "Rustwater" that "Hangs in icicles over the windows and door,/ Like frozen piss aimed at trespassers" (*CP*, 97).

Kinnell's poem does not carry with it the hubris that only through his singular vision will this metanalysis or more enlightened comprehension be possible. To wit, it puts forth a self-referentiality and an unconcealed meta-awareness,[31] referring to its own continual pursuit of *ars poetica* and the process of making. More pointedly, Kinnell steps a foot into these metaphysical waters as a preliminary introduction to this concept, opening his 1968 edition *Body Rags*, the same volume which contains "The Poem," with "Another Night in the Ruins." Thematically overlapping, this poem takes up poetry as life's work for its subject. In the seventh and final stanza, the lyric speaker pleads:

> How many nights must it take
> one such as me to learn
> that we aren't, after all, made
> from that bird that flies out of its ashes,
> that for us
> as we go up in flames, our one work
> is
> to open ourselves, to *be*
> the flames? (*CP*, 157-158)

In what reads as one lineated burst of utterance, the speaker expresses the frustration that accompanies the practice of composition and poetic process, using the idea of ruins as a spatial metaphor of the mind, foregrounding the kind of cognitive infrastructure or architecture on which despair and ruination have fallen.

Kinnell's lexicon is often littered with outdated, anachronistic words, a reflection of his desire to recover and to expand language into a use-case realm where all words become possibilities; oftentimes this specificity of lexicon infiltrates his verse because only a certain word will suffice. He revels in the novelty of a limitless option of words without restriction,

[31] Meta-awareness and highly self-conscious metapoesis can be traced transnationally across the Anglo-American tradition, among but not limited to: Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846) translated by Charles Baudelaire as "Genèse d'un poème," a testament to the construction of story and narrative; "Poetry" by Marianne Moore" (1921), itself a study in revisionism and demonstrative praise of poetic elitism; Archibald MacLeish's, "Ars Poetica" (1926), a response to Horace's eponymous epistle; Stevens' "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" (1947); "Notes on the Art of Poetry" (1951) by Dylan Thomas; Anne Sexton's "An Obsessive Combination of Ontological Inscape, Trickery and Love" (1959); and Richard Wilbur's "The Writer" (1969).

key aspects which were missing for him in rectangular verse. However, at times this can have a habit of taking the reader out of the flow of the poem, to become disconnected from being held in the suspension of the prosody. It is noteworthy that in this closing stanza, Kinnell does not use the simple word "phoenix" in the poem, but somewhat awkwardly, "that bird that flies out of its ashes," moderating this syntax with a level of gloss necessary to sustain the flow and the pacing of the verse itself. This seemingly minor change in structure is essential for the success of this stanza; should we instinctively insert 'phoenix' in its place, we lose the juxtaposition of "ashes" and "flames." Resultingly, the symbolism of the cyclical metaphor, particularly in its spatial imagery, becomes less overt. Indeed, the symbolism of using a phoenix is both a simple and an apposite one, the act of self-destruction so that one may be reborn and resurrected. Yet, that a phoenix is immortal through the recurrence of its own regenerative powers suggests Kinnell's ontological self-knowing, a state considering the experientiality of one's conscious self. In this manner, Kinnell is employing both physical and metaphorical senses; as the self-aware body is concomitant with language, any structural or 'ruinous' breakdown would affect both mind and language.

By contrast, "The Poem" (1966 version) articulates that the idea is not that we are reborn into life from the ashes, or that we remake ourselves from what remains. Through the creative mechanism of our writing, we introduce a method of combustion that invites a conflagration of ideas, and perhaps even a metaphorical immolation of our own processes, thoughts, and creativity: "On our hill of despair/ the bonfire we/ kindled has lighted the great sky,/ though it's true, of course,/ to make it burn we had to throw ourselves in..."[32] In the grander sense, we are not withholding anything from ourselves or from our creative praxes in the delivering, and the offering up, of this work. Thus, using our (metaphorical) corporeal selves as kindling, our creative passions burn out quickly and explosively. At our cores, we are

[32] Kinnell, "The Poem," 219.

our own self-destruction and despair, as well as our own generated light, a symbolic paradox of self-serving intention and self-preservation.

Although it would appear that "The Poem" loses all of this context in *Collected Poems*, in addition to the proto-knowledge we obtained from the 1966 *Poetry* iteration, we do have a definitive answer as to where this clarifying text has gone. Kinnell has in fact removed a stanza from the 1966 version of "The Poem," and deposited it, with some revision taken, in "Another Night in the Ruins." As opposed to the lines being addressed to a general, pluralised "we" (as aforementioned), they are instead reconfigured, and spoken by his brother Derry, thus recounted by Kinnell through subjective pronouns of "me" and "you":

> He used to tell me,
> 'What good is the day?
> On some hill of despair
> the bonfire
> you kindle can light the great sky—
> though it's true, it turns out, to make it burn
> you have to throw yourself in...' (*CP*, 156)

Through the interlacement of both poems, Kinnell initiates a metanarrative of interconnectedness, one which relies on these two poems taken and read in context successively in *Body Rags*. What began as a dialogic structure of call-and-response with Whitman regarding the process of poetic composition manifests into Kinnell's purposeful dialogue with himself, and a sustained meditation on the metapoesis of literary practice. Attending to the study of poetic subject, descriptions, and rhetorical attributes, this line of inquiry would continue to resonate with Kinnell through to his final volume in which "Oatmeal" features as both a meditation on the act of writing poetry, and a dialogue with poets, John Keats and Patrick Kavanagh.[33]

Keatsian Negative Capability and the Subversion of Persona

[33] Kinnell's archival notes show that he had originally intended it to be a supper with Yeats, not Keats. Galway Kinnell, "Oatmeal" drafts, [1989?] Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

To read Whitman is to be held in a web of expansive experience of interchangeability and mercuriality, in which we, his literary descendants, are invited into the fold. "Song of Myself" masterfully elides "I" into "you"— ("It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,/ Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.)"[34] This shift, a metaphorical passing of the torch, reflects how he transforms ipseity from implicit selfhood and self-awareness to more universal principles that trickle down through the ages. Denis Donoghue suggests that Whitman did not fall prey to confronting the nature of the self that Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Ralph Waldo Emerson did, an observation which also sheds light on how, in Kinnell's view, this might draw attention to the problematical nature of Whitman's self-invention as 'one of the roughs,' and 'the good gray poet.' Rather, Whitman saw every new experience as an opportunity to expand the self, and to seek multiplicity in all things.[35] In "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," at the hinge of the poem in Strophe 5, Whitman queries, "What is it then between us?/ What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?/ Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not."[36] Kinnell characterises this as 'Keatsian negative capability,'[37] in other words, a certain shapelessness of personality to obliterate oneself by flowing and enunciating from within another being, speaking one's self in the process. He maintains that this process is transactional, relying on an equal exchange between poet and subject: "Whitman gives whatever he flows into a presence in human consciousness, and in return, this other thing or creature gives Whitman a situation

[34] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 66.
[35] Denis Donoghue, "Walt Whitman," in *Connoisseurs of Chaos: Ideas of Order in Modern American Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1965) quoted in *Walt Whitman: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Murphy (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1969), 429.
[36] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 123.
[37] In a December 1817 letter to his brothers, George and Thomas, Keats writes: "I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*,* that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason*—" John Keats, *Selected Letters*, ed. Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 41-42.

and vocabulary which enable him to see and articulate his own being in a new way."[38]

Indeed, Whitman is formulaic in leaving nothing to be imagined, telling us exactly who he is at any given moment, and what he equitably inhabits or assumes. In "The Sleepers," first published in the 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he details:

> I go from bedside to bedside, I sleep close with the other sleepers each in turn,
> I dream in my dream all the dreams of the other dreamers,
> And I become the other dreamers.
>
> [...]
>
> I am the actor, the actress, the voter, the politician,
> The emigrant and the exile, the criminal that stood in the box,
> He who has been famous and he who shall be famous after to-day,
> The stammerer, the well-formed person, the wasted or feeble person.
>
> I am she who adorn'd herself and folded her hair expectantly,
> My truant lover has come, and it is dark.[39]

Harold Bloom connects this trope in Whitmanian construction to a reliance on the literary device of synecdoche;[40] in other words, Whitman is not simply a dreamer himself but encapsulates all other dreamers. This would play on the notion between autobiography and fictitious self, a sense of parsing between the poet and the individual, which runs throughout much of Whitman's verse.[41]

In Michael Patrick Robertson's estimation, Kinnell's compositions derive from the particular (autobiographical) and progress to the general (universal):

> Kinnell's interpretation of the world is particular to his experience, abnegating other selves in favor of the idiosyncracies of his own life. The poem is emerging from emotions that originate in subjective, personal experience […] So although the poem is based in autobiography, it progresses beyond the facts of the poet's life and finds that impersonal voice of common, and universal, experience.[42]

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[38] Galway Kinnell, "Walt Whitman and Negative Capability," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 81, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 221.
[39] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 316-317.
[40] Bloom, *The Daemon Knows*, 72.
[41] Bloom notes: "*Song of Myself* marvelously presents the fictive 'Walt Whitman' self and the evasive 'real Me' or 'Me myself,' a dialectic developed further in *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking* and *As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life*." Bloom, *The Daemon Knows*, 70.
[42] Michael Patrick Robertson, "The Mythmaking Self (or the Myth Making Self): Fiction and Experience in Galway Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares*" (1992). *Honors Papers*. 567.
https://digitalcommons.oberlin.edu./honors/567

If Kinnell resembles Whitman as a democratic speaker, it is in his desire to almost disappear from the poem itself, so that the composition resembles someone (or something) conversing, abandoning ego altogether. His goal is not blatant or unrestrained didacticism, or replication of multiple subjectivities or objects in an individual poem, but instead, to exhaust a single thread of exploration. Kinnell elucidates:

> Often a poem at least starts out being about oneself, about one's experiences, a fragment of autobiography. But then, if it's really a poem, it goes deeper than personality. It takes on that strange voice, intensely personal yet common to everyone, in which all rituals are spoken. A poem expresses one's most private feelings; and these turn out to be the feelings of everyone else as well. The separate egos vanish. The poem becomes simply the voice of a creature on earth speaking [...] you are suddenly outside yourself, everywhere.[43]

The conflation of subject and poetic voice whether human or non-human—tantamount to an appropriation of Keatsian negative capability—allows him to recede out-of-view from the framework of the poem itself, and to erase traces of his presence or of an implicated *persona* in the work.[44] In both Whitman and Kinnell, this brings a peculiar interplay to the fore, one comprised of self-invention but also of self-effacement. This equanimity of action suggests a democratising principle: the poet as a universal voice and a great equaliser, professing truth by the instantaneity of experience.

As per Keats's model, there is a distinct spatialising dimension of negative capability, one that involves both a degree of uncertainty as well as universal embodiment, principles identifiable in Kinnell's work, and to which he speaks in the above excerpt. These spatial implications relate to abstraction and to the concept of being a concentrated being, who is then everywhere as a universal virtue or truth. There is sense of overwhelming dissolution, akin to Whitman as he dissolves in "Song of Myself"—"I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,/ I effuse myself in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags"—or in "Sparkles from

[43] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 6.
[44] Kinnell characterises this as "an effort to come to terms with [his] life on earth as one of the animals of the earth." Kinnell and 'Rose' [Rose Styron?], "Transcript of interview," MC 64. Further, he identifies this as a "powerful sympathy," and notes Henry David Thoreau's highest poetic praise accorded to *Leaves of Grass:* "It is as if the beasts spoke." Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 319 and 321.

the Wheel": "Myself effusing and fluid, a phantom curiously floating, now here absorb'd and/ arrested."[45]

Yet Kinnell, in his subversion of persona poetry, did so by raising his ambivalence about the legitimacy of the voices of his peers, such as James Dickey and even Bly,[46] the idea that "[p]oetry verifies itself, telling us by the authenticity of its voice how true it is."[47] In Kinnell's estimation, both of their occasional deficiencies in poetic composition derive from their inability to 'transcend personality,' that is to say, an inability to disentangle or to disengage the poet from his words in speaking or expressing truth. To an extent, their poems subsume personality, hiding the unethical or the immoral behind the guise of reality, of an assumed personage, as opposed to standing up and revealing to all the mysteries that are held within the psyche or inside one's heart.

There is an explicit sense of derision advanced by Kinnell, emblematic of his own complicated relationship to persona poems, an evaluation of whether their presentation is dishonest and synthetic, in service to a level of artifice which obfuscates the true intention of any poem.[48] By contrast, he attempts to work against this ellipticity in his own literary practice, using it as means of enacting Keatsian negative capability:

> A *persona* has its uses, and also its dangers. In theory, it would be a way to get past the self, to dissolve the barrier between poet and reader. Writing in the voice of another, the poet would open himself to that person. All that would be required would be for the reader to make that same act of sympathetic identification, and in the *persona*, poet and reader would meet as one. Of course, for the poem to be interesting, the *persona* would have to represent a central facet of the poet's self [...] In the voice of J. Alfred Prufrock, Eliot expressed his own sense of futility and his own wish to die. Without the use of the *persona* Eliot might not have been able to express this at all [...] The *persona* makes it OK. For the same reason, it is an evasion. As he develops his character, even Eliot forgets that this sense of futility and this wish to die are his own, as well as Prufrock's. The *persona* makes it unnecessary for him to confront the sources of these

[45] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 69 and 291.
[46] See Kinnell's essay "Poetry, Personality and Death" for a robust discussion of persona poems pertaining to James Dickey and Robert Bly. Galway Kinnell, "Poetry, Personality and Death," in *A FIELD Guide to Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Stuart Friebert, David Walker, and David Young (Oberlin: Oberlin College Press, 1997), 255-271.
[47] Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 319.
[48] "If you then fictionalize who you are, the whole poem loses its only purpose for being. And so, when you take a persona, we all know it's a persona, we all know it's fiction." Galway Kinnell, "Sessions on Craft, Squaw Valley Writer's Conference," September 1991, audio, 47:17. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 12). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

> feelings or to explore their consequences in himself. It functions like the Freudian dream, fictionalizing what one does not want to know is real.[49]

In Kinnell's assumption of a certain Keatsian negative capability, he manages to circumvent, and even discard the façade of persona by allowing for aspects of malleability and transference that wholly substitute his subjective self with that of the poem. However, his success in this regard depends on our suspension of disbelief as readers, and our willingness to accept that he commiserates, adapts, or is somehow a changed individual from the experience, "to float out/ over the trees, seeking to be one/ with the unearthly fires kindling and dying" (*CP*, 265). We may hold Kinnell to his own standards of "sympathetic identification,"[50] such that the value of his words be measured by the validity or authenticity of his introspective expression, and not of their achievement of resolution or clarity of ideas. By this appropriation of capability, he renders an implicit opposition to the pursuit of the aesthetically beautiful, intimating vacillation and uncertainty that belie normative conceptions of reason.[51]

In the fourth section of *The Book of Nightmares*, Kinnell, positioned as "Galway" who is exchanging notes with "Virginia"[52] in the poem, writes to the "stranger/ extant in memory by the blue Juniata" telling her:

> these letters
> across space I guess
> will be all we will know of one another.
>
> So little of what one is threads itself through the eye
> of empty space.

---

[49] Emphasis is Kinnell's own. Kinnell, "Poetry, Personality and Death," 257. This principle will be further elaborated in the "Soundscapes and the Aural Imagination" section of this chapter.

[50] Using "Sparkles from the Wheel" as a point of departure, Kinnell avers, "It lets us understand what powers came in to play, by which Whtiman [sic] could flow into things and creatures and know them as if from the inside: that power of sympathetic identification he gives them a voice, they give him a language. Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, MC 64.

[51] See "The Path Among the Stones" as Kinnell's "decision to remain in and happily accept the imperfect condition." Galway Kinnell and Thomas Gardner, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *Contemporary Literature* 20, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 427.

[52] Virginia (née Zeiders) is a real-life, long-term correspondent with Kinnell. He explains that she is a mystic and a seer: "She is one of those born without the protective filtering device that allows the rest of us to see this humanized, familiar world as if it were all there is. She sees past the world and lives in the cosmos." Although the poem alludes to the pair never meeting, they did in fact share one in-person engagement, after which Kinnell expressed his disappointment. Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 108-109.

Never mind.
The self is the least of it.
Let our scars fall in love. (*CP*, 236-237)

As a tacit form of expression, Kinnell distils the essence of what we share together down to the wounds that mark us, be they physical or emotional, allowing for a mix of the aesthetic and the imperfected. But he also finds a means of self-discovery and a conception of selfhood through his own version of sympathetic identification with the subjects of the poems. In this way, he relies on this consciousness to assimilate or to be bound to another life elsewhere. By enmeshing his own self in the narrative of poetic construction, Kinnell directs this poem away from the definitive persona poem, implicating his recognisable personhood in the hypothetical narrative trajectory: "Can it ever be true—/ all bodies, one body, one light/ made of everyone's darkness together?" (*CP*, 236) In essence, Kinnell's use of the interrogative underscores his use of poetic form to dwell in Keatsian mystery, to accept that we must rely on a more intuitive understanding of our relationship to the world by embracing changeability, self-transformation, and uncertainty.[53]

Keatsian negative capability is largely achieved, and perhaps most readily observed, in Kinnell's animal-themed poems.[54] In "The Henflower," Section II from *The Book of Nightmares,* we discover that the hen's features are concomitant with the speaker's own: "wing/ of my wing,/ of my bones and veins,/ of my flesh/ hairs lifting all over me in the first ghostly breeze/ after death" (*CP*, 221). These poems are bursting with imagery yet given surprisingly basic titles that deceive the intertwined natures of subject and poet. "The Porcupine," which immediately precedes "The Bear" in the 1968 volume of *Body Rags*, accedes to this presentation, and details a sleeping porcupine shot by a farmer. Both the bear and the porcupine die from wounds inflicted by tree limbs; in the case of the bear, the

[53] Ultimately, Kinnell's poetic pursuit of truth would reveal the inadequacy of religion, in his estimation, to encompass these principles, as described in "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed": "But the arms of prayer, which pressed his chest/ in childhood—long ago, he himself, in the name/ of truth, let them go slack" (*CP*, 392).
[54] See Johanna Hoorenman on the role of animals and animality in the poetry of Kinnell and others. Johanna Hoorenman, "Writing 'that animal darkness': Galway Kinnell, Gary Snyder, James Merrill" (PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin, 2010).

death is a strategically mediated one over the course of several days. In "The Porcupine," the creature wanders off, and its fate, although already written, is left in a state of ambiguity at the close of the poem.

Much like "The Bear," in which the hunter (as lyric speaker) attempts to unite both spiritual and physical experiences by inhabiting the creature, in "The Porcupine" Kinnell renders a stunning transposition of identity in Strophes 5 and 6. However, departing from the structure of "The Bear," the lyric speaker is not concomitant with an instrument of death (in this case, transmogrified onto the role of the farmer), but rather with the victim, that of the porcupine. In the following stanza, the bed creates its own sense of a spatial apparatus, acting as a microcosm of the larger, rural environs:

> I roll
> this way and that in the great bed, under
> the quilt
> that mimics this country of broken farms and woods,
> the fatty sheath of the man
> melting off,
> the self-stabbing coil
> of bristles reversing, blossoming outward—
> a red-eyed, hard-toothed, arrow-stuck urchin
> tossing up mattress feathers,
> pricking the
> woman beside me until she cries. (*CP*, 202-203)

It is of especial import that Kinnell selected a spiny, prickly, mostly unlovable animal as the subject of the poem, one whose body is structured around defensive mechanisms, and whose mere presence is anathema. Through the anthropomorphising of the porcupine, Kinnell, as poetic speaker, likens it to Saint Sebastian, [55] and then by extension, relates it to himself:

> In my time I have

[55] Saint Sebastian was a Roman martyr who, when shot and pierced by arrows, did not die, surviving 'the slings and arrows' as we know conventionally through popular idiom, and through Hamlet's soliloquy, Act III, Scene I: "Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer/ The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, 613. Kinnell's religious iconography is specifically Catholic in this instance.

crouched, quills erected,
Saint
Sebastian of the
scared [sic] heart, and been
beat dead with a locust club
on the bare snout.
And fallen from high places
I have fled, have
jogged
over fields of goldenrod,
terrified, seeking home,
and among flowers
I have come to myself empty, the rope
strung out behind me
in the fall sun
suddenly glorified with all my blood. (*CP*, 203)

Through the analogous similarities of his text, Kinnell gestures to an interlocution with Marianne Moore's "The Pangolin" (1936) as well as "St. Jerome and his Lion" (1959) by which he initiates a distinction with his own poetic sensibility, concretising his subject and bringing into relief his handling of a similar thematic. In parallel likeness with the porcupine's fortified posture and sharp, thorny quills, the pangolin— "Not afraid of anything is he,/ and then goes cowering forth, tread paced to meet an obstacle/ at every step," is covered in his reinforcements, "Another armored animal—scale/lapping scale with spruce cone regularity."[56]

Perhaps more recognisable is the intertextuality "The Porcupine" shares with a pair of complexly related poems: Elizabeth Bishop's "The Armadillo," first appearing in *The New Yorker* (1957) and Robert Lowell's response, "Skunk Hour," published in *Life Studies* (1959). Bishop's poem,[57] in its querying of the human condition as well as its nod to the celebration of St. John, conjures the kind of martyrdom and forsaking of the animal

[56] Marianne Moore, "The Pangolin," in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition*, eds. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 461 and 463.
[57] Elizabeth Bishop, "The Armadillo," in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry, Second Edition*, eds. Richard Ellmann and Robert O'Clair (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 824-825.

kingdom which saturates Kinnell's text, relating the struggles of Saint Sebastian to those of the porcupine, and of the lyric speaker himself. In its penetrating darkness— "I hear/ my ill-spirit sob in each blood cell,/ as if my hand were at its throat..../ I myself am hell"[58]— Lowell's "Skunk Hour" counterbalances Kinnell's porcupine, likened to the sublimity of an "ultra-/Rilkean angel!" (*CP*, 201) each terrifying in their own imports.

If we were to affix a description to Kinnell's methodology, we might attest that his output resembles a 'half-way persona poem,' in the sense that he is not stepping into costume, through overarching metaphor or personification, for the duration of the verse. Instead, he employs one subject interchangeably for the other, both visually and linguistically so. The transposability Kinnell creates is easily accessible and simply achieved, as he becomes the misunderstood creature itself, inhabiting its experience with entrails dragging, "the rope/ strung out behind me/ in the fall sun/ suddenly glorified with all my blood" (*CP*, 203). Kinnell applies keen attention both to locality and to spatialising elements which act to flush out his metaphor, ultimately supporting the armature of the poem with substance and context.

By dividing the poem deliberately into the sensibility of two halves—one focused on the porcupine itself, and the other, the lyric speaker—Kinnell affirms that whether porcupine or poet, his view of anti-speciesism and egalitarianism remains the same; each one speaks for the other as members of the animal kingdom. In this way, Kinnell develops the vulnerability of the porcupine to evolve human empathy derived from the natural world. Moreover, he manages to achieve Keatsian negative capability, a conflation of subject and of poetic voice, in a more subtle, and decidedly less instructive manner than the Whitmanian formula which inelegantly proclaims through parataxis, 'I am...' This composition and organisation of ideas, which also mimics the duality of his call-and-response structure, is Kinnell's calculated attempt

[58] Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, eds. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 192.

to circumvent persona, by offering poetry which defies dramatization or performativity to mask intentionality.[59]

Whitman's Seductive Idiom

Though successor to Robert Frost as Poet Laureate of Vermont (1989-1993), Kinnell did not share his delight in crafting formulaic meter, the Frostian stance that it should be something which resisted ease, that is to say, "something to hold and something...to put a strain on."[60] Kinnell found liberation in Whitman's long lines of loosely cadenced verse, discovering his own vibrant, even exuberant desire to write in free verse without the constraints of formal prosody.[61] Whitman's idiosyncratic daring and flouting of convention offered a fresh, seductive idiom; eschewing the stylistic confines of metrical arrangement, his poetry tenders bravado and abstraction to counter pragmatically planned, accentual syllabic versification.

At a technical level, Kinnell appropriates and renews many of the stylistic elements and rhetorical devices of Whitman, and "The Poem" comports an exercise in Whitmanian aspects: syntactic parallelism, repetition (anaphora, epistrophe); cataloguing; and variation of line length.[62] The syntactical units are a chain of clauses, long and end-stopped with commas, and lend an expansiveness, not solely in the physical development of rhythm and pace, but also in its breadth of cataloguing such disparate and distinct tangibles (or very nearly tangible items, such as senses only accessible through cognitive or emotive states): "fern-leaf"; "*unfulfilled*"; "fir"; "hound"; "pits"; "fly"; and, "armful of last-year's-snows" (*CP*, 175), which is accessible only in memory. The very isolated lines of "more whitmanesque and free,"

[59] This specific point derives its connection from Kinnell's criticism of Eliot, as detailed in the introduction to Chapter One.
[60] Meter should be "something to hold and something... to put a strain on." Deirdre Fagan, *Critical Companion to Robert Frost: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007), 75.
[61] Galway Kinnell, *Essential Whitman* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1987), xi.
[62] See Gay Wilson Allen, *The New Walt Whitman Handbook* (New York: New York University Press, 1986); also, James Perrin Warren, "Style and Technique(s)," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 693-696.

"khaskura," and "writing" (*CP*, 175) are effective in drawing increased attention, combining and suggesting an amalgamation or relation between these much shorter syntactical units. Noting the use of lowercase, Kinnell's reference of "whitmanesque" is done in a rather ironic way, calling attention to the informality of his address, or as Kinnell has sometimes stated, a way in which he may downplay Whitman's influence,[63] perhaps bearing some resemblance to Stevens in this regard. Khaskura, referring to the Nepalese language, is a word of even tones, and the articulation of breath-stress too has a constancy and a mellifluidity to it, modifying the "emptiness" (*CP*, 175) that is being written.

Further, Kinnell's use of hyphenated words as creating compounds, a way of enriching the nouns by detailed gerunds, highlights the present continuous verb tense Whitman favoured. In this stanza we are given: "cementing"; "becoming"; "chasing"; "composing"; and "convulsing" (*CP*, 175), alternating between trochees and iambs which serve to mimic the contortions of a body in space. These verbs are also juxtaposed rhetorically with the jaunty rhyme of "lightning" and "hand-writing" (*CP*, 175), which Kinnell purposefully splits and places on the next line. Whilst Whitman studiously avoided rhyme in favour of natural cadences, Kinnell is both inspired by organic breath and expression, as well as by calling attention to the artfulness of literary craft, and the act of writing. One of the more superfluous and rather extraordinary terms Kinnell uses is "trochaic dimeter brachycatalectic," brachycatalectic itself a protracted, excessive word to explain two syllables at the end of verse. In these moments, we observe Kinnell's playfulness with language to create a soundscape all his own. He displays an ability to harness a syntactical movement of words that is both oracular and melodious, the music of which is based on the sense of the poem itself.[64]

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[63] Kinnell, "My Encounters with Whitman," 424. Kinnell also defines Whitmanesque as descending the Platonic ladder in the same vein as Blake or Rainer Maria Rilke, "a motion from the conventionally highest downward toward union with the most ordinary and the least, the conventionally lowest, the common things of the world." Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 322.

[64] Galway Kinnell and Leonard Lopate, "Interview with Galway Kinnell and Rebekah Presson Mosby," WNYC, *The Leonard Lopate Show*, 14 April 2002, audio, 33:59. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 31). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Kinnell's employment of Whitman's characteristic syntactic parallelism—*parallelismus membrorum*— as a rhetorical device contributes to deliberate verse of sustained effect, with the poesy dependant on the taxonomy of phrases alluding to its importance. This parallelism pertains to the usage of patterns, word order, syntax, repetitions of thought, word phrases, rhythmic structure, or clauses in consecutive lines,[65] and is wholly executed in Kinnell's "In the Hotel of Lost Light," Section V of *The Book of Nightmares*. The poem re-joins the figure of 'the tramp' who is woven throughout the volume, having debuted in Section I through a desire to conjure the written word through his own corporeal making: "The singed grease streams/ out of the words, the one/ held note/ remains—a love-note/ twisting under my tongue, like the coyote's bark,/ curving off, into a/ howl" (*CP*, 213-214). Following the tramp's return in "The Shoes of Wandering" (Section III), "In the Hotel of Lost Light" sees his self-portrayal as "one who gets ready to die, as Roland's horn, winding down/ from the Pyrenees, saved its dark, full flourishes/ for last" (*CP*, 239), recalling the familiar *chanson de geste* of Roland's epic heroism at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass.[66]

Operating within the same semantic space or context, Kinnell introduces both the fourth and fifth verse paragraphs with quotation marks to indicate "the drunk smelling of autopsies" as the tramp speaking (*CP*, 239). Composing his "final postcards to posterity," they are written out for him in "this languished alphabet/ of worms" (*CP*, 240) as he elaborates:

> "I sat out by twigfires flaring in grease strewn from the pimpled
> limbs of hen,
> I blacked out into oblivion by that crack in the curb where the forget-
> me blooms,
> I saw the ferris wheel writing its huge, desolate zeroes in neon on
> the evening skies,
> I painted my footsoles purple for the day when the beautiful color
> would show,
> I staggered death-sentences down empty streets, the cobblestones

[65] Galway Kinnell, "Galway Kinnell on Walt Whitman," in *Poetry Speaks*, eds. Elise Paschen and Rebekah Presson Mosby (Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2001), 17.
[66] It is perhaps an additional layer of texture provided by Kinnell, linking the tramp to the deeply flawed, yet sympathetic Roland whose blowing of the oliphant alerts his men, triggering his own sacrificial death. In this way, we perceive both as martyrs. See *The Song of Roland*, trans. John O'Hagan (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883).

assured me, *it shall be so*,
I heard my own cries already howled inside bottles the waves washed up on beaches,
I ghostwrote my prayers myself in the body-Arabic of these night-mares. (*CP*, 240-241)

Isolating the fourth stanza, Kinnell assumes a familiar Whitmanian structure, evidenced in poems such as "The Sleepers" (1855) and "I Sit and Look Out" (1860), likewise consistent from his early notebook, Talbot Wilson, "Earliest and Most Important Notebook of Walt Whitman" (1847-1854).[67] These poems are constructed according to alternating sets of long, extended lines, and shorter indented or tabbed-in lines. Kinnell also puts this method of verse organisation to use in the fifth strophe of "The Poem," using spatial deixis to assist in the construction of his language. He accounts for an overarching catalogue of actions fulfilled by emplacement, bearing similarity by fleshing out contexts of positioning and temporality, realised through parallel structure and prepositional phrasing: "by twigfires"; "into oblivion by that crack in the curb"; "down empty streets"; and "inside bottles" (*CP*, 240-241). "In the Hotel of Lost Light" repeatedly combines the subjective pronoun "I" with a verb of the past tense, relaying these former actions conferred as memories. In the end, the only remnants will be their written details, penned down and disseminated by being "scattered into the future" (*CP*, 242), underscoring locational uncertainty and ambiguity.

Similarly, "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight" (Section VII of *The Book of Nightmares*), which uses modal auxiliary construction in both deontic and epistemic manners, Kinnell situates both the possibility of actions he *would do*, and at the same time, implies a stringent commitment that he *must do* them. As a father attempting to stave off the loss of his daughter, he affirms in desperation:

I would blow the flame out of your silver cup,
I would suck the rot from your fingernail,

[67] The notebook, also known as "Notebook LC #80," is not in fact Whitman's earliest, having received that label from Emory Holloway. See The Thomas Biggs Harned Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, 1842-1937, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
https://whitmanarchive.org/manuscripts/notebooks/transcriptions/loc.00141.html
See also Matt Miller, *Collage of Myself: Walt Whitman and the Making of Leaves of Grass* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 2-8.

I would brush your sprouting hair of the dying light,
I would scrape the rust off your ivory bones,
I would help death escape through the little ribs of your body,
I would alchemize the ashes of your cradle back into wood,
I would let nothing of you go, ever (*CP*, 251).

These verbal modalities and semantic proliferation lend repetition, a refrain as in song, initiating and propelling the auditory imagination such that we can discern these words as music. Kinnell's employment of parallel structure further provides a sense of mounting tension; he executes a curious intention of fulfilling his desire "to find a new place in the poem," and "to conform to its irregular curves, to the terrain itself"[68] as he cradles us between Maud's new life, and the threat of impending death.

Soundscapes and the Aural Imagination

The rootedness of poetry in the oral tradition of recitation—an impulse of singing forth as a literary form—makes it a well-resourced medium for moderating and for expressing structures of sound. Diction and lexicon, from the everyday vernacular to the anachronistic, as well as syntax each contribute to directing the reader to become more astute to the physical characteristics of words in their pronunciations or word play, exuding a musicality in aggregate. Just as we would measure pitch, timbre, and tempo in music, poetry is structured around musical devices of language and rhythms of speech in which positive and negative spaces on the page become as important as the phonetically inspired text itself.[69]

Sound apprehension provides details of a surrounding environment, that which is proximate, harmonious, discordant, or locational, and gives the body another kind of

[68] Kinnell, "The Poetics of the Physical World," 113-114.
[69] Northrop Frye identifies *melos*, *lexis*, and *opsis* (music, diction, and spectacle) as three of the six aspects of poetry listed by Aristotle. Addressing the organisation of music and sound, he precises that "[a]pplying such a principle to poetry, we should say that when we find sharp barking accents, long cumulative rhythms sweeping lines into paragraphs, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, the spluttering rumble of long words, and the bite and grip of heavily stressed monosyllables, we are most likely to be reading a poet who is being influenced by music." Northrop Frye, *Sound and Poetry: English Institute Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), xiii.

emotional intelligence by using the sensory apparatus of the ear. Soundscapes[70] possess the foreknowledge of delimitation, tracing what is both within a space, and what is without, or on the outskirts. Therefore, the body, in its position to sound in space, originates an intentional spatiality of boundaries from the relationality or positioning to other bodies. *Melos*, or the musicality of verse, engenders acoustic space through references to sound which contributes to the construction of definitions and borders.[71] These sonorous reverberations and intonations localise us to the actions of the poem, and more specifically, to the locales in which their action is occurring or taking place. Conveying a compelling sensibility of language created by pre-verbal sounds, cascading notes, or even impenetrable, discordant resonances requires an acuity on the part of the poet, a pointed sensitivity to both rhythms and intonations of speech.

Initiated by his enthralment with the melodically inflected verses of Edgar Allan Poe, Kinnell's interest in the tonality and layering of sound—textures or sound sense in poetry achieved by the relations between words and syntactical patterns—found complicity in Whitman's loosely inflected, voluminous lines. He likens Whitman's sounds to the kinds of crooning one might hear between mother and baby, intimations where "the rhythms and sounds are not decorative but essential expressive elements."[72] By these methods, Whitman achieves a central intimacy with reality; this quintessence of interiority is characterised by Kinnell as "sympathetic identification,"[73] a notion touched upon in his evolution of Keatsian

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[70] The term 'soundscape' was first used in 1929 by Finnish geologist Johannes G. Granoe (1882-1956). Shuyao Huang and Joan Quionglin Tan, "The Loss and Backtracking of Sense and Place – Soundscapes in The Town and the City," *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature* 6, no. 6 (June 2018): 9.
"Soundscapes are the totality of all sounds within a location with an emphasis on the relationship between individual's or society's perception of and intersection with the sonic environment." Sarah R. Payne, William J. Davies, and Mags D. Adams, "Research into the Practical and Policy Applications of Soundscape Concepts and Techniques in Urban Areas," (London: DEFRA, 2007): 2.

[71] Murray Schafer was one of the earliest to assess that landscapes and spaces can be mapped out by sound, precursors to the physical drawing of boundaries. This creates its own sense of limits and definitions amid a sensory experience: "In the territorial calls of birds we encounter the genesis of the idea of acoustic space [...] The definition of space by acoustic means is much more ancient than the establishment of property lines and fences..." R.M. Schafer, *Our Sonic Environment and the Soundscape: The Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1977), 33.

[72] Kinnell has indicated this half-page as page 3.5, as a string of text to be added to page 3. Galway Kinnell, "NYPL Library Talk," 1992, Box 25, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

[73] Kinnell, "Poetry, Personality, and Death," 257.

negative capability as a challenge to persona. He expounds: "Whitman's line represents a way of approaching reality, of touching and imitating the inner shapes of things. If you put Whitman's line down on something, and let it dry a bit—and picked it up, it would retain the shape of what it lay upon. Its music is as if let out of its hiding inside speech."[74]

Kinnell's early poem, "First Song" (1951) is one to which he returns repeatedly in his recordings and poetry readings. It holds nostalgic value in a career of literary work, but also demonstrates his humble beginnings in evolving a poetic language: a poet's first song. Kinnell's initial encounters with poetry were of Poe, and he equated "Ulalume—a Ballad" (1847) as a kind of "secular equivalent—a poetic equivalent—of the Kingdom of Heaven," noting that the tones and rhythms of Poe's verse correlated to those of the King James Bible.[75] Kinnell discloses:

> I remember the moment I discovered the poems of Edgar Allan Poe. What was most startling to me was that the English language, which I mostly heard in the genial and endearing, and truly unmusical Rhode Island accent...could be transfigured and made to sing.[76]

"Ulalume," a piece conceived by Poe for elocutionary practice and recitation (at the urging of Reverend Cotesworth P. Bronson[77]), is particularly sonic, employing repetition of end-stopped lines and anaphora, deriving its rhetorical heft from syntactical parallelism:

> It was night, in the lonesome October
> Of my most immemorial year
> It was hard by the dim lake of Auber
> In the misty mid region of Weir—
> It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
> In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.[78]

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[74] Kinnell, NYPL talk, MC 64. In "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible," Kinnell experiments with this, demonstrating an increasing affordance to sensory elements like physical embodiment and touch: "kneel/ on the scorched earth/ in the shapes of men and animals" (*CP*, 248).
[75] Galway Kinnell and 'Rose' [Rose Styron?], "Transcript of interview," MC 64.
[76] Galway Kinnell, "Craft of Poetry," [n.d. 1977?], audio, 55:49. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 36). Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[77] Bronson was a well-known teacher of public speaking, having written a popular book, *Elocution, or Mental and Vocal Philosophy* (1845). Edgar Allan Poe, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol.1: Poems*, ed. T.O. Mabbott (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 410.
[78] Edgar Allan Poe, *Collected Poems* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2008), 84.

Through the sounds and echoes of Poe's poetry coupled with the notion that "language could be a kind of voiceful, musical utterance,"[79] Kinnell developed a preoccupation with the musicality of verse and the physical attributes of words; these tonal sounds and rhythms would remain a cornerstone of his poetic practice. Nods to Poe's metrically sonorous ballad are evident in Kinnell's "First Song," which features as the opening poem in *What a Kingdom It Was*. The poem is comprised of rhymed stanzas, three sextets with mostly end-stopped lines and slant rhyme:

> Then it was dusk in Illinois, the small boy
> After an afternoon of carting dung
> Hung on the rail fence, a sapped thing
> Weary to crying. Dark was growing tall
> And he began to hear the pond frogs all
> Calling on his ear with what seemed their joy.
>
> Soon their sound was pleasant for a boy
> Listening in the smoky dusk and the nightfall
> Of Illinois, and from the fields two small
> Boys came bearing cornstalk violins
> And they rubbed the cornstalk bows with resins
> And the three sat there scraping of their joy.
>
> It was now fine music the frogs and the boys
> Did in the towering Illinois twilight make
> And into dark in spite of a shoulder's ache
> A boy's hunched body loved out of a stalk
> The first song of his happiness, and the song woke
> His heart to the darkness and into the sadness of joy. (*CP*, 34)

"First Song" pivots between paradoxical emotions and feelings of contentedness begetting despondency (or vice versa) that Kinnell would continue to telegraph in his work; it bears further significance as the first poem that he showed to William Carlos Williams. Although Williams objected to its inauthenticity in principle, he advised Kinnell to write from a place of his own experience, and not from the perspective of a midwestern boy so removed from his East coast upbringing.[80] However, this was not a fanciful idea so much that it was a memory Kinnell had from his childhood in Rhode Island transposed onto the Illinois landscape of the

[79] Berkley Hudson, "The Sun Shines on Galway Kinnell," *Providence Sunday Journal* (5 May 1983): B-1.
[80] Robert Hass, 'Afterword' to *Black Light: A Novel* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015), 128.

nineteenth century. At the time, Kinnell was living in Chicago, and wrote this poem within the first month of moving there.[81] However, Williams did offer formative advice for the young poet,[82] as Kinnell considered the developmental beginnings of a more genuine poetry, moving out of third person and into the first, closer to the speaker's own lived experience.

Both the visual and the aural are entwined by the action of the poem, in concert with his diction describing a musical environment: "hear"; "calling"; "sound"; "pleasant"; and "listening" (*CP*, 34). Kinnell eventually moves past formal rhyme structure and accentual syllabic verse in his poetry, solidifying aspects of visuality combined with musicality; the music does not disappear merely because of a transition to free verse. In keeping with his guiding principles, Kinnell encourages readers and aspiring poets to be well-versed in meter, situating its implicit sonorousness at the centre of poetry. At "Sessions on Craft" in Squaw Valley (1991), he delivered a lecture in creative writing, maintaining that:

> It's absolutely necessary to know about meter, even if you never write a metrical line in your life because you have to know the principles or the basis on which the music of the great poetry in your own language was created. And, you not only need to know it theoretically, but to steep yourself in it, and really hear it, and let it flow through you, and to memorise the poems that have this music in them...[83]

In his own poetry, there are numerous rhetorical devices upon which he relies to create sound structure. By employing rhyming, onomatopoeia, refrain, consonance, among other techniques, Kinnell conveys a rich sound-sense that can be both harmonious and discordant. In particular, he activates our listening skills such that there is an inter-relationship between music and meaning whereby pattern, image, and sonic elements merge to craft what he deems a poetic "chant," opening sensory channels for the body.[84] The affordances of these incantations are metrical, emotive, musical, or rhythmical in nature, so that the specificity is

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[81] Kinnell and Terkel, WFMT, MS Am 3277.
[82] "William Carlos Williams was the first well-known poet I came to know in person. I would visit him from time to time and read him my new poems. I felt that he welcomed me into the community of poets, and he also gave me useful advice." Galway Kinnell interviewed by Jason Hollander *NYU Today* (2005) as quoted in *Bloodaxe Poetry Introductions: Jack Gilbert, Jane Hirschfield, Galway Kinnell and W.S. Merwin*, ed. Neil Astley (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2008), 54.
[83] Kinnell, "Sessions on Craft," MS Am 3277.
[84] Kinnell and Lopate, WNYC, MS Am 3277.

not of import, but rather, a sense of musicality (parameters defined by one's own self) that we hear, either when reading poetry or when engaging in an auditory relationship with it.

A likely inference for Kinnell's love of the musicality of the poetic line may be attributed to the necessary focus on the poet's voice to process or to hear the expression of free verse most clearly and unbounded, given its more prosaic verse form. Through these rhythms, it is possible to visually remove or to ignore the shapes of the words themselves, in turn listening only to the structured sound devices that dictate the poem. In essence, rhythm is achieved through a certain kind of approximation that comes from within us in fits and starts, layering a spatial dimension of locations and movements of our bodies, thereby shifting emplacement. Subsequently, it becomes one of primary emphasis in Kinnell's poetry, one that defies systematisation through an irregularity almost impossible to anticipate:

> I say this word confidently, as if we all know what it means, but the truth is no one knows what rhythm is. We all know what it feels like, though. We move in surges, as if to a beat, and have a sense of being carried forward. It is not an absolutely regular beat, there are little lingerings and hastenings. Thump thump thump thumpthump thump thump clang...[85]

Kinnell's fascination with rhythm underscores his adjacent relationship to the Beat Generation; whether directly or indirectly as part of his zeitgeist, cool-style jazz driven by syncopated rhythms and pulsed distortions, music that resisted homogeneity and uniform structure through polyphonic ensembles (e.g., Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* or Dave Brubeck's "Take Five") emerged in late 1950s New York City. As his engagement with Whitman continued, music—not simply processed through auditory channels but through pulsating rhythms enveloping the body—coupled with a certain technical precociousness, would imbue Kinnell's poetic verse, propelling him into an exploration of urban soundscapes.

Donald Hall highlights "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" (1960) as the logical starting point of Kinnell's career:

> I think that Galway Kinnell's poetry begins—no matter how many years it took to get started—with 'The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World.'

[85] Galway Kinnell, "To the Scholar-Athletes," 1993, Box 29, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

> This poem derives from Whitman without mimicking his manners, a poem of generosity and inclusiveness; a poem of experience in which experience is never subsumed by form—or by intellectual resolution, which for some critics is the rub.[86]

Kinnell's ambivalence in both confirming and denying Whitmanian inspiration[87] nevertheless directed his verse into a long, sustained narrative inspired by the Lower East Side of New York City. The epigram to the poem, written in German, translates to: "What a realm this little alley was," diminutive phrasing playing off the title of the volume itself, *What a Kingdom It Was*. The poem is a means of catenating both the wretchedness and the suffering that Kinnell felt were the raw truths of the world surrounding him in the post-World War II diaspora, environs turned especially acerbic in his post-Christian view. Divided into fourteen strophes, the poem is one of Kinnell's most ambitious as to length; each strophe is meant to roughly align with the fourteen stations of the cross, and visually, to impose the structural shape of a crucifix atop the Manhattan grid.[88] It progresses from day to night, and from its attention to detail may build a meticulous cartography of this corner of Alphabet City. Kinnell uses religious symbology and iconography as a framework of language of the sublime that we readily understand in the Western world, a way of comprehending magnitude and gravitas, but also, as a technique to denigrate religiosity.[89]

Describing his own neighbourhood, in what reads as a preparatory study for the poem itself, Kinnell discloses in a June 1958 letter:

> I live in the Lower East Side, around the corner from the open street market on

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[86] Hall, "Text as Test," 157.

[87] Kinnell vacillates on whether he was directly influenced by Whitman in this regard. In an interview with Ken McCullough (8 February 1976), he emphasises the necessity of reading poetic masters because it gives one "strength and identity." He insists that he had no intention of following Whitman in "The Last River" or in "Avenue C" despite appearances otherwise. Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 87. However, in a 1980 addendum to "Whitman's Indicative Words" he states: "The following fall, in New York City, living on East 5th Street, around the corner from Avenue C, I continued to read Whitman, and at the same time I undertook a rereading of the King James Bible. Just as Walt Whitman had wandered through market places and peered into shops from thresholds, so I loitered gazingly up and down my more desolate Avenue. My ambition became to sing the place into the music which 'Song of Myself' and the Bible had both set flowing within me." Galway Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 325.

[88] Kinnell explains the structure of the poem based on Jerusalem and the stations of the cross. Paul Mariani, "Kinnell's Legacy: On 'The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World,'" in *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell: The Wages of Dying*, ed. Howard Nelson (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1987), 193.

[89] For an example, see "The Olive Wood Fire" (*CP*, 337) in which Kinnell compares his son Fergus to the likeness of God.

> Avenue 'C.' Down the street is Hook and Ladder 11 […] There are Jewish bakeries and Puerto Rican vegetable and fruit stores. You can get the best bread in the world, and the greenest bananas this side of Puerto Rico […] It is not romantic at all, and never does one feel the presence of centuries in the place, though in the people you touch milleniums. They all speak a little English, and many speak it well, but they are more at home either in Spanish or Yiddish. But maybe it is nice anyway, a kind of ramshackled, decaying 'new world,' inhabited by the forlorn migrants from Eastern Europe and re-migrated children from the Carribean [sic].[90]

Kinnell depicts the underlying cultural fabric of the Lower East Side in the late 1950s whereby Avenue C functions as a central trope or figure, an enclave of pluralistic society and quotidian vernacular.

Within a conceptual framework of relationality, "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" serves a dual purpose in Kinnell's oeuvre. At the time of its publication, it was not only provocative in its form and content—a more daring departure for Kinnell which brought a flurry of attention—but also as a new mode of viewing the city by immersing oneself within it, in the more perambulating vernacular of psychogeography.[91] More widely, through the individualism of his bardic vision, he confronted marginality and near banishment in a section of the city primarily inhabited by immigrants and refugees. In our current moment, the poem functions more so in the vein of historicity, as an artifact of a mid-century New York City whose distinct character and narrative have been altered by gentrification.

We enter the poem non-linguistically, primed by aural perception in a city defined by the incessant clamour pulsing through it:

> pcheek pcheek pcheek pcheek pcheek
> They cry. The motherbirds thieve the air
> To appease them. A tug on the East River
> Blasts the bass-note of its passage, lifted
> From the infra-bass of the sea. A broom
> Swishes over the sidewalk like feet through leaves.
> Valerio's pushcart Ice Coal Kerosene

[90] Correspondence, 1 June 1958, C1680.
[91] Galway Kinnell and Fergus Kinnell, "Interviews," 26 November 2006, video, 01:01:36. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 18, Tape 12). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Moves clack
clack
clack (*CP*, 86)

The jolting, disjointed phrasing of bird refrain coupled with the low status sound of the tugboat situate us, grounding both speaker and reader in place in the regular hum of Avenue C. The cries of baby birds signal the beginning of the day, primitive sounds heralding the dawn and attuning the seasonality of the poem to the warmer months. As the city awakens from its slumber, the stressed and unstressed repetition of "pcheek" (*CP*, 86) renders breathlessness from its consonant cluster, reinforcing a realistic interpretation of the monotonous vocalisations of baby birds in the nest. The poem lends to being read aloud, with the bunched consonants providing a certain musicality of expression; unlike a digraph, whose oral ligature blends into tone, we can parse both sounds of each consonant when we pronounce them, allowing the voiceless stop phoneme of the puffed /p/ and crisp /k/ to be articulated.

On a broken wheelrim. Ringing in its chains
The New Star Laundry horse comes down the street
Like a roof leak whucking into a pail.
At the redlight [sic], where a horn blares,
The Golden Harvest Bakery brakes on its gears,
Squeaks, and seethes in place. A propane-
gassed bus makes its way with big, airy sighs. (*CP*, 86)

The interchange of loud and soft, which designate sights and sounds of Avenue C, situate the reader whilst immersing us in an atmosphere of sibilant /s/: "squeaks"; "seethes"; and "big, airy sighs" (*CP*, 86), mapping space through soundscape. Movements of the rickety pushcart are echoed in the more graphic element of using the words in a concrete fashion to visually mimic surroundings of action and sound. Affording more currency to the visual space of the verse arranged on the page, both the onomatopoeia, and the music of the ordinary, become increasingly more apparent. We hear the "roof leak whucking," coupled with the even, clacking stride of a man as he leaves his doorway and turns the corner: "tic toc tic toc tic toc tic hurrah toc splat" (*CP*, 86-87). Kinnell experiments with the hard,

metronomic /c/ sound, then lifts it by the soft and blithe /h/ "hurrah," only to resume in "toc splat," like a rimshot or sting of percussion ending with a bang.

Although the ferry of Whitman's "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (1856) had long since been replaced by the Brooklyn Bridge (and epitomised by Hart Crane in "The River" section of "The Bridge" in 1930), Kinnell too, centres upon this body of water in "The River That is East" (1960).[92] In a collision of past and future, the hopeful optimism of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is matched by the boy in Strophe 2 who entertains illusions of grandeur, swinging his legs from the pier and wondering "if in some stateroom/ There is not a sick-hearted heiress sitting/ Drink in hand, saying to herself his name" (*CP*, 109). Yet Kinnell's growing intentions in the poem counteract this childish dream-state as cynicism takes root, for the boy presumably grows into the man in Strophe 3 who "has long since stopped wishing his heart were full/ Or his life dear to him" (*CP*, 109). The East River, or the "River of Tomorrow" (*CP*, 109), bears resemblance to the winding tributary of "The Last River," carrying material geographies to their extinction.

Analogous to "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," the poem opens through a proliferation of urban soundscapes inducing the aural. Kinnell achieves a sense of richness, depth, and cohesion through a maturity in perfecting this geographical imagination in his poetry by the more subdued, integrated verse. By gradually allowing it to develop and to manifest more instinctively over time, the sonic element recedes so that it does not seem deliberate in its effect, but rather, organically part of the poem in evoking the locality of the landscape.

One of the more significant elements of Kinnell's soundscapes is found in the enunciation, tone, intonation, and pacing of his poetry, which puts these more sonic elements into sharp relief. In 1965, Kinnell gave a poetry reading at the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan,

[92] Kinnell directly invokes Crane's "The Tunnel," Section VII of *The Bridge*. Crane pens: "Tomorrow,/ And to be...Here by the River that is East—/ Here at the waters' edge the hands drop memory;/ Shadowless in that abyss they unaccounting lie." Hart Crane, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 70-71.

and featured "The River That is East," "Title of Accusation," "Middle of the Way," and several others, including "The Fossils."[93] It is at these readings, surrounded by the engagement of a live audience, that Kinnell's diction finds its footing. His lines rhythmically roll off his tongue, a process by which he offers that "[p]erhaps giving readings also affects the music of the poems—it may lengthen the lines, give them more flowing cadences."[94] Through this current of inflected voice, and meandering line, he articulates the dream state of youth, heralding the future enunciated in "The River That is East." Each line of narrative is brought to life via the sonic triumphs of the poem, binding us in a locale delimited by an escalation of sound and echo verging on the corporeal: "clanging"; "booms"; "snowfall hitting the dirty water"; "white-winged gulls which shriek"; and "dangling/ Limp red hands, and screaming as they touch" (*CP*, 108-109). Kinnell focuses on the vocality of his words being formed and breathed out from his vocal apparatus, rising from the poet's very soma, and in turn, penetrating the flesh of others through a collective physicality and body of language.[95] Ultimately, the aural exchange with the audience functions as if listening to music, demarcating spatiality, and further integrating words into the body through a provocation of emotionally induced valences.

Physical Embodiment: Language as Speech Acts and Sexual Pleasure

In Section 5 of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman declares: "I too had receive'd identity by my body,/ That I was I knew was of my body, and what I should be I knew I should be of my body."[96] Whitman's poetic ethos, expounded through his innovation of free verse, enabled the kind of poetry Kinnell wished to create, writings which afforded access to the whole of language to address sexual freedom, nature, and vocality as well as the poet's fundamental role

[93] Kinnell, YM-YWHA, University of Buffalo.
[94] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 33.
[95] Kinnell, "Walt Whitman and Negative Capability," 221.
[96] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 123.

as witness-bearer and truth-teller.[97] By separating language from the self-conscious, he gave conscious experience an intentionality, reaffirming Kinnell's belief that anything could be expressed in poetry to capture the interiority of experience, the 'inner-life'[98] he so esteemed as elemental to his own work.

Unequivocally, Kinnell characterises Whitman's verse as therefore proposing a "new language" for American poetry whereby words are activated, physical entities for they are "contemporary, vivid, muscular, and at the same time fantastic, musical, and self-generating."[99] For Whitman, this is represented by the notion that his body creates and intertwines with the poem; bearing synonymity and metaphorical significance, in Whitman's texts it becomes impossible to have one without the other, as though he were laying out his corporeality on the page. However, for Kinnell's purposes, he carries this thought to further completion by asserting that words must be connected to reality to retain physicality. Poetry should bring the consciousness of existentiality down to the level of the lifeworld, to be rooted in what can be readily apprehensible as of the earth.[100]

By extension, Whitman opened opportunities and entanglements for the body in its spatial negotiations and complexities. He proffered a method for future poets like Kinnell to be inheritors, to carry the mantle in his spirit, as it were, and to confidently distil these experiences or frames of reference into poetry in ways they saw fit for the interval and historicity of their generations. Kinnell renegotiates using the body as universal language to affect an intentional dimensionality or delineation in spatial boundaries. Much like the aural imagination and the strictures of sensory experience, his tacit awareness is created from the relationality or the positioning of bodies to each other through a hermeneutics of witness and encounter.

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[97] "Through me forbidden voices,/ Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,/ Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 42.
[98] As Kinnell states of poetry that it is "the art without technique—An emotional life—a love of the world around one—a lack of inhibition—and the mother tongue." Galway Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, MC 64.
[99] Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, xviii.
[100] "What entrances Whitman is not words as such but what they render luminous." Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 316.

Acoustic music of the exterior environment animates "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," reflecting a post-industrial sensibility by which Kinnell fixates on disembodied and polymorphous soundscapes of an urban sphere. Counter to this, "There Are Things I Tell to No One" (1980) confronts the music of speech acts and pleasure in the interiority of the poet's sexual experience. From the title, we are instantly immersed in a world of utterance, confronting acts of discourse in a secretive world, as though we are vicarious witnesses on the precipice of a revelatory interval. Utilising tensions between music and silence to evoke memory, Kinnell ushers in an epiphanical moment of commonality to produce a verse of startling candour. In its construction, the poem relies on the spatio-temporal, configuring both embodiment and temporality to define place.

Kinnell originally published the poem in *Harper's* in 1979 under the title "There Are Things I Tell to No One but to the Poem," later collecting it in Part IV of *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*.[101] This auxiliary understanding of the poet solely addressing the poem complicates how we typify a poem which, on the surface, is a dramatic monologue. The change of title invites us to share parcels of information, emotion or knowledge the poet has otherwise withheld or refused to release into the world. From the outset of the first quatrain, Kinnell depicts a blatant sense of self-censoring, a desire to express the inner life which reveals itself in a heavenly or transcendent music, but which is blocked by an inability to speak freely and without limitations:

> There are things I tell to no one.
> Those close to me might think
> I was depressed, and try to comfort me.
> At such times I go off alone, in silence, as if listening for God. (*CP*, 320)

The second strophe qualifies the assertions of the first, using the virtue of happiness and implicit sadness as a binary separation by which spaces are drawn through abstraction:

> I say 'God'; I believe,
> rather, in a music of grace
> that we hear, sometimes, playing

[101] In answering correspondence on the subjects of poetry and drama, Kinnell writes: "Probably it's a matter of how one sees experience, or feels it, as outspoken conflict, or as silent rumination, that one tells to no one, except the poem." Galway Kinnell, "Letter to Lucille Saint-Peter," New York, NY (7 March 2000).

from the other side of happiness.
When we hear it and it flows
through our bodies, it lets us live
these days intensified by their vanity
worshipping, as the other animals do,
who live and die in the spirit
of the end, that backward-spreading
brightness. (*CP*, 320)

The repression and attendant dissipation of this self-consciousness will be contingent upon the ability to dissociate it, and to surrender to the embodiment of experience, thereby achieving attainment of a certain ecstatic experience. By submitting in this way, one can be overtaken by aurality, letting it define both dimensions and parameters of the body. This auditory event, and subsequent experientially defined reality, permits it to be the instrument by which the body acts as a receptor as well as an interpreter of music.

The phonemes of "God" and "grace" work particularly well in this instance to show interchangeability, in addition to Kinnell's willingness to work through the appropriate language to articulate his idea. "God" and "grace" are not merely monosyllabic words that impart a certain tuneful, guttural chiming, but also act as a metaphorical approximation of what Kinnell deems "the embodiment of the sacred character of life."[102] Granville Taylor attests that "[t]he 'music of grace' is Kinnell's 'flesh made word'" because "[i]t comes from the body and flows through the body."[103] Additionally, grace itself is anthropomorphised, with the ability to speak "in notes struck/ or caressed or blown or plucked/ off our own bodies: *remember/ existence already remembers/ the flush upon it you will have been,/ you who have reached out ahead/ and touched the dust we become*" (*CP*, 320).

Here, Kinnell employs two distinctive visual-verbal aspects to enhance his objectives in this section of the poem. The first takes the form of the italicised portion, used to define the act of "grace" speaking. In concert with the plain text of the lyric speaker, it functions to delimit voices as an anthem and refrain, echoing the mimetic call-and-response examined

[102] Kinnell et al., "Being with Reality," 174.
[103] Granville Taylor, "From Irony to Lyricism: Galway Kinnell's True Voice," in *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell*, ed. Nancy Lewis Tuten (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 223.

earlier in "The Poem." Secondly, participial adjectives with single stresses such as "struck," "blown," and "pluck" build upon each other as though a crescendo of notes, reinforcing that acts of music inhabit a haptic sphere, the tactile confluence of mouth, fingers, and hands.

This upsurge, steadily building and rising, logically leads into the third stanza in which Kinnell brings an additional human element or companion to the lyric speaker; situating vocality in the flesh, the cries of love-making and jouissance are counterbalanced by the wails portending death: "Just as the supreme cry/ of joy also has a ghastliness to it,/ as though it touched forward / into the chaos where we break apart,/ so the death-groan, though sounding/ from another direction, carries us back/ to our first world" (*CP*, 320-321). These utterances achieved through orgasm enact a primal scream that is both nascent and extreme, as Kinnell cleverly plays with language construction and the spondaic "death-groan." In French, of which he was a skilled translator of Villon, Yvan Goll, and Yves Bonnefoy, orgasm is 'la petite mort'—literally 'small death' or 'little death'—which comes from the notion that once the heights of pleasure are reached, some of the life forces are successively lost. Through intense release, individuals experience an almost out-of-body experience akin to full-body shivers and a loss of consciousness.[104] Kinnell explores this notion more fully in "Last Gods," a poem centring around invented mythology which Frank Lentricchia reasons as the "quintessence of Kinnell's anti-metaphysics of the erotic body."[105] It recounts the deaths of gods who traded their divinity for mortality and passionate, carnal love, gifting humans with their ecstatic cries: "At last they call out/ in the tongue of the last gods,/ who refused to go,/ chose death, and shuddered/ in joy and shattered in pieces,/ bequeathing their cries/ into the human throat" (*CP*, 412).

The sounds of two lovers united in climax produces music which emanates from the body, initiated non-verbally, and derived from the deepest reaches of communication and

[104] *La petite mort* is particularly associated with female orgasm. The term is said to date back to sixteenth-century French forensic and barber surgeon, Ambroise Paré. Manuella Kiala, "'La petite mort': ce phénomène post-orgasme terrifiant," *Le Messager* (28 Aug. 2024): https://www.lemessager.fr/649322292/article/2024-08-28/la-petite-mort-ce-phenomene-post-orgasme-terrifiant
[105] Lentricchia, "Modernist without a Handle," 415.

sexual expression.[106] These cries carry us forward and backward, hurtling through time and space, from our "first world" (*CP*, 321) in which we cry ourselves into being at birth, and then foreshadowing and touching death as we recede and advance through the timeline. This is a temporal transition that endures far beyond our transient reality: "*remember/ existence already remembers/ the flush upon it you will have been,/ you who have reached out ahead/ and touched the dust we become*" (*CP*, 320). Concurrently, we are hovering in a paradoxical plane, flanked by happiness and ghastliness, where we may experience both registers through a transgression of abstract boundaries. The nature of our existence is afforded a sentience, whereby external space unites with internal psyche, overturning a priori arguments of logical reasoning in favour of the empirical evidence of sensory experience.

The poem locates chaos as aloneness, "into the chaos where we break apart" (*CP*, 321), or as an entropic site of loneliness, a silence that exists once the cries of passion recede:[107]

> Then the last cry in the throat
> or only imagined into it
> by its threads too wasted to make sound,
> will disappear into the music
> that carries our time on earth
> away, on the catafalque
> of bones marrowed with god's-flesh,
> thighs bruised by the blue flower,
> pelvis that makes angels shiver to know down here we make love
> with our bones,
> I want to live forever. (*CP*, 321)

Moving through the act of crying as a melody or voice of human music signalling life and death—the intake of breath at birth, at joyful fruition, or finally in the death rattle—we arrive at the central message of a desire to circumvent mortality stated by the lyric speaker as plainspokenly and wilful a line as we could find in Kinnell's work: "I want to live forever" (*CP*, 321). The speaker desires immortality unequivocally; however, there is solace presented by the spatiality that gathers endemic forces and musical currents together, for these are: "the

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[106] This is an idea that Kinnell borrows from Jean-Paul Sartre, "that language comes from the deepest place, from sex, particularly when love is involved." Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 112.
[107] Through the cessation of music, we may connect this to "Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock": "The song of the whippoorwill stops/ And the dimension of depth seizes everything" (*CP*, 147).

spaces that gather into one/ sound the waves of spent existence/ that flow toward, and toward, and on which we flow/ and grow drowsy and become fearless again" (*CP*, 322).

Likewise, in "Flower of Five Blossoms" (1990) Kinnell works toward reconciliation of some of the overarching premises set out in earlier works such as "The Poem" and "There Are Things I Tell to No One." He revisits a commonality of themes, pivoting from the acts of contemplating metapoesis and of writing poetry, to an intense dialogue with the poem itself, now extending this direct address to an orchid through an overarching metaphor of a musical sonata. His archives at University of New Hampshire reflect approximately thirty-one drafts of this poem, most of which contain extensive notes and edits, composed between March and May 1989.[108]

Once more, Kinnell's technique of pastiche writing is evident, with multiple drafts typed with handwritten edits, then with cut and pasted text glued over top or onto a clean sheet. Within the archive, as noted previously, there are many successive drafts of this poem; multiple print-outs of the same sheets and pages of the poem might suggest Kinnell brought it to his creative writing poetry class at NYU for student critique and feedback. Furthermore, in his faxed letter to Olds, he details that a conversation between him and "V." prompted his writing "Flower of Five Blossoms." Indeed, whilst abroad at the Bellagio Study and Conference Centre in Italy, he faxed a copy of the poem to Virginia Kamsky on 3 March 1989, subsequently writing twelve pages of draft manuscript over the course of a week.[109]

In his direct discourse to an orchid reminiscent of an ode, Kinnell's exploration of the geographical imagination through sensorial witness finds its achievement through musicality and awakened sensuality in "Flower of Five Blossoms." By virtue of its thematic undertaking,

[108] Galway Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
[109] Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms," MC 64. In an initial search in the archives, I was unable to discern what precisely transpired in his conversation with Virginia Kamsky, and why it was so impactful in writing this specific poem. Kinnell writes to Olds: "My last conversation with V. —about two weeks ago—was so awful it set me free, and in the last week these twelve pages appeared, as you can see chaotic and possibly without a future." Galway Kinnell, "Fax from Galway Kinnell to Sharon Olds," 30 May 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

it follows suit from "Agape," "Who, on Earth," "Divinity," and "Last Gods" in *When One*, a string of poems centring around desire, lust, and lovemaking. Whereas Whitman was spontaneous and spoke startling truths, his early adoption of sexual liberation in poetry endorsed transgressions of language which freed Kinnell to write without self-consciousness, and to glorify the physical and the primal in extolling the corporeal entity.[110] Composed in audacious and provocative verse, "Flower of Five Blossoms" makes this purpose manifest, exploring elements of music and carnality whilst explicitly addressing the female anatomy through earthly beauty and grace.[111]

In the poem, Kinnell attempts to straddle a fine line between cliché objectification and tasteful meditation, utilising the orchid as both muse and a more universalising "I," conflating subject and object in a manner consistent with Keatsian negative capability. Moreover, each of the five blossoms in the poem is correlated with a different woman in his life that he has loved in various dimensions and scales of Platonic love. Kinnell includes his mother, who he puts in a place of prominence as representing the first bloom of the orchid in the drafts; he later moves her into position as the fifth blossom in the *Collected Poems* version. In his faxed draft to Olds, he describes the experience of childbirth as a counter to pleasure and arousal, and yet still centred on a distinctly sexual plane:

> except for one constant, the first blossom,
> which would always be my mother.
> Strange for I have been talking of sexual resemblances.
> Yet not strange, for it was as a sexual creature
> she seized me into existence, it was through her vagina,
> trespassed by a man one way, transpierced by three babies
> the other,
> I was dragged out alive.[112]

[110] Stephen Matterson deliberates on the disingenuousness of Whitman and his obfuscation of meaning, bringing into relief Whitman's tactics for deflection, "from his typical evasiveness" to his "outright deception." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, xvi.
[111] Kinnell was adamant that no subject matter should be prohibited or verboten from one's literary practice. Galway Kinnell and Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, 23 July 1991, audio, 29:37. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 8). Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[112] Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms," MC 64.

An integral part of Kinnell's desire in writing "Flower of Five Blossoms" is to embrace a notion of embodied knowledge,[113] and his own concept of bisexuality by which we are bifurcated into both 'female' and 'male' sensibilities. In a putative sense of mutual co-existence with each defined by the other, Kinnell brings both sets of anatomy into the framework of the poem:

> *Phalaenopsis*, sensual Orchidaceae,
> sometimes, out of the corner of the eye, your blossoms perched on
> their twigs seem true to your name, 'moth-like,'
> and there, in the salep risen out of the pot of chipped bark, is the
> origin of your family name, ὀρχις, 'testicle.' (*CP*, 413-414)

In her assessments of Kinnell's draft manuscripts, Sharon Olds believes this duality to be successfully communicated through the verse, noting that "subliminally the speaker is the flower too, is the woman each of us each aspect of nature [sic]."[114] Much like Hall, Robert Bly, and Hayden Carruth, Olds consistently and critically engages with drafts of Kinnell's work, an "ecology of writing" which will feature prominently in Chapter Four.[115] Through her extensive draft notes related to iterative revisions of "Flower of Five Blossoms," she guides Kinnell to mediate an exchange of ideas, and to fulfil the highest sense of what he desires for this poem. As she states of the finished work, "I love the way the poem's [sic] progressed, toward clarity, calm for all its wildness, & a kind of emotional cleanness (the opposite of self-pity)."[116]

Indeed, the orchid's refinement defines the poem's exchange with the symphonic—"You yourself are already a kind of music—"[117] and we are shown how song informs language directly, through the physical shapes of words that are formed and uttered in the poet's mouth, and in the desire to speak from "the vestibule opening into the center of being;/…/ and find there, like a kiss that has a soft lick in it, like 'blossoms,'/ the name of this place and speak it" (*CP*, 414). Lovemaking breaks the silence thereby pulling the life utterance out of the stillness.

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113 "In reality, the mind is only a denser place in the flesh." Kinnell, "Poetry, Personality, and Death," 266.
114 Sharon Olds, "Fax from Sharon Olds to Galway Kinnell," 17 March 1989 [originally hand-dated 15 March 1989], Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
115 Van Hulle, *Tracing Creativity in Literature*, 95.
116 Olds, "Fax to Galway Kinnell," 17 March 1989, MC64.
117 Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms," MC 64.

In this way, a synaesthetic experience is created by visual and aural aspects of this poem, articulated through the orality of forming words physically in the poet's mouth; breaking the silence of the ocular gaze, it moves from one aesthetic pleasure to another.

Much of Kinnell's efforts are expended in trying to access harmony and likeness through the orchid's self-expression, and to discern the pattern of life, contemplating whether living itself is an "interlude,"[118] through shifting material geographies. Kinnell suggests earth's unremitting renewal and commitment to the cyclicality of life and death, through contrasts between the terrain and the ephemerality of both individual and flower. He celebrates the dead of winter, the notion that earth still retains its vigour, able to add layers of complexity and growth. His verse thus tenders the provocative, as he peregrinates through rhythmic, physical, seductive language. The lyric speaker details:

> when out there earth
> draws down on top of herself yet another of her freezing sleeping
> clothes,
> but underneath is awakening…
> becoming…blowsining…blissamous…(*CP*, 416)

Kinnell's prodigious sense of vitality recalls Whitman's "This Compost" (1856) in which much of the first strophe is spent wading through tensions, thus being sickened by "sour dead" and "foul liquid and meat":

> Now I am terrified at the Earth, it is that calm and patient,
> It grows such sweet things out of such corruptions,
> It turns harmless and stainless on its axis, with such endless successions of
> diseas'd corpses,
> It distils such exquisite winds out of such infused fetor,
> It renews with such unwitting looks its prodigal, annual, sumptuous crops,
> It gives such divine materials to men, and accepts such leavings from them at last.[119]

By the close of the poem, Whitman trades revulsion for festivity, in which his fears of disease are finally allayed by the biological phases of growth and decay concomitant with earth's replenishment.

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[118] In the draft version, 'life' is exchanged for 'consciousness': "But maybe it is the other way round as well, "everything dies and sings/ And consciousness is an interlude/ when, still humming, we can look up, gawk about, imagine the world, fall back into singing." Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms," MC 64.
[119] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 276-277.

As an archival draft, "Flower of Five Blossoms" is exemplative of Kinnell's generalised preoccupation with detailing descriptions of sound that seem more prominent through the drafts as compared to the published versions which offer more succinct, cinched forms, and tighter verse lines. Kinnell addresses the orchid bloom:

> I want to play you music,
> show you a violin
> drawing such cold, transfigured life as you are
> out of itself—possibly a sonata by Brahms,
> because 'Brahms' is close to the sound thinking of you shapes
> in my mouth,
> the slowest passages, when the bow hairs
> rest nearly immobile on the strings, as lips might,
> on lips, in stillest kissing, when a tongue
> might be lying against a tooth in the other mouth, one can't say,
> the bow's tremors at what is to come
> all that shakes any sound out of them at all.[120]

Olds is pointed in her notes about this portion, demanding greater clarity from Kinnell (Appendix 2). Internalising her comments, his revised stanza positions the speaker as a deictic centre— "I put on a sonata by Brahms/ and I was standing at the mantelpiece/ just as the slowest passage began" (*CP*, 414)—encoding a sense of space and time that strengthens the stanza overall. As presented in *Collected Poems*, a more lyrical, flowing narrative, and a characteristically Whitmanian aside in the anticipatory moment it builds through parenthetically enclosed text:

> A few minutes ago, I put on a sonata by Brahms
> ('Brahms,' nearly the sound dwelling on you forms in my mouth)
> and I was standing at the mantelpiece
> just as the slowest passage began, that moment
> when the bow rests nearly immobile on the strings
> —as mouths might, on mouths, in stillest kissing,
> when a lip could be lying against a tooth in the other mouth, one
> can't say—
> the bow's tremblings at what is about to happen
> all that shakes any sound out of the strings at all (*CP*, 414)

[120] Kinnell, "Flower of Five Blossoms," MC 64.

In turn, the music that is described in the drafts becomes absorbed into the musicality of the final verse structure and wording, an achievement which Kinnell realises fully in "Saint Francis and the Sow," appearing in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*.

"Who touches this touches a man": Kinnell's Haptic Turn[121]

Just as Kinnell turns from the hierarchical matrix of ocular-centrality to aurality, he shifts perspectives to find new ground for his geographical imagination through the universality of tactility and touch. Revealing his greater interlocution with corporeal experience and aesthetic form, in "Poetry, Personality, and Death" (1971), he describes vision and how a succession of sensorial discoveries complement and satiate our ideas of knowledge. Kinnell theorises:

> A baby takes pleasure in seeing things, yes, but seeing is a first act. For fulfilment the baby must reach out, grasp it, put it in his mouth, suck it, savor it, taste it, manipulate it, smell it, physically be one with it. From here comes our notion of heaven itself. Every experience of happiness in later life is a stirring of that ineradicable memory of once belonging wholly to the life of the planet.[122]

Initiated by haptic experience, Kinnell activates both the sensibilities and the interpretative dynamics of carnal hermeneutics, a preoccupation with the body as a mediator of sensation, orientation, and meaning.[123]

Solely based around notions of tactility and the haptic, "Saint Francis and the Sow," one of Kinnell's most anthologised and well-known poems, focuses on an intimate moment between Saint Francis, the patron saint of animals, and a mother pig. The pure and elegant simplicity of this poem is defined by two sections that function within a single-sentence structure:

> The bud
> stands for all things,
> even for those things that don't flower,
> for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;

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[121] From Whitman's poem, "So Long!" in "Songs of Parting." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 372.
[122] Galway Kinnell, "Poetry, Personality, and Death," 266.
[123] Richard Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, eds. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 16-17.

though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on its brow
of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within, of self-blessing;
as Saint Francis
put his hand on the creased forehead
of the sow, and told her in words and in touch
blessings of earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and
blowing beneath them:
the long, perfect loveliness of sow. (*CP*, 285-286)

In the opening of the poem, touch is a generalised concept, before the reader is drawn in closer to its activation as a therapeutic of the body between Saint Francis and the sow. By alluding to somatic trauma or suffering— "even for those things that don't flower" (*CP*, 285)—Kinnell suggests a resolute strength of will and dogged resiliency by which the bud stands strident, defiant, and strong; it is firm in its acknowledgement of self-worth whether or not it reaches fruition.

Given Kinnell's recurring fascination with flora and its metaphorical attributes, it is worth comparing this bud in context with "Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock" (1964). Kinnell's title ironically denies the concept of herding, by focusing on a single flower, with the lyric speaker sharing that "The last memory I have/ Is of a flower that cannot be touched" (*CP*, 148). This flower transitions from bud to bloom successively, but in so doing, hastens its own inexorable death; it is a flower which only reaches a sense of self-forgiveness nearly too late to matter: "The petals begin to fall, in self-forgiveness./ It is a flower. On this mountainside it is dying" (*CP*, 151). Whilst now too fragile to touch, the flower has already been kissed by the tactility of the sun's radiance and visited by pollinating insects that have encouraged it to reach this stage of its life cycle. The speaker precises that "In its covertness

it has a way/ Of uttering itself in place of itself" (*CP*, 151), an overtone suggestive of the inadequacy of language to stand in opposition to the inescapable forces of the physical world.[124]

Progressing to the second section, in which Saint Francis and the sow feature prominently, there is an important distinction to be made that touch is in fact a mediation through the flesh. Although Plato denigrated touch and taste as illusory senses in his valuation of sight as paramount, it was Aristotle who first insisted on the mediating character of tactility.[125] As a place where we are most alert to preconscious memories and past traumas, the sense of touch—that is to say, to touch and to receive touch— instantly connects us with the other.[126]

More specifically, there is also an implication that touch runs so deeply that we can reach the soul. Aristotle argued in *De Anima* (Book II) that touch is the most universal of the senses,[127] paving the way for the Whitmanian hermeneutics that touch is also the most democratic, Whitman's image of things pleasing the soul underscored and facilitated by touch; this pertains to a soul conflated with the body that Kinnell would find so readily presented in Whitman's body of work, and to which he would respond in his own: "Come said my soul, Such verses for my body let us write, (for we are one)."[128] A culmination in the haptic is mirrored in Kinnell's "The Night" (*Imperfect Thirst*, 1994), which depicts making love so deeply it is enacted with bones, just as in "There Are Things I Tell to No One": "Their bones almost hit—the purpose of flesh/ may be to keep the skeletons from bruising each other [...] They

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[124] In *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*, Kinnell seems to have developed a sense of the haptic he did not possess in the *Flower Herding* volume, exemplified by "The Apple Tree": "We create without turning,/ without looking back, without ever/ really knowing we create./ Having tasted/ the first flower of the first spring/ we go on,/ we don't turn again/ until we touch the last flower of the last spring" (*CP*, 324).

[125] Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," 19.

[126] Ibid., 21-22.

[127] *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 554-581.

[128] This epigraphic poem is found on the recto of the title page from the 'deathbed edition' of *Leaves of Grass* (1891-1892). R.W. French, "*Leaves of Grass*: 1891-92 edition," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 379. Whitman refers to the inextricable link and dialogism between body and soul in "Eidólons," a preoccupation of metaphysical poetry. For similar dynamics of body and soul preceding Whitman, see Andrew Marvell's "A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body" and Yeats's "A Dialogue of Self and Soul." Unknown author, *The New York Daily Tribune* (19 Feb. 1876): https://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/reviews/rivulets/anc.00200.html

lie holding each other./ For a moment the glue joining body and soul does not ache" (*CP*, 447).[129] Once more, Kinnell spirals back in his intentions, reinforcing a notion of the body as a therapeutic repository of interpretation, experience, and healing.

Although there is no explicit mention or selection of vocabulary referring to music in "Saint Francis and the Sow," it is one of the most musical of all of Kinnell's poems in its delivery. Assuredly mellifluous, having thoroughly internalised these elements in the verse by incorporating and embedding the resounding tones, it demonstrates an achievement of Whitmanian stylistic elements and rhetorical devices including cataloguing, anaphora/repetition, and long, cadenced lines. The purposefully paced syntax mimics both the action and the sustained interaction between St. Francis and the mother pig. Hank Lazer characterises this duration, amplifying that "Kinnell gives us a long moment" for "in the musical elaboration of a single sentence, Kinnell allows the moment to labor, dance, and play toward its fit and powerful conclusion."[130]

Indeed, the alliterative musicality of "from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine" (*CP*, 286) with a proliferation of sibilant /s/ sounds and single-stressed words flanking an amphibrach is quite successful. Expanding and multiplying this technique, Kinnell's linguistic construction continues to induce wonder through the catenating phrase "to the sheer blue milken dreaminess spurting and shuddering/ from the fourteen teats into the fourteen mouths sucking and blowing beneath them:/ the long perfect loveliness of sow" (*CP*, 286). Kinnell develops an heuristic element for the sow in which she is reminded—even granted the permission she perhaps will not grant herself in her pathos—of a haptic perception by which she learns self-appreciation. Through his appropriation of calming touch and connectivity, Saint Francis gives of himself to be fully present; touching the sow and being touched by her in kind reaffirms their differences. In these moments of close contact, they

[129] Whitman's lines from Section 3 of "I Sing the Body Electric" might be less physical in their tactility, but no less intimate: "You would wish long and long to be with him,/ you would wish to sit by him/ in the boat that you and he might touch each other." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 74.
[130] Hank Lazer, "That Backward-Spreading Brightness," in *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell*, ed. Nancy Lewis Tuten (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 87.

hold space together, building a sense of trust, reciprocity, and empathy in the otherness each brings into a lifeworld defined by "a self carnally located 'here' and an other located 'there.'"[131]

Traces of Sound in Memory

In *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*, we recognise Kinnell's distinct preoccupation with things finding permanence, drawn from the bravado of approaching death of *The Book of Nightmares* that is then mitigated and tempered by a poet's confrontation in writing a subsequent volume of real-life, quantifiable loss. Kinnell composes three poems in this volume that he uses to honour his mother, Elizabeth Mills Kinnell, through elegiac verse. The first two, entitled "Goodbye," and the short, single sextet "Looking at Your Face," act as prologues to "The Last Hiding Places of Snow." In "Goodbye," he announces:

> My mother, poor woman, lies tonight
> in her last bed. It's snowing, for her, in her darkness.
> I swallow down the goodbyes I won't ever get to use,
> tasteless, with wretched mouth-water;
> whatever we are, she and I, we're nearly cured. (*CP*, 305)

Kinnell precises her location such that a comparison is drawn between her inhabiting a final resting place, whilst his grief, as lyric speaker, suffuses the poem. Kinnell flashes between scenes, from Elizabeth's deathbed to a poetry class in Pittsburgh, ultimately conjuring a world bereft of its inhabitants:

> one day the streets all over the world will be empty—
> already in heaven the golden cobblestones have fallen still—
> everyone's arms will be empty, everyone's mouth, the Derry earth.
> It is written in our hearts, the emptiness is all.
> That is how we have learned, the embrace is all. (*CP*, 306)

Kinnell's non-vocalised words are rooted in the body where, disrupted from any outpouring, they will remain suppressed within him. Whilst the poem also establishes the sustained metaphor of snow that figure throughout poems for Elizabeth, there is a distinct echo of

[131] Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," 22.

"Freedom, New Hampshire," Kinnell's elegy for his brother Derry, referring once more to the renewal of life wrought by demise and decay, and the vitality of the earthen landscape: "Sprouting good Irish grass," the graveskeeper blarneys,/ he can't help it,/ "a sprig of shamrock, if they were young" (*CP*, 306).

Similarly, "The Last Hiding Places of Snow" is a means of Kinnell coming to terms not solely with Elizabeth's dying, but with his own absence from her final moments. The speaker possesses a fixated desire to rectify what seems an injustice, illustrated through his use of rhetorical accent:

> I was not at her bedside
> that final day, I did not grant her ancient,
> huge-knuckled hand
> its last wish, I did not let it
> let go of the son's hand gradually—and so
> hand her, with some steadiness, into the future.
>
> […]
>
> *Why did* you come so late?
> *Why* will you go too early?
>
> I know there are regrets
> we can never be rid of,
> that fade but never leave:
> permanent remorse. (*CP*, 309-310)

Metaphorically scattered as snow, his mother can be found in physical crevices of memory and meaning, both literal and figurative hiding places "among the old endless blue lightedness/ of stars," and "where snow/ falls flakes down fragile softly/ falling until I can't see the earth/ any longer, only its shrouded shapes" (*CP*, 311). Visually, Kinnell purposefully slows the pace of the poem by spacing words farther apart ("falls"; "flakes"; "down"; "fragile"; "softly"; "falling"), mimicking the soft, wayward descent of snowflakes before they are abruptly carried away. Tracing the way back after her passing, the speaker reaches an interface where life and death meet, at an aperture where there is a way in, but not yet for him: "at the gates of the world, between/ holy ground/ and ground of almost all its holiness gone, I loiter" (*CP*, 309-310). This demarcation or boundary can be viewed as an open point of access, an interstitial

space where humanity recedes into death.[132] Kinnell suggests this previously in *The Book of Nightmares*, proclaiming in "Lastness": "Here, between answer/ and nothing, I stand" (*CP*, 272), a cavernous space between articulated words and utter emptiness.

In his grief, the lyric speaker uncovers pain connected to both inner and outer worlds by language, a landscape defined by the soundscape of guttural "sighs" and "groans" (*CP*, 307) emanating from both the human body and the forest:

> Only the struggle for breath
> remained: groans made
> of all the goodbyes ever spoken
> all turned meaningless; surplus world sucked back
> into a body laboring to live
> as far as it could into death; and past it, if it must.
>
> There is a place in the woods
> where one can hear
> such sounds: sighs, groans
> seeming to come
> from the purplish murk of spruce boughs at dusk,
> from the glimmer-at-night of white birches,
> from the last hiding places of snow,
>
> wind,
> that's all, blowing
> across obstructions: every stump
> speaks,
> spruce needles play out of it
> the sorrows cried into it somewhere else. (*CP*, 307-308)

Irene Klaver reasons that "[b]oundaries are places where different entities, different modes of being, different ontological domains, meet, interact with each other, give and take from each other—places of heterogeneity that call for renegotiation or translation."[133] In the poem, Kinnell enunciates the role of the more-than-human world as possessing its own mimicry of human language. It acts as a useful metric for discerning the communicative and intermediary sounds between Kinnell's own consciousness, and the ones held in embodied memory. Human speech reverberates through the trees in the woods, transformed from language and whimpers, except now existing in physically ravaged form, "shredded down to a hiss/ from

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[132] Sara R. Greaves, "La co-constitution du texte et du contexte: une approche éco-phénoménologique des *Excavations* de Peter Riley," *Études britanniques contemporaines* 30 (2006): https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.12434
[133] Greaves, "*Excavations* de Peter Riley," online.

being blown through this valley of needles" (*CP*, 308). Sound, as opposed to time, remains as a spectre in memory, worked out through the gradual evolution of grief and diminishment of clear language; the way back through his mother's love is the point where language intersects with the communication of pain. It becomes the "moment the voice 'changes' and stops/ murmuering of ev rlasting things [sic] but sings final things"[134] from a "runner of wasted breath" (*CP*, 309).

The role of sound, musicality, and its evocation of memory is significant in another of Kinnell's foundational elegies, that for his father, James Scott Kinnell. In stark contrast to the nonlexical language of sighs, groans, and hissing as seen in "The Last Hiding Places of Snow," Kinnell foregrounds the poem in the soundscape of the quotidian, of everyday noises. "Memories of My Father" (1990), which figures in the opening section of *When One*, memorialises James, an immigrant from Edinburgh, Scotland who worked odd jobs and taught woodworking at the local high school in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. James instilled within his son Galway a love of creating with one's own hands, as Kinnell writes: "He is ~~my path to~~ the past. / Where hard labor was born and mostly died."[135] Although his father passed away in 1948, it was not until the late 1980s that Kinnell wrote a dedicated poem in his honour, a timeframe which points up the complicated nature of Kinnell's processing of their relationship.[136]

There are numerous drafts of this poem collected in the archives, many of which are quite personal in detail; in some cases, they bear little resemblance to the more sanitised version found in *Collected Poems*. What is clear from the proliferation of drafts of this poem is Kinnell's unflappability, a fixated and steady pursuit to find the right words, and conceivably to inhabit preoccupation with his father's absence and loss as a mechanism of consolation.

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[134] Galway Kinnell, "Memories of My Father" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
[135] Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.
[136] The margins of these drafts contain annotations which Kinnell works through in his composition of the text. He states of his father: "His death was dreadful to me. I loved him when I was a child. I needed to restore the bond: to feel his respect and, more than that, pure affection." Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.

Finding resolution in the enclosed spaces of verse as well as through the writing process of elegiac poetry, Kinnell achieves gradual closure at the end of these domestic elegies, an "internal shape of a poem"[137] presented as a reconciliation with death as an inescapable generality. Working unhurried and measured through his grief to uncover a process of healing is a lesson he gleaned from his disappointment with Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" (1865-66). Kinnell has been unreserved in his critique of the poem, expressing that "[i]t accepts death too eagerly for a poem written on the death of another [...] Whitman's acceptance of death may be compared with premature ejaculation: he is so terrified of death, that he rushes to die. The greatest elegies first howl, before they attempt to heal."[138]

The archival drafts were originally entitled "Memory of My Father," and by this distinction it is likely that Kinnell changed the title so it would bear allusion to, but not replicate, Patrick Kavanagh's own "Memory of My Father" (coincidentally, Kavanagh's father was also named James). In the drafts pertaining to "Memories of My Father," Kinnell has a paper on which he has written the first stanza of Kavanagh's poem, along with part of the second: "Every old man I see/ Reminds me of my father/ When he had fallen in love with death/ One time when sheaves were gathered/ That man I saw in Gard..."[139] Although Kavanagh's sixteen-line poem is much shorter than Kinnell's which spans seven strophes, there is an itinerant atmosphere or peripatetic sense about it that "Memories of My Father" also shares, gesturing to the framework of an anonymous father who shirks off the spectre of death.[140] Contained in the same folder are earlier drafts of shorter poems such as "Dark Streets" and "Dust of Snow" (uncollected poems by Kinnell) suggesting multiple drafts were reconstituted or merged, and then later transformed to configure his elegiac poem for James. "Dark Streets" reiterates song as an exercise in expelling grief, inducing its "absolute

[137] Kinnell likens this to a "living texture" found in "Song of Myself," in which the poem completes its subject as "an exploration of an alienated condition and, to some degree, a resolution or understanding of it. I would call that its true form, its essential form." Kinnell and Gardner, "An Interview," 429-430.
[138] Galway Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, MC 64.
[139] Galway Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.
[140] Ibid.

forgetting-spell,"[141] and echoing the beginning and final strophes of "Memories of My Father" as a preparatory text (Appendix 3).

In structuring our reading of this elegy, both "The Tragedy of Bricks" and "Kilauea," which precede "Memories of My Father" sequentially in *When One* should be read as precursive, foundational texts relevant to our interpretation. Much as "Goodbye," in conjunction with "Looking at Your Face," act as proto-knowledge for "The Last Hiding Places of Snow," these poems are preliminary in the address of his father, and in the ways in which Kinnell appropriates the language of sound to conjure memory. In his review, Stephen Yenser advances that Kinnell is "*making* words out of sound as a potter shapes a pot from clay," and that "[t]o Kinnell's good ear all creation is a heterogeneous orchestra."[142] As the first poem of the volume, "The Tragedy of Bricks" introduces Kinnell's emphasis on ordinary, monotonous sounds of bricklaying, the "slub clump slub clump" (*CP*, 376) of mortar and brick juxtaposed with his father's silence: "like a father,/ which has a tongue in it/ that does not speak, like a father" (*CP*, 378). "Kilauea" evolves a metaphor of displacement vis-à-vis his father from the most active volcano in Hawaii to a common furnace in their childhood home. From this seemingly interminable stanza which reads as one poetic burst of verse, we learn that "Once/ he could get up when he wanted and go/ into an untouched future; when I knew him/ he was sprinting to get to death/ before his cares could catch up/ and kill him" (*CP*, 378).

As a poet for whom the inter-relationality of the artistic enterprise appealed across a nexus of creative engagement and a community of writers, Kinnell commonly sought critique and feedback from his fellow poets, peers, and students.[143] He received specific commentary from Hall on "The Tragedy of Bricks" that arguably improves not only the poem in question,

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[141] Ibid.
[142] Emphasis is Yenser's own. Stephen Yenser, "Reviewed Work: *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*," *Poetry* 158, no. 4 (July 1991): 218.
[143] Kinnell was known to give drafts of his own poems to his students for critique, a communal workshopping of his own literary practice beside theirs. Hudson, "The Sun Shines," B-1.

but also refines the trajectory of "Memories of My Father." The final lines of Kinnell's draft read:

> an antecedence formerly known as infernal corrosion.
> When the boy grows up it will provide the mindset for the neutron
> bomb.
> Which eats first the living forms
> and after that the windows and doors.

To which Hall inserts his feedback:

> This is terrific but I'm troubled a bit by the end, which feels abrupt, off-hand, especially considering how bleak it is. The poem is so rich, filled with a resolving joy, that the ending feels almost whimsically black. There must be other routes to a satisfactory finish.[144]

Indeed, requiring a re-calibration, Kinnell heeds Hall's critique of finding "other routes" (and not Bly's suggestion to remove the poem altogether),[145] altering the closing to elicit greater attention to the inner shape of the poem, and the overall sense of what Kinnell deems "living texture,"[146] that gently brings the poem to its logical conclusion. He pens:

> The boy knows his father and mother
> will disappear before the least brick cracks
> or tells its story: an order of going
> formerly known infernal corrosion.
> Up in the future they are laying the footing
> for the construction of the neutron bomb,
> which evaporates the living forms
> and spares the bricks and the mortar. (*CP*, 378)

As a group of dedicated poems, Kinnell has an unconventional way of presenting his domestic elegies of Derry, Elizabeth, and James. Each one begins in a highly immersive style almost halfway into the rising action. In "Memories of My Father," Kinnell uses a non-linear chronology to pivot between past and future, interweaving sonic memory. Through the cohesion of these recollections, Kinnell examines the closeness and the separation between Kinnell junior and senior, as the boy ineluctably grows into the man, and the son ultimately

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144 Galway Kinnell and Donald Hall, "The Tragedy of Bricks" drafts, 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
145 Robert Bly, "Letter to Galway Kinnell," 3 January 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
146 Kinnell and Gardner, "An Interview," 430.

becomes the father, for better or for worse. We enter "Memories of My Father" at a specific moment of aurality:

> When we drove a spike too weak into wood too hard
> we got, not
> the satisfied grunt of everything organized to go downward,
> but a sudden yodel,
> like a funny bone singing.
> I don't want to go back to that workbench
> with its smell of spruce sawdust, where the voice
> inside things cracks, and changes, ever again. (*CP*, 380)

The spruce trees of his elegy for Elizabeth have reduced to literal dust, as Kinnell employs the workbench as a central locus, or a peculiar initiation of memory characterised by sound and placiality. Through assonance and the repetition of /o/ sounds, he evokes the long, sustained tonality of the nail striking the wood: "We got, not..." allows the reader to linger over the comma, and to carefully parse these chiming chords; alliterative /s/ sounds rebound in the "smell of spruce sawdust" (*CP*, 380). Through an initiation into the all-encompassing clatter of the poem, we are given a depiction of an old timey New England town, a catalogue of wagons rattling bottles of milk and cream, scissor-grinder carts, horses, amid sights and reverberations of the village streets. Ice is described as "silenced water" (*CP*, 381) suggesting its suspended quality of atoms frozen in time. We hear "the noise inside things that have turned into old rags, AWWWWRAGHHH!" (*CP*, 381) a marked reference to *Body Rags*, and the old crone of "Avenue C."

Among the many drafts of this poem, Kinnell initially began with the metaphorical notion of viewing time statically as a separation in density of liquids: "The past settles to the bottom./ How clear time is/ It is still there."[147] However, the literal and symbolic dimensions of Kinnell's relationship with his father, as a demonstration of closeness and separation, is achieved through repetition and figurative language, defined and contextualised primarily by sound as time itself wears on:

> The sound comes from none
> Of these now no ones, but from the no one himself,

[147] Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.

the father, who neither brings up the rear nor goes on ahead,
and never rides alongside;
and it approaches closer and closer
and just before arriving goes farther and farther away. (*CP*, 381)

Our understanding of Kinnell's father is developed and elucidated by positionality, through the individual descriptions of jockeying "up the rear"; "on ahead"; "alongside"; "closer and closer"; and, "farther and farther away." In the preparatory drafts of Strophe 2, Kinnell demonstrates his father's childhood preoccupation with roadways, and the specificity of his Scottish heritage from Edinburgh to the Isle of Skye, recounting:

~~O my father,~~
~~how you loved roads: how yout [sic] spent~~
your life upon them, lighting them
by ~~the~~ greater intensity of being
Upon them; how you sat even as a child
by the roadside, watching the road
leave Edinburgh for the Highlands,
And thence to, of all places,
Kyle of Lochaslsh [sic], determined to know
Does life hold anything of all of what
it wakes longing for?[148]

The figure of James looms upon a threshold, neither included nor excluded, but in a lacuna all his own, perhaps only belonging as a "no one," for he is the "no one himself" (*CP*, 381). In this particular instance, it is worth consulting Kinnell's manuscript drafts (Appendix 4), which replace James with "The Past,/ personified" and move through an enumeration of sonic identities and resemblances thoroughly depicted, "into the endless series of unpaved streets."[149]

Much like "The Poem" in *Body Rags* or "The Path Among the Stones" in *The Book of Nightmares*, material geographies and objects of permanence permeate Kinnell's verse through imagery of pebbles and rocks, relating to archetypal roles of father and son. He initiates his metaphor through the sentimentality of childhood keepsakes as "The boy picks up a pebble, puts it/ in the pointed place at the bottom of his pocket,/ first checking with a finger for a

[148] Ibid. These more personal renderings of James are not retained in the published versions.
[149] Ibid.

hole" (*CP*, 381-382). Juxtaposed with the ability of nature to hold both space and memory, Kinnell addresses geologic and linear time in Strophes 3 and 4 through extensive, near-Whitmanian lines that echo William Wordsworth's "My Heart Leaps Up":

> Unlike the boy, who will turn into the father,
> and unlike the father, who will turn into no one,
> the pebble on the windowsill does not wrinkle, does not die,
> though one day it will get lost,
> or be thrown out,
> maybe by the father the boy who stuck it in his pocket in the first
> place becomes,
> when he forgets what it was he wanted the pebble to remember. (*CP*, 382)

From the construction of this dense text, most of which has been modified or removed in subsequently published versions, we absorb the sounds that haunt Kinnell, exaggerated by the syntactic parallelism and construction of what he distinguishes: "It is not the milk man I hear/ nor the ice man with pick and tongs, nor the ragman with his ~~bellow~~/ that carried for blocks, ~~dismal, dry~~,/ indecipherable, nor the knife grinder..."[150] Configuring images of the past, or as he personifies it quite deliberately, "The Past," Kinnell wrestles with its ubiquity in the present intensely—"that ~~told us~~ present life goes on ~~right~~ entirely inside memory & glints of eternity/ the present transpires inside memory/ everything we live occurs inside memory."[151] Kinnell telegraphs an expansion and study of memory by conflating aurality with the passage of time, and by scrutinising their interconnectivity.[152] Through the combination of these sonic elements and the silence of his father, he achieves an amplification of sensorial witness; Kinnell is able to hear distinct sounds of daily life which define his memories against a familial soundscape of otherwise stillness.

In his revisions (Appendix 4), Kinnell clarifies that "It is the no one, <u>the father</u>, who brings up the rear, & goes away with a cry that finds no ears, & turning back, no longer a mouth—"[153] evaluating the ephemerality of sound and language. His text calls into question

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150 Galway Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.
151 Ibid.
152 We might also consider the linking, nostalgic element with his previous volume, "The Past" written during the dissolution of his marriage to Inés Delgado del Torres, and post-awarding of the Pulitzer Prize for *Selected Poems*.
153 Galway Kinnell, "Memories of My Father," MC 64.

whether within a particular sound structure we may appraise the validity of a sound, to consider its existence or commit it to memory if it no longer endures. As readers, we are left to consider if sound is imperceptibly written, as in the silences of Kinnell's deceased father, and whether these negated memories, along with the spaces and places they inhabit as discrete events in time, may still be called into existence by their absences.

Spectrality and Sensorial Witness

Jacques Derrida defines the spectre as a "paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit,"[154] which offers a bridge between past and present. Deriving from an epistemology than can neither be confirmed nor denied, in Derrida's estimation, these spectres are to be both waited for and anticipated, the guarantee of fruition notwithstanding.[155] Attending to space, place, and landscape, Kinnell's interactions with the spectral, and its attendant conceptions penetrating his work, include an expansion of the interlinked trauma and witness of place and event. Such dimensionality reaches its apogee in the grandest of his threnodies, "When the Towers Fell," first published in the one-year memorial edition of *The New Yorker* in September 2002. For Kinnell, in the wake of the atrocities of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, these categories of periodic intervals become fused with a modern dystopia and a violent historiography whose spatiality is determined by the geographical imagination of sensorial witness. Mediated through cognition and knowing, the poem carries with it a prevailing sense of materiality due to the hermeneutical nature of presences and absences.

[154] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.
[155] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 4.

Although Kinnell's experiences of 9/11 did not precisely resemble the years Whitman spent during the Civil War immersed in habitual experiences of anguish and injury,[156] his was a rapid inhabitation of devastation, of an immensity and magnitude, too large to grasp. The events of the Civil War and 9/11 hold significance in their similarities and congruencies, with both poets deeming their roles as sense-makers; to an extent, they each assumed responsibility as historians and active journalists. Although Whitman gradually developed into a perambulatory hero, occupying densely packed spaces of grief and suffering, it is his interaction with the wound, both physically and through his own processing of trauma, which became a predominant component of his quotidian lexicon.

In "The Wound-Dresser," originally collected in *Drum Taps* (1865) as "The Dresser" and given this more apposite title in 1876,[157] the lyric speaker proceeds with cautious precision in the cataloguing of wounds, essentially how soldiers are identified upon arrival. We are given a rough and unedited scene, a proliferation of injuries upon which death may hasten mercy, from the "crush'd head" and "the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene" to "the fractur'd thigh," and "the stump of the arm, the amputated hand."[158] Despite being reminiscent of Thoreau's inexhaustible lists, the depersonalisation of the soldiers is not an abject dehumanisation, but rather, a symbolic way of connoting the loss of livelihood, characteristic of an element of humanity that imbues Whitman's poetic text with vitality.

But Whitman's forbearance as a journalist and documentarian during the Civil War contain some notable parallels to Kinnell's own lived experiences of 9/11, including his memorialisation of those who perished, honoured in his elegiac poem, "When the Towers Fell." Kinnell's poetic cosmography had long-solidified his reputation as "the death-haunted, tragic Kinnell,"[159] a prescient designation affixed by Bell, and an acknowledgement of the

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156 Whitman's relationship to the Civil War—calling it by name and even speaking about it aloud—was an oft-refused and complicated one. See "The Real War will never get in the Books," in Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days and Collect* (Garden City: Dover Publications), 80.
157 Harold Aspiz, "The Wound Dresser," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Donald D. Cummings and J.R. LeMaster (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 800.
158 Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 233-234.
159 Bell, "Galway Kinnell," 602.

thematic substructures of his post-Christian interrogation of human impermanence. Just as Whitman gathered information in his livraisons for *Memoranda During the War* (1875), an itinerant Kinnell collected on-the-spot interviews in handmade notebooks from his numerous visits to first responders at Ground Zero.[160] Most poignantly, Kinnell was "struck by the 'wide-openness' of their talk about painful experiences," in the collective mourning and bereavement of the city, and thus, "some bits of the language in the poem derive from their words."[161] As a corollary, this passage from Whitman is haunting in its relevance, and could seemingly represent those very experiences:

> I am the mash'd fireman with breast-bone broken,
> Tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
> Heat and smoke I inspired, I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,
> I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels,
> They have clear'd the beams away, they tenderly lift me forth."[162]

This process of an immediacy of composition, mediated through first-hand testimony, inhabited a space of familiarity for Kinnell, who had served as a journalist and roving photographer for *The Tehran Journal* during his Fulbright year in Iran, aspects of his corpus that will be addressed more thoroughly in Chapter Three. Another striking iteration of Kinnell's developing engagement with witness is mirrored in his usage of heterogeneous mediums such as poetry, letters, photographs, and both fictional and journalistic prose to represent what he observed, undertakings deemed by Amy Motlagh as his "body rags."[163] However, in evaluating his own abilities to encapsulate his role as a poet of encounter more fully, Kinnell came to realise the fraught intersection of art with his own lived experience. As both a creative act and an attempt to inhabit authentic witness, "When the Towers Fell" benefits from Kinnell's evolving self-introspection and critique.

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[160] Kinnell was also known to make livraisons for other journalistic pieces—pocket-sized, simple white paper, folded together and stapled—as evidenced in his archives. As an exemplar, see Galway Kinnell, "Hawaii from the Air," 1981, Box 29, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

[161] Galway Kinnell and Alice Quinn, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *The New Yorker* (16 September 2002): https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/09/16/writing-for-the-dead

[162] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 52.

[163] Amy Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution: Translation, Adaptation, and Appropriation in Galway Kinnell's Cold War Writings on Iran," *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal* 13, no. 4 (July 2016): 225-226.

In many ways, Kinnell's threnodies represent the doleful utterances of a poet left behind to struggle in the earthly interstices. In these transitory spaces, the poet must reconcile with the permanence of dying, as well as encounter the anguish it confers, in the absence of an afterlife. Grounding his songs of lament in his own storied familial history, his friendships, and in his experiences of the natural world, Kinnell's elegiac poems often assimilate profound sentiments of memory, tenderness, and regret. His domestic and personal elegies are not necessarily redemptive or in search of salvation, but rather, hasten an imperative of catharsis and consolation through their longer, more narrative formats. Kinnell's relationship with demise, and its aftermath, is an anguished and aggrieved relationship by which his composition of elegies, and his act of writing itself, are perceived through a framework of experience.

For Kinnell, commemorating large-scale death poses a distinctive challenge by which poetry is extricated from the intimacies of private life, and placed into the public sphere of historical consciousness on the global stage. The anomalous, indeed aberrant, poetic sensibility necessary to cultivate for writing a mass elegy is contingent, in his given case, upon the specificities of place in which the atrocity occurred, and with his personal connection to it. Kinnell maintains that if 9/11 had happened elsewhere, and not in New York City directly outside of his windows, he would not have been equipped to write about it in the same way, or perhaps he would have been altogether unable.[164] Although the tragedies of the day were not only restricted to Manhattan, (with coordinated attacks occurring at The Pentagon and Shanksville, Pennsylvania) Kinnell's poem closely attends to the events at the Twin Towers.

Echoing Whitman's restraint in *Memoranda During the War*, Kinnell divulges his process of composition in conversation with Alice Quinn: "I wanted to make my account true to my own feelings, but I also felt I should protect the families from any tendencies I might have to depict things in extreme ways."[165] Faithful to his instincts, Kinnell's account is devoid of graphic images or alarum, deliberate in his intentions to disregard the politicised aspects

[164] Kinnell and Quinn, "An Interview," online.
[165] Ibid.

terrorism posed in the early hostilities of impending warfare between the US "War on Terror," and the escalating offensive against Afghanistan and Iraq. Concurrently, we identify his attempts to portray a non-exploitative version of events, one which positions traumatic memory in the contextual framework of this explicit geographical space. As he continues:

> One thing that helped was the realization that this poem was not the place to try to work out the political dimensions of the attack, even if I were able to […] But whenever I tried to introduce these matters into my poem […] the whole thing fell to earth with a thud. At last, I realized that the poem had to be about the attack and the deaths and the suffering and the grieving and, if possible, to a degree, the solace of staying close to what happened.[166]

Kinnell's "When the Towers Fell" was one of the first poems of its kind post-9/11,[167] achieving completion through a disjointed process of oral composition and pastiche over the course of ten months. This collage-inspired form, reminiscent of Ezra Pound's *Cantos,* was not unfamiliar to him, having recorded similar techniques to report what he observed and experienced in his journals from Iran,[168] and noted in the demonstration of Kinnell's palimpsest. He later collected the elegy as the third section of his final volume of poetry, *Strong Is Your Hold.*

Consequently, "When the Towers Fell" is a testimony of pathos, a song of lament written at the climax of crisis. In its demonstration of personal and collective witness, it depicts an iconographic landscape mired in devastation and grief, the moment when "[f]right becomes the condition of trauma proper."[169] The poem interchanges between lyric speaker and an omniscient narrative in which Kinnell attempts details of some historical record to recount the grim happenings both before, and after, the implosions. He imagines the details of those who arrived at work on an ordinary weekday, only to perish, and those survivors who were

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166 Ibid.

167 Lentricchia says of "When the Towers Fell" that it was "written with eloquent unselfconscious and forceful simplicity, an evocation of the hopelessly trapped that no American writer was to match, with the lone exception of Don DeLillo in *Falling Man*, a novel whose rendering of the disaster is itself a poem, standing alongside Kinnell's." Lentricchia, "Modernist without a Handle," 410.

168 Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 225. In my own handling of these archival materials containing Kinnell's *Persian Notebook* articles and photographs, Kinnell pasted his work on various papers, as though mock-ups or drafts. Based on these arrangements, I would allege that he played a greater, perhaps more editorial role, at the newspaper than previously surmised.

169 Zwarg, "The Work of Trauma," 71.

left behind to search for them in vain. Kinnell's employment of a spectral presence is foregrounded from the earliest stanza of the poem, commencing from a place of both existence and non-existence, a preoccupation with states of in-between:

> From our high window we saw them
> in their bands and blocks of light
> brightening against a fading sunset,
> saw them in the dark hours glittering
> as if spirits inside them sat up
> calculating profit and loss all night, saw
> their tops steeped in the first yellow
> of sunrise, grew so used to them
> often we didn't see them, and now,
> not seeing them, we see them. (*CP*, 522)

Using the collective "we," Kinnell's recollection of the Twin Towers from his apartment window presents a visual lexicon of colour and light, one predicated on the intimations of sight enacted from quotidian memory. We find confirmation that his poetic vision and sight is location-specific, derived from his personal connection with place, and his repeated, everyday encounters under the purview of the watchful towers, witness to the happenings of lower Manhattan.

As such, it is a familiarity with both a vocabulary of knowing and of disbelief, a trick-of-the-eye or half-state of perception in which the oversized, looming presence of the towers blends into the landscape as though taken for granted. Yet their absences persistently define their forms, standing in majesty against the cityscape, beacons "brightening against a fading sunset" (*CP*, 522). In this way, Kinnell situates the spectral presence of the World Trade Center by creating a dialectical structure of physical and conscious witness, reified to the hyper-real in which we are not able to distinguish reality from a simulation of that reality: "the canopy of supposed reality" (*CP*, 524).[170] Through these disparate but interrelated registers—intersecting areas of the within and the without—he draws himself in as chronicler of a cataclysmic historical event, serving both as witness and as bearer of traumatic memory that cannot be

[170] Kinnell directly invokes Jean Baudrillard's post-structuralist concept of simulation and the hyperreal, whereby the new reality appears more authentic than the past or pre-existing one. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

reconciled: "Hard to see past the metallic mist/or through the canopy of supposed reality/ cast over our world, bourn that no creature ever born/ can pry its way back through, that no love can tear" (*CP*, 524).

Shifting from Kinnell to Whitman, "Song of the Open Road" (1856) provides a pragmatic and substantive comparison to "When the Towers Fell." In Section 2, the lyric speaker proclaims: "You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you are not all that is here,/ I believe that much unseen is also here.// Here the profound lesson of reception, nor preference nor denial."[171] These lines from Whitman accentuate Kinnell's position, the intimation of certain approximations, coupled with a reliability that perception can concurrently subvert and affirm, expressly when funnelled through the subjectivity of self. In this case, both poets are presented with empty or vacant landscapes in which futures are unclear and imagined.

The vast, physical spaces of emptiness Kinnell encounters at Ground Zero are juxtaposed with Whitman's open road, one of linguistic construction, as he imagines "The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose."[172] Whilst the positions in viewing these places of emptiness are taken from two opposing perspectives—one predicated on processing the loss and witness of erasure, "the intangible presence of an absence,"[173] and the other seeking promise amongst an unspoilt emptiness—in both cases, the landscapes are replete with meaning derived from a spatio-temporal context. As Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren maintain, "The return to—or even first arrival at—a specific place can, willingly or unwillingly, result in a recollection of or encounter with past experiences and perceptions, making the concept of location immensely powerful as well as layered."[174] Their presuppositions are consistent with Rachel Pain's approach to the overlapping sense of

[171] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 112.
[172] Ibid.
[173] *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, eds. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 423.
[174] Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 395.

trauma, evidenced in Kinnell's poems of historical witness vis-à-vis Nagasaki and Hiroshima.[175]

Moreover, the sequence of events of 9/11 marks both specificity and substantial intensity derived from location, one where past encounters and acuities mingle with an uncertain, unstable present. It is the notion that "places are simultaneously living and spectral, containing the experience of the actual moment as well as the many times that have already transpired and become silent—though not necessarily imperceptible—to the present."[176] Kinnell captures this sentiment of straddling boundaries and abstraction: "On this side it is 'amnesia,' or forgetting the way home;/ on the other, 'invisibleness,' or never entirely returning" (*CP*, 524).[177] In the intervening months, Kinnell's daily life became filled with habitual experiences of trauma in Manhattan: people searching for loved ones for weeks and months on end, excavating the site not merely to clear rubble, but to find any remainders they could of life, "the all-night lifting/ and sifting for bodies, pieces of bodies, a thumb, a tooth, anything/ that is not nothing" (*CP*, 523-524).

Swept up in "the immense/ lineage of the twentieth century's history of violent death—" (*CP*, 525), the taxonomies of devastation, transgressions, and murder are catalogued in the poem in succession:

> black men in the South castrated and strung up from trees,
> soldiers advancing through mud at ninety thousand dead per mile,
> train upon train of boxcars heading eastward shoved full to the
> corners with Jews and Roma to be enslaved or gassed,
> state murder of twenty, thirty, forty million of its own,
> state starvation of a hundred million farmers,
> atomic blasts erasing cities off the earth, firebombings the same,
> death marches, assassinations, disappearances,
> entire countries become rubble, minefields, mass graves. (*CP*, 525)

[175] See Pain, "Geotrauma." 972-989.
[176] Blanco and Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader*, 395.
[177] In the original version published in *The New Yorker*, the line is "'invisibleness' or never in body returning" which makes it clear that these individuals are physically invisible, as opposed to the less specific version in *Collected Poems*— "invisibleness or never entirely returning"—which allows for both mental detachment and physical invisibility (*CP*, 524). Galway Kinnell, "When the Towers Fell," *The New Yorker* (16 September 2002): 54.

Held in this context, the events of 9/11 inhabit history "not as a likeness/ but as a corollary" (*CP*, 525), or as Kinnell first states in *The New Yorker* version, "This is not a comparison but a corollary,/ not a likeness but a lineage."[178] It is the existentialist nightmare come to bear, the unexpectedness of an impending catastrophe realised against the backdrop of suffering, and the worrisome confirmation that spectres may not remain spectral at all, but become tangible, melded with haptic experience.

By providing context for the events of 9/11, Kinnell does well to show that they are part and parcel of an entire century of gruesome demise in which humankind has committed atrocities against itself. Now in the year 2001, at the turning point of a brand-new century, the in-between liminality that stands between the past and the potential advent of change:

> Seeing the towers vomit these black omens, that the last century dumped into
> this one, for us to dispose of, we know
> they are our futures, that is our own black milk crossing the sky: *wir schaufeln*
> *ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng*[179]

Kinnell does not offer optimistic suggestions or hopefulness, but an intentionally harsh and bleak proliferation of horrors destined to continue in the twenty-first century.[180]

In this case, Kinnell is not grappling with an existential crisis in "When the Towers Fell" precisely because it is predicated on a violent act which had already happened. Therefore, his actions in writing this elegy are deliberate, considered, and cautious in memorialisation, whilst looking to an unstable future. From this position of uncertainty, acute devastation occupies two modes, becoming both a lived and a spatiotemporal condition. Accordingly, engagement with the disorientation of the in-between can potentially hold unforeseen, disaffecting consequences.[181] Kinnell, by virtue of a set of circumstances set in motion by what appears as a new world order, one which submits a broken ethos and psyche of everyday

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[178] Kinnell, "When the Towers Fell," 54.
[179] Kinnell borrows this line from Paul Celan's "Death Fugue," translated in *The New Yorker* version as "we're digging/ a grave in the sky there'll be plenty of room to lie down there." Kinnell, "When the Towers Fell," 54.
[180] Of note, these specific lines offering more detailed insight into his pessimism surrounding humankind are removed in the *Collected Poems* version; the quotation from "Death Fugue" is, however, retained.
[181] Nari Senanyake and Brian King, "Geographies of Uncertainty," *Geoforum* 123 (July 2021): 130. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.07.016

Americans grappling with the psychological stress of terrorism on their soil, must make specific choices to address these spaces of instability and ambiguity. Yet the very nature of this certain crisis, and the necessity of it to be converted into a proper, enduring elegy leaves him no room for indecision or vacillation. Kinnell structures "When the Towers Fell" such that it does not reflect on hypothetical uncertainties or metaphorical distress. Centred by the title of the poem, he focuses on the facticity of the day, and its immediate aftermath, a re-telling of the real and the actual within a wider context of generalised human suffering in the twentieth century.

Kinnell employs syntactic parallelism to grand effect, incorporating the structure of a quantitative adjective and a verbal past tense (akin to "In the Hotel of Lost Light"). With each subsequent, end-stopped line, he seems to be working out all the horrific possibilities of these final moments, a list where final moments are individuated as line items on a ledger. Of especial import is whether Kinnell does provide a sense of consolation through these words, or if they are meant to be treated as an historical artifact or record, a view of events as the poet witnessed it. With keen, journalistic precision for reporting facts and witness, Kinnell pens:

> Some died while calling home to say they were OK.
> Some called the telephone operators and were told to stay put.
> Some died after over an hour spent learning they would die.
> Some died so abruptly they may have seen death from inside it.
> Some burned, their faces caught fire.
> Some were asphyxiated.
> Some broke windows and leaned into the sunny day.
> Some were pushed out from behind by others in flames. (*CP*, 523)

As opposed to continuing to deliver a pictorial representation as he has detailed of the unfolding of events up to this point, Kinnell pivots, turning to the more visceral to round out this narrative of witness, an exploration of sensual geographies through the primacy of sense. He describes a scene engulfed by fumes and vapours, one that succeeds in bringing the reader as closely into the action as possible. Through his meticulous description, our olfactory senses are activated, filled with the acrid scents blanketing the city, a tragic intermingling of

incinerated steel, skyscraper, and human bodies washing over Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs:

> Burst jet fuel, incinerated aluminum, steel fume, crushed marble,
> exploded granite, pulverized drywall, mashed concrete, beserked
> plastic, crazed chemicals, scoria, rotting flesh, vapor
> of the vaporized—draped over
> our island up to streets regimented
> into numerals and letters, breathed across
> the great bridges to Brooklyn and the waiting sea—
> astringent, miasmic, empyreumatic, sticky,
> air too foul to take in, but we take it in,
> too gruesome for seekers of lost beloveds
> to breathe, but they breathe it and you breathe it. (*CP*, 525)

The fumes of death take on a physical, respirated presence, as hazes of a smouldering stench of the immolated are literally drawn in and out with every breath, "vapor/ of the vaporized" (*CP*, 525) becoming one and of another's body. Kinnell revisits his interlocution with double consciousness, one that he attempts to resolve through a Whitmanian ethos, the equivalence of language as flesh, and flesh as language, rooted in both the mind and the body, for they are united. Kinnell's choice of sensorial adjectives is particularly salient in this stanza, employing words such as "astringent," "miasmic," and "empyreumatic" to convey noxious fumes of incineration, abutted by the visceral connotations of "sticky," attributing a sense of restlessness and exertion to breathe scalding air.

Moreover, the question of geographical belonging is complex, and one to which Kinnell pays assiduous consideration whilst negotiating his careful response. Many bodies of the victims are devoid of a resting ground, unable to be returned to the earth for burial; skewed, misappropriated, or lost, this is unsettlement devoid of closure. Olds has stated that Kinnell is "someone likely to write in an intimate way about how the human body is treated—no matter where the body is."[182] The specificities surrounding "When the Towers Fell" require a particularly dignified depiction of those bodies in space, whether they "let themselves fall,

[182] Stacey Chase, "Kinnell: Poet of Vermont," *Green Mountain Review* (Fall/Winter 1989-90): 22.

begging gravity to speed them to the ground" or "leapt hand in hand that their fall down the sky might happen more lightly" (*CP*, 523).

In this way, the experiences depicted in the poem relate to both tactile and physical locations of bodies contextualised in their surroundings, communicated by Kinnell's profound vision of earthly connectedness as he avers, that "those who leapt in twos from the towers most likely weren't lovers but friends, or even total strangers, and yet gripping each other's hand represents to me a sort of momentary betrothal that gave them the courage to go,"[183] decidedly the collision of tragic forces, and the arc towards idealism, even as death overtakes. The notion of bodies clasped together harken back eerily to sections VII and VIII of *The Book of Nightmares*. In "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight," Maud awakens from a nightmare and Kinnell comforts her, precising: "you cling to me/ hard,/ as if clinging could save us" (*CP*, 251). The subsequent poem, "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing" (discussed at length in Chapter One), carries with it an even more prescient encounter, for they too are caught in a "most tragic concumbence, strangers/ clasped into one, a moment, of their moment on earth" (*CP*, 258).

Throughout his composition, Kinnell brings immediate spatial implications to the fore; these spectral and placial geographies contain active rescue sites, crime scenes, mass graves, and memorials to the lost, unaccounted for, or missing in the aftermath of the attacks. In a frame of reference seeming to exist outside of time, the counteraction of terrorism affords itself the prescribed power to instantly alter human and urban cartography, such that its manifestations enact irreconcilable binaries of living versus deceased, and the occupation of memory left to inhabit a void of cityscape. Here, he depicts the immense weight of survival in contrast to the quietus of spiritual and bodily departure:

> In our minds the glassy blocks succumb over and over,
> slamming down floor by floor into themselves,
> blowing up as if in reverse, exploding
>
> downward and rolling outward,

[183] Kinnell and Quinn, "An Interview," online.

the way, in the days of the gods, a god
might rage through the streets, overtaking the fleeing.

As each tower goes down, it concentrates
into itself, transforms itself
infinitely slowly into a black hole

infinitesimally small: mass
without space, where each light,
each life, put out, lies down within us. (*CP*, 527)

The immolation of the two towers condemns consciousness to the double-wound of its witness, a tension between absence and uncertainty conferred to this hallowed and sacred landscape. Each tower transforms into a compressed "mass/ without space" in which light and life are extinguished.

Kinnell's rather evident allusions consist of quotations from a constellation of poetic heroes on grief and suffering (including Villon, Hart Crane, Aleksander Wat) in addition to Paul Celan's "Death Fugue," which, in Kinnell's judgment, is "one of the greatest human cries ever attempted."[184] Of especial pertinence is the invocation of Whitman's elegy for President Abraham Lincoln, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."[185] Kinnell's choice of lines from the Lincoln elegy underscores his recognition of repeated intergenerational trauma in America, utilising Whitman's delicate verse as a touchstone for the scores of families and children left behind to cope with the loss, or the soldiers who would engage, year-upon-year, in newly enacted military interventions:

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought.
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.[186]

[184] Kinnell and Quinn, "An Interview," online.
[185] Kinnell insisted Whitman be given the penultimate word, believing that even though Whitman attempted to speak for the people during his lifetime, the unfortunate truth was that the people were not listening. Ibid.
[186] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 252.

Whitman's purposeful repetition of "I saw" in Section 15 of "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" acts as a method of reader-orientation and assurance as well as facilitates allusions to the truthful testimony of his witness relaying the ever-expanding narrative surrounding Lincoln's death; it, too is a very public poem in which the poet offers the mourning nation consolation, a means of processing troubled times. Helen Vendler has praised Whitman for his discarding of traditional elegiac convention, "[t]o abandon the convention—more moving than any other in elegy—of the address to the one dead, is to rule everything in the service of the true." She elucidates that this is a break with archetypal elegy, in which there is a procession of mourners, the decking of the grave, confrontation of the corpse, eulogy, dirge or hymns.[187]

However, Kinnell's inclusion of Whitman's verse also carries with it a statement on poetic composition, a meta-awareness by which Kinnell held himself accountable in the construction of his verse. One of his major critiques of Whitman's poetry, previously touched upon vis-à-vis "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," is a weakness that erodes many of his works: beginning a poem in the same clarity with which it ends. Kinnell permits Whitman to have the second-to-last word; in the end, to our relief, he constructs a poem that is distinctly emblematic of his own poetic cosmography, a metropolitan elegy to counter Whitman's pastoral one. Incontrovertibly, Kinnell works against Whitman's technique through the arc of "When the Towers Fell," through the intensity that builds throughout the scope of the poem: the shocking and revolting images; the indescribable sadness; and the interspersal of metronomic precision with both his own encounters coupled with the factual events of the day. Whilst Kinnell does not turn to water for reconciliation as Whitman so famously did— "into the oceanic or the impalpable"[188]— it is the confluence of geographical imaginations—visual, aural, haptic, and spectral—that gesture towards clarity and closure.

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[187] Helen Vendler, *The Music of What Happens: Poems, Poets, Critics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 145.
[188] Vendler, *The Music of What Happens*, 144.

In assessing a relationship of intellectual inheritance between the pair, we cannot escape the question of Bloomian anxiety which has so markedly characterised literary criticism in which intra-poetic relations and parent-poems are offered as psychological barriers affixed between writers and literary perpetuity. Kinnell does not maintain exclusivity coupled off with Whitman in this regard, retaining his own sense of other major poets connected more directly as intermediaries in the line of Whitman, such as Crane and Allen Ginsberg, "the only one to understand Whitman and to bring into the poetry of our time a comparable music."[189] As a poetic figure, Whitman truly looms large, and there are countless other poets (D.H. Lawrence, Stevens, Williams, Pablo Neruda, Joy Harjo, among many others) who evoke, reject, or interact with him in their literary praxes.

Moreover, the foreword to *Essential Whitman*, along with essays such as "Whitman's Indicative Words" (1973) and "'Strong is your hold': My Encounters with Whitman" (2007), are candid records of Kinnell's grievances with Whitman, underscoring his proper detachment from him in forming an objective opinion, in conjunction with an absence of anxiety between precursor and ephebe. Having allowed himself the adequate distance for self-reflection, development, and appraisal of his own poetic process and competencies through his close study of Whitman's six publications of *Leaves of Grass*—which Whitman revised over a period of thirty-five years and conceived of as 'experimental text'[190]— Kinnell was confident in removing the Nietzschean mask[191] Whitman had cultivated, revealing his humanity, rather

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[189] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 48. See *Leaves of Grass: Sesquicentennial Essays*, eds. Susan Belasco, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

[190] In the foreword to *An American Primer* (1904), Horace Traubel includes Whitman's quotation that *Leaves of Grass* is "only a language experiment." Michael R. Dressman, "An American Primer (1904)," in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, eds. J.R. LeMaster and Donald D. Kummings (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 16.

[191] In *Walt Whitman Reconsidered* (1955), Richard Chase discusses the double personality framed by Nietzsche, and likens it to Whitman's desire to construct a public persona or guise, much like Yeats or Twain, as more than one self. *Walt Whitman: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Murphy (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1969), 331.
Also worthy of note is Matterson's observation that in "Out from Behind This Mask (To Confront a Portrait)," Whitman is addressing a photograph of himself as the wound dresser included for *Leaves of Grass*: "Out from behind this bending rough-cut mask,/ These lights and shades, this drama of the whole,/ This common curtain of the face contain'd in me for me, in you for you, in/ each for each..." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 286 and 528.

paradoxically, as self-serving, well-intentioned fraudulence, and accepting his flaws in affecting that identity.

Kinnell's disappointment in Whitman's vacillation between varying intensities of disingenuousness and inauthenticity increasingly served his own poetry. He emboldened his personal resolve to confront explicitly the kinds of disquieting subjects such as death, sex, and romantic love that Whitman boasted about encountering, but which inflicted fear and shame upon him. Conceivably, whilst ironically of extreme nuisance to Kinnell, Whitman's incessant revisions managed to fuel Kinnell's passion to do the same, to his own detriment. Throughout his life, Kinnell found himself ensnared in the crosshairs of creative license that ebb and flow with neurotic perfectionism, and at a metacognitive level, wrestle with self-awareness and reflexivity in writing practice.

More emphatically, there were ineluctably aspects of Whitman's poetic ethos which Kinnell did take at face-value; perhaps in his identification and acknowledgement of Whitman's flaws he was better able to tease out those attributes he could apply to his own poetic practice. In a conversation between Whitman and Horace Traubel on 21 July 1891 (one that remained unpublished until 1996), Whitman reminisced about the early stages of *Leaves of Grass*, musing:

> Bucke probably does not know that long long ago, before the 'Leaves' had ever been to printer, I had them in a half a dozen forms—larger, smaller, recast, outcast, taken apart, put together—viewing them from every point I knew— even at the last not putting them together and out with any idea that they must eternally remain unchanged.[192]

In this passage, Whitman hints about treating his own poetry as living documents, an ironic foreshadowing and candidly permissive statement that confirms the instinctual confidence Kinnell later deployed. Kinnell crafted *Essential Whitman* as a volume of idealised versions of Whitman's poetry in the hopes that he could access their original character, for many of

[192] Horace Traubel, *With Walt Whitman in Camden, Vol. 8*, eds. Jeanne Chapman and Robert MacIsaac (Oregon House: W L Bentley, 1996), 351.

those "great poems are muddy from too much tampering."[193] Bloom otherwise laments that "[i]t is an unhappy paradox that we have never got Whitman right, because he is a very difficult, immensely subtle poet who is usually at work doing almost the precise opposite of what he asserts himself to be doing."[194]

Yet we know, particularly from Kinnell's extensive drafts of *Essential Whitman,* in cobbling together the 'best' versions of the poems that this was quite an ambitious undertaking, and that he felt a taxing responsibility to approximate perfection in Whitman's poems in a way that Whitman, in Kinnell's estimation, failed to capture himself (Appendix 5). Presumably, had Bloom paid any mind to Kinnell's work post-*Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*,[195] he might have been inclined to acknowledge that Kinnell did in fact *get it right*, or come crucially close, several years on. Whitman's intention of addressing the reader as "You" acts in a prescriptive or didactic way, begging the idea that we take his texts and commute them to posterity in the generative ways we are able.

Kinnell's creation and evolution of *Essential Whitman* further underscores Kinnell's long-standing creative engagement with a poet who was not particularly *de rigueur* at the time of its publication in 1987, such that this became a critical edition of personal poems that speak as much about the poetry of Whitman as it does about his own. Whilst the volume is neither a comprehensive nor a resourceful text for research purposes, it provides valuable insight into Kinnell's own editorial and textual scholarship, along with his critical selection and methodology. He harnessed creative license to experiment with or to strengthen work that was not his own, but that he understood belongs to everyone in Whitman's capacity as the Father of American poetry, as an American idiom, and as a beloved internationally regarded poet. Consequently, in completing the task of "our greatest native master, the bearer of the American tradition,"[196] Kinnell draws upon the

193 Kinnell, *Essential Whitman*, xx.
194 Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books), 248.
195 Bloom, "Straight Forth Out of Self," 4.
196 Kinnell, "Whitman's Indicative Words," 314.

equanimity between Whitman and the reader, proclaiming his own sense of consequence and import as a major American poet in the process.

Chapter 3

"Paradise Elsewhere"— Tehran and Its Golden Allure

I experienced in that countryside a curious feeling resembling homesickness—homesickness not for my geographical home, but for the home which is always located where one is. I felt I was close to it but unable to come in contact with it. It was as if the ends of some nerve which had been severed were coming back to life and beginning to seek one another. It was perhaps only the desire one had to be no longer a stranger on the face of the earth.

–Galway Kinnell, "Persian Notebook: Landscapes of Burujird" (1960)[1]

Kinnell stood somewhat poised to shift his focus towards Iran, compelled by a rich tradition of translation, intertextuality, and cultivated attention to Persia in nineteenth-century American letters. Straddling a complicated relationship with European influence, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman had previously turned to the aesthetic practices of Sufi masters such as Sheikh Mosleh al-Din Saadi Shirazi (1200-1292); Jalal e-Din Mohammad Molavi Rumi (1207-1273); and Khajeh Shamseddin Mohammad Hafez Shirazi (1319-1431). Emerson's infatuation with Persian literature is well-documented, traced through his poem "Saadi" (1842) featured in *The Dial*, his essay entitled "Persian Poetry" (1858) published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, as well as his translations of hundreds of lines of Persian verse sourced from German, highlighted in J.D. Yohannan's canonical exploration of "The Influence of Persian Poetry Upon Emerson's Work" (1943). More recently, Roger Sedarat's *Emerson in Iran: The American Appropriation of Persian Poetry* (2019) contends that "Emerson's transformative renderings of Eastern verse" serve to "reorient the self in his own literary tradition."[2]

Thoreau was similarly preoccupied with conflations of his personhood with that of Persian medieval poets and mystics, revitalising a kind of colonising impulse through his own transcendent, epistemological deductions. A devotée of Saadi, he pens in his journal on the 8th

[1] Galway Kinnell, "Persian Notebook: Landscapes of Burujird," *The Tehran Journal* (16 April 1960): 4.
[2] Sedarat notes Emerson's desire to define himself in accordance with Hafez, citing a particular journal entry in which he declares, "Such is the only man I wish to see or to be." Roger Sedarat, *Emerson in Iran: The American Appropriation of Persian Poetry* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 2. See also Mehdi Aminrazavi, ed. *Sufism and American Literary Masters* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014).

of August 1852, "The entertaining a single thought of a certain elevation makes all men of one religion […] I know, for instance, that Sadi [sic] entertained once identically the same thought that I do—and thereafter I can find no essential difference between Sadi and myself. He is not Persian—he is not ancient—he is not strange to me. By the identity of his thought with mine he still survives."[3] Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, including "A Persian Lesson" from *Good-Bye My Fancy* (1891) annexed in the death-bed edition, plays on a shared identity as "the greybeard sufi,"[4] whilst *Drum-Taps* are said to encapsulate a Persian spiritual mysticism, with parallels drawn by Sedarat, Arthur L. Ford, and affirmed through the collection of archival materials of Whitman's annotations on Persian poetry at Middlebury.[5]

Yet despite the authenticity of Kinnell's engagement with Persia, both poetically and experientially, his relationship with transnationalism, cultural identity, and literary output within the context of the Middle East has been consistently elided, with scant critical attention or narrative analysis paid to an energetic and significant aspect of Kinnell's personal and literary lives. This chapter, therefore, takes up this key strand of research. It follows the linear chronology of Kinnell's intellectual inheritance, exhibiting his dedication to an evolving literary practice, metabolising expressions of self and creative engagement, with a distinct focus on conceptions of identity in his geographical imagination. Moving from the poetic mythos of Kinnell's Transcendentalist forebears and Whitmanian idiomatic legacies, it draws upon his brief but intense stay in Iran that brought first-hand witness and encounter within an evolving cultural paradigm; he spent six months as a Fulbright scholar, lecturing in American Literature at the University of Tehran in 1959, after which he expended an additional half-year as a roving journalist for *The Tehran Journal*, a period marked by the post-

[3] Henry David Thoreau, *Journal Volume 5: 1852-1853*, ed. Patrick F. O'Connell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 289. Thoreau uses a combination of the diacritic Saʿdī and Saadi, to produce the name 'Sadi.
[4] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 404.
[5] See Roger Sedarat, "'The Battle Trumpet Blown!' Whitman's Persian Imitations in *Drum-Taps*," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 39, no. 4 (Spring 2022): 163-188; also: Arthur L. Ford, "The Rose Garden of the World: Near East Imagery in the Poetry of Walt Whitman," *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 5, no. 1 (Summer 1987): 12-20. Matt Cohen, "Introduction to Whitman's Annotations and Marginalia," *The Walt Whitman Archive*, eds. Matt Cohen, Ed Folsom, and Kenneth M. Price. http://www.whitmanarchive.org/item/anc.02073

coup industrial thrust of the US into Iran, and Kinnell's assessments of the Westernising impulses altering the country during the Cold War. Immersed in prominent literary modernist and artistic circles, including the *She'r-e Nimaa'i* or "New Persian Poetry" movement, Kinnell fostered close friendships and generative working relationships through socio-poetic engagements. In addition to major Iranian poets such as Nader Naderpour, Forugh Farrokhzad, Nosrat Rahmani, and intermedial poet-painter Sohrab Sepehri, his quotidian and intellectual life was constellated by Norwegian expatriate Brita Jenssen Ziesler as well as photographer and archivist, Sean Sweeney.

Activated by his Iranian inheritances, Kinnell's literary practice is not solely imbued by the topographical contours of a transnational and transhemispheric poetics, but also by material and psychogeographies interrelated by culture, history, identity, and the proliferation of these aspects. These range from material geographies of objects, landscapes, and the haptic body, to psychogeographies of itinerance and geospatial trauma. Through his usage of heterogenous literary mediums extending to medieval ghazals, prosodic ethnographies, collaborative translation, photojournalism, and his first and only novel, *Black Light* (1966), Kinnell synoptically integrates cross-cultural and linguistic praxes within globalising spatial orientations.

Origins and Intimations of *Black Light*

In his afterword to the 2015 re-publication of *Black Light*, a year after Kinnell's death, Robert Hass affirms of the text:

> Reading it again recently, after its author's death in October 2014, I was struck by its originality and ferocity. And I found myself looking in it somewhat more urgently for Galway Kinnell, and wondering—especially in these days when Iran is so much in the headlines—about how its young author came to the place—psychically, geographically—where it was written.[6]

[6] Hass, afterword, 123.

Hass's biocritical fascination with Kinnell's audacity is essentially a holistic point of departure, an inquiry about origins and origin stories pondering what, in Kinnell's direct experience, could engender this novel.[7] Kinnell's relationship with Iran would permeate throughout his poetic life, as both formative and foundational to his subjective experience. For readers, in qualifying our own appraisals of the text vis-à-vis the geographical imagination, Kinnell's self-reflexivity, self-identification, and experientiality of space, place, and landscape form a primary basis for analysis. In exploring the foundations of Kinnell's polyspatiality, this chapter attends to the particulars in attempting to trace or seek Kinnell within the localised experience framed by Iranian inheritance, and the specificity of the geographical imaginations it catalyses, particularly in *Black Light* and *Sheffield Ghazals* (1994).

Despite the scarcity of critical scholarship pertaining to *Black Light*, Kinnell's novel is not without controversy, and merits response in our assessment of the text, in addition to the geographical imaginations it comprises. Although Hass reacts to what he deems "originality and ferocity"[8] in the book, Amy Motlagh denies the singularity of the text, problematising its thematic substructures in its referencing of one of Iran's most canonical modern works, *Buf-e Kur* (1937) or *The Blind Owl*, written by Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951). Motlagh is unequivocal in her commentary; alleging that the resemblances between the two texts would suggest Kinnell's replication, she enumerates the similarities thus:

> a paranoid artisan, living in virtual isolation; the presence of an ethereal girl who drives the artisan to violent madness; a murder by stabbing; the flight into the desert after the crime; the appearance of an old man who helps him and who also resembles him; the imagined or real sexual encounters with a female family member etc.—are so similar to Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* that they cannot be dismissed, although the resemblance is never noted by critics.[9]

[7] Hass admits to reading the novel through a consideration of the biographical specificity of Kinnell himself, an attempt to "read the younger writer through the lens of the older one." His assertions position Kinnell as wrestling with religious proclivities, a kind of self-reflective work whereby he works out his own sense of personhood through the veil of this culturally conservative main character: "[it]'s clear, for example, that in Jamshid he was not anatomizing conservative Islam, he was exorcising devils of his own, whether of the New England or the Irish Protestant variety." Hass, afterword, 139.
[8] Ibid., 123.
[9] Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 228.

Motlagh adds further evidence to her conjecture, arguing that Kinnell's former girlfriend, Jenssen Ziesler, was a doctoral student, both fluent in Persian and writing her thesis on Hedayat.[10]

Indeed, had Kinnell read *The Blind Owl* or encountered it in any capacity, it would have been in either French or English prior to the publication of *Black Light* in 1966; Roger Lescot's French translation, *La Chouette Aveugle*, appeared in 1953, and the English edition, translated by D.P. Costello, in 1957. Motlagh cites personal communication with Kinnell in 2012, by which Kinnell dissociates himself from *The Blind Owl*, and attests to no prior knowledge or reading of the novel.[11] In contrast, through research conducted for this thesis, his miscellaneous compositions suggest a wholly incongruent narrative, as evidenced in Houghton Library's most recently established Kinnell archive, *Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran*. Kinnell pens:

> The other ghost is the last chance for man to be himself. It is the ghost of Sadegh Hedayat, the greatest fugitive of modern Iranian literature, who committed suicide in Paris in 1951, the year the Mossadegh came to power. Besides short stories, [h]is works include a novel, The Blind Owl, a satirical study of the middle class called Haji Aqa, and some collections of Iranian folklore. Born to one of the '1000' families, he despised his class, and turned to the common people, to the old, remote ways when 'the manners of bus driver's assistants had not yet penetrated.' He wrote of the poor, the lost, the nervous works. If for Western readers Hedayat's work seems too dependent on Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and the French Existentialists, he is a deeply moving artist for the young Iranians who still mourn for his country [...] One young man from the province told me: 'I do not read the works of Sadegh Hedayat. If I were to read them, I would be too sorrowful. I would die myself.'[12]

Still more convincing and conclusive are excerpts from his personal correspondence with Anne Buchanan Crosby, with Kinnell writing to her from Iran on 23 January 1960: "1. Could you find out if Haji Agha, by Sadegh Hedayat, has ever been published in translation. (It came

[10] Ibid., 229.

[11] Ibid., 228. In our appraisal, we should consider that Motlagh's personal communications with Kinnell took place two years before his death. At the time, Kinnell was 85 years old, succumbing to leukemia in 2014 at the age of 87.

[12] Galway Kinnell, "Tehran Journal Notes and Miscellaneous," Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450), Box: 3, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
See Amir Hussein-Radjy, "Shocking the Bourgeoisie with Iran's Misunderstood Modernist," Sunday Times Book Review, *The New York Times* (8 May 2022): https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/12/books/review/sadeq-hedayat-blind-owl.html

out here about 15 or 20 years ago.) 2. Could you see what else of his may be available (excepting The Blind Owl which I have.) and air mail it if there is anything."[13]

Kinnell's archival writings comport a consideration of Hedayat's significance within the Iranian literary canon, and his own attempts to contextualise Hedayat's political and cultural legacy through the opinions and testimonies of locals themselves. Collectively, these aspects underscore a dimensionality of the geographical imagination presented in *Black Light* as ever more affirming, significant, and reified within the body of Kinnell scholarship. Kinnell's computation of material and psychogeographies continues to cultivate complexity, from the sociality of relations and the class divisions between liminal and marginal, expanded to sensorial and spectral witness, and to additional considerations of identity. As a novel and textual event in Kinnell's corpus, *Black Light* epitomises a major inflection point: the pre- and the post-Iran, and the ever-shifting apotheosis of Kinnell's geographical imagination.

Through textual scholarship, the role of archival research, in both manuscript and audio imports, thereby performs a specific function in cross-pollinating ideas of narrative origin in Kinnell's work. Acknowledging this, we point to several coincident pieces in Kinnell's archive that support the construction of *Black Light*, as well as the enduring aspects of Persian. Upon his return, he sent a proposal for *The Half-Known Iran (or Persia)* or *The Iran I Loved* (working title), a volume which he aspired to publish as an omnibus of his "Persian Notebook" series.[14] Kinnell's editor confidante, Barbara B. Miller (commonly addressed as "Betty"), appraised this assemblage rather harshly, stating that "[i]n its present form, the books [sic] smacks of amateurism and lacks depth of thought."[15] Much to Kinnell's disappointment, the failed project never came to fruition; several years before his death, he returned to this work

[13] Correspondence (23 January 1960); Anne Buchanan Crosby Collection of Galway Kinnell Letters and Manuscripts, C1680, Manuscripts Division, Department of Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
[14] In its ethos, it seems close to Gary Snyder's *Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries* (initially appearing in 1957), a first book of prose containing his essays on Japan.
[15] Letter from Barbara B. Miller (née Brakeley) to Galway Kinnell [1961-1963?], Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450), Box: 3, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

a second time in 2013 in discussion with Vermont-based editor, Sharlene Tracy.[16] In his initial pitch for the project to Betty, the subjects he suggested be included (but had not yet written) are absorbed thematically in *Black Light*: "From Meshed to Yazd"; "The Red Light District"; "The Opium Smokers"; and "The Mosque."[17]

Further, Hass observes Kinnell's inspiration for Jamshid's character through a real-life carpet mender, Ali Aqa Turkeh, who Kinnell profiled in "Persian Notebook: The Persian Carpet" as "a man who runs a repair shop for carpets in the bazaar. He works in a little second-storey room full of carpets, variously colored wools, and a family of tame pigeons. He weaves yarn into the moth and cigaret holes so careful [sic] that only a close examination gives away his art."[18] Ali is a common name, and one he uses for a character of central importance in *Black Light*. More specifically, Kinnell's archival photographs support that Kinnell chose Jamshid and Ali after "Jamshid Layegh" and the famous actor "Ali Nasirian;" both starred in "Le Rossignol errant" performed by the *National Art Troupe of Iran* in Paris (8-11 April 1960) during the fourth season of the Théâtre des Nations, a series of productions that united actors, theatrical performances, dance, and artistic works from a selection of countries that might have otherwise been inaccessible in the Western hemisphere.[19] Kinnell's photojournalistic work in this instance centred on theatre provides yet another dimensionality to his work, and reinforces a fictive identity he did not entirely accept as a persona in poetry, but welcomed more openly in other genres.

These points of interest, from high-handed speculations of plagiarism and evasive authorial intrigue—tantamount to a "sloppy translation/adaptation or a quasi-racist

[16] "Biographical/Historical Note," Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450), Houghton Library, Harvard University. https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/hou03583/catalog
[17] Galway Kinnell, "The Half-Known Iran (or Persia)," Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450), Box: 3, Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[18] Galway Kinnell, "Persian Notebook: The Persian Carpet," *The Tehran Journal* (2 July 1960): 3. Also mentioned in: Hass, afterword, 134. Please note that all materials from Kinnell's Persian Notebook series were obtained from MS Am 3450 at Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[19] These countries included Iran, East Germany, West Germany, and the U.S.S.R., among others. *Théâtre des Nations Program*, Sarah Bernhardt Theatre (15 March-13 July 1960): 27.

interpretation of native life in Iran"[20]— to derivations of narrative, theme, character, and inspiration, foreground a book that should not be considered an anomaly or aberration in Kinnell's poetic corpus. Rather, *Black Light* continues his engagement with intellectual inheritance, and the developing trajectory of his collective, literary imagination. Anecdotal renderings and historical-biographical approximations map our tendencies to pinpoint, almost cartographically, where and how Kinnell was inspired with specific reference points as well as thematical considerations, especially given an assortment of derisions and tensions surrounding his authorial integrity and intent.

Likewise, the transition from poetry to prose as a fluid process is not unconventionality within his work, but rather, permits us to assess and to foster appreciation of this additional literary medium as part of Kinnell's writing cache. Although these findings provide both textuality and texture for the elaboration and conception of the text, it is the construction within the narrative itself, and the geographical imagination it catalyses, which propels our inquiry. Perhaps more saliently, our purpose is not to further constellate these points which act as a refutation of claims pointing to plagiarism, or an elision of Hedayat's work into a metaphorically capacious translation for a Western audience, or even Kinnell's attempt at replication to satisfy an American idiom.[21] That is to say, our developing preoccupation is to show how narratologically and cosmographically these particular inheritances activated Kinnell's geographical imagination, providing access both to material and psychogeographies hitherto in his work, unknown or unexplored.

Interestingly, these geographical imaginations were already present on Kinnell's horizon. This analysis, therefore, in tracing the arc of Kinnell's poetry practice maps out his

[20] Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 229. Of additional interest, and as a counterpoint, is Michael Beard's volume *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel*, which posits that the book was unreadable within Iranian culture at the time of its publication. Rather, it relies on future readers and translations, as he states, "I propose to let critical attention flow in the other direction, to examine *The Blind Owl* as a commentary on its Western predecessors, to use it as a lens through which to see, as if from outside, aspects of our own narrative tradition." Michael Beard, *Hedayat's Blind Owl as a Western Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), x and 4.
[21] Of Kinnell's Iran writings, Motlagh avers that "each of these texts is a translation into an American idiom of the different encounters Kinnell was having with Iran." Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 225.

geographical imagination whilst aiding in the emplacement of his poetic ethos; it provides a body of work through which we gather continuities and discontinuities amongst an extension of genres. Kinnell thus joins the ranks of major American poets such as Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, John Berryman, William Carlos Williams, Donald Hall, and many more, delineated by those who intended to write solely poetry, and those who extended boundaries or definitions of their poetics through an expansion of literary practice.[22]

Kinnell draws his epigraph in the front-matter to *Black Light* from Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191) who advances a philosophy of Illumination or 'Illuminationism' ('science of lights') in his most eminent volume *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (*The Wisdom of Illumination*), straddling both metaphysical and cosmological imports: "Observe the so-called 'half-moon.' The half of it that faces the day is dressed in borrowed light. The half of it that faces the night is dressed in its own light. The same with a simple lamp. Down low, the flame is white. Halfway up, it already begins changing itself into black smoke." In their 1999 translation of *The Philosophy of Illumination*, John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai underscore the text as Suhrawardi's "metaphysics of light and darkness," and one which is arranged in a kind of hierarchy of lower and higher ontological planes.[23] These underlying principles reverse the binary relationship between black and white, and of good and evil, with each becoming a key to the unfolding of the other; light is its own material reality, and darkness, the absence of light.[24] It is possible that Kinnell had read Henri Corbin's translation of Suhrawardi which emerged mid-century, due to the contemporaneity of its publication in France, and his time lecturing in Grenoble.

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[22] See Stephen Fredman, epilogue, *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse, 2nd ed.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), which features a re-written final chapter, and new epilogue addressing contemporary poetry. Also, an evaluation of Fredman's approach to "non-lyric (or post-lyric) prose poetry" in Michael Delville, "Stephen Fredman's *Poet's Prose: The Crisis in American Verse*, *The Prose Poem: An International Journal* 7 (1998): https://core.ac.uk/reader/56324841

[23] Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), xix and xxvii.

[24] Natalia Vorontsova, "Light or Darkness? Suhrawardi's Philosophy of Illumination," (26 November 2023): https://www.essentiafoundation.org/light-or-darkness-suhrawardis-philosophy-of-illumination/reading/

Despite the anachronistic, hundreds of years of distance separating these creative figures, one of Kinnell's earliest poems contains reverberations and intimations of this cryptic title of visually evocative significance, an intertextuality he would discover in Suhrawardi's words. Collected in Kinnell's grouping *First Poems: 1946-1954*, "The Old Moon"[25] underscores the archetypical symbolism of the moon along with its mysterious phases, which birth a shape-shifting landscape. Marrying subjective bewilderment with an air of wistfulness, the lyric speaker reminisces about the moon-gazing of youth, bridging universal geographies of nationality and heaven into view from abstraction:

> I sat here as a boy
> On these winter rocks, watching
> The moon-shapes toil through the nights—
> I thought then the moon
> Only wears her mortality. (*CP*, 14)

The second stanza is a series of interrogatives, semi-vowels, and glides, questioning why the speaker is consistently solicited and drawn back to the rocks:

> Then why to these rocks
> Do I keep coming back, why,
> The last quarter being nearly
> Wasted, does the breath
> Come back dragoning the night? (*CP*, 14-15)

Through the material geographies of "these winter rocks" (*CP*, 14) which seemingly indicate and reflect phases of the moon, geologic time seems to stand still. The moon, unimpaired by the regularity of its cycles, is in opposition to the lyric speaker whose exhalation, and its physical manifestation is depicted as foggy, vaporous breath "dragoning the night" (*CP*, 15), as though rushing forth flames. These exhalations bring him closer to singing, and therefore more proximate to his central purpose of articulating the poem, by which he connects the natural world to the song he brings forth.

[25] Beginning in 1985, Kinnell was an instrumental and guiding figure of The Community of Writers summer workshop program. The title of the program's fiftieth anniversary anthology is taken from "The Old Moon," honouring both Kinnell and the High Sierras to which he returned yearly. See *Why to These Rocks: 50 Years of Poems from the Community of Writers*, ed. Lisa Alvarez (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2021).

Similarly, Kinnell maintains in "The Poetics of the Physical World" that "poetry is the wasted breath."[26] In this instance, the speaker views the waning of the moon as a kind of exhaustion, capturing time physically through quantified cycles. Nelson underscores an analogous notion, that "[l]anguage and consciousness can come into their own full power only by occupying the territory of the physical world."[27] As "The last quarter being neatly/ Wasted" (*CP*, 15) there is some intimation of a revelatory moment, gleaned from the mysteries of the moon, in the splendour of its metaphysical and nebulous landscapes. From the vantage of the naked eye, these are mere surface geographies. Although the light reflections on the surface of the moon indicate its lunar cycle, revealing a 'dark moon' phase during which it becomes invisible, the total materiality of the moon becomes obscured.

Kinnell snapshots the lyric speaker's experience as a boy, now carrying him into adulthood through a contemplative fixation divining the abstraction of the soul:

> Unless, perhaps,
> The soul, too, is such a country,
> Made of flesh and light,
> And wishes to be whole
> And therefore dark. (*CP*, 15)

Although disparate in composition, the sedimentary rocks of the earth moved by water, and those igneous counterparts of the moon, represent materiality and physical embodiment as studded within a bare landscape, reminiscent of the stones "as/ the face/ drifts on a skull scratched by glaciers" in "The Poem" (*CP*, 174). Likening both the moon and the soul as "such a country/ Made of flesh and light" (*CP*, 15), Kinnell unpacks the vastness measured by the terrestrial and lunar movements as well as material geographies and illumination, what Stevens would liken to "the celestial possible," which differentiates itself against the night sky or within one's body. As Stevens advances through metapoesis in "To an Old Philosopher in Rome":

> A light on the candle tearing against the wick
> To join a hovering excellence, to escape

[26] Kinnell, "Poetics of the Physical World," 125.
[27] Nelson, *Our Last First Poets*, 80.

From fire and be part only of that which

Fire is the symbol: the celestial possible.[28]

Considering the metaphysical in tension with the materiality of the wick, Janet McCann would call this "the candle of the mind,"[29] which alludes to something beyond the transforming power of the individual imagination. Much like Kinnell's "Another Night in the Ruins," in which self-awareness is linked to the construction of language, self-destruction is not a fear of cognitive or bodily loss but a transitive state pregnant with potentialities of creation.

Subsequently, Kinnell employs an unusual metaphor by which the soul is "Made of flesh and light" (*CP*, 15), and the moon shares in these traits by proxy. These characteristics underpin geological impermanence, which does more ideologically to retain circular thinking of the interrelatedness of earth and heaven, as well as soliciting a Christian metaphor, dichotomies of divinity and humanity, of flesh and light to which Kinnell returns in "The Supper After the Last" (1960). The moon, anthropomorphised as a woman, "Only wears her mortality" (*CP*, 14), a reminder that what we perceive as the visibility of the moon will wax and wane, leading ineffably to a quasi-death in which her full figure commands complete illumination. In "Hafez' Illuminated Garden," Kinnell quotes the laments of Hafez's poetry: "The earth now seems like paradise, for the lily and rose have/ come to bloom./ But why have they bloomed? Everything goes away."[30] Shrouded in dim obscurity, the celestial body reaches totality, becoming "whole/ And therefore dark" (*CP*, 15) doled out in precise, syllabic strokes.[31]

Although pointedly foreswearing religiosity, Kinnell's pious impulses have been replaced by sacred and spiritual yearning with a specific delimitation between celestial and

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[28] Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 433.

[29] Janet McCann, "'The Celestial Possible': Wallace Stevens' Last Poems," *Southwest Review* 66, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 79.

[30] Galway Kinnell, "Persian Notebook: Hafez' Illuminated Garden," *The Tehran Journal* (13 August 1960): 5.

[31] Consider the intertextuality and allusions present in Kinnell's work, conscious or subconscious with "To an Old Philosopher in Rome": "Things dark on the horizons of perception/ Become accompaniments of fortune, but/ Of the fortune of the spirit, beyond the eye,/ Not of its sphere, and yet not far beyond,// The human end in the spirit's greatest reach,/ The extreme of the known in the presence of the extreme/ Of the unknown." Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 432.

terrestrial geographies. Concurrently, he builds on a Transcendentalist pantheism which is fashioned in the spirit of Hafez. As Kinnell elaborates, "The poetic mystic, on the other hand, is pantheistic. He seeks God not because he hates things, but because he loves them, because he seems in them a beautiful, haunting light which seems to come from elsewhere."[32] Such a circular pantheism, situated amongst connections and divides of both earth and heaven, casts a wide-ranging lens on the geographical imagination combined with its panoptic borders and boundaries. The enigmatic moon, in its relationality to the flesh and to the soul of the poet, holds itself in tension with the earth and the heavens. The concept of 'elsewhere' is exceptionally open-ended, and Kinnell creates further nuance by allowing the reader to build connections where explicit syntactical chains remain unclear; once more, we seek return to Stevens' celestial possibilities of lunar, astral, and solar bodies. In his gestures to reconcile a growing preoccupation with body-soul connections and discrete emplacement within that context, Kinnell demonstrates his early engagement with corporeality and haptic geographies. Such a sentiment is faithfully mirrored by Robert Bly in his poem "Looking Into a Face" from *The Light Around the Body* (1967): "I have risen to a body/ Not yet born/ Existing like a light around the body/ Through which the body moves like a sliding moon."[33]

The Sacred Art of Mending: *Black Light*'s Cartography

When we first encounter Jamshid, the anti-heroic protagonist in *Black Light*, he is repairing a carpet on which the head of a bird of paradise has been disembodied. Sunlight filters into his small, dingy atelier, bringing life to a wall of colourful wool, through its geometrically patterned illuminations and refractions, acting as demarcations of compartmentalised, ordered space. Kinnell writes: "He valued for more than its light the trapezoid of sunlight that glided beside him over the flowers and tendrils of his own carpet on the floor; it itself was like a carpet, but

[32] Kinnell, "Hafez' Illuminated Garden," 5.
[33] Robert Bly, *The Light Around the Body* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967), 53.

one that came from heaven" (*BL*, 1).[34] Jamshid, "a lowly repairer of rugs" (*BL*, 14), is not a carpet maker but a *mender*, a salient choice by Kinnell which allows him to ground the narrative within a metaphorical framework of repair, uniting materiality, creative praxes, and personal atonement. Set throughout Iran, Kinnell's fable-inflected novel reconfigures Jamshid's experience from Mashhad[35] (a prominent destination of religious pilgrimage), to the desolate Lut Desert, continuing to Shiraz, to Isfahan, and finally, to the chaotic street culture of Tehran with its gated red-light district of New City. As a text, *Black Light* serves as a discursive narrative on social morality, culture, and sexual taboos. Through a depiction of Jamshid's meticulously handcrafted acts mediating reappraisal and repair, in conjunction with the evolving materiality of the Persian carpet, the novel engages with questions of primal lust, shame, atonement, and rebirth, ultimately revealing Kinnell's greater interlocution with geographical imaginations of identity.

Jamshid is a widower with an only daughter, Leyla, for whom he is eager to find a suitable spouse. He asks the local mullah, Torbati, to help him with this request, only to later discover that Torbati, a holy man of sanctity and repute in the mosque, has been accepting bribes to arrange fake marriages for religious pilgrims. When Torbati visits Jamshid in his carpet repair shop, he defames Leyla, pronouncing her a whore unfit for marriage, and attempts to extort Jamshid should his further matchmaking service be required. In an intense fit of rage over the mullah's hypocritical posturing, Jamshid stabs Torbati through the heart with his embroidery shears, killing him. He then rolls the mullah's body in a carpet, heading rather perfunctorily to the police station to confess to the murder. However, the officers laugh Jamshid out of the station; suddenly, he finds himself a fugitive. He immediately leaves town and is desert-bound, whereupon he meets Ali, a wandering murderer with formidable survival instincts, whose only belongings are a small carpet, in addition to an ailing camel named Hassan.

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[34] All references and citations of *Black Light* (parenthetically listed as '*BL*') are from the 2015 Counterpoint volume, except where indicated.

[35] Kinnell uses 'Meshed' and 'Mashad' interchangeably.

On the original cover of *Black Light*, published by Houghton-Mifflin, and dedicated to Jenssen, the Persian carpet is foregrounded as both a prominent and a central element of the book. However, we ultimately lose this primary context with subsequent editions by Rupert Hart-Davis (1967); Farrar, Straus and Giroux (1980); and Counterpoint (2015) whose images merely evoke a generic desert landscape or silhouettes of Iran, without gesturing to the carpet as a character in and of itself. Items of material culture such as the Persian carpet can certainly be read in terms of commodity structure, or through applying Marxist critique of capitalistic modes of production that examine social mobility. It would be a fair extrapolation that Kinnell acknowledged a societal discourse surrounding power structures of modalities of labour, and alternatively could be read as a critique of commodity structures and socio-economic strata.[36]

Writing what is essentially a picaresque fable, Kinnell chose the prominence of the Persian carpet, and its depiction throughout *Black Light*, for its familiarity and iconography to a Western readership. He contends of his first day in Tehran walking down Ferdowsi that "seeing Persian carpets in the windows, I felt my sense of strangeness suddenly diminish." He continues that "[p]erhaps no other Iranian work of art has such power to make the Westerner feel at home, but at the same time this sense of familiarity is, I am sure, illusory."[37] Noting the significance of the rug as a convergence of sites of pleasure, aesthetic enjoyment, value, and luxury, Kinnell imbues the carpet as a site of material geography and spatial dimensionality, an object through which identity is enumerated as subjective experience. Mediated through its representations of landscape, it acts as a means of modulating character and those of material place through specific cultural reference points and relationality. Wherever Jamshid finds himself and for what purpose, the carpet defines a place of prominence, whether used for

[36] In his Persian Notebook series, Kinnell highlights work production in conjunction with the intriguing rhythmic chant of weavers as they read the design or *naghsheh*, aloud. It is, in essence, the rug coupled with oracularity as a poetic act. He also notes recordings made by Sweeney of the Kerman factory for the Library of Congress. Kinnell, "The Persian Carpet," 4. This historiographic component is contextualised and counterbalanced by Minoo Moallem who explores the Persian carpet as both transnational commodity as well as aestheticized and fetishized object. See Minoo Moallem, *Persian Carpets: The Nation as a Transnational Commodity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 17.

[37] Galway Kinnell, "The Persian Carpet," 3.

prayer at the mosque, or in the courtyard where Jamshid draws upon his waterpipe surrounded by the angular walls, starry sky, and a "rectangle of heaven" (*BL*, 11). Even in the barren desert as a barrier against the land, the carpet enacts and delimits spatial boundaries through individually appointed, quotidian spaces of consecration and refuge. Through its ability to be moved, and therefore reconceived in purpose, the mobility of the carpet further contributes to create and to enact the geospatial.

Kinnell details the ideological points of tension between the carpet and its greater context in the materially geographic world:

> More deeply, I guess carpets replaced animal skins on the floors because the skins are so thoroughly of this world; they even smell of mortality, and are, in fact, precisely the 'mortal sheath.' A relief from the ordinary world, the carpet must have been also, on a deeper level, a transcendence of it. It was an abstract garden defying the desert, a dreamed area distilled from the sights and sensations of so many oases, a bringing together of far-scattered sign of beauty into a stylized surface richer than anything existing on earth. Composed of elements of the world the carpets also opposed the world, as all acts of transcendence deal in symbols belonging to that which they seek to leave behind.[38]

As recapitulations of paradise, they draw us inward towards their flourishes and embellishments, much like the landscape of the Persian garden or courtyard, merging the sacred with the everyday.[39]

In his treatment of the Persian carpet as heterotopia or "other spaces" which straddle the real and the imagined, Michel Foucault affirms the dynamism of the rug as a kinetic garden that can shift across space:

> The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center (the basin and water fountain were there); and all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space, in this sort of microcosm. As for carpets, they were originally reproductions of gardens (the garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space). The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.[40]

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[38] Ibid., 12.
[39] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Sacred Art in Persian Culture," *The UNESCO Courier* 24, no. 10 (October 1971): 20.
[40] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* (Spring 1986): 25-26.

Indeed, Foucault's sentiment bears much in common with Kinnell's extrapolation. Kinnell's position vis-à-vis these codes of spatiality evolves his own comprehension of meaning-making surrounding Iranian ethos and identity. Whilst Kinnell demonstrates the Persian carpet as a site of prideful place in the world, a dimension held as an access point to the transcendent through the earthly, his later incorporation of it in *Black Light* suggests a somewhat darker and more probing metaphysical stance. In her poems, Farrokhzad bore a similar sensibility, interlocuting with the traditional garden by transforming it into a graveyard, what Levi Thompson addresses as a "transformation" or "yet another instance of a modernist imagining her own significant geographies within her poetry."[41]

Kinnell triangulates the mosque, the carpet, and the garden as achieving excellence and "elaborate expressions"[42] simultaneously, which he attributes to the strong aesthetic character of Sufi mysticism, one that pivots between asceticism that "abandons the earth," and pantheism, "which renders it divine."[43] By virtue of Kinnell's crafting of Jamshid, and his significance as an anti-hero, he connects these material geographies, querying how an object of extreme aesthetic beauty and utility could denigrate those who repair them. It becomes a question of transcendence, however, contrasting the biophilia afforded by the American Renaissance, as captured in Kinnell's poetic cosmography and ethical centring.

Made by an intense process of weaving, Persian rugs comport their own textilic cartographies: the warp as vertical, longitudinous strands, and the weft as horizontal, lateral or latitudinal strands. Hence, Jamshid's acts of mending and repair are akin to restoration, to bringing the carpets back to their original splendour in celebration of the paradisical. As such, this concept of pre-eminence, of ideals and aspirations as aforementioned by Kinnell, and later developed in *Black Light*, is mirrored in Jamshid's concealed mending. His perfection of technique and repair belies any wear and tear, or any imposition of time or circumstance

[41] Levi Thompson, *Reorienting Modernism in Arabic and Persian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 145.
[42] Kinnell, "The Persian Carpet," 12.
[43] Ibid.

enacted upon an object. Meticulous acts of hand-mending deny the life cycle or lived, material experiences of the object, refuting its narrative and disavowing the history attached to it, concealing them by perfection, and broadly, erasing all traces of a past life.

Mingling material and psychogeographies, Kinnell writes of Jamshid, "He had spent all those years in Meshed weaving closed the gaps, as if he had thought that if you perfected a surface what it was laid upon no longer had to be reckoned with. Now that he had broken through the surface, it seemed he had no choice anymore but to die into the essential foulness of things" (*BL*, 47). Mending of this nature does not allow for any openings—it permits neither light to penetrate through, nor flaws or breaks in the continuous fabric—and, the more metaphorical interpretation of that fabric as a hermetically sealed object gestures towards the carpet as a representational landscape unmarred by discontinuities. For Jamshid, and the attendant 'good as new' of his carpets angling to restore paradise, imperfection is anathema. Yet it is a proliferation of defects and discontinuity, of gaps and gaping holes in both physical and hermeneutical senses that will bring him to greater consciousness of experience over the course of the novel.

Through his journalistic observations and ethnographically focused writing in his "Persian Notebooks," written primarily for an expatriate audience, Kinnell's self-designated purpose would seem to be privileging visual imagery and cultural symbolism. However, true to his own poetic ethos, he shifts quite pronouncedly between factual and informative expository writing in crafting this work, to a fictional narrative prose privileging geospatiality; Kinnell distills this transcendence into a lifeworld grounded in materiality and texture. We might extrapolate that in *Black Light* in particular, he no longer occupies the self-appointed role of an émigré educator, but rather, that of a literary practitioner cultivating and evolving a sense of the transnational. He thus pivots to the geographical imagination as a commentary on Westernising influence, de-emphasising visual paradigms and the dominance of sight. More pointedly, he de-Westernises or decouples vision-derived knowledge in favour of a view that is not dominated by the straight objectification of the gaze, but one comprised of both subject

and object where we are in a continual state of tactilic experience, and self-referentiality in space.

In terms of experientiality, a first contact with objects of material culture can be primarily visual. We read them as texts and material geographies in their own right because of the specific roles materials play in defining, and in orienting, spatial organisation. However, in the case of textiles like the Persian carpet, we may define them through haptic perception: our skin acts as a receptor as well as an interpreter of the physical and material presence of the item. By using what is called 'hand,' we hold the textile between our thumb and forefinger, rubbing them together to arrive at an evaluative stance about its quality, utility, and our own perceptual sensitivities.

Noting the preoccupation of the Sufi spirit, Kinnell dwells on sensorial, bodily perception and applies this to his characterisation of Jamshid, as well as to his kleptomaniacal instincts. Tired of sleeping on the desert floor, Jamshid becomes so overtaken by jealousy and covetousness that he actually considers killing Ali to get his carpet: "One night it came to him that the only way to save himself was to murder Ali and to take the carpet for himself" so that "protected from the earth by the woven ornaments of paradise, he would rest as on a pure sunlit cloud"(*BL*, 34). In Jamshid's estimation, there is a crossing and a transference of boundaries acting as a proxy membrane; flesh is pressed into the carpet, which is then pressed into the earth, endowing a layer of comfort and a certain "ritual cleanliness"[44] provided by it. Through the materiality of the carpet, Jamshid builds a sense of home and of emplacement, one which acts as an interface between the earthly and the experiential:

> Later Jamshid made a point of inspecting the carpet. The knotted wool was nearly all gone and the carpet had only the airiest residuum of color and design left. It had once been a prayer rug, and the outline of the sacred niche, with its willow tree, was barely visible. In the old days Jamshid would have recommended this carpet be thrown on the trash heap. He persuaded himself as best he could that it was nothing to covet (*BL*, 34).

[44] The traditional Persian home is seen as a place of purity and simplicity akin to the mosque. Likewise, the ritual cleanliness of the prayer carpet, where one may pray or go barefoot, relates to one's spirit. Nasr, "Sacred Art in Persian Culture," 20.

As the novel unfolds, Jamshid's act of murder is not without consequence or retribution, and a reward of 1000 tomans is offered for his apprehension and delivery, dead or alive. Whilst attempting to save his friend from a gang of bounty hunters, Ali is brutally stabbed with the same pair of embroidery shears used to kill Mullah Torbati. Through ominous and sinister description, Kinnell's passage contrasts the affordances of "The Old Moon." The fullness and natality of the old moon, and its holistic geographies, are countered by a menacing, dark light deriving from its own heavenly body. It is as though Kinnell is presenting a dualistic interchange, two sides of the same coin magnifying light, dark, and their collective inter-proliferation in the manner of Suhrawardi:

> Jamshid saw the great rock in the moonlight. As he approached it, the world seemed to become deserted. A deadness came into the air. There was something poisonous about the moonlight. The rock alone seemed to live. A struggle seemed to be taking place on its glistening surface. Its black light cast straight down on the earth, illuminated a broken form (*BL*, 40-41).

Wrapping Ali's body in the carpet, Jamshid then fastens it atop the camel, Hassan, vowing to bring it back to Ali's wife as per his dying request: "All that seemed important now was to bring the remains of Ali, the best man he had known,[45] back to the earth of Shiraz" (*BL*, 50).

As the body rots and decomposes on the journey, it is attacked vigorously through the carpet by vultures as it passes beside a Zorarastrian tower or *dakhmah* where human remains are strewn in full exposure.[46] Apart from Jamshid's, and our own obvious disgust, of the synesthetic convergence of rank smell and taste as maggots embed Ali's flesh, and vultures perforate the carpet, both natural processes work together to fill the carpet with holes, ultimately disintegrating it. Jamshid's overwhelming desire to maintain the carpets as one continuous, uninterrupted cartographic form is disrupted by discontinuity. Hence, he contemplates what has fundamentally embedded itself in his consciousness from the earliest

[45] Kinnell removes "the best man he had known" as it was in his original version. As a result, his changes lose an attention to particular and essential components of Jamshid's relationality to Ali. See Galway Kinnell, *Black Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966), 57.

[46] Jamshid describes Zorastrian beliefs pertaining to burial: "That to bury a dead man in the earth would befoul the earth. That to drop him in the sea would befoul water. That to burn him would befoul air. It was for the birds, creatures who were essentially corrupt, and also, therefore, slightly sacred, to transmute dead flesh into the sky" (*BL*, 45).

pages of the novel: "When you snap a single thread, he reflected, you threaten the whole fabric" (*BL*, 8).

As readers, we now consider the trauma of Jamshid's lived experience a second time: the first inflicted by his own surprising crime of passion and violence, and the second in its traumatic return. We may compare the two men, Mullah Torbati and Ali, not merely bearing similarities in having been murdered by the same weapon, and the significance afforded to a double murder, but more pointedly in Kinnell's relation and depiction of the flesh, which is two-fold: the men's bodily experiences in contact with the Persian carpet, as well as the carpet's greater contributions and entanglements of the body (symbolically and physically), and somatic trauma. Shelly Rambo's concept of the "invisible wound" is applicable here, as she advances that "[t]he study of trauma, largely a Western enterprise, is often referred to through the image of invisible wounds; thus, the work of trauma healing is to bring these wounds to the surface—to make visible what is invisible."[47]

With regards to Ali and Torbati, the rug has initial and total contact with their corpses, encompassing, enrobing, and enveloping them. In the case of the mullah, the carpet does not deteriorate by clinging to and masking the very flesh inside of it; Torbati's body is discovered expediently, presented as the sacred flesh of a lived body with a fatal wound. But for Ali, it is a process of decomposition, disintegration, and an unravelling. This creates both a sense of connection and alterity with Jamshid, who has custody of his body, and is in constant contact with it through the veil of the carpet.[48] In Jamshid's empathetic awareness, we connect the trauma and the witness of the wound to Kinnell's poetry, particularly to the psychic and corporeal dislocations in "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing," or to the somatic trauma of "Alewives Pool."

[47] Shelly Rambo, "Refiguring Wounds in the Afterlife (of Trauma)," in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, eds. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015): 263.
[48] As a corollary, in his journalism Kinnell likens the Persian carpet to "a kind of veil over the earth," imbuing the sense as one of protection and of safety. Kinnell, "The Persian Carpet," 12.

Attending to narrative structure, Kinnell's free indirect discourse unravels Jamshid's inner questioning and sustains there for the duration of *Black Light*. These revelations bridge sentimentality with compassion, awareness, physicality, and haptic observation, entering Jamshid's consciousness:

> Are the dead really foul? Jamshid wondered. It was true Ali was stinking. But it seemed to him now that if he had loved Ali it was not entirely for the shine of his spirit, it was also for the glittering darkness of his flesh and bones. Once the light was gone, was the remnant suddenly worthless and foul? Only his own nose, after all, was offended. God did not care about bad smells, nor did Hassan the camel. Nor did the sand and sky (*BL*, 45).

As tactile beings, our skin acts as a mediating membrane or interface, and it connotes a desirable level of tactile proximity to others. This ongoing experience underscores the carnality of our lives as both subjects and objects of touch in a spatial dimension. Through Kinnell's distinction, we see in the wider sense, the definitions of tactility promulgated by Kearney, namely: "To be tactile is to be exposed to otherness across gaps, to negotiate sensitively *between* other embodied beings, to respond to solicitation, to orient oneself."[49] Jamshid's view of Ali's body, specifically his reference to it as "the remnant" (*BL*, 45) in all its corporeal decomposition, bolsters a sense of alterity and self-referentiality triggered by his own navigation, seeking his place in the landscape, and in the wider configuration of the world. Indeed, it is a process of translation and interpretation of the space around us, from the proto-linguistic origins of touch, we are constantly "prefiguring, refiguring, and configuring our experience."[50]

The rug itself, experienced by and in contact with the body, mimics and exaggerates these gaps identified by Jamshid. It explores, probes, and expands them to reveal even larger leaps of faith and understanding. In this way, the carpet possesses a dual function by which the mutability or transposability of its role transforms spatio-temporally. These gaps are not merely literal or aesthetic ones, rubbed apart by time and violent circumstance, but become

[49] Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," 19. [italics in original]
[50] Ibid., 21.

concomitant with the flesh of the wounded, along with the tensions between vitality and mortality.

Within the metaphors of the rug and repair, we have what can be seen as a meta-metaphor, a collision of rug and body in their tactile engagements: geospatial traumas, traces, and "transversalities of touch,"[51] in which we do not collapse into a sameness, but rather, retain our otherness, whilst concurrently dissociating, and yet finding ourselves within it.[52] Kinnell elicits an underlying spatial intersectionality in his work. Wounds essentially are scars, "open trauma" which never close as sites of touch calling us to heed the carnal knowledge of perpetual, corporeal experientiality.[53]

Ultimately, the materiality and the emplacement of the Persian carpet in *Black Light* connect Kinnell's visual encounters in Iran, his textual concerns in constructing a loosely picaresque fable, as well as his usage of the carpet as a framework to address corporeality through somatic traumas and carnal desires of the body. Over the course of a peripatetic, almost nomadic experience of belonging, by which Jamshid's psyche is activated by the landscape, shifting materialities and geographies take hold. In Jamshid's mind, the carpet is imagined as a source of bodily protection, a blanket, and a funereal shroud, by which it becomes a place to find peace and domesticity amongst the unravelled threads, clinging to a past which has slipped through the gaps.

Upon his arrival at the Persepolitan ruins of Takhte Jamshid with Ali's remains, Jamshid lays him to rest on a sepulchre in a tomb originally constructed for an Achemenian king. Jamshid retains the carpet, rolling it up, and crafting a sling for it from the straps of Hassan's harness. Exhausted and utterly drained after the journey, in both psychological and physical imports, Jamshid then lies on the bare earth. Having considered murdering Ali over the carpet, Jamshid has markedly shifted in his intentions. Kinnell calls attention to this

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[51] Richard Kearney, *Touch* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 16.
[52] "In touch, we are both touching and touched at the same time, but we do not dissolve into sensuous sameness. Proximity is not immediacy. Difference is preserved." Kearney, *Touch*, 19.
[53] Kearney and Treanor, *Carnal Hermeneutics*, 5; Rambo, "Refiguring Wounds," 263.

moment as an anomalous one, yet also draws our attention to a specific point of character awareness and enlightenment. The barrenness of the deserts allows for the vivid materiality of the Persian rug to emerge as a centring of home and emplacement, a landscape where Jamshid appears to belong to a dusty, earthen history. Kinnell returns us to Platonic notions of the tripartite soul with its focus on logic and rationality and spirited emotion, along with considerations of earth and body.[54] The third section, that known as the appetitive dimension of the soul, concomitant with and enhanced by rapacious desire, finds its apogee in the latter half of the novel, powered by Jamshid's psychosexual encounters and devolution into madness.

Indeed, Kinnell's crafted psychogeographies are manifested through a string of Jamshid's sexual encounters bordering on the surreal, some of which may be read as hallucinatory episodes that further deregulate power, primacy, and accuracy of sight. Through his depiction, Kinnell advances a kind of psychosis by which the eyes and ears play tricks, and the body, in its sensorial perception, discerns the real and the actual: a pivoting to the haptic in opposition to ocular centrality. Given the odd juxtaposition of reality and imaginary, he creates an imprecise, shadowy narrative by which he layers an additional surrealist aspect to the text.[55]

Once Jamshid arrives at a field littered with empiric remains, he encounters a wailing woman who is distraught over the loss of her son. The noises reverberate with him as "the most anguished sound he had ever heard," and "a kind of ecstasy" (*BL*, 56) akin to a consuming preoccupation throughout several of Kinnell's poems such as "There are Things I Tell to No One"; "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible"; and "The Path Among the

[54] Plato's allegory of the chariot is of specific import, whereby the soul is the charioteer commanding two horses, a sentiment echoed in *The Republic*, Book IV in its discussion of the tripartite soul. See Plato, *Phaedrus and the Seventh and Eighth Letters*, trans. Walter Hamilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973; also, Plato, *The Republic*: *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. G.R.F. Ferrari and trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[55] I would proffer that considering the rise of Lettrists and Existentialists in the 1950s and 1960s, along with Kinnell's proximity to this unfolding movement in France as a lecturer in Grenoble, and translator of surrealists Yves Bonnefoy and Yvan Goll, this would seem entirely plausible. Hass insists that Kinnell infused Albert Camus, as he argues the most important writer in France of the period, as a cultural artefact into *Black Light*. Hass, afterword, 129.

Stones." This thematic concern, where pain is concomitant with exaltation, is one Kinnell continues to wrestle with, particularly in succeeding volumes such as *The Book of Nightmares*, and *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*.

Jamshid's orientation in this physical landscape of empiric ruins, once the grand ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, becomes one of wide-open sexual liberty. He has intercourse with the woman, after which he then lies awake, cradling her in his arms. Through these sleepy, dream-induced aspects, the encounter seems bizarrely unnatural, and bordering on the hallucinogenic. As noted by Juan Antonio Suárez and Juan Francisco Belmonte-Ávila, sexuality comports a markedly powerful geographical stimulus for surrealists, especially when closely allied to the open-ended spaces, and their prospects for risk and opportunity:

> These are spaces for temporary occupation: borrowed, rather than properly inhabited, they lack personal marks, and are pregnant with the possibility, new in modernity, of a floating desire that frequently changes object. These sites allow desire to become depersonalized and disconnected from habit and continuity. As they elude familial or informal social supervision, they foster sexual adventure. [56]

There are no delimitations to configure a psychosexual place, and so in this way, Kinnell authorises Jamshid's access to an infinitude of possibilities in his geospatial ability to enact configurations of the self. It is a sexual awakening activated by the inexhaustible possibilities of his surroundings, and his indefatigable desire for which consummation is not enough.[57] As a corollary, we should note the gendered psychogeographies, which whether overtly or not, reflect cultural social mobility, relegation, and definitions or applications of power dynamics, not dissimilar to our discussion of liminality and marginality in Chapter One. Whether or not Kinnell is specifically participating in the bias of gender-based roles or simply trying to keep

[56] Juan Antonio Suárez and Juan Francisco Belmonte-Ávila, "Postwar American Experimental Film and Queer Psychogeography," *American Studies in Scandinavia* 52, no. 1 (2020): 47-48.
[57] Renaud Barbaras explains, "Unlike need, desire cannot be fulfilled; thus, the presence of what is desired does not fulfill desire but intensifies it; or better, in desire there is no difference between fulfillment and frustration." Andrea Staiti, "Desire as the Individuation of Need: A Phenomenological Proposal in Dialogue with Barbaras and Husserl," in *Somatic Desire: Recovering Corporeality in Contemporary Thought*, eds. Sarah Horton, Stephen Mendelsohn, Christine Rojcewicz, and Richard Kearney (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 6; also, Renaud Barbaras, "Life and Perceptual Intentionality," *Research in Phenomenology* 33 (2003): 157-166.

Jamshid in a space of contained temptation so that the character would necessarily have to confront these sexual, psychogeographical challenges stirs a line of reader-response and questioning.

However, as Jamshid makes his way to New City in Tehran, interior and exterior spaces will assume a place of prominence in the novel ordained by Kinnell's crafting of events which relegate them as transitionally occupied spaces of self-searching and sexual trauma. Kinnell both co-houses and co-locates these peaks of sexual pleasure and pain so that they work as though they are synonymous moans, groans, and whimpers consummating desire, and the physical distress associated with it. We later discover the material manifestations of this in the forms of weeping sores on Jamshid's body as he passes from bed to bed, from taking Ali's wife as a lover, to various prostitutes in New City. In *Sheffield Ghazals*, he locates pain receptors in the brain as embedded both cognitively and corporeally (*CP*, 457), whilst in "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible" he avows, "And a wind holding/ the cries of love-making from our nights and days/ moves among the stones, hunting/ for two twined skeletons to blow its last cry across" (*CP*, 249).

The re-publication of *Black Light* in 1980 features many modest changes of lexicon and syntax, which, whilst not amending the story in its thematic and narrative arcs, do alter the book tonally. Kinnell states that, "[i]n preparing the book for re-publication after its first appearance fourteen years ago, I made a great many small revisions throughout. Each revision seemed a matter of style, yet the cumulative effect has been, perhaps, to change perceptibly the entire mood of the book."[58] The timing of his decision to edit and to republish the text suggests that it was prompted by the 1979 Revolution, which culminated in the fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty, the last historical monarch in Iran. Simultaneously, in Kinnell's poetic work stateside, he was held in a tension of nostalgic revision coupled with generative creativity,

[58] Galway Kinnell, note (1980) to Galway Kinnell, *Black Light* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2015), 122.

through the curation of *Selected Poems*, which would debut in 1982, and culminating with *The Past* in 1985.

At the textual level, Kinnell declares his own misgivings about the original *Black Light*, and his shortcomings in terms of knowledge and global engagement to convey Iranian culture fully and adequately, a disclaimer he makes clear in a note to the revised 1980 version:

> This note is simply to acknowledge the obvious—which is that while I saw as much as I could, alas I wasn't able to see everything. In a regular novel, one expects a description of surface life—which *Black Light* may provide. But one also expects a certain understanding of the social fabric. For me, as a foreigner who spent only a total of twelve months in Iran, it was impossible to know much about the inner workings of that ancient, complex, tradition-ruled, abruptly modernizing country.[59]

Kinnell erases a geocultural othering by writing a fictive, picaresque from the third person perspective, which is more allegorical in its narrative structure. As such, he exudes a self-consciousness about the gaps in his own interpretation, and in his cultural experience of Iran as a visiting scholar.

The short, episodic chapters of the novel reinforce this categorisation, by which he uses the guise of a fable as a filter or layer of interpretive meaning that the reader must then hermeneutically decode: a framework to better understand the cultural and intellectual contexts by which the text was created, and in what capacities and deficiencies, whilst considering those we bring to it as well. Gaps are hermeneutic ones that account for differences in interpretation and culture, but also signify the dissolution of perfection, necessary for the psychogeographical trajectory of the novel as it expands Jamshid's exilic quest, into the underbelly of society with a circle of untouchables: those who loiter in the shadows, whose lives are dominated by touching and being touched, a balance of desire and need, of pleasure and pain.

Charting Kinnell's Transnational Poetics

[59] Kinnell, note, 121.

Kinnell's engagement with an unfamiliar culture catalysed through the Fulbright Scholar Program is inherently transnational and transhemispheric in its configured relationship between expatriate writer and new opportunities for insight and understanding. To an extent, his encounters are cognate with the exilic underpinnings of events of his own lived experience that will be further examined in Chapter Four, chiefly the complexity of departure and return in real and imagined spaces. However, amidst the aesthetic reconfiguration of poetry in Iran in the 1950s and 1960s, the complications of competing spheres of influence by which Kinnell's geographical imagination is tied not merely to experientiality of place but to nation-states and politics of identity as well, merits consideration. As a Fulbright recipient, his attitudes and views are both enlarged and challenged by his exposure to international, educational exchange.

In ascertaining the ways in which poetry travels across boundaries, Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics* is apposite, a study which pivots "through imaginative as well as literal mingling and merging, new coinages, new intergeographic spaces" as well as "the new compound identities" that may come into being.[60] Despite the perceived heterogeneic harmonies, Ramazani also forewarns of the complexity of what he deems "[i]nterstitial concepts of culture"; these aspects include "creolization" and "hybridity" in addition to transnationalism. Whilst these areas of both contact and diaspora, in view of location, culture, and identity, lend themselves well to poetry, they are themselves truly "agglomerations of complex origin," and should be sensitively acknowledged as such.[61]

Although Kinnell enters as an emissary of American Literature, into a space undergoing the height of poetic modernity in Iran, we should highlight the role of the US, in addition to cultural imperialism, as spectral forces at play during the Cold War amid this politicised growth. Donald E. Pease contends that Americanists and literary critics "facilitated exchanges between literary and political realms and effectively transformed the field into an

[60] Jahan Ramazani, *A Transnational Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 60.
[61] Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics*, 28 and 47.

agency of neocolonialism." He further assesses that this was purposefully effectuated to "subsume other literatures and geopolitical spaces into a universal Americanism that reshaped the entire world in the images and interests of the United States."[62] Moreover, Motlagh notes Kinnell's position as a cultural ambassador for the US in an expanding Cold War empire, a precarious position for a writer who is a political activist, social commentator, and cultural emissary on behalf of the Fulbright commission.[63]

For Kinnell, there was certainly momentum building at what would be a charged moment of historical inflection within Persian culture and letters as it sought to dismantle ancient cultural traditions of rhyme and verse. It cannot be overstated the extent to which Kinnell's direct exposure to this dynamic and concretising force of Persian modern poetry, in addition to its legacy of lineage and intellectual inheritance, was tremendously formative in its convergence of new and old. In "Captive Birds: Forough Farrokhzad and the 1960s Iranian Avant-Garde" (2025), a Houghton Library exhibition featuring Kinnell, Christina Davis, curator of the Woodberry Poetry Room composed the following:

> Kinnell's time in the country coincided with a flourishing of the Iranian avant-garde: Farrokhzad, Nader Naderpour, Nosrat Rahmani, and their vibrant circle in Tehran were, according to [Elizabeth T.] Gray, 'immediate heirs to the ground-breaking work of Nima Yushij (1895-1959), the father of the New Poetry, who broke with classical Persian forms and sought to integrate free verse into Iranian poetry.' While the scope of political liberty—and freedom of expression—waxed and waned after the early 1950s, these poets persevered in their experiments (and, in many cases, their courageous activism) for the remainder of their lives.
>
> Kinnell's visit marked the beginning of a lifelong commitment to immersing in—and learning from—other cultures and was in keeping with his steadfast engagement with freedom movements in America and worldwide.[64]

Much of the serendipity Kinnell discovered in his poetic allegiances and affiliations is determined by timing, and by being on the cusp of what was at that time in Iran, the inflection point of the inchoate modern poetry movement, New Persian Poetry. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak discredits a "rhetorical posture" which locates the phenomenon of poetic modernity in Iran

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[62] Donald E. Pease, "National Narratives, Postnational Narration," *Modern Fiction Studies* 43, no. 1 (1997): 18.
[63] Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 221.
[64] Christina Davis, curatorial statement displayed in "Captive Birds: Forough Farrokhzad and the 1960s Iranian Avant-Garde" exhibit, Houghton Library, Harvard University, March 2025.

with a break with the past; Iran's familiarity with European cultures is thus a process of "negotiations" and "contestations" within its literary community.[65]

Deepened by European connections, in particular tied to the French Symboliste movement and Russian tradition, Ali Esfandiari, commonly known by his pseudonym Nima Yooshij (1896-1960), is traditionally heralded as the father of modern Persian poetry and *She'r-e Nimaa'i*.[66] Through "Afsaneh" (translated as "Myth"), a poem through which he laid out his guiding principles, in addition to the founding manifesto of his movement, Nima initially assumed the poetic reigns, directing it dimensionally and dynamically in terms of versification and wider purpose. After Nima's death in 1960, the movement continued coalescing, with Farrokhzad, Naderpour, and Sepehri coming into relief as major figures of Persian modernist poetry, and Kinnell's unlikely contemporaries.

Naderpour, who had been a close disciple of Nima, as well as mentored by poet and political activist Feridoun Tavallali, forged his own poetic divergence from their compositional influences, swiftly developing his own distinct style, one conjoining eloquence with classical poetic foundations in addition to modern form and structures; as his work progressed, his poems could be distinguished from other Persian modernists simply by their visual renderings on the page.[67] Through his meteoric poetic success, Naderpour acted as "the hinge,"[68] a bridge between Iranian tradition and the unlimited bounds of Persian poetic modernity, bestriding each through his legacy to Nima as well as to his commitment to an evolving Persian paradigm. He is credited with organising the very first Persian modernist circle (meeting), which Kinnell is reported to have attended.[69]

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[65] Ahmad Kirimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 1.
[66] Karimi-Hakkak offers an alternative position on Nima's legacy and recognition as the father of modern Iranian poetry, discrediting and subverting him as a towering, singular figure of Persian poetic modernity.
[67] Ardéchir Lotfalian, "Préface," in Nader Naderpour, *L'ardente clarté des crépuscules* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021), 20; my translation.
[68] This moniker was conferred to Naderpour by Mohammad Hoqouqi. Rouhollah Zarei and Roger Sedarat, *Nature and Nostalgia in the Poetry of Nader Naderpour* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2017), 2.
[69] Hass, afterword, 131.

For her part, Farrokhzad's publications came to prominence in *Ferdowsi Magazine*, a bi-weekly periodical and pre-eminent modernist literary and social weekly in Iran.[70] She expediently defined her own sense of poetic development through subversive poetry often focalising on female desire and sexuality, a designation of feminism she refuted.[71] Her popularity as both a poet and a filmmaker climbed sharply over the next few years, before her premature death in 1967 at age thirty-two, later elegised by Sepehri in "Doust" ("Friend"). Like Naderpour, Nima bore substantive influence on Farrokhzad's approach to the inextricable nature of language and meter, with metrical dexterity a hallmark of her literary practice.[72]

Although Kinnell struggled to find his footing among rising poetic movements in the US, he ironically achieved a place amongst these prominent New Persians. Exploring this 1960s epoch in Tehran, and how this cultural milieu imbued Kinnell's literary practice assumes especial significance within the framework of Iranian inheritance and geographical imaginations of identity. Our interests lie with the kinds of valences assumed by his work, conjoint with the socio-political, modernising aesthetic practices they bore out. We might assume that his harnessing of French, in which he had become quite skilled, became an additional language of commonality and linguistic precision with Naderpour, who had studied French language and literature at the Sorbonne.

The Iran-American Association served as an intellectual meeting space in Tehran for Kinnell and his contemporaries, a formal space to counter the stimulating bohemian literary

[70] Sholeh Wolpé, "Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967): A Brief Biography," in Forugh Farrokhzad, *Sin: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad*, ed. and trans. Sholeh Wolpé (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), xxiii.
[71] Amir Hussein-Radjy, "Overlooked No More: Forough Farrokhzad, Iranian Poet Who Broke Barriers of Sex and Society," *The New York Times* (30 January 2019): https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/30/obituaries/forough-farrokhzad-overlooked.html
[72] Thompson, *Reorienting Modernism in Arabic and Persian*, 153.

salons the poets held at their homes.[73] On 18 April 1960, the Iran-America Society[74] held a rare bilingual poetry reading featuring Naderpour and Kinnell as their selected poets. Each delivered poems in their native language before a mostly bilingual audience. The 11 June 1960 edition of *The Tehran Journal Magazine* published the report of the event, which is partially excerpted:

> The joint reading not only made clear how differently poetry is practiced in the United States and in Iran, but also showed how, at its, [sic] deepest level, poetry is a single enterprise, an extreme search to speak the truth, no matter where it is practiced.
>
> The two poets were Mr. Galway Kinnell, whose first book, *What a Kingdom It Was* has just been published in the United States, and Mr. Nader Naderpoor, whose five books, of which the latest is *MASCARA*, have made him one of the best known of the younger poets in Iran. [...]
>
> The reader will see that both poets share a distinct debt to the European tradition; at the same time, he will see the deep mark in each poet of his native tradition: the hallucinated, harsh quality of the American, the elegance and sadness of the Persian.[75]

In addition to the reportage of the event, the newspaper included poems by each poet over the course of two weeks: "Growing Mirror" (Appendices 6A, 6B)[76] and "Fortune Teller" written by Naderpour (translated in collaboration by Kinnell and Naderpour); and the following week's offering, Kinnell's "The Supper After the Last" (offered in Farsi by Naderpour).

"The Supper After the Last," collected in *What a Kingdom It Was* whose publication pre-dates Kinnell's time in Iran, conjures a fictional imaginary in situ after the Last Supper of Christ. The title of this first volume, with its obvious allusion to Kinnell's refutation of a divine kingdom, ushers in the querying, impious poems found within its pages; in several others such

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[73] Writer and translator Karim Emami recounts of Farrokhzad, for example: "Her new home, the one-story red-brick house off Hedayat Street within a stone's throw of the film studios where she worked was a gathering place for her friends on Friday evenings. Such people as Mahmud Azad Tehrani the poet, Sirus Tahbaz the editor, Sohrab Sepehri the poet and painter, and even the great Shamlu would assemble there." Karim Emami, "Recollections and Afterthoughts," lecture, Austin, Texas, [n.d.]:
https://www.forughfarrokhzad.org/papers/papers3.htm

[74] The centre was founded in the 1950s with the aim of engaging cultural enthusiasts and intellectuals of Tehran interested in a cross-cultural exchange. Ramin Asgard, "U.S.-Iran Cultural Diplomacy: A Historical Perspective" *al Naklah* (Spring 2010): 4. Coincidentally, the Iran-American centres were also established in the cities of Isfahan, Mashad, and Shiraz, all of which feature as locations of import in Kinnell's *Black Light*.

[75] "Bilingual Poetry," *The Tehran Journal Magazine* (11 June 1960): 10.

[76] Kinnell heavily edits the text post-publication, renaming it "The Grief Mirror." See Appendices 6A and 6B.

as "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," discussed extensively in Chapter Two, and in "To Christ Our Lord," he continues to grapple with Post-Christianity, coupled with his own defiant irreverence of his previously held systems of belief. "The Supper After the Last" is couched in thinly veiled incredulity that then subverts an immortal Christ in favour of the transcendence of the earth. Adhering to the linear chronology dictated by Kinnell's extant corpus, his conception and writing of "The Supper After the Last" appears during the nascent stages of his deepening intellectual inheritance and linguistic capabilities afforded through a Whitmanian lineage, moments before the geographical imagination of Iran had entered his consciousness or poetic identity.

In the context of his own burgeoning poetic ethos, it is fascinating that Kinnell chose this poem which breaks with religion so overtly, especially within the intensifying Iranian oppositional rendering of secularisation and religiosity leading up to the White Revolution of 1963.[77] Sherman Hawkins maintains that the poem makes a fresh start as a purely creative canvas, a shift from mimesis to vision, evolving "its moment of insight in the act of its making."[78] Hawkins quotes Kinnell as disclosing, "I mean towards a poem without scaffolding or occasion, that progresses through images to a point where it can make a statement on a major subject."[79] Thematically, the poem fosters haunting and jolting symbolism, and considers *creatio ex-nihilo*, the theistic notion which supports the divine creation of the universe from nothing, a doctrine supported by both Christianity as well as Sufi mysticism.

In the opening two strophes, "The Supper After the Last" lures the reader into a false sense of security and repose. Kinnell perambulates in tidy progression through scenes akin to a gentle summer divided between expansive landscapes of desert and sea, and the alluring, locative abode of home:

I

[77] This being Kinnell's first complete volume of published poems, and perhaps what he considered with a certain pride to be one of the hallmark poems of the volume.
[78] Sherman Hawkins, ed. *Seven Princeton Poets: Louis Coxe, Galway Kinnell, George Garrett, William Meredith, W.S. Merwin, Theodore Holmes, and Bink Noll* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 62.
[79] Hawkins, *Seven Princeton Poets*, 62.

The desert moves out on half the horizon
Rimming the illusory water which, among islands,
Bears up the sky. The sea scumbles in
From its own inviolate border under the sky.
A dragon-fly floating on six legs on the sand
Lifts its green-yellow tail, declines it wings
A little, flutters them a little, and lays
On dazzled sand the shadow of its wings. Near shore
A bather wades through his shadow in the water.
He tramples and kicks it; it recomposes.

II

Outside the open door
Of the whitewashed house,
Framed in the doorway, a chair,
Vacant, waits in the sunshine. (*CP*, 81-82)

Kinnell employs an abundance of end-stopped lines in commas and full stops, in addition to interrogative and exclamations, which suffuse the poem with a theatrical performativity. His textual structure reads as a list of stage directions, similar to "Meditation Among the Tombs" in *First Poems 1946-1954*, with an intense focus on the geographical setting and spatial awareness: "The chair waits, less and less vacant./ The host's plan is to offer water, then stand aside.// They eat chicken, drink rosé. The chicken head/ Has been tucked under the shelter of the wing" (*CP*, 82).

Whilst accessible as a mid-length text, the poem does hold considerable tonal heft, which Kinnell does not derive from lyrical affect but through a series of strophic quatrains. In its spatial authority and mode of address, including the specificity of its lexicon, "The Supper After the Last" transports the reader through real and imagined spaces; a world constructed by the faithful, here for Christ's return, can only be a "mirage" (*CP*, 84) fabricated from an undisciplined, conscious mind; in other words: a delusion. The poem derives its rhetorical strangeness from psychogeographies of impermanence, as "the scene begins to float in water":

The witnesses back off; the scene begins to float in water.
Far out in that mirage the Savior sits whispering to the world,
Becoming a mirage. The dog turns into a smear on the sand.
The cat grows taller and taller as it flees into space. (*CP*, 84)

Kinnell has very clearly delineated dialogue, such that speaker, narrating the unfolding vignette (either singular "you" pronoun or plural), and subject are disentangled from one another. Jesus as "the Saviour" commands under his breath, and visibly unwelcome, "stares at the company, where he is company" (*CP*, 82).

> From the hot shine where he sits his whispering drifts:
> You struggle from flesh into wings; the change exists.
> But the wings that live gripping the contours of the dirt
> Are all at once nothing, flesh and light lifted away.
>
> You are the flesh; I am the resurrection, because I am the light.
> I cut to your measure the creeping piece of darkness
> That haunts you everywhere under the sun. Step into light—
> I make you over. I breed the shape of your grave in the dirt. (*CP*, 84)

In his startling adumbration of the scene, Kinnell develops Christ into the persona of a grim reaper-like figure who pores over human shapes, creating material geographies of burial and the underworld. Kinnell later returns to the divine as a homicidal aberrant, doubling down on God's incursions, striking those made in his image, in "Dear Stranger Extant in Memory by the Blue Juniata."[80]

Interestingly, the accusations Kinnell makes against Eliot regarding persona as a mode of evasion in his 1915 "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (as detailed in Chapter Two) might in fact hold true about his own crafting here, as he stands behind an inverted version of Jesus Christ. For Eliot, his sense of the mask and the attendant persona was not simply a mode of evasion, but also a method of facilitating self-articulation. As the speaker remarks in "Portrait of a Lady" (1917): "And I must borrow every changing shape/ To find expression."[81]

The attention paid to the bilingual poetry event, as featured in *The Tehran Journal*, underscores the significance of a burgeoning transcultural appreciation, inviting both readers and observers to consider "the hallucinated, harsh quality of the American, the elegance and

[80] Virginia Zeiders, in her exchange with Kinnell writes: "Dear Galway,/ I have no one to turn to because God is my enemy. He gave me/ lust and joy and cut off my hands. My brain is smothered with his/ blood. I asked why should I love this body I fear. He said, *It is so/ lordly, it can never be shaped again—dear, shining casket. Have you/never been so proud of a thing you wanted it for your prey?*" (*CP*, 236) [italics in original]
[81] Thomas Stearns Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 12.

sadness of the Persian."[82] Through this critical, public-facing cultural discourse, both Kinnell and Naderpour, as poetic personages, become emblematic of wider symbologies and nationalistic representation. National belonging is brought to the fore against a politics of identity, as though each is an archetype of its own nation-states's cultural modes of artistic and aesthetic production. Although the article locates Europe as a significant influence for both Kinnell and Naderpour, at this point in Kinnell's chronology he had already severed his connection to a stylistically mimetic engagement with European prosody. Having left behind the cadences of Yeats and embraced a certain Whitmanian latency in his own work, Kinnell revoked his commitment to continental forebears and precursors.

Through the pioneering legacies of both Whitman and Nima, Kinnell and Naderpour are endowed two standard bearers of poetic tradition; ironically, Kinnell is working against a European tradition, and Naderpour is working toward one. By contrast, Persian literary tradition is well-established over a millennium, and thus European influence is not revisionist or dilutive but a brand-new poetic imagination to propel their movement through mid-century. Kinnell's notes reveal his observation that, "This abandonment of the past is evident everywhere. All serious, young poets write what are called "new poems"—that is, poems based on French symbolism of a hundred years ago."[83] Hence, both Kinnell and Naderpour are not labouring at cross-purposes. Instead, they are trying to achieve representative idioms, or, in Whitmanian terms, "the topmost proof of race is in its poetry,"[84] with these specific poems standing as exemplars for American and Persian letters in the 1960s.

Energised by his own French translations of Villon, Bonnefoy, and Goll, Kinnell was aware of the reception and dissemination of Persian literary works in translation, notably Edward M. FitzGerald's translation of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859), which Kinnell

[82] "Bilingual Poetry," 10.
[83] Kinnell, "Tehran Journal Notes and Miscellaneous," MS Am 3450.
[84] Walt Whitman, "The Poetry of the Future," *The North American Review* 132, no. 291 (February 1881): 195. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25100937

assails as tantamount to "an act of cultural imperialism"[85] by FitzGerald's taking the original Persian poetry and by 'improving' on it. For Kinnell, although a translator himself, translation is an impossible art, leaning on the somewhat limited Frostian axiom that "[i]n translation what is lost is the poetry."[86] David Bellos provides a counterargument to Frost, asserting that "[i]t's not poetry but community that is lost in translation." He continues that, "[t]he community-building role of actual language use is simply not part of what translation does."[87] By extension, the poetry is not simply bilingual in that poems were presented in both native languages but too, possesses an added dimensionality through Kinnell's translation, and the reciprocal ones in English provided by Naderpour.

Translation becomes cooperative in terms of the negotiations in its conferral and transferral from Farsi into English, as well as a kind of co-authorship which displaces the notion of a solitary bard through a transnational representation of shared identity in the geographical imaginary. The very definition of 'translation' comports geospatial relations, a rendering across or movement from one place to another. Or, in a mathematical sense, the literal displacement of Euclidean geometry such that every point of spatial location retains its integrity and positionality. Accordingly, the complexity of these orchestrations and harmonies cross-fertilise a symbolic mythos held within the poetic imaginary of the poems themselves. Metaphors, whether tropic or not, collide with Kinnell's role of alighting language from one place and setting it down in another.

At the core, these notions of situatedness in space and place link global spatiality in direct interference and convergence with Kinnell's identities of the transnational, both through his translations whilst in Iran, in addition to his later poetic and prose works. We cannot, therefore, underestimate the affordances and the significance bestowed upon

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[85] Galway Kinnell, "Translation Lecture, NYU" [1984?] audio, 1:03:31. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 36). Houghton Library, Harvard University.
[86] Kinnell, "Translation Lecture, NYU," MS Am 3277. Kinnell's lecture emphasises methods of translation, poetic fidelity, and linguistic prowess. His approach leans heavily on the general rules stipulated by Alexander Fraser Tytler Lord Woodhouselee's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* (1790).
[87] David Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), 338.

Kinnell's poetry. In addition to the nationalistic importance attributed to his work within a new and evolving American idiom, the transnational and the transhemispheric are brought to the fore; as such, the purpose of translation is not to produce an Americanised equivalent of extant Persian forms and sensibilities. That two poets, Kinnell and Naderpour, are constructing poems in a symmetrical and simultaneous fashion, in tandem with working closely together on the translations of each, is a heightened means of intertextuality and reciprocity that expands geographical imaginations of identity, and the role of the poet in that discernment. From this we may appreciate the difficult undertaking of Kinnell in collaborative translation of Naderpour's work, and especially in his new translations of Hafez's ghazals along with Irage Khojandi, in which they sensitively bring Hafez "into modern, living Englich [sic] while seeking to remain as faithful to the original as possible."[88] Kinnell formally revisits this collaborative translation in his work on Rainer Maria Rilke in partnership with Hannah Liebmann for their selected translations in *The Essential Rilke* (1999).[89]

Kinnell therefore occupies a pivotal position, similar to the 'hinge' of Naderpour, one which attends to immersing himself in the rich and varied poetic tapestry of the Iranian past whilst cementing his feet in the evolving trend of a Persian modernist present, and the experimental *charpereh* of poetic modernity. To work alongside Naderpour, Farrokhzad, Rahmani, and Sepehri at the height of this movement left an indelible mark on his own literary practice. It was not the processes and praxes of modernity which brought them closer together as a locus of points around a central node, but rather, how this inheritance permeated and invigorated Kinnell's poetic cosmography and infrastructure. Scholars have highlighted the kind of revolutionary impulses[90] which likely activated or enhanced Kinnell's own sensibilities

[88] "Three poems by Hafez," trans. Galway Kinnell and Irage Khojandi, *The Tehran Journal Magazine* (23 April 1960): 11-12.
[89] For comprehensive discussions on the linguistic, metaphorical, and cultural challenges of Persian to English, see Dick Davis, "On Not Translating Hafez," *New England Review* 25, no. 1-2 (Spring 2004): 310-318; also, Hafez, *Translations and Interpretations of the Ghazals: Hafez*, trans. Geoffrey Squires (Ohio: Miami University Press, 2014), vii.
[90] For example, Naderpour was part of the Tudeh and the socialist left, only to leave the group prematurely. Poupak Naderpour, Preface to Nader Naderpour, *L'Ardente clarté des crépuscules* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021), 10; my translation.

(steeped in a blend of counterculture in Iran), about the civil injustices happening in his native US. Kinnell attests to his profound interest in these poetic alliances:

> At that time in Teheran, a group of poets and writers were talking about plans that never came to fruition about making a bilingual magazine. In this group, there was an Iranian writer, who was also a very handsome, well-known actor [Nader Naderpour] ... We had the promise of funding from an American source, some government agency for the promotion of American culture. But at the last minute the Americans pulled back, fearing that there were too many leftists among our group of writers. Little did they know that the danger would come from the right.[91]

Despite the nature of delicate political affiliations and the potential perils identified by American diplomatic interests, Kinnell's statement speaks to the enterprising nature of their joint creative project. Unfortunately, although the Farsi-English publication never materialised, Kinnell, in concert with Sweeney, was instrumental in developing sound recordings of Naderpour, Farrokhzad, Sepehri, and Rahmani, a cross-cultural legacy of exchange that forms a significant corpus within Kinnell's archives.[92]

Poetic Legacies of Iran

True to his impulses to revise his poetry post-publication, Kinnell took liberties to re-work the entirety of *Black Light* as well. That the work itself maintains a place of prominence in his cognition in the intervening years of the early 1960s, 1980s, and even as late as 2013, is duly significant. It displays its intellectual value in his developing sense of the lasting impact of his texts, and the centrality of his own self-preservation. As joint editors of Kinnell's *Collected Poems*, Barbara K. Bristol and Jennifer Keller both address his "determined pursuit of ever-elusive perfection," and his desire to not merely alter and repair his literary works, but to amend his poetic identity: "In the new versions, it sometimes appeared that he was trying to revise the poet he had been at twenty-five, as well as the poems" (*CP*, xli).

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[91] "Biographical/Historical Note," Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450), Houghton Library, Harvard University. https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/hou03583/catalog

[92] These audio recordings are housed in The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

At the time of writing *Black Light*, the novel as a form was the instrument through which Kinnell created this narrative, embarking on an expedition, in both metaphorical and literal imports, further interrogating the transnational and the transhemispheric through the fictional identity of anti-heroic Jamshid. Whilst we may trace other legacies from Iran throughout *Body Rags*, including "Testament of the Thief" (provisionally titled, "Persian Garden"),[93] and that *Body Rags* was meant to be called "A Night in the Ruins"[94] but was later changed, how much of Iran is present in his poetic practice in the immediate years following is not readily apparent. In an interview with Chard deNiord, Kinnell reveals, "I didn't write much poetry while I was there, I don't know all the reasons, but one was that so much of it I didn't understand."[95]

Upon returning to the States, Kinnell found his bearings to work through his experience in the Middle East through poems such as "Testament of the Thief," an overt allusion to Villon's "Le Testament," in which he harnesses tonality and lyricism whilst openly gesturing to fragrant Iranian bazaars, opium smoking, and a disjointed montage of downtrodden individuals. Written in seven strophes, just as "The Bear" and "The Porcupine" which it precedes in *Body Rags*,[96] "Testament of the Thief" performs as a pastiche of Kinnell poems ranging from past, present, and future, including "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World"; "The Last River"; and "Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock." Its striking similarities of composition to "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible," and "At the Reading of a Poet's Will" (1960), both in thematic and narrative configurations, suggest Kinnell might have used "Testament of the Thief" for a dual purpose, as both a pretext or inspiration for its revisitation in Section VI of *The Book of Nightmares*. This group of poems

[93] James William Robinson, "The Embrace is All: Galway Kinnell's Poetry, 1950-1985" (1986), 282. *Doctoral Dissertations*, 1499. https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/1499

[94] Galway Kinnell Papers, Box 1, Folders 1959-1960, Lilly Library, Indiana University, quoted in Motlagh, "*Black Light*, White Revolution," 221.

[95] Chard deNiord and Galway Kinnell, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *The American Poetry Review* 40, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2011): 8.

[96] Kinnell details crafting poems in seven strophes, an inherently magical or symbolic number, as a natural output for him. He admits to changing those that are six or eight and rounding them out, so they all produce seven in total. This numerical symbolism is reflected in the ten strophes of each individual poem in *The Book of Nightmares*, utilised to evoke Rainer Maria Rilke's *The Duino Elegies*. Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 41.

establishes a dialogue of events between last wills and allotment across both ordinary and horrific spaces, including fields of war and the underworld. "Testament of the Thief" evinces Kinnell's morbid fascination with grotesquerie defined by material and psychogeographies of the undesirable: "claustrophic pewk-worm"; "the louse"; and "nerve-wracked flea" coupled with "skinny assbones" in "a poor portion of the world" (*CP*, 196-197).

Kinnell has a certain fascination with the notion of giving things away, of bequeathing materialities. In their asceticism, these poems are suffused with the values of Sufi mysticism, and a renunciation of material goods. These are not gifts to retain legacy or purpose, but rather indiscriminate fodder, whether flesh to sustain insects, dust blown off bones, or dangling offers of mortality for the taking.

Throughout the poem, Kinnell includes quotation marks to indicate strands of an individual's discourse, as though breaking the fourth wall of the scene he plays out in verse. Gérard Genette's concept of focalisation speaks to Kinnell's ability to draw distinctions between strophes, and their narratological imports, whereby we identify a homodiegetic narrator of zero focalisation, and the external focalisation of a speaker, effectively framing "who speaks" and "who sees."[97] In the poem, Kinnell deploys an unreliability of narration and style, in a cross-section peppered by the banalities of mutual existence, "of the old testaments of their lives,/ the little meals,/ the airs,/ the streets of our time" (*CP*, 199). The poem unfurls through a dual focus: the first, a narrator's omniscient observations; and the second, the partial testimonies recounted by a "coolie"[98] who "sits, resting,/ shirt open,/ legs spread,/ head lolled to one side" (*CP*, 196). Kinnell's usage of this pejorative term seems at odds with the ethos of the poem; we learn that the speaker is an opium peddler emerging as an unlikely protagonist,

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[97] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 186.

[98] A pejorative term (originating in the 1830s) for unskilled workers, usually of Indian or Asian descent, but generally referring to indentured servitude. Why Kinnell employs this word, given its historical usage, and in the context writing about an opium peddler, is difficult to assess. See Lakshmi Gandhi, "A History of Indentured Labor Gives 'Coolie' Its Sting," in *NPR Code Switch: Word Watch* (25 November 2013): https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2013/11/25/247166284/a-history-of-indentured-labor-gives-coolie-its-sting
Of note, Kinnell substitutes the term "navvy" (usually employed to refer to Irish railroad or manual workers) in Section 6: "Item, to the navvy/ who trudges over the earth/ bearing earth on his backbones" (*CP*, 199).

detailing a cast of forlorn, desperate characters from all walks of life gathering for a fix. Kinnell transposes and translates location, utilising beggars, colonels, degenerates, cops, high school principals, and poets as bodies in space, which occupy poetic narrative as "changes of state that affect, or are initiated by, individual existents, and these existents have bodies that both occupy space and are situated in space."[99] Through the equalising principles of de-commodification and disenfranchisement of certain death, the modalities of democratisation of space and station intersect and diverge.

These interplays of nuance and poetic sensibility intertwine and untwist to reveal a poem which compartmentalises language and character. Recalling Hafez, Kinnell doles out sobering generalities even to the flourishes of natural beauty:

> The wild rose dies,
> the hollyhock falls before finishing its blossoming,
> the poppy does not come back,
> the moth preens herself by stages
> for her carnal moment.
>
> And yet a rose
> has tossed the corpse its perfume.
> That that bloated snout can catch it proves
> the body, too,
> has its origins in paradise. (*CP*, 197-198)

Using plain language, Kinnell's meaning here cannot be obfuscated, one which levies our sole condition of living to reach fruition, and then passing away. He expresses this through the heights of carnality mirrored by the moth who "preens herself by stages/ for her carnal moment," but also in the dying rose; it tumbles downwards, ultimately disintegrating and perfuming the earth, and the dead scattered below. Paradise, one of the most profoundly unknowable places, and a notion he will return to in *Sheffield Ghazals*, marries material and psychogeographies through "the fumes of the real" (*CP*, 199) or the embers of opiates, but also of an imagined, rapturous space, interwoven with the earthly lifeworld.

[99] Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), 16.

Whilst Kinnell wrestles with the utilisation of narrative in poetry, he admits that many of his poems do rely on this architecture to propel them. In an interview with *The Ohio Review*, Kinnell eschews the use of narrative in poetic practice:

> OR: How important do you see narrative as being for your work, for your poetry?
>
> GK: I used to depend more on narrative than I do now. I would like a poem to be able to be free of narrative. The [sic] *Duino Elegies*, for example, the supreme modern poem, is supreme partly because it doesn't have a shred of narrative in it.
>
> OR: You see narrative then as a crutch? Something you've depended upon and want to transcend? Narrative seems so much the sense of the journey, the sense of forward motion in your poems, especially *Body Rags*.
>
> GK: Yes, my poems have depended a lot on narrative. Certain ones, like "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," don't use narrative. Other poems, like "The Bear," are sheer stories. If a poem could be free of narrative altogether, it would at least open the possibility that some truth could be said directly rather than by parable. It would be nice if there were poems that could teach the way Rilke does, the way much of the best of Whitman does.[100]

Kinnell explicitly aggrandises non-narratives as modern, and therefore more desirable or germane in his view; by this assessment, he conducts a self-referendum and indexing of his own abilities as a poet. However, Kinnell, by his self-conscious inhibitions, falls short in apprehending that the strength of his poems lie precisely in this narrative feature of his work, and not necessarily, in the more instructive, messianic qualities of Rilkean didacticism or Whitman's self-assured intensity, where text and body are united as one: "Camerado, this is no book,/ Who touches this touches a man."[101] The notion of "parable," as Kinnell refers to it, as a bridge to truth or its discovery by virtue of indirection or lesson-making, formulates the poet's role as a proselytizing one of oblique connection.

Kinnell exudes a deference for poets who define the poet's role as a distillation of experience, and an universalising of it that leans toward non-secular evangelisation. His view of storytelling is that it pales in poetic virtue compared with the standard-bearing importance of absolutes. As a poet struggling to evict narrative from his poems, he aspires to achieve this

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[100] Galway Kinnell, "The Weight that a Poem Can Carry: An Interview with Galway Kinnell," *The Ohio Review* XIV, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 25-38, quoted in *Poetry Criticism: Vol. 26*, ed. Laura A. Wisner-Broyles (Farmington Hills: Gale Group, 1999), 241.
[101] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 372.

by working against his own proclivities as a practitioner, altering his work to fit a specific paradigm.

Indeed, what he perceives as a shortcoming or more dramatically, a delayed ability to define truth through poetical pedagogy, is one of the more prodigious callings of his poetry. In *American Originality: Essays on Poetry*, Louise Glück details:

> Contemporary critics prefer, it appears, the static/rhapsodic, in which the translation of event to art is more literal: what is event in the world becomes, in the poem, luminous image. In fact, narrative is also transformation and re-creation, and the use of stories managed in more ways, to more ends than one…But the impulse to use narrative informs the work of some of our best (and certainly most original) poets.[102]

Specifically, Glück is referring to Robert Pinsky, but her point is well-taken, and au fait to our handling of Kinnell. Both the material and psychogeographies of his work rely on "the spatializing narrative"[103] of real and imagined spaces; his usage of narrative acts as a horizontal rendering or cross-section, situating the reader, not simply in an arrangement on the page, but in particular moments and locality. In *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, Kinnell grounds his verse among disparate places, ones which include spatial aspects of transit, translocation, and the awakenings of the transnational in his geographical imagination. From Oregon's Tillamook Forest in "Tillamook Journal," and the grand Pacific Ocean in "Middle of the Way," by way of India and Spain in "To A Child in Calcutta," and "Tree from Andalusia," Kinnell recounts arrivals, homecomings, cardinal directions, and mountainous ascents. His work, with its focus on toponymy, culminates in a reliance on the specificity of these locations to imbue the poems with meaning, bringing the spatial dimension into relief against the backdrop of the lifeworld.

The Ghazal as Textual Fidelity

[102] Louise Glück, *American Originality: Essays on Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 41.
[103] Further, "narratives not only describe space, they shape the apperception of storyworlds, and serve to situate writers and readers in space." Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative*, 138.

The role of the ghazal in Kinnell's poetic consciousness, and its readerly reception of his *Sheffield Ghazals*, differs from the public perception of other late modernist American poets with whom adoption of the form is synonymous. Adrienne Rich's iconicity amongst US poet-practitioners of the ghazal, achieved in part through "Ghazals (Homage to Ghalib)" in *Leaflet: Poems 1965-1968* and "Blue Ghazals" in *The Will to Change: Poems 1968-1970*, has its roots in Aijaz Ahmad's *Ghazals of Ghalib* (1971). Spurred by Ahmad's idea to commemorate the 1869 death of Urdu poet Mirza Assadullah Beg Khan (pseudonym Ghalib), the book appeared in its preliminary form as a centennial pamphlet with translations by Ahmad, Rich, and William Stafford, entitled "Poems of Ghalib;" it was later re-published in *The Hudson Review* (Winter, 1969-70). Assisted in notable part by Carolyn Kizer,[104] Ahmad's edited compendium followed two years later as an expansion of works with the inclusion of thirty-seven translations by Ahmad, W.S. Merwin, Rich, Stafford, David Ray, Thomas Fitzsimmons, Mark Strand, and William Hunt.

Receptive to the presentation of Ghalib to American readers, including his own role in stewarding this introduction, Ahmad believed he was participating in a transnational discourse that was afforded legitimacy because it was in concert with an authentic literary practitioner; in this case, without any self-deprecation: himself. He insisted that "the finished versions be done by persons who are primarily poets and not necessarily scholars of Urdu," continuing that it could "be achieved through collaboration only between an Urdu writer (in this case, myself) and several gifted American poets who have experience in working with raw, literal versions."[105] Although Ahmad acts as an intermediary and a facilitator, he does not offer further criteria to justify his selection of individual poets. Whether this was an oversight on

[104] Kizer's contributions to this volume deserve our critical attention. She began translating ghazals in Pakistan in coordination with USIS. Ahmad was assigned to Kizer as a cultural ambassador, during which time they began a romantic relationship. Kizer became a seasoned translator of Urdu ghazals, specifically of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and helped Ahmad to develop the method of translations and annotations for *Ghazals of Ghalib*. Despite these qualifications, Kizer's ghazal translations are not included in the book, "a glaring omission" as noted by her biographer. Maria Janssen, "Poet in Pakistan: The Flamboyant Carolyn Kizer," *The Markaz Review* (14 March 2021): https://themarkaz.org/poet-in-pakistan-the-flamboyant-carolyn-kizer/
See Carolyn Kizer, *Cool, Calm & Collected: Poems 1960-2000* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2001).
[105] Aijaz Ahmad, ed. Introduction to *Ghazals of Ghalib* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), xviii.

the part of Ahmad, or effectuated intentionally, Kinnell is noticeably absent from the grouping. Whilst poets, such as Rich, were discovering and manipulating the ghazal form for the first time, Kinnell would have been well-positioned, through his previous translation experience in Iran some thirteen years earlier, prior to Ahmad's undertaking. Kinnell's expertise in translation had become increasingly defined in the early 1960s through a special edition of *Poetry* (July 1962) featuring his translation of Bonnefoy's *Du Mouvement et de L'Immobilité de Douve*, in addition to *The Poems of François Villon* (1965), along with a translation of Goll's *Lackawanna Elegy* (1970), which arrived on the heels of *Selected Poems by Yvan Goll* (1968) translated from French and German by Kinnell, Bly, George Hitchcock, and Paul Zweig, with colour-print illustrations by Jean Varda.

In the 1960s, translation, and the putative interest surrounding its allure, were actioned as polemical typologies by US poets, expanding the social role of poetry amongst a generation of literary practitioners who questioned poetic forms and belonging, particularly Rich. Effectively, it found its way by surrounding commentary on several critical tensions, namely civil rights as well as geopolitical conflicts. Through these channels, citizen poets also expressed anti-American or anti-US sentiments, as a means of creating content to enter public discourse, subsequently affecting readerly consciousness. In this vein, David Caplan credits Rich with effectively transforming the socio-political and literary-historical contours of the day into style and form; he cites her identity as a white, Jewish lesbian as instrumental in her choosing to use ghazal to find a sense of vocation and place within the unfolding national narrative she had been missing.[106]

Eliot Weinberger clarifies the catalysts which spurred the evolutions of two separate "flowerings of translation" among American poets:

> The first, before and after the First World War, was largely the work of expatriates eager to overcome their provinciality and to educate their national literature through the discoveries made in their own self-educations: to make the U.S. as 'cultured' as Europe. The second, beginning in the 1950s and exploding in the 1960s, was the result

[106] David Caplan, "'In That Thicket of Bitter Roots': The Ghazal in America," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 80, no. 4 (Fall 2004): 119 and 122.

> of a deep and already half-forgotten-anti-Americanism among American intellectuals: first in the more contained bohemian rebellion against the conformist Eisenhower years and the Cold War, and then as part of the wider expression of disgusts and despair during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War. Translation—the journey to the other—was more than a way out of America: the embrace of the other was, in the 1960s, in its small way, an act of defiance against the government that was murdering Asians abroad and the social realities that were oppressing minority others at home. Foreign poetry became as much a part of the counterculture…a new way of seeing, a new 'us' forming out of everything that had not been 'us.'[107]

Referencing Weinberger's vital distinctions, Michael Collier includes Kinnell in an assemblage of (what Collier considers to be) mainstream poet-translators along with Merwin, James Wright, Rich, and Philip Levine, a group which inexorably "began their apprenticeships in the rain shadow of New Criticism."[108] The utility of Collier's metaphor conveys both the dearth and the positionality of arising from nothing—of *creation ex nihilo*—under the protective scaffolding of a marginalised or unpopular standpoint.

To this, Collier proffers another layer to endorse the revival of translation, one which strategically worked to reduce the dominance of *The Waste Land*, and its command of literary aggrandisement, in favour of other quintessentially modernist traditions which may have been consequently overlooked. He incorporates two additional groups in his assessment, beginning with Williams and the Objectivists who "absorbed nativist strands of modernist American poetry" (the benefactors of Charles Olson's "Projectivist enterprise"), and includes Jerome Rothenberg, Kenneth Rexroth, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Paul Blackburn, Jack Spicer, and Robert Kelly.[109] The third grouping consists of older poets whose selections took a more classical approach in subject matter: Richard Wilbur, a mentor and personal friend of Kinnell; John Ciardi; Randall Jarrell; Delmore Schwartz; Robert Fitzgerald; Elizabeth Bishop; and James Merrill.

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[107] Eliot Weinberger, "Anonymous Sources: A Talk on Translators and Translation," IDB Cultural Center, Washington D.C., 9 November 2000.
[108] Michael Collier, "Translation" in *American Literature in Transition, 1960-1970*, ed. David Wyatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 69. We might also consider Lowell, particularly in reference to *Imitations*, as a pertinent member of this grouping.
[109] Collier, "Translation," 69-70.

Whilst Kinnell was certainly pondering the necessary occupation of poetry in a changing geopolitical landscape, his relationship to the ghazal as a textual schema differed significantly from Rich, and other poets, such as Jim Harrison, and Bly who wrote extensively in this genre. In her notes to *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970* Rich affirms, "My *ghazals* are personal and public, American and twentieth-century; but they owe much to the presence of Ghalib in my mind: a poet self-educated and profoundly learned, who owned no property and borrowed his books, writing in an age of political and cultural break-up."[110] Rich and others certainly profited from the momentum of a post mid-century interest in exploring non-Western traditional poets, one originating in Ghalib's ghazals, which established a cross-cultural, transhemispheric appreciation.

Harrison suggests in his "Notes on the Ghazals," that he was inspired to experiment with the compositional structure due to Rich's popularising of it, and clarifies his choice as signalling a respite for him from a period of longer forms; employing a lyric, such as the ghazals, permitted him "to regain some of the spontaneity of the dance, the song unencumbered by any philosophical apparatus, faithful only to its own music."[111] Denver Butson addresses the acute irony in Harrison's statement, one which exalts a natural impulsivity whilst simultaneously "throwing off the very encumbrances making the form what it is." Further, he suggests Harrison's first and only foray into formal poetry may have been stimulated as an aggressive, non-narrative response to the predominance of confessional poetry.[112] Bly's ghazals are perhaps among the most controversial selections in comparison with Rich, Harrison, and Kinnell, if only because at first glance, his ghazals are unrecognisable as such. Whilst visually they resemble *terza rima*, his division of verse into tercets into poems

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[110] Adrienne Rich, *Collected Early Poems: 1950-1970* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 426. Caplan quotes Rich: "I certainly had to find an equivalent for the kinds of fragmentation I was feeling, and confusion…There I found a structure which allowed for a highly associative field of images. And once I saw how that worked, I felt instinctively, this is exactly what I need, there is no traditional Western order that I have found that will contain all these materials." Caplan, "The Ghazal in America," 119.

[111] Jim Harrison, "Notes on the Ghazals," in *Collected Ghazals* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2020), 3-4.

[112] Denver Butson, "Faithful to Their Own Music: The Ghazals of Jim Harrison," in Jim Harrison, *Collected Ghazals* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2020), 80.

featuring in such works as *The Night Abraham Called to the Stars*, "allows for thirty-six syllables sonically, divided perfectly into twelve syllables amongst each line.[113]

At the level of adhesion to form, in *Sheffield Ghazals* (as will feature later in this chapter), Kinnell both departs from and alters, in varying degrees, the formulaic dictums which govern poetic composition, and the stringency of the ghazal itself. In this case, Kinnell asserts his autonomy in selecting and disregarding the primary structures of the ghazal. Traditional ghazals would stipulate *matla* (opening couplet); *radif* (refrain); *qafia* (rhyme scheme), and *makhta* (closing couplet) amidst end-stopped verse, in a minimum of five couplets. Kinnell is more interested in the non-associative logic between couplets retained in the characteristic tension rippling from one *bayt* or *sher* to the next. He employs the representative *takhallus* at the end, which details and refines his argument, laying more robust texture by calling out and defining the poet's identity. The takhallus is a vestige from early oracular forms of ghazal in which another party would speak the poem to the crowd on a poet's behalf; thus, the mentioning in third person is synonymous with a penname for the poet. For Kinnell, it is not unfamiliar for him to address himself personally in poems, having included invocations to "Galway" in "Middle of the Night" and "December Day in Honolulu" in *The Past* as well as throughout *The Book of Nightmares*.

The tendency to break with tradition earns reproach from ghazal purists, particularly Agha Shahid Ali, whose consequential anthology, *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (2000) acted as a response to the preceding three decades during which American poets found expression writing in ghazal, incorporating it into their literary praxes. As one of the more outspoken proponents of ghazal fidelity, Ali welcomes what he deems as "the shackles of the

[113] In an interview with the *Paris Review*, Bly expounds: "The line that poets use most often in both Persian and Arabic tends to be sixteen or eighteen syllables. So if you have two eighteen-syllable lines, you really have thirty-six syllables. By contrast, the typical line in English, in the sonnets, for example, is ten syllables. A line in English becomes unwieldy if it's extended into eighteen syllables. If one adopts three eleven- or twelve-syllable lines, you end up with about thirty-six syllables. I think the Islamic writers felt that thirty-six syllables is a useful and completed unit of expressiveness. That's why I went to three lines." "An Interview with Robert Bly, Part 10: New Poems." https://robertbly.com/int_10.html

form,"[114] a notion which he argues derives from canonical eleventh-century Persia. Houman Harouni, author of *Unrevolutionary Times* (2022) and contemporary practitioner of the ghazal, underscores that the canonical form affords a certain kind of freedom. One conjures a poetic idea in couplet form, from which the only obligation remaining is to return to a place defined by repetitions of rhythm and rhyme, taken in concert with the darting and unexpected movement of the gazelle, which inspires the action of the poem.[115]

Ghazal, in its most authentic configurations, therefore, conjoins tight strictures with the rigidity of subscribing to formulaic versification. Ahmad elaborates that the Urdu poetics are borrowed from Persian, continuing:

> The ghazal is a poem made up of at least five couplets. If there are fewer, it is considered fragmentary; there is no maximum. Each couplet is usually independent of any other in meaning and complete in itself as a unit of thought, emotion, communication, etc. No two couplets have to be related to each other in any sense whatever except formally...and yet they form parts of a single poem. The only necessary link is in terms of prosodic structure and rhymes...Only when a unit of poetry is meant to communicate a single thought, emotion or observation, and only when the poets deal with the essence rather than the particulars of an experience, can you have so small a unit and dispense with the idea of continuity, an idea which is central to Western poetics.[116]

However, for Kinnell's part, his non-conforming ghazals seem to earn repute, particularly from Ali. Whilst we are inclined to assume that Ali is referring to *Sheffield Ghazals*, both teaching in the Creative Writing department at NYU might suggest that there was an even deeper familiarity with Kinnell's poems. Ali stipulates:

> I do like many of the so-called ghazals by many American poets (among the more vibrant examples I would single out James Harrison, Adrienne Rich, Robert Mezey, and Galway Kinnell) and could make a case for their discarding of the form in the context of their immediate aesthetics and see in their ghazals a desire to question all kinds of authorities by getting away from linearity and that crippling insistence on 'unity.'[117]

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[114] Agha Shahid Ali, ed. *Ravishing DisUnities: Real Ghazals in English* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 3.
[115] Houman Harouni (poet and scholar), personal interview by author, 9 December 2024.
[116] Aijaz Ahmad, William Stafford, and Adrienne Rich, "The Poetry of Ghalib," *The Hudson Review* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1969-1970): 610.
[117] Ali, *Ravishing DisUnities*, 11.

By referencing poets of considerable esteem, Ali privileges poetic sensibilities and accomplishments of the aesthetic they express in versification despite these not being strict interpretations. He shows an objective appreciation for these poems as being independent from the strictures of tradition as strong, successful texts within each poet's corpus. Perhaps, in acknowledging ghazal in their works, he has also processed that Kinnell and others approach the work with a seriousness of cultural appreciation, along with a comprehension of the form, and in some cases, previous translation experience; once they establish their bearings, poets then feel comfortable in allowing that knowledge to manifest into other variances.

Ghazals, in the works of late American poets, straddle two camps: they can be considered translation exercises of a certain diligence, or appropriated as transliterated forms in English; or, devoted for purposes of elasticised, anglicised, 'American' verse. Although these poets do share an unorthodox approach, coupled with a unique liberty in appropriating the ghazal thematically and formulaically, there is also a shared notion of the ghazal as providing constructions of the self, in differing imports. For Rich, the nature of a readily unfamiliar form allowed her to access political activism, and to frame her own interrogation of identity, both poetic and not. As Caplan explains, "The ghazal form helps Rich to manoeuvre within this 'thicket of bitter roots,' the 'difficult woods' where less oblique claims of solidarity tempt furious reassertions of difference."[118] Yet for Kinnell, his translation, and any relation to ghazals did not unfold in an equivalent manner. Having previously discovered his moral compass and ethical centring in the Transcendentalists, he was not in need of an international form of poetry to show dissatisfaction and rebellion.

It becomes critical, therefore, to consider Kinnell's relationship to lyric, and to question what specifically he intends to achieve through this antediluvian and revered form within the wider context of his corpus. Given his dissatisfaction with narrative in his own

[118] Caplan, "The Ghazal in America," 123.

poetry, we might extrapolate that he utilises ghazal because it belies interconnection and interrelatedness. By embracing the discontinuities and disconnection of the form, he may circumvent narrative and unity. As ghazal depends precisely on not having a cohesive strand, it allows him to escape or to shirk off these restraints in verse, producing a series of commemorative poems that are consequential whilst still evocative of the specificity of place and setting. Ramazani insists that "[t]he disjunctive logic of poetic lineation instructs us not to expect geographic continuity. Each line is a different scene, a different chapter, a different cultural world."[119]

Harouni affirms that there is not a 'whole' to disturb, metaphorically speaking, in a ghazal. As such, it can be a poetic place where individuality is infused above thematics. He elucidates:

> The ghazal is extremely personal, and a form of poetry that is always fresh. It's one of the most personal because there is no theme that holds it all together. There is no story that holds it all together. What is it that binds it? It's nothing but the poet. Nothing but the poet's soul. Almost every ghazal can lend itself to song. Once you have established that individuality within a line, you follow it, coming up with image after image that— preferably not across one poem—but across a few poems can cultivate your reader. It's very difficult to say what you are following there because it's not thematic. But you can think of it as a thread, and in front of you is a sea of needles, which are all the cliches that a culture has put in front of you. You can choose from them, and once threaded, the needles are bound in such a way that they can swing, they can dance.[120]

More specifically, the ghazal becomes, in Kinnell's oeuvre, a dual-pronged approach bridging transnational approximations with the poet's own sense of self-identity and sensibility. The first considers direct, faithful translations, conducted cooperatively in his limited 500-word Farsi vocabulary. These translations are not readily available outside of Iran, whilst the second, *Sheffield Ghazals*, are written in his native tongue, a sequence which he felt inspired or enabled to master after significant practice, exposure, and mentorship from other poets.

An Ode to New England Prosody? Reading *Sheffield Ghazals*

[119] Ramazani, *Transnational Poetics*, 61.
[120] Harouni, in discussion with the author, 9 December 2024.

Although *Black Light* and its dark exploration of the psyche preceded *The Book of Nightmares* chronologically, there is an element of a logical, linear progression shared between these two texts in terms of their employment of quest figures that hold a discernible connection with each other. *Body Rags*, as an interim volume, disrupts there being a direct or immediate sequence of time between the two works, and an explicit link. This lack of progressive arrangement may be overlooked in favour of Kinnell's spiral approach; by revisiting poetic expressiveness, prosody, and exploring leitmotifs after some arbitrary measure of elapsed time, Kinnell achieves a chronology based on his own metacognition. Kinnell's unfolding diachronicity, as relates to individual texts, brings into relief an intentionality in the work that signals key elements of his process, one which extends the life and the reception of his texts, within a shifting frame; effectively both reader and critic are disarmed by an unpredictability to anticipate connection. What might be computed as obsessional in his poetic practice from a point of outside detachment in fact acts as signposts or guiding principles. To the reader, they designate his retention of context and engagement with intellectual inheritance throughout his poetic practice.

Robin G. Schulze outlines a theory of 'Textual Darwinism' wherein authorial intention is compounded through changing material and historical contexts. As the author shows intention, specifically through these altered parameters and compressions over time, a new version of material text is established. Each adaptation of the text is thus considered "'fitter' in relation to its conditions."[121] In his "Author's Note" to *A New Selected Poems* (revised edition, 2001), Kinnell elucidates this very connection to his own literary practice, and its personal implications for his own writerly self-worth:

> For many years, I have felt exasperated by my intractable habit of working at certain poems again and again, over long spans of time. But in recent years I have come to accept that, at least in the case of a complex project, this is simply how I write...From the outside, it may seem only that a given poem has been belatedly revised, while to me, making these changes was still part of the process of composition, a final stage in the protracted struggle with my very 'sullen art.'[122]

[121] Robin G. Schulze, "Textual Darwinism: Marianne Moore, the text of Evolution, and the Evolving Text," *Text* 11 (1998): 275.
[122] Galway Kinnell, *A New Selected Poems* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), xi.

Though Kinnell revisits poems in his editorial practices, coiling back in his compositions, the ordering of poems in his volumes remains the same, despite their obvious, and often frustrating, diachronicity. In the case of *Sheffield Ghazals*, it follows the atypical normality for Kinnell of holding and returning to forms, thematics, and poetic expressiveness, in ways that counteract a static positioning. His does not fit formulaic itinerary or necessarily uphold spatio-temporal configurations. In our approach to reading this series of poems, we must first locate the work in context, and to consider Kinnell's tenure as the second Poet Laureate of Vermont (1989-1993), as well as his contributions to creating his own emblematic New England prosody.

In 1961, two years before his death, Frost was selected as the first poet laureate of the US state of Vermont through Joint House Resolution 54. It would be twenty-six years between Frost's passing and Kinnell's achievement of the same honour; in the interim period, the honorific was not remanded, and no poets served in this role.[123] Kinnell initiates a reconciliation with the Frostian idiom in his elegy entitled, "For Robert Frost." The pair had previously met on only one occasion, an odd circumstance in which Kinnell volunteered to bring Frost to a medical appointment.[124]

In the poem, through which Kinnell seeks poetic advice from the older, revered poet, the lyric speaker waxes dejectedly in Strophe 1:

> Why do you talk so much
> Robert Frost? One day
> I drove up to Ripton to ask,
>
> I stayed the whole day
> And never got the chance
> To put the question.
>
> I drove off at dusk
> Worn out and aching
> In both ears. Robert Frost,
>
> Were you shy as a boy?
> Do you go on making up

[123] Chase, "Poet of Vermont," 16.
[124] Ibid., 15.

For some long period of solitude?

Is it that talk
Doesn't have to be metered and rhymed?
Is talk distracting from something worse? (*CP*, 123)

Kinnell continues his excoriation of Frost in relaxed, vernacular verse, depicting Frost's failed recitation of "Dedication" at the inauguration of John F. Kennedy. Here, he demonstrates how Frost, a towering poetic figure who bore great dignity, was reduced to appearing small and feeble in front of the nation, as the January wind blew across his face, and the bright wintry sunlight prevented him from reading his words on the page:

I saw you once on the TV,
Unsteady at the lectern,
The flimsy white leaf
Of hair standing straight up
In the wind, among top hats,
Old farmer and son
Of worse winters than this,
Stopped in the first dazzle

Of the District of Columbia,
Suddenly having to pay
For the cheap onionskin,
The worn-out ribbon, the eyes
Wrecked from writing poems
For us—stopped,
Lonely before millions,
The paper jumping in your grip,
And as the Presidents
Also on the platform
Began flashing nervously
Their Presidential smiles
For the harmless old guy,
And poets watching on the TV
Started thinking, Well that's
The end of *that* tradition,

And the managers of the event
Said, Boys this is it,
This sonofabitch poet
Is gonna croak,
Putting the paper aside
You drew forth
From your great faithful heart
The poem. (*CP*, 123-124)

True to Frost's convictions, in a moment of strength, singular ability, and pathos, he began to recite "The Gift Outright" from *The Witness Tree* (1942). Playing on notions of 'dedication,' Kinnell's "For Robert Frost" cuts sharply to the heart of the matter: Frost did not require a scripted poem for the event; as a poet of national repute, his words inhabit his every fibre, and are indelibly imprinted on his memory.

As Kinnell's elegy for Frost wears on, he alludes in no small measure to Frost's more famous material, such as "Into My Own" (1913) and "Come In" (1942):

> Once, walking in winter in Vermont,
> In the snow, I followed a set of footprints
> That aimed for the woods. At the verge
> I could make out, 'far in the pillared dark,'
> An old creature in a huge, clumsy overcoat,
> Lifting his great boots through the drifts,
> Going as if to die among 'those dark trees'
> Of his own country. (*CP*, 125)

At the close of the text, Kinnell demonstrates his shared and profound cultural understanding of milieu with Frost, senses of landscape and place to which both poets commit equally. Identity is entwined with abode in the forms of freedom and itinerance, and a free-flowing passage through a common mythology of place and localised inheritance.

Sheffield Ghazals is informed by the material and psychogeographies of place, but also of conception, ontologically speaking, of the poet's situatedness in a locality within these realms. At the metaphorical level, this occupies a position of comfort for Kinnell, whose elegies (such as those discussed in Chapter Two) depict New England forests of endless winter, thick with the density of trees whose longevity and semi-permanence will succeed our collective lifetimes. In addition to Kinnell's metacognition, which creates a non-linear terrain for the exploration and expansion of ideas, there is, paradoxically, a continuity that arises from a discontinuous form like the ghazal. Through an attention to meditation, these disjointed, reflective images achieve harmony and precision of thought; clarity is evinced by a delicate interplay of conceptual fields through which Kinnell weaves and interrogates. As a group, the poems read as a beloved sense of the ordinary, and a series of aphorisms which contain

expositions of self-contemplation in view of mortality, in addition to the identity sought therein.

Kinnell bought his home in Sheffield in 1960 when he returned from Iran, and it was meant to be a home he continually renovated and improved, a family homestead, and what would become his final resting place.[125] His centring these poems in small-town Vermont grounds our readerly interpretations within their specific context of space, place, and landscape whilst contemplating his role more expansively as a Vermont poet. That the poems appear in *Imperfect Thirst* (provisionally titled *Neverland*),[126] as the conclusion of his term as poet laureate is unsurprising, given that it is customary that those honoured create works of locational consequence and state canon, in the spirit of commemoration. Frost's iconicity and synonymity with New England in general, and Vermont more particularly, demand from Kinnell his own forged identity vis-à-vis the region.

There are often little to no distinguishing features to indicate a title notation for the ghazal; thus, each is usually differentiated through a cycle of numbers or though alphabetical order. Rich has gestured to this anonymity somewhat, organising her ghazals under a central rubric (such as *Blue Ghazals*), and then assigning a date to each such as notations for a diary entry or a journal record (i.e. "9/21/68" or "7/26/68:ii"). Kinnell's usage of individual titles, as subsections to the overarching section entitled, "Sheffield Ghazals" thereby insists on an individuation of these specific poems.[127]

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[125] Kinnell is buried on his property, beside a large stone slab, the subject of "The Stone Table" in *Strong Is Your Hold*. Charlotte Albright, "Poet Galway Kinnell Dies at 87," *Vermont Public* (29 October 2014): https://www.vermontpublic.org/vpr-news/2014-10-29/poet-galway-kinnell-dies-at-87

[126] Much like paradise, *Neverland* (and its obvious allusions to J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* – perhaps this is why it was discounted in the final drafts) calls into question real and imagined spaces, and a sense of the poet's spatial belonging and non-belonging. "Neverland" is the concluding poem in *Imperfect Thirst*. Galway Kinnell, *Imperfect Thirst* drafts, Box 26, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH, USA.

[127] This is later problematised when excerpting some ghazals from the series, and not others. *A New Selected Poems*, which draws upon material from *What a Kingdom It Was* through to *Imperfect Thirst*, includes two ghazals from the Sheffield sequence. Removed from the larger context of their grouping, they are renamed rather inelegantly "Sheffield Ghazal 4: Driving West" and "Sheffield Ghazal 5: Passing the Cemetery." It is unclear whether these are editorial or authorial interventions.

"The Biting Insects" comprises the opening ghazal of the sequence, an interrogation on selections and acts of dying. Kinnell hurdles through disparate images of the macabre, moving from mosquitos and deer flies siphoning blood, to universalised suicidal urges, to Jesus dying on the cross, and finally to an intimation of his own death. In its underlying query, this ghazal relates to ideas explored in our study of Kinnell's exile in Chapter Four, an ongoing preoccupation with contemplations of suicide, animals/insects in the lifeworld, and the spatio-temporality surrounding these events.

At this juncture, there is an important distinction to be made in Kinnell's selection of pests, and the symbolism of their respective vocations through their contributions to the life cycle. Stinging insects, those which die upon human contact, are generally disembowelled by such acts when their stingers become embedded in flesh. Biting insects, those which enact feeding practices, feast off the 'blood meal' they obtain, subsequently producing eggs. Through his close attention to the natural world, Kinnell somewhat despondently highlights, in both literal and metaphorical imports, the proliferation of pests who breed and subsist by eking out the vitality of others. Perhaps there is a tinge of irony here, as the futile deaths of insects like honeybees, who contribute to aesthetic pleasure and pollination, seem to die needless deaths. He uses these insects to connote a non-specificity of "entering/ other life-forms" (*CP*, 454), as though beings who successfully contemplate the inevitability of death may be rewarded. Further, it suggests a kind of disintegration, whereby humans deteriorate into carbonic atoms, or pass through the various stages of biospherical decay.

Translated to the final bayt of the ghazal, in its casual submission to the life cycle, Kinnell's intonation is one of apathy and abruptness; mortality is a chore we must see to its inexorable completion, and measurably so:

> And yet dying gets done—and Eddie Jewell coming up the road with
> his tractor on a gooseneck trailer and seeing an owl lifting its
> wings as it alights on the ridgepole of this red house, Galway, will
> know that now it is you being accepted back into the family of
> mortals. (*CP*, 454)

This voice is a fearless one, although it is perhaps harsher than previous poems such as "Fisherman" (for Allen Planz) featured in *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words*, in which Kinnell speaks of impending mortality as a time "now you have to that degree also ceased fearing,/ and waits there to recognize you into it/ after you've lived, lived past the sorrows,/ if that happens, after all the time in the world" (*CP*, 290).

In "The Biting Insects," Kinnell reaches back to a tragic invocation from a familiar makhta of Hafez, a couplet of bereft intonation which he had previously contemplated during his time in Iran: "A nightingale alighted in Hafez' garden,/ Stayed but to fill its song with tears, and fled."[128] It is as though the older poet is informing the younger, each specific to the locality they inhabit, against a landscape of universal melancholy. The nightingale's sorrowful song permeating Hafez's sumptuous, illuminated gardens is countered by the owl, a traditional harbinger of death, in Kinnell's contemporary, rural abode.[129] The simplicity of Frost's world— of farms, tractors, and winding roads—delicately hovers in the background of Kinnell's allusion.

In *Sheffield Ghazals*, Kinnell retains very little of the systematic formalism of the ghazal. Clarifying Kinnell's interlocution by choosing this verse, Harouni emphasises:

> I think that his use of the term should be seen as a poetic move, as a creative act, so that he places you in a poetic tradition that deals with love as spirituality, and love as given. He doesn't have to struggle the way many American poets have done to first convey that what he is expressing is a spiritual matter, and that the spirituality is infused with some kind of physical love. There isn't a separation between these two. I don't know how much he was relying on his audience to understand beyond that.[130]

Kinnell does, however, retain the ghazal's attribution of identity, a calling out of his own name, which is a hallmark feature of this type of poem. Upon first reading, apart from his name mentioned in the penultimate lines of the poetry, and his own very pointed gesture of calling these five poems "ghazals," there might be very little to distinguish them as such from a series

[128] Kinnell, "Hafez' Illuminated Garden," 5.
[129] Owls as omens, or messengers (particularly of death) is a widely held belief in many indigenous cultures in the US. See Jake Skeets, "Drunktown," in *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through*, eds. Joy Harjo, Leanne Howe, and Jennifer Elise Foerster (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2020), 354; also, Shepard Krech, *Spirits of the Air: Birds and American Indians in the South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009).
[130] Harouni, in discussion with the author, 9 December 2024.

of aphorisms (such as in the fifth ghazal, "Driving West"). The ghazals are loosely arranged around pre-conceptions and notions of mortality and quotidian pleasure. In our initial approach, the location of countryside, small-town Vermont holds dialogue with both the ghazal mastery of Hafez, and the monolithic Frost, a rapprochement of dialogue enacted by Kinnell through these poems, in textual and intertextual imports.

Much like "The Biting Insects" and the subsequent ghazals of this section, "Paradise Elsewhere" adheres couplets arranged in end-stopped lines without enjambment. "Each couplet," in the words of Ali, "must be like a previous stone that can shine even when plucked from the necklace, though it certainly has greater lustre in its setting."[131] In its direct engagement, assertiveness, and self-representation, the takhallus of the poem aids the reader to deduce layers of the poet's identity. By the nature of its intentions, it serves as a qualifier between the strands of the poem which act independently from one another, and the poet's relationality to the autonomy of each unfolding vision. Having a signature at the end of each ghazal, especially in Kinnell's sequence, creates a continuity for generative comparison between each poem.

The centrality of the poem, which reads absurdity in disparate parts through its mention of "human foibles"; "human idiocy," and its references to the "tottering" (*CP*, 454) of emeritus professors, should not obfuscate Kinnell's overall intention to examine the psychogeography of the mind and the landscape through memory. He includes the spatiality of the body-as-vessel by which we hold and position aspirations within us, for the proverbial 'hopes and dreams' of the 'grass-is-greener' set, amid its general appeal to the ideals of human nature. Meted out through irregular, syllabic intervals of line Kinnell queries: "Yet it has happened to many others, and to you, too, Galway—when/ illness, or unhappiness, or imagining the future wears an empty/ place inside us, the idea of paradise elsewhere quickly fills it" (*CP*, 455). Kinnell seems to be commuting back, a dalliance with his younger self,

[131] Ali, *Ravishing DisUnities*, 183.

dismantling an idealistic version of "Galway" who wrestled with mystery, transience, and symbolism surrounding Hafez' paradise, writing:

> [th]e beauty of things may insist that it has its being elsewhere, but the poet is aware that all he knows of that elsewhere he knows through them; and there is a certain absurd loyalty in his knowledge that both they and he are mortal. Why, anyway, should he abandon things, in favor of a paradise which, for all he knows, may have no other existence than in the visible succession of fair copies on earth?[132]

In its open-endedness of mind and location, "Paradise Elsewhere" is a ghazal by which the reader is encouraged to wander into the far reaches of a mentality that privileges locative otherness, and "the state of mind we will have in heaven" (*CP*, 454). The discrete, individual 'events' of these poems, including disparate landscapes created as poems-within-poems collectively assemble a grand sense of rhetorical value and metapoesis.

Featuring as the third poem in the grouping, "Collusion of Elements" participates in a general cohesiveness that is evident in both "The Biting Insects" and "Paradise Elsewhere." The title is an evocative one, but the text itself is an interim one, and perhaps the weakest of the sequence. In its impudence, it suggests a kind of plotting or conspiring together. As readers, it is at first quite unclear what Kinnell connotes by "elements." Through the poem's unlikely pairings, Kinnell addresses Latin names of flower species. On the riverbank he details daffodils, "*Narcissus poeticus*" which "holds an ear trumpet toward the/ canoe apparitioning past," and sunflowers, "*Cosmos sulphureous*" which "flings back all its eyelashes and stares" (*CP*, 455). In the first half of the poem, Kinnell manages to create a ghazal of amusement; eventually, we ascertain the impetus for the title, "the Archimedean collusion of elements" (*CP*, 455), also known as a tension held between water and objects with equal vigour.

However, the comedic aspects of this poem are short-lived as we approach the second portion, in which Kinnell's language is made plain, and matter of fact: "Pain is inherently lonely./ Of all the varieties of pain, loneliness may be the most lonely" (*CP*, 455). This statement is biting, cutting to the core with a visceral, gut-punching quality we have come to

[132] Kinnell, "Hafez' Illuminated Garden," 5.

expect in Kinnell's body of work. As "Collusion of Elements" progresses, Kinnell delineates a clear precarity of balance and tenuousness between success and failure, by establishing a sense of alterity in moving outside the laws of science. The elements become a perfect storm, repelling the logic of physics: "If there are burn-throughs, a vessel could founder; if cold O-rings,/ blow up./ As for you, Galway, the more dire the burn-throughs, the looser the/ O-rings, the greater the chance you could float or fly" (*CP*, 455).

Subverting "earthly life" (*CP*, 456) Kinnell's fourth ghazal "Driving West" combines a plethora of his ethical and existential concerns. Through the autonomy of each couplet, the ghazal form serves as a referendum on the spectre of nuclear proliferation and genocide, environmental impact, and technological progress. Although the ghazal radif (refrain) normally creates an associative logic, in his interpretation of ghazal Kinnell achieves this through a proliferation of images catalogued through an animated deck of tractor-trailers, cars, romantic couples, computers, airplanes, and lightning. One of the most potent of the series, the makhta of "Driving West" balances in the lacunae of real and imagined spaces, a preoccupation which permeates his volume, *The Past*. Kinnell pens, "This happened to your father and to you, Galway—sick to stay, long-/ ing to come up against the ends of the earth, and climb over" (*CP*, 456). Once again, boundaries and interstitial spaces are brought to the fore; in his melancholic verse, Kinnell deepens his relationship with his father, and reinforces the anguish of their separation.

Dislocations, the unsticking from space, tie the poet's identity to typologies of the loco-specific. Such disarticulation is a distinctive feature of Kinnell's ghazals which render our conceptions of landscape and abode as simultaneously fixed and fluid. On the one hand, Kinnell's poems are typographical ones confined to place by the names they invoke. On the other, it is far too reductive; these poems ebb and flow from a central location through a hyper plain-spoken language of the everyday, one which Kinnell and Frost share at this intersection, specifically in Kinnell's fifth and final ghazal.

"Passing the Cemetery" interrogates relationships between bodies and the material world, in which "Desire and act were a combination known as sin" (*CP*, 456). The poem passes from corporeal materialities, focusing on how bodies and their contributions to the world can give shape to one another, and can enact realities together. Kinnell passes from this realm of embodiment into a spiritually immaterial world, one that is specifically non-material, and non-existent. Contemplating death entwined with the righteous judgment of the divine, the speaker considers the repentance of human souls juxtaposed with the sinful. In its renunciations and punishments, the poem parallels thematic underpinnings of *Black Light*. Kinnell returns to the textilic uncertainty of Jamshid, whose fears hung in the balance between harmony, discord, and the death of Ali: "A deathbed repentance intended to pluck out one bright terrible/ thread could unravel a lifetime—and the lifetimes of those left/ behind" (*CP*, 457).

Of all of Kinnell's ghazals, "Passing the Cemetery" seems the most triumphant in balancing concomitant beauty and pain, requisite in the ghazal. In the final third of the poem, Kinnell distils his consummate interlocution with religion, material geographies of the body, and embodiment, rebuffing the "Intricate and simple things/ As you are, created/ In the image of nothing" Jesus proclaims in "The Supper After the Last" (*CP*, 83).

> Fishes are the holy land of the sea.
> In them spirit is flesh, flesh spirit, the brain simply a denser place in the flesh.
> The human brain may be the brightest place on earth.
> At death the body becomes foreign substance; a person who loved you may wash and dress this one you believed for so long was you, Galway, a few embrace the memory in it, but somewhere else will know it and welcome it. (*CP*, 457)

In its submission, the makhta recalls otherness and empathy of "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing"— "We who live out our plain lives, who put/ our hand into the hand of whatever we love/ as it vanishes,/ as we vanish,/ and stumble toward what will be, simply by arriving,/ a kind of fate (*CP*, 261). Yet it also accentuates Kinnell's interlocution with Frost, holding "Into My Own" in conversation. Frost's couplet sonnet unfolds:

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

I should not be withheld but that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away,
Fearless of ever finding open land,
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear.

They would not find me changed from him they knew—
Only more sure of all I thought was true.[133]

As opposed to a couplet-driven ghazal, "Into My Own" is the leading poem of Frost's first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will* (1913), centring on a sense of self, and the expansion of a *kunstleroman*. The poem considers a poet's foray into language and a development of a naïve, inchoate individual into something more complex and mature. Frost's sonnet yields a deepening sense of self and one's ideals through its clever, skilful rhythmic patterning and iambic pentameter of natural speech. Reflecting his own expert engagement with poetic craft, Kinnell's "Passing the Cemetery" elicits intertextuality and interconnectedness, a conjuring of a Frostian legacy whilst also branching out to show a depth and an expansion of poetics that has grown away from trite, staid metaphors. Frost's rather thick metaphors of a forest of "dark trees,/ So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze"[134] show a steadiness into the spectre of the unknown. In Kinnell's ghazals, he is both practitioner and interpreter; he interrogates the unnatural, contemplates the material and the technical, the ethical and the religious, and placates sinful desires. Forging swiftly on to the horizon, he heads west, penetrating the wide indeterminacy, with an emphasis on the cognitive aspects of open space so that "somewhere else will/ know it and welcome it" (*CP*, 457).

[133] Robert Frost, *Collected Poems, Prose and Plays* (New York: The Library of America, 1995), 15.
[134] Frost, *Collected Poems*, 15.

Frost's ubiquity in Vermont conjures a romanticised view of poetry, from his establishment of Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, which would play an instrumental role in Kinnell's writing life, to the mountain which bears his name, a looming physical manifestation of his indispensable poetic achievements amid a pantheon of American writing. Kinnell, in his capacity as a new generation of poets, three decades after Frost's death, suggests an enlargement of geographical containment, bounded and unbounded by poetic consciousness, opening freer forms of material and psychogeographies in his poems. Such accessibility holds a privilege of possibility and reformulation, a veritable tension between the mythic and the real. Although Kinnell engages with a romantic, Frostian Vermont in poems such as "Blackberry Eating" and "Apple-Picking," he underscores the prospect of expanding those limitations through a panoramic spatial gaze: "A girl puts her head on a boy's shoulder; they are driving west./ The windshield wipers wipe, homesickness one way, wanderlust the other, back and forth" (*CP*, 456). The very names Kinnell chooses, *Sheffield Ghazals* (not Sheffield, VT), and "Driving West" indicates expansion through its indication of locality coupled with a transnational tradition of form. His globalising intentions unite a chain of poems in which polyspatiality is brought into relief, a contribution to a transhemispheric rendering of ghazal, and a cross-connection with the elasticity of form.

Tyler Mills explains that the beloved appears in ghazals as "an object of absolute torment for the speaker…The ghazal, especially in the contemporary lyric, becomes the death cry of a being at the moment of realizing that only one can lose this struggle to free oneself—from oneself."[135] In our assessment of the achievements of Kinnell's ghazals, there is an element of torture in his poetry, though not necessarily reconciling with a beloved as such (as would be true for a traditional ghazal), but with his own selfhood. The interlacement of a

[135] Tyler Mills, "Shine in that Vivid Isolation: A Case Study of the Ghazal in the Contemporary American Lyric," *The Writer's Chronicle* (May/Summer 2013): https://webmaster.awpwriter.org/magazine_media/writers_chronicle_view/2819/shine_in_that_vivid_isolation_a_case_study_of_the_ghazal_in_the_contemporary_american_lyric

poet's vocation, along with its retention in his consciousness inspires Kinnell to come to the ghazal as a poet laid bare, and for the reader to locate this sensibility within his texts.

Unlike geographical imaginations of liminality and marginality, or contemplations of social structures and omissions, *Sheffield Ghazals* are immersed in the identity of the poet. Activated by his Iranian inheritances, Kinnell explores a transnationality rooted in the aesthetics of nostalgia and memory, as well as an entanglement of self, place, and poetic practice. As he had come to the form earlier, nearly a decade before his US poet compatriots, the ghazal did not hold the same resonances to fit a moment of destabilisation and collective national admonitions. In Kinnell's geographical imagination, the ghazal is neither a means of expression to ideate a polemical age, nor a method of encompassing a shifting socio-political dynamic. It is, in Kinnell's oft-grim and dry humoured fashion, a natural setting within which to identify himself, and to connect definitions of home and abode. In terms of placiality, Harouni speaks to the sacred dwelling that the ghazal opens for Kinnell, and the singularity of its elaboration for this achievement:

> It's not just a romantic element like love. It sounds like what he's creating in Sheffield is a sort of spiritual space, but a spiritual space that doesn't look like a church, or an ashram, or a Sufi khānaqāh. It looks like a house in a town by an American highway. And just as a church doesn't just sanctify its own ground, it sanctifies the town that it's in, the house in Sheffield also sanctifies America by the power of the universal promise of salvation, by the universal spirit.[136]

Ghazals, in all their lyric intentionality, reflect a gentle assertion of Kinnell's profound connection and attachment to place. Through his propitious exposure to Iran, Kinnell poetically refines metrical discipline and formal prosodic structures, a desire to reshape and to reformulate the voice of a new generation of writers in his beloved, Sheffield.

In one of Kinnell's taped poetry sessions with Farrokzhad (audio-recorded by Sweeney), informal banter between the pair brings into relief the delimitations of prose and poetry, linking Kinnell's own connections with poetic musicality.

[136] Harouni, in discussion with the author, 9 December 2024.

> GK: Can you understand these words?
> FF: No.
> GK: Here's another American poem: 'Rain Over a Continent.' [Kinnell reads the poem aloud.] Does it sound as though it's written without rhythm or with rhythm to you?
> FF: With rhythm.
> GK: Hmm, no, I'm just curious how it sounds because your poetry sounds very rhythmical to me even though I don't understand it. I think this must sound like prose to you.
> FF: The last one was very...different.
> GK: This one rhymes. The one I'll read to you, 'The Seven Streams of Nevis.'[137]

Framed by his experiences during his time abroad, Kinnell learns of the necessary complexities of other creative literary outlets to adequately convey poetic truth. This is buttressed by his own willingness to achieve a fluidity in self-identification and definition as poet and literary practitioner.

One of the outlying questions that remains is why Kinnell turned to prose, to a novel, instead of employing poetic persona as an obvious means of resolution. However, this is complicated by Kinnell's adhesion to a certain Keatsian negative capability, and the dissolution between subject and object. In his poetic cosmology, the parameters seem more clearly defined, with the sparsity of ideas and visual-verbal textual construction left vacant. That he would seek to author prose as a definable, delimited form of writing (as opposed to embracing the hybridity of prose-poetry) is significant at this early stage of his writing career, later undone by works such as "Proem" in *Imperfect Thirst*. It signals a heterogenous poetic identity derived from an intellectual, multilingual circle, without sacrificing the integrity of forms, or forsaking his own ideals of poetry.

Kinnell maintains his position as both an inheritor of rich Persian tradition and engagement in American letters, but also as an intrepid innovator and thinker, ensuing from his authentic poetic and experiential engagement in Iran during the New Poetry movement. Through a proliferation of written forms, he attempts both to localise and to synthesise Iranian poetic tradition. By these methods, which followed a sequence of ethnographic journalism,

[137] Galway Kinnell, Forough Farrokhzad, and Sean Sweeney, "Poetry Recording in Tehran," 1960, audio, 49:20. https://library.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/static/poetry/listeningbooth/poets/kinnell2.html

translation, and prose, he finally arises full circle by returning to poetry. In the initial phases, Iran disentangles his grasp and complicates his comprehension because he lacks a certain way of organising the polyspatial forms of its social, cultural, and historical identity. These gaps of interpretation and comprehension in an unfamiliar country, in hermeneutical and personal imports, reveal Kinnell's ongoing interlocution with the inherent dislocations and uncertainty of the geographical imagination. By accepting new forms and genres of writing, he appreciated each in their own utility to extend his literary practice, and to authenticate his participation and contributions in an evolving transnational paradigm.

Chapter 4

Crying Oneself into Self-Knowing

"...and one knows/ after a long time of solitude, after the many steps taken/ away from one's kind, toward the kingdom of strangers,/ the hard prayer inside one's singing/ is to come back, if one can, to one's own,/ a world almost lost, in the exile that deepens,/ when one has lived a long time alone."[1]

–Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone" (1990)

In "The Past," the eponymous poem from *The Past*, Kinnell details, somewhat presciently: "my friend/ and mentor warned, 'Don't lose/ all touch with humankind'" (*CP*, 359). Through this admonition, the speaker is actively dissuaded, if not impeded, from choosing an existence of withdrawal and of departure. The softness of the endings of the line, in various alveolar consonantal pairings, function as an ironic interchange of linking elements; in their hypnotic rhythm, they belie the cautionary whilst compelling introversion and personal agency. Through its seclusion, "The Past" confronts intimations of the exilic, and of the isolated self which is, by the poet's own autonomous choices, taken in private contemplation.

Much like the depiction of quietude and clarity in "Tillamook Journal" or "Ruins Under the Stars," the lyric speaker is positioned at the precipice of real and imagined spaces, articulated in kind by "Middle of the Way": "I love the earth, and always/ In its darknesses I am a stranger/.../ But I know I live half alive in the world,/ Half my life belongs to the wild darkness" (*CP*, 139-141). Kinnell yearns for a kinship with obscurity, although he still asserts agency to find his way back, offering a prescriptive to others for reaching these demi-states; emplacement is thereby created by the literal and the figurative present, competing halves which enact transitory spaces between reminiscence of the actual, "when the past just managed/ to overlap the future, if only by a trace" (*CP*, 367), juxtaposed with the forward-looking stance of the illusory.[2]

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[1] Galway Kinnell, *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 68.
[2] In *The Past*, Kinnell has mimicked these overlapping boundaries of past and future by following "The Past" sequentially with "First Day of the Future."

The Past, as the interceding volume between the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Selected Poems* and the successive *When One*, bridges amatory poems of familial love, conviviality, and sexual desire amid personal recollections, dissolution of marriage, as well as odes to dear friends and colleagues. Within Kinnell's trajectory of work, it acts as a definitive marker of elapsed time, and consequently as a means of decoupling his 'former' life by welcoming the potentialities of a new identity ahead. But the precarious uncertainty of the future is less than sanguine, a tension Kinnell conveys through revisions of line. In the original 1985 publication of *The Past*, "First Day of the Future" ends rather plainly and pragmatically: "I'm not sure I'm going to like it living here in the future./ I don't think I can keep on doing it indefinitely,"[3] a nearly suicidal ideation that establishes an intermediary to the expansion and the resolution of these ideas in *When One*. However, in *Collected Poems*, the dramatic revision of these same closing lines foretells the speaker's muted resignation along a 'straight and narrow' path: "But I guess I'm here. So I must take care. For here/ one has to keep facing the right way, or one sees one dies, and one dies" (*CP*, 361).

Regrettably, in the interim period between composing these volumes, Kinnell underwent an intense eighteen-month period of deep isolation, a time of self-imposed exile he characterises as living "bitterly alone."[4] Despite this rupture in private dwelling and social spaces induced by a disorienting misanthropy "where one's ties with the human/ broke" (*CP*, 425), Kinnell continued to scrutinise the affordances and the deficiencies of his own literary practice; he crafted 167 drafts of his grand, titular poem, "When One," and admits to dozens more tucked away in boxes from Vermont to New York.[5] Ultimately, he achieves reconciliation by a return to the sanctity of the quotidian in his work, as well as the sacredness of the lifeworld, acutely sought through animals and insects—"those dark/ creatures of being-

[3] Galway Kinnell, *The Past* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 46.
[4] Galway Kinnell and Terry Gross, "Poet Galway Kinnell Writes About Isolation," *Fresh Air*, NPR, 4 April 1989, audio, 9:51. http://freshairarchive/org/guests/galway-kinnell.
[5] Galway Kinnell and Neil Shepard, "'With Poetry You Get Nothing Unless You Give Everything': An Interview with Galway Kinnell," in *Green Mountain Review, Special Issue: Galway Kinnell* 3, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1989-99): 45. Whilst this quantity of drafts may seem startling or anomalous in his corpus, it points to the generally obsessive nature of revisions endemic to his literary practice.

on-earth, singing them to the end/ and even before sensing they are about to sing, crave/ the light of self-knowing."[6] This keen specificity "into the bliss of kinship" (*CP*, 422) that Kinnell shares with the more-than-human world repairs bonds with his own, a regaining of faith in his fellow humankind.

Vital to the construction of *When One* and its publication are a confluence of close friends and peers, an "ecology of writing"[7] enacted through Sharon Olds, Hayden Carruth, Donald Hall, and Robert Bly who invariably foster and substantiate Kinnell's compositional practices through supportive, sociological frameworks of collaborative and constructive criticism. Kinnell, in his capacity as Co-Director and Professor of Creative Writing at NYU, in combination with his role as Director of the Poetry Program at the Squaw Valley Community of Writers (1985-2002), and innumerable participatory and leadership roles in workshops such as Middlebury Bread Loaf School of English among others, speak to his reliance on, if not compulsion to, cultivate an entourage of poetic community. In spite of the duress he experienced imputable to his exile, Kinnell still maintained the value of fellow, experienced poets in bringing evaluation and revision of texts as a process of colloquy. The exilic, intersected with the import of maintaining a society of peers, produced a sociological framework of creative spirit imparted both to himself and to others in an environment of synergy and mutual benefit.[8]

The preceding three chapters (marginality and exclusion; sensorial witness; identity) provide a typology for the polyspatiality of Kinnell's geographical imagination in both material and psychological imports. Exile represents the culmination or coalescence of these

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[6] Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone" drafts (1989), Box 18, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

[7] Term employed by Marilyn M. Cooper who addresses it as a response to cognitive models of writing theory. See Marilyn M. Cooper, "The Ecology of Writing," *College English* 48, no. 4 (April 1986): 365-366. For more on ecologies of writing and the composition process, see Chapter 3 in: Van Hulle, *Tracing Creativity in Literature*, 75-120.

[8] In an interview with Michael Silverblatt, Kinnell avers, "But really, I don't think poets have ever often written in solitude, and when they did, they suffered from it." Kinnell's interview is one of the most in-depth, not solely because of Silverblatt himself who seems probative and empathetic, but in Kinnell's demeanour, seeming freer in his responses, and perhaps more authentic. Galway Kinnell and Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, 23 July 1991, audio, 29:37. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 8). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

constructs, by which cognisance, corporeality, and structuration of space, place, and landscape are contained within the geographical imagination. The categorisation of feeling apart due to marginalisation or inhabiting exclusionary or liminal spaces of belonging and non-belonging, along with polarities, disparities, and lack of access to interior and exterior locations or personal agency (often consigned to borders, outskirts, and edges) comport physical and mental assemblies of relegation. As the apprehension of the body in all its facets, sensorial witness is in direct contact with the immediacy of spatial surroundings. Kinnell's comprehension of the emotional, physical, and cognitive impacts of sensuous geographies bears out exile as a mode of inhabitation. Lastly, identity, in its grappling with greater questions regarding community, mutuality, and the shaping of self and self-discovery through artistic output and social collaboration, is produced by interlocutive and discursive praxes of conception. The multiplicity of these geographical imaginations as they apply to exile—relegation, inhabitation, and conception—are contained within the seemingly limitless bounds of real and imagined spaces. These spatial definitions, intersected with an intellectual inheritance of poetic affiliation, inform the constructions of Kinnell's exile around which this final chapter centres.

Poetic Exile—The Exilic Poet

In the winter of 1989, Kinnell was selected as one of three Steinberg Fellows in the PEN at Penn Program, along with novelist Larry Heinemann and playwright A.R. Gurney.[9] Whilst in Philadelphia for a series of guest lectures, he was invited to appear on National Public Radio (NPR) to discuss his work, and to excerpt a reading of "When One" from his recently completed, nominative volume. The poem, comprised of a series of thirteen-lined stanzas and eleven strophes, each beginning and uniformly ending with the same phrase, was forthcoming

[9] University of Pennsylvania, "Two Out of Three," *Almanac* 35, no. 19 (17 January 1989): 1. https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v35pdf/n19/011789.pdf

in the October issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. In Kinnell's first public reading, he presented the eighth verse:

> When one has lived a long time alone,
> one likes alike the pig, who brooks no deferment
> of gratification, and the porcupine, or thorned pig,
> who enters the cellar but not the house itself
> because of eating down the cellar stairs on the way up
> and one likes the worm, who by bunching herself together
> and expanding rubs her way through the ground,
> no less than the butterfly, who totters full of worry
> among the day-lilies, as they darken,
> and more and more one finds one likes
> any other species better than one's own,
> which has gone amok, making one self-estranged,
> when one has lived a long time alone.[10]

As readers, we recognise the inclusion of animals which have significantly figured in Kinnell's body of work, such as in "The Porcupine" and in "Saint Francis and the Sow," both of which are collected in *Selected Poems*. More specifically, the chosen stanza is exemplative of a general anxiety of estrangement that courses through the poem; as the eighth in a sequence of eleven strophes, it approaches the apex of the poem's internal machinations, playing well as a representative portion for those listening for the first time. Kinnell is well-known for reciting his work from memory, and this round verse of almost arpeggio-like difficulty— "and more and more one finds one likes/ any other species better than one's own"[11]—impressively translates across the medium of radio. Sharing this poem with radio listeners was significant, a further indication of Kinnell's desire to foster a colloquy of kinship in reading, and to bring poems to a wide-ranging, general audience.

During the *Fresh Air with Terry Gross* broadcast, Kinnell discussed his recent period of seclusion, elucidating to Gross how he was "roused from misanthropic isolation" by "deciding to re-join the species."[12] He conveyed the metaphorical link the poem shared with his emergence from exile:

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[10] "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone" as read by Kinnell on NPR. Kinnell and Gross, *Fresh Air*. See also Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone, *The Atlantic Monthly* (October 1989): 82-83.
[11] Kinnell and Gross, *Fresh Air*.
[12] Ibid. Kinnell's misanthropy, in relation to other people, and to himself by proxy, manifests itself in early drafts of "When One." He writes, "one grows somewhat distant from one's own kind/ feels some contempt, which

TG: This is a poem about living in exile from people in a way and having this temporary bond with insects and animals instead of people.

GK: It's living alone, and it's living kind of bitterly alone in a way, so it could be characterised as depression. However, depression usually doesn't have that…

TG: Misanthropic…

GK: Lively interest in other beings, you know, depression generally closes off interest in everything. So it isn't really depression, it's more misanthropy, really. It's connected to depression.

TG: Is this a period you feel like you're in now?

GK: No. That is behind me. The period ended the moment I put the last touch, the finishing touch on the poem. There's no connection between finishing the poem and the termination of that period. But this did happen, that for a year-and-a-half I lived in rather severe isolation.

TG: Can I ask what brought you back from that "exile"?

GK: In part it was discussions with a very wise doctor that I had been seeing. In part it was escaping from the clutches of psychopharmacologists.[13] In part it was deciding, really deciding, to rejoin the species. And in part it was falling in love. And finally, it was climbing a mountain. This was in Northern Italy. Along the path there were little tableaux showing the life of Jesus and it begins, the first tableau, it's a path that leads up to a church quite high on a cliff, and the first tableau on the bottom shows Jesus being born, crying or calling out or whatever. You could see his mouth is open, and of course there are animals in the barn where he is born. And they all must be making a kind of wonderful, harmonious music together and loving people are hovering over this child. So the child is born in complete kinship and in oneness with all the other species the way our species was born, and the way each of us individually is born. And then the tableaux show the gradual isolation of this man. But the thing about those later tableaux was that, this was an extremely beautiful place where I was, extremely beautiful—so the thing about those later tableaux was that their depiction of heaven, with all the gold and the angels singing and everything it looked awfully–tawdry–compared with this world where I was actually standing, you know. And as I turned from the tableaux and looked at our world and saw how extraordinarily beautiful it is, then something happened to me, some kind of peace and fearlessness came into me, which haven't left me. So, those are some of the things I think that have roused me

has in it self-contempt,/ for their greed and their madness, and closer to the less harmful/ species/.../ one likes alike the other creatures,/ for being sane, and less like one's own species/ for having gone beserk, one becomes self-estranged/ when one has lived a long time alone." Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64. It also bears striking similarity to Section 32 of Whitman's "Song of Myself": "I think I could turn and live with animals, they're so placid and self-contain'd/.../ They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession." Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 47.

[13] To my knowledge, this is the sole instance in which Kinnell publicly references circumstances or diagnoses surrounding his mental health during this period of exile. However, some of his poems do address mental illness more explicitly. The enumeration of drugs (used to treat disorders such as anxiety, depression, bipolarity, and neural pain, among others) in Kinnell's poem "The Ceiling," suggests his familiarity and conversance with mental illness and psychiatric medications. Similarly, in "The Road Between Here and There" as it appears in the first edition of *The Past*, he pens, "Here I hurt with mortal thoughts and almost recovered," language suggestive of co-terminality with Kinnell himself. Kinnell, *The Past*, 3.

> from this misanthropic isolation. And I cannot believe that I will ever fall back into it again. I just can't think that would ever happen.[14]

As a geographical (if not diasporic) imagination, exile is often concomitant with notions of banishment, migration, hiding, and withdrawal. Indeed, one of the most fundamental substructures of exile is the centrality of 'home' versus 'away,' of a familiarity with native language and culture that occupies "a space of privileged belonging"[15] as opposed to estrangement or alterity elsewhere. Hasti Abbasi and Stephanie Green maintain that "[w]hether sought voluntarily or imposed by necessity, the desire for the writer to find voice in exile, and perhaps a new way of writing, emerges from the transformative struggle between the loss of a familiar world and a heightened attention to questions of place, language and culture."[16]

Although it is of paramount importance to parse the types of exile in this context, we must acknowledge that Kinnell's psychological isolation was indeed a singularly constructed geographical imagination we may categorise as "material and metaphorical" space[17] whereby the exile is a figure disconnected from humanity by misanthropy. However, many analogous intrinsic responses, frames of reference, and individual harm consequent to transnational or expatriate exile, forcible removal, or exiles of displacement (ecological and environmental, suppression, criminal, etc.) still apply. These include dispossession, rupture, alienation, loss of self, and a complicated relationship to one's origins; it is also possible for parts of the self to be "lost in transit," the idea that we may take our leave of the old, and despite a migratory process of departure, never arrive at the new.[18]

Likewise, Kinnell must still regain a refamiliarization with himself, with other individuals, and with his environs. Unlike Henry David Thoreau, who actively chose solitude

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[14] Kinnell and Gross, *Fresh Air*.
[15] Liliana Foşalău, "Espaces exilaires—espaces identitaires chez trois écrivains francophones roumains," *Philologica Jassyensia* 8, no. 2 (2012), 211; my translation.
[16] Hasti Abbasi and Stephanie Green, "Writing and Romantic Exile," *TEXT* Special Issue 41: Romanticism and Contemporary Writing: Legacies and Resistances (October 2017): 2.
[17] Neal Alexander, "On Literary Geography," *Literary Geographies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 5.
[18] Andrew Harlem, "Exile as a Dissociative State: When a Self is 'Lost in Transit,'" *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 27, no. 4 (2010): 461. Harlem views exile as "polysemantic, signifying not only, and perhaps not most crucially, specific migratory precipitants or constraints on geographic mobility." Ibid.

to sharpen his mind and clarify his self-introspection, living "bitterly alone"[19] as Kinnell states, is a destructive force. The spatiality of exile, and its specificity in relation to the geographic imagination he can access, is underscored by the complexity of away and return in real and imagined spaces. In *The Past*, we see the potentiality of human agency, and the possibility of return, whereas in *When One*, it takes the whole of the volume to make good on this eventuality:

> and one knows,
> after a long time of solitude, after the many steps taken
> away from one's kind, toward these other kingdoms,
> the hard prayer inside one's own singing
> is to come back, if one can, to one's own,
> a world almost lost, in the exile that deepens,
> when one has lived a long time alone. (*CP*, 425)

In *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, Michael Seidel addresses alienation in the life of the writer, namely as part of an artistic consciousness activating separation as desire, perspective as witness, and alienation as a new form of being. Seidel continues that the "task for the exile" especially in the case of the exiled artist, is to "transform the figure of rupture back into a figure of connection."[20] Considering Kinnell as a poet within the milieu of literary exile specifically, and within its greater contexts more widely, this comports his estrangement from peers, scholarly advances and critical discussions in the field, in addition to collective literary workings and creative outputs.

Similarly, Ewa M. Thompson articulates, "[i]n the twentieth century, the status of many a writer has been enhanced by his exile. Exile today does not automatically make a writer into a pariah but rather offers new and diverse opportunities for creativity and action,"[21] a notion that could be applied in our overall reading of *When One* and the expansion of Kinnell's literary practice moving forward. Whilst Thompson's conclusion is applicable to Kinnell, her exploration queries transnational and political implications for Russian, German, and Eastern

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[19] Kinnell and Gross, *Fresh Air*. We may consider "Skunk Hour" in a similar context: "My mind's not right." Robert Lowell, *Life Studies and For the Union Dead* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), 89.
[20] Michael Seidel, *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), x.
[21] Ewa M. Thompson, "The Writer in Exile: The Good Years," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 513.

European writers, and the ways in which "forcible expatriation"[22] was not a death to poetic imagination, but somewhat incongruously, proved to be of beneficial consequence through their extension to a Western, predominantly American, audience. In these cases, much like for Kinnell, exile is not a method of silencing or censoring provocative thought or artistic consciousness in creative discursive practices, but rather, acts as a building block of experientiality that brings ancillary dimension thematically, and enhanced linguistic skill to the work overall. Abbasi and Green corroborate Thompson's postulation, suggesting that the dislocation of exile, coupled with feelings of estrangement, can offer new spaces for the articulation of identity, and for an expansion of creative practice to incorporate "fresh, creative terrain."[23]

Indeed, by carving out spaces for creativity, productivity, and new definitions of the self, Kinnell establishes for himself what Miles Ogborn deems "geographies of texts,"[24] whereby modes of literary production are activated and engaged, and writings are read and interpreted. Whilst continuing to work with reasonable intention and speed during his purposeful estrangement, an unusual curiosity in itself, Kinnell must have internalised that he would continue to have an engaged audience, a consideration of his own (and still very desired) public reception. In his preparatory notes for a lecture he presented at the World Scholar-Athlete Games, shortly after his isolation, he confides that "poetry is a state of energy first of all," and that there are "two deaths of a poet; when he or she dies, & before that, when the energy to write fades and vanishes."[25] It is likely he felt pressure to translate any potency not merely as an adequate means of self-preservation of his redemptive healing, but so that others could garner something of use from his isolation in critical and pragmatical applications; at heart, this is crucially his permission 'to return' to a previous state of being.

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[22] Thompson, "The Writer in Exile," 499.
[23] Abbasi and Green, "Writing and Romantic Exile," 3-4.
[24] Miles Ogborn, "Mapping Words," *New Formations* 57 (2005): 149, as quoted in Alexander, "On Literary Geography," 5.
[25] Galway Kinnell, "Notes on Athlete and Poet," 1992, [Box 28/29?], Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

To Kinnell, there is a reciprocity of first principles of experientiality by which we cannot know words without first knowing the world, the inverse of which is also true.[26] In his case, exile is a self-made or self-induced phenomenon restored by language, and by his own literary practice through the confluence of his intellectual peers. Exilic consciousness is disclosed through the written word, such that it is not a world of a proto-linguistic imaginary, but instead, one of plurality and fluency. Kinnell never loses sight of this connection, a linguistic stability that remains despite his self-imposed exile.

Kinnell's Authorial Anxieties

The configuration of numerous poems in Parts I and II of *When One*, in addition to the eponymous poem, are deeply gloomy, isolating, and decidedly lonely, extending these elements into a sustained, parochial view which sketches, rather obliquely and experimentally, a cast of miserable, pathetic, and pitiable figures. These poems stand in marked contrast to *The Past* in which the poems still retain a kind of daring and sacrosanct glibness that resists demoralisation, as shown in "The Road Between Here and There." Kinnell conjures a flash of isolated images which build along the trajectory of his life in which he retraces his steps, packaged almost as paragraphs with a repetition of spatial deictic phrasing: "Here." Most of these are anecdotal, ordinary vignettes, identifying private and biographical details, yet there is a levity with which they are handled, patched together as both literal and figurative pathways of his experience. Anticipating that all roads must eventually come to their inevitable limits, Kinnell's pithy ending declares, "Here I arrive there" (*CP*, 333). In the original publication, he punctuates the poem using a preposition before the locative adverb, offering a moment of

[26] In his archival notes about readerly discovery of language, Kinnell cites Seamus Heaney's 'Carrickfergus' ("The Singer's House"), and Hall's "syntax is sinew" alongside notes about John Clare's desire to articulate the natural world by becoming a poet: "It seemed he knew the language of the birds, & wrote it down, like a language we readers simply don't know yet." He further contrasts the "solitary character of writing" of Dylan Thomas with the idea that poetry can be written through groups of writers who are not in competition with one another. Kinnell, "Notes on Athlete and Poet," MC 64.

peremptory dismissal before applying the sober realisation of advancing age: "For here, the moment all the spaces along the road between here/ and there—which the young know are infinite and all others/ know are not—get used up, that's it."[27]

In her review of *When One*, Sarah Cahill remarks:

> Kinnell may be one of the most linguistically virile of contemporary poets—the muscularity of this kind of writing carries with it a kind of undeniable bravado—but one senses in *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone* that all erotic energy has been absorbed into language; human interaction has practically ceased. The book resonates with a desolate loneliness. Kinnell, now in his sixties, speaks in a voice which is worn and tired, although still highly libidinous; he weathers rejection and symptoms of aging; his thoughts are increasingly occupied with death.[28]

Cahill approaches the volume from a biographically critical vantage point, asserting that because of his advancing age, Kinnell focuses on mortality (an inevitable thanatophobia), and has therefore rescinded his stronghold on various vital and exuberant life forces. In his letter to Kinnell accompanying the revised manuscript of *When One* Carruth remarks, "Of course the poems touch me topically very closely and in many ways, the sexuality and death, etc., so my responses are perhaps more acute than a younger person's would be."[29] Even Kinnell's own very personal statements to Gross during the NPR broadcast create context for analysing the work either in light of or with reference to biographical specificities and anxieties. However, given the pre-existing knowledge and psychopathology we have surrounding the volume's composition, questions become amplified regarding our assessment and treatment of the text, in addition to the kinds of critical lenses best applied for our purposes.

Amongst Kinnell's handwritten and typed drafts of "When One" is a separate sheet of sectioned writing, suggesting intimate notes or musings in his attempts to address a pervading anxiety and overarching desolation (Appendix 7). On the lefthand portion of the page it reads: "except when I know/ What I did not know, and go forth/ happy. Happy/ that, whatever happens, I will have loved/ and in the worst case,/ in my misery, know I will

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[27] Kinnell, *The Past*, 4.
[28] Sarah Cahill, "A Hundred Verses of Solitude," in *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell*, ed. Nancy Lewis Tuten (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 126.
[29] Hayden Carruth to Galway Kinnell, letter, 4 January 1990, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

recover/ because I will have risked/ and not merely retreated."[30] The righthand frame details Kinnell's attempts to seek "clarity," and demonstrates a fairly obsessional working out of an interior monologue positing new against old. He writes a repetitive and forceful refrain to seek clear, cogent thought:

> except—
> waking up into
> a new clarity—
> into the clarity of
> clarity
> the new clarity of a
> renewed clarity.
> clarity: clarity
> clarity: clarity
> new old[31]

Keen and prevailing interest in authorial anxieties advanced by Kinnell, as well as by scholars and researchers alike, is certainly not a new phenomenon, but one which continues to cultivate academic scrutiny in the fields of cognitive studies. Psychiatry journals are rich with qualitative, longitudinal studies which attempt to, and often are successful in, showing direct relationships between mental illness, affective disorders, alcoholism, and productive output in the creative arts.[32] Seminal and canonical studies within the Digital Humanities have used corpus linguistics and diachronic analyses of texts to test hypotheses in authors suffering from dementia and neurodegeneration, in particular Agatha Christie and Iris Murdoch.[33] One of the master conclusions that the data bears out is that these affective disorders, illnesses, and even genetic predispositions, can lend well to increased creative and artistic productivity. In the case of both Christie and Murdoch, lexical disintegration, syntactical changes, and an

[30] Galway Kinnell, handwritten notes, 1989, Box 18, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
[31] Kinnell, handwritten notes, MC 64.
[32] J.J. Schildkraut, A.J. Hirshfield, and J.M. Murphy, "Mind and mood in modern art, II: Depressive disorders, spirituality and early deaths in the abstract expressionist artists of the New York School," *The American Journal of Psychiatry* 151, no. 4 (April 1994): 482-488; also, F. Post, "Creativity and psychopathology: A study of 291 world-famous men," *BR J Psychiatry* 165, no. 1 (July 1994): 22-34.
[33] John Bayley chronicles his marriage to Iris Murdoch and the onset of her debilitating Alzheimer's in the memoir, *Elegy for Iris* (1999).

overall decline in their compositional styles supported these hypotheses regarding their praxes.[34]

Similarly, Kinnell's interest in elaborating a connection between Emily Dickinson's posited bipolar disorder and her prosody to gain further insight into her creative output—and his own, by proxy—centres around access to these cognitive and emotional centres, a means of detection and introspection by penetrating into his own inner, subjective experience. His is a preoccupation of geospatial awareness and disorientation, and largely, the placement of the poet relative within that context. In the case of Dickinson, what Kinnell apprehends as her leading a life in which "she knows profound sense of abandonment—and loneliness"[35] is a distinct focus on positioning, of indexing her intrinsic geospatial awareness, and subsequent disconnection, in experiencing the world. In Kinnell's adoption of a biocritical approach, his fascination with these intertwined facets effectively gestures to a desire in his own literary practice, derived from his inherent sense that the poet's role is actively one of service; it is a vocation by which the poet renders the unpalatable extremes of human experience, and distils it for others, in all walks of life.

In "Last Holy Fragrance" (1985) Kinnell's elegy for James Wright,[36] Kinnell describes this poetic self-reparation and its more acute extension of curative powers, through the figure of Wright's once-burgeoning youth:

> forty years earlier, by the Ohio,
> where he sat and watched it
> flow, and flowed himself inside it,
> humming and lulling first beginnings
> of poems that would heal himself
> but also everybody, including those
> who lie on sidewalks, like dropped
> flowers waiting to be lady slippered

[34] The study uses published work from Murdoch (confirmed Alzheimer's); Christie (suspected of Alzheimer's); and P.D. James (healthy control subject). Xuan Le, Ian Lancashire, Graeme Hirst, and Regina Jokel, "Longitudinal detection of dementia through lexical and syntactic changes in writing: a case study of three British novelists," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26, no. 4 (December 2011): 435-461.

[35] Kinnell, NYPL Talk, MC 64.

[36] The poem enters a dream-like state, straddling both anxiety and reminiscence. Wright's service in the US Army during World War II is of especial relevance in this context: "Even asleep his face sweats. SS/ torturers start working Cagney over./ He knows he will crack and spill/ the invasion plans. When he hears/ the rumbling of B-29s/ come to shut his mouth, he cracks/ a grin" (*CP*, 355). See Jonathan Blunk, *James Wright: A Life in Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017).

into first perfume or last stink. (*CP*, 356)

Kinnell employs a predominant metaphor of perfume to show the duality of two necessary extremes: love, as a pleasing fragrance; and "Fear, the potion of death" which is "a love derivative" that "some terrible/ pinch of it must be added one/ way or another to bring back/ our will to cling" (*CP*, 356). He repeatedly uses the word "lull" to activate the power of song and smell, as in a lullaby or a seduction into a trance. The employment of doubled consonants and eye rhyme mimic these dual senses whilst the Ohio River courses within and through the body of Wright himself: "humming and lulling first beginnings" (*CP*, 356). Much like Kinnell's interrogation of the riparian through autobiographical rapportage, here he recalibrates the lens. The Ohio becomes synonymous with Wright, joining in a poetic imaginary where the outpouring of words considers "what has been lived/ and what remains to be" (*CP*, 355).

In this instance, Kinnell's specific diction, led by the reverberating sensation of two rhythmical trochees ("humming"; "lulling"), and a halting amphibrach ("beginnings"), highlights the exceptional skill of Wright in harnessing language with a power both envied and exalted by Kinnell:

> It will be a long time before anyone comes
> who can lull the words he will now not again use
> —words which, now he has gone, turn this way and that—
> hum and inveigle them to press up against, shape
> themselves by, know, true-love, and idolize. (*CP*, 357)

Kinnell's usage of dashes flanks and frames an individual line juxtaposing "words" and the reality of Wright's death. Deliberately placed commas slow the pace, thickening the verse like precise, steady strokes of a clock. Through his meticulous descriptions, Kinnell imbues the words with a physicality and a sentience, as though language itself meanders and contorts itself without Wright as its master to assume the poetic reins.

Yet "Last Holy Fragrance" has its share of vagaries, what reads as a deliberate inscrutability or obfuscation that conflates the sensibilities of Kinnell and Wright, or at least develops them similarly through inclusion of a pivotal moment of epiphany that the poet is struggling to put into words. It further advances Kinnell's obsession with a privileging of

poetical prowess to harness these darker truths, and as a poet, to be the clarion voice that speaks for all. Presented as a short interlude, the second stanza appears to quote either Wright's internal monologue or vestiges of a conversation he once had with Kinnell:

> 'How am I ever going to be able to say this?
> The truth is there is something terrible,
> almost unspeakably terrible in our lives,
> and it demands respect, and, for some reason
> that seems to me quite insane, it doesn't hate us.
> There, you see? Every time I try
> to write it down it comes out gibberish.' (*CP*, 354-355)

However, there can be a dangerous, self-harming element to this, by going too far, and the how and means of modulating this are individual to each poet. In "Last Holy Fragrance," Kinnell praises Wright for his "surprising language/ a little with the mourning/ that goes on inside it, for what it names" (*CP*, 354). Kinnell posits that the most horrifying place to be is inside one's own self, to delve wholly into the human psyche.[37] His admiration for Dickinson's singular ability to probe into the darkest corners of experience relentlessly, and to mine the inner recesses, or to be, as he states so resolutely, "completely fearless to go into places in us where horror dwells,"[38] are aspects of psychogeography he valued in Wright's poems as well, and sought to illuminate and articulate in *When One*.

In "The Sylvia Plath Effect: Mental Illness in Eminent Creative Writers," James C. Kaufman contends:

> Yet many people in the arts, because of the very 'mystical' nature of how a person creates, may (even unconsciously) credit 'divine inspiration' for their work. Poetry, especially, is seen an art linked to having some sort of a 'muse.' Even if such a misattribution results from superstition or modesty, it may produce a perceived external locus of control—to such a muse, inadvertently placing themselves at a higher risk for depression and other emotional disorders.[39]

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[37] Galway Kinnell and Nigel Beale, "Galway Kinnell on Poetry," 15 October 2009, *The Bibliofile*, audio, 27:27. http://www.thebibliofile.ca/poet-galway-kinnell

[38] Kinnell and Beale, *The Bibliofile*.

[39] James C. Kaufman, "The Sylvia Plath Effect: Mental Illness in Eminent Creative Writers," *Journal of Creative Behavior* 35, no. 1 (2001): 47. Kaufman absorbed much negative criticism of his research and has since changed his focus. See James C. Kaufman, "From the Sylvia Plath effect to social justice: Moving forward with creativity," *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 13, no. 3 (May 2017): 173-177.

Whilst Kaufman's study has entered the mainstream of popular parlance—and with it, bolstered the patriarchal stance of women poets as 'confessional', a trope that continues to prosper despite the pejorative intent behind its labelling—its focus on Plath ignores the extant sociological and supportive frameworks for writers such as Kinnell, in particular. The deficiencies of the cognitive process model of writing concerning the solitary author, addressed by Marilyn M. Cooper in "The Ecology of Writing,"[40] and what Dirk Van Hulle takes up in the sociological dimension of writing, will be explored in more depth in this chapter. Writerly and peer relationships providing a nexus of support, along with poetry's role to bring him on a path to "health and wholeness"[41] may account for why Kinnell was able to emerge from exile, that he was able to successfully work things out through deep introspection in the poetry, and not be led down a path of self-destruction. We might also gesture to Kinnell's generally maintained stance whereby he faults flaws in the work that must be remediated to successfully self-moderate; should these deficiencies be carried through the compositional process, the poetry would suffer accordingly.

Whilst it is clear from his own reflections on Dickinson, along with anecdotal reports of his peers,[42] for our purposes, exile, and the linguistic products associated with this period, are to be discerned by their role in altering his literary practice, of which "When One" is the central text emerging from this aggrieved space. Despite evidence to the contrary (from Kinnell's own statements, anecdotal or otherwise), it is not within our purview to allege

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[40] "Like all theoretical models, the cognitive model projects an ideal image, in this case an image of a writer that, transmitted through writing pedagogy, influences our attitudes and the attitudes of our students toward writing. The ideal writer the cognitive model projects is isolated from the social world, a writer I will call the solitary author. The solitary author works alone within the privacy of his own mind…he uses his analytic skills to discover a purpose. To imagine an audience, to decide on strategies, to organize content; and he simulates how his text will be read by reading it over himself, making the final revisions necessary to assure its success when he abandons it to the world of which he is not a part." Cooper, "The Ecology of Writing," 365-366. See Linda Flower and John R. Hays, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 32, no. 4 (Dec. 1981): 365-387.

[41] Kinnell and Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, MS Am 3277.

[42] Hall, at a lecture with Kinnell at Squaw Valley, opens up about his lifelong struggle with bipolarity (and his recently diagnosed manic depression, after the death of his wife and fellow poet, Jane Kenyon). He cites Kenyon's texts as manifestations of her own manic depression, underscoring the tangibility of mental illness in written works. Galway Kinnell and Donald Hall, "Talk and Discussion, Asilomar, California," 2 January 1997, audio, 29:37. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 1, Item 12-13). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

specific psychopathologies or co-terminal assessments. Rather, more stark divisions can be drawn between what was lost as far as his literary practice in the intervening time, and what stood to be regained. Our readings of the *When One* volume should proceed with a certain acknowledgement of a biographical component of the poet's lived experience that informs his words on the page— "to place the author at an aesthetic remove"[43]—whilst simultaneously submitting to our discovery of consciousness and complexity in Kinnell's work through reader-response. It would be an oversimplification or negation to link each poem as episodic approximations or depictions from a larger, and thematically personal, crisis.

Preamble Poems in *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*

Kinnell opens upon an exploration from multiple perspectives, age brackets, and time frames over the course of several poems in Parts I and II of *When One*: "The Massage"; "Judas-Kiss"; "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed"; "The Ceiling"; and subsequently, "The Room." In "The Massage," Kinnell's habitual preoccupation and enjoyment of touch, most prominently seen in erotic poems such as "The Waking" and "Rapture," are rendered through the unnerving verse of a sentient corpse. It is in fact eerie and macabre subject matter that disarms the reader, Kinnell's verse nestled flush with death as it reels and quivers in its own newness, reinforced by a title which suggests the subject's vitality, perhaps even his own stimulation. Concurrently, it is of especial testimony to both Kinnell's literary process, and to the maturity of his craft, that his unorthodox subject matter brings his ordinary privileging of tactility into surprising and uncharacteristic contexts. For the poem is, at its heart, about the desire of haptic connection, one that quickly devolves into a last touch, or the finality of intimate recognition. The body is the place of action in the poem, serving as its own material geography.

[43] Alison Booth, *Greatness Engendered: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 53.

Presented as stichic verse, a long utterance through a mostly homogenous single stanza scattered with end stops, "The Massage" describes the experience, from a cadaver's perspective, of the preparatory process of a death massage to combat the stiffness and the muscular tension of rigor mortis. Kinnell triangulates three individuals in the poem: a male subject lying on a mortuary table; a shadowy female counterpart (evidenced through vague references of the pronoun "she"); and lastly, an embalmer or 'masseuse,' who is depicted only through the physicality of hands and motion, "the hands of the hitter" which "do not tire" (*CP*, 388). Divided into dual vignettes, "The Massage" is embedded with interwoven layers of memory and consciousness, along with senses of hearing and touch. Kinnell offers a split temporality whereby he switches between the current moment in time, the man lying "bunched up,/ in a corner, in remorse, eyes squeezed shut," subsequently flashing "back in the kitchen where the sharp tongue/ made its points while she puttered about,/ that he was dumb, that he was worthless" (*CP*, 388). We are not given any context for the subject's repentance, nor can we discern who the female figure is; however, whether mother or lover, the text indicates a fraught and sour relationship, one by which "he would never reach the future alone" (*CP*, 389).

The poem sets off in a series of trochaic pentameter: "Hoisted onto the table, he lies limp./ He likes this—existence annihilated/ into these two hands. How could anyone/ willingly leave a world where they touch you/ all over your body?" (*CP*, 388). Prone and immobile, the man trades "the birth table" for the mortician's: "The hands find coagulated rump-tissue—delve,/ spear, grabble, until the buttocks want to jig" (*CP*, 388). He longs for these last, unremitting touches that seem to handle his body with impunity and impertinence, for "no one has touched him/ so unstintingly since she unsafety-pinned/ and talcum-slicked the tiny little body" (*CP*, 388). The quad-syllabic "unstintingly" and "unsafety-pinned" coupled with "and talcum-slicked" play off of each other as a kind of iambic trimeter, halting the verse to a crawl so that the triple trochaic "tiny little body" thus sings out in differentiation, adding an element of aural mimesis.

The regularity of Kinnell's verse, alternating into iambic pentameter as the poem progresses, acts as a veiled clue for us to pay closer mind; oftentimes when Kinnell is being deliberately regular in his verse, it signals greater complexity is afoot, and therefore asks for our increased attentiveness to the content held within his form.[44] By extending the tenderness and the intimacy of touch into this quasi-realm of consciousness, he probes a more grandiose metaphysical question that ponders human consciousness at death, and considers whether or not we remain sentient beings, be it cognitively or as souls rising outward, before eternal oblivion sets in. Kinnell's archives support his interest in the mind-body connection, and a consideration of interactionism, dualism, and materialism according to philosophers such as René Descartes and George Berkeley.[45] The salient, linking element is his interest in theories melding mind as part of the physical body, in addition to a focus on mental occurrences, vis-à-vis the role of the central nervous system in processing conscious thoughts, feelings, and pain. This same preoccupation parallels *Sheffield Ghazals*, where he pronounces that "spirit is flesh, flesh spirit, the brain simply a denser place in/ the flesh" (*CP*, 457).

Echoes of "There Are Things I Tell to No One" can be discerned in the future-looking amphibrach and extended trochee of "existence annihilated," one which will fail to be realised (*CP*, 388): "*remember/ existence already remembers/ the flush upon it you will have been*,*/ you who have reached out ahead/ and touched the dust we become*" (*CP*, 320). Kinnell inserts several multi-syllabic words and hyphenations, creating a tension between form and message whilst combining diphthongs such as "Hoisted" with the assonance and eye rhyme of "i" such as in "lies"; "limp"; "likes"; "this"; "into"; and "willingly" (*CP*, 388). In "The Massage," the man has a heightened sense of reality and observation, and portrays an underlying cynicism enacted through hearing in addition to touch— "and a tear popping out, like the tongue/ of a snake

[44] In his review of Larry Eigner's *On My Eyes*, Kinnell complains that "[a]gain speech is let off the hook because it is camouflaged by poetic devices. The real value of getting rid of rhyme and meter, I had supposed, was in order to throw the responsibility for the poem wholly on speech itself." Galway Kinnell, "Seeing and Being," *Poetry* (September 1962): 402.

[45] Galway Kinnell, "Mind-Body," 1992, [Box 28/29?], Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

through its closed smile" (*CP*, 388)—the death tear revealing itself as a final emblem rendering sorrow, or perhaps welcoming joy.[46]

Kinnell has done well both to indicate and to draw upon the symbology of death, or harbingers of the end. He refers to other signs of loss of life in terms of spatial proximity and crossing over realms, the "cadaver/ two beds away spits out the scatological verbs,/ as though he fears they will frisk his heart/ in the next world" (*CP*, 389). Shifts in metrical weight are found in the contrasts of the amphibrach "horns of cars," and with the trochaic rhythm of "urgent siren," both of which approximate the vehicular sounds they are describing, in addition to the exhausting, breathless continuation of four uninterrupted lines: "who pries/ flesh off little brown unidentifiable bones/ of the creature who days before clomped about/ abruptly gobbling as though thinking up jokes" (*CP*, 389). Yet the one place that the masseuse is unable to access is the man's broken heart; weary with life and deep-rooted melancholy, the musicality of his bodily materials is contained within "the twelve cartilaginous bars" (*CP*, 389), a double meaning which plays on the physical structure of his ribs and the 'bars' of musical notation. Kinnell employs spondees to slow down and pace his line rhythms, lending gravitas to his central point: touching cannot exist in the next world after death.

As we delve deeper into the volume, we become further bystanders to an evolving change of register for Kinnell, as noted previously concerning *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* and *The Past*. His former 'devil-may-care' attitude, upon which many of his poems stake their identities and infuse his poetic ethos, continues to dissipate and to recede. Here he is softer and more vulnerable, bringing life to dark and psychologically haunting poems in a way that *The Book of Nightmares*, always a useful source for comparison, does not. Whilst *The Book of Nightmares* may address the unspeakable, it does so in a compelling and decidedly picaresque manner. More precisely, there is a certain inherent illogic or naïve quality to it, one which

[46] These lines would seem to correlate to Strophe 4 in the original publication of "When One," a sexual lament which describes secretions from the somewhat interchangeable role of the pitiable snake: "like milk of paradise into the flesh,/ until a glimmering appears at his mouth,/ such a drop of intense fluid as, among humans,/ could form after long exciting at the tip/ of the penis, and as he straightens himself out/ he has the pathos one finds in the penis." Kinnell, *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*, 62.

reifies its ambiguities to the mythic. In *When One* the poems are, at times, a forebearance; at others, wizened and weary, they buck against the inevitable of the here and now. These poems demonstrate a commitment to psychogeography where much of the placiality is enacted experientially through the inhabitation of a fixed position of cognitive or sensorial witness.

Kinnell turns what is commonly understood to be the 'Betrayal of Christ' or 'Kiss of Judas' into both a compound noun— "Judas-Kiss" as duplicity—and a verb (as in, 'to Judas-Kiss'), by the simple elegance of hyphenating the pair of words. The poem launches in a spirit of resignation:

> Those who lie waiting know time
> goes away eventually but in the meantime
> sits there—oh maybe shuffles in its mechanisms
> once in a while, skips a day, sometimes
> behind you a whole year can get lost,
> but basically sits there. (*CP*, 389-390)

He deploys the plural demonstrative "those," and uses "most" (*CP*, 390) as a pronoun; this adroit manoeuvre allows the poem to gesture towards the more anonymized and universal language of the central title of the volume, along with the eponymous poem, to be revealed in the subsequent pages of Part IV.

From the outset, there is the suggestion of an unspoken and shared commonality with other individuals whose experiences match those of the speaker, a personal narrative of suicidal tendencies and misunderstanding. Time is compartmentalised in tracts and swathes that sit as discrete lumps, and yet somehow, despite the almost physical weight of its presence, it is entirely inaccessible. However, in this iteration, Kinnell does not threaten or succumb to a spectre of existential annihilation, but instead demonstrates how life ekes itself out from bearing of torment, illness, and forgetfulness, a position which allows time to virtually evaporate, and even disappear. In its slow passage, Kinnell conjures decidedly gruesome analogies of landscape. Suspended between heaven and hell, memory is anthropomorphised and discarded as "the tiny ditched/ carcasses of remembered acts" that "remain stuck nose and feet/ to the amberish helix/ of the heaven of childhood,/ which droops down into the

golden ringlet/ of hell" (*CP,* 390). He likens disparate images of life as an "amberish helix," evoking the double helix of DNA's nucleic acid, the spirals of which form an hourglass shape, mimicking the proverbial metaphor of the sands of time turning upon themselves.[47] Hell, depicted as "golden" is particularly provocative, inverting our perceptions of the pearly gates of heaven bathed in wan, buttery light.

Kinnell further delineates, in a sense drawing alliance between two types of sufferers—"most" and "some"—the larger portion are those who can bear to self-medicate by portioning out their relief day-by-day (presumably in this context, pain relievers of some kind). However, there are still others whose desire to 'end it all' overtakes, a bottle of pills as a guaranteed accomplice to suicide: "Most can wait/ for the capsule's slow burst/ to lull them off, but some, dying/ to get on with it, swill the whole/ bottle-load down in one/ foul gulp" (*CP*, 390). He presents this self-annihilation somewhat informally, almost like scratching an itch, a "dying/ to get on with" the desire to die. In an interview with Ken McCullough, Kinnell describes this heightened psychological conflict, a compulsive fascination with death as a bewitching and a vigorous force, referencing "The Starry Night" by Anne Sexton. Sexton's poem reads in part:

> Oh starry starry night! This is how
> I want to die:
>
> into that rushing beast of the night,
> sucked up by that great dragon, to split
> from my life with no flag,
> no belly,
> no cry.[48]

[47] Kinnell may be alluding to the concentric circles of Dante Alighieri's "Inferno" in *The Divine Comedy*, with each circle of hell fitting neatly into the one preceding it. His exploration of concentric circles is exemplified in some of nature's most basic patterning—skipping stones—as he depicts in "The Path Among the Stones": "and that wafer-stone/ which skipped ten times across/ the water, suddenly starting to run as it went under,/ and the zeroes it left,/ that met/ and passed into each other, they themselves/ smoothing themselves from the water…" (*CP*, 265).

[48] Anne Sexton, "The Starry Night," in *The Norton Anthology of Literature*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), 2699.

Kinnell states that Sexton's poem "expresses a death wish" but also "what you might call the *happy* hunger to die...So many of the great poems begin similarly—a feeling of strangeness and then of terrible kinship."[49]

Likewise, in his introduction to *The Poems of François Villon*, he expounds upon Villon's usage of death as a conventional metaphor for lost love, attesting that Villon "writes out of a peculiarly fierce attachment to our mortal existence…It is a cry not only against the brevity of existence and the coming on of death but also against this dying life itself, this life so horrified by death and so deeply in need of it."[50] Kinnell's observations regarding Villon's poetry could similarly be impressed upon his own; he, too, writes on a knife's edge, teetering between two conflicting positions which seduce the poet into a hypnotic state of bipolarity, and a state of ambivalence. Exemplified through the figure of Judas in the poem, Kinnell approaches this cognitive dissonance through a sacred kiss, equal parts friendship and treason.

Although most notable given the nature of its title, the poem more generally interrelates with religious threads and overtones as it progresses, a further indication of his refutation of religiosity in favour of the secular. By taking up the mantle of the Judas-Kiss (involving arguably the most villainised or demonised individual in all of human history), Kinnell in fact appropriates a more nuanced, unpopular, and sympathetic portrayal of Judas Iscariot, one that is dismissed within the canonical constructs of mainstream Christianity, and is often deemed, perhaps unjustly, as heresy.[51] This viewpoint would instead ally with the Gnostic Gospel of Judas in which Judas is said to have fulfilled the prophecy with which Jesus, his best friend, had tasked him. Major poets and writers across a transnational tradition have approached the tensions of loyalty, betrayal, and historicity in the Judas story including Wright's sonnet "Saint Judas" and its accompanying volume (1959); Robinson Jeffers' "Dear

[49] Kinnell, *Walking Down the Stairs*, 88-89. Kinnell's own "When One" is written to similar effect in Strophe 8, expressing that one "covets the stillness of inorganic matter,/ in a self-dissolution one may not know how to halt" (*CP*, 424).
[50] Galway Kinnell, *The Poems of François Villon: New Edition* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1977), xvii.
[51] The Gnostic Gospels are viewed as heretical and therefore non-canonical. They are omitted from the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) of the New Testament.

Judas" (1928); Brendan Kennelly's *The Book of Judas* (1991), an epic poem in twelve parts; Jorge Luis Borges' "Three Versions of Judas" in *Ficciones* (1944) in which identities become transposed on this sacrificial figure; and Countee Cullen, who explored Judas's humanity in the ballad meter of "Judas Iscariot" (1925):

> So Judas took the sorry part
> Went out and spoke the word,
> And gave the kiss that broke his heart,
> But no one knew or heard
> […]
> It was not death that Judas found
> Upon a kindly tree;
> The man was dead long ere he bound
> His throat as final fee."[52]

The centrality of "Judas-Kiss" thus builds to a titular betrayal, the enumeration of which is given in the final third of Kinnell's poem:

> Then somebody,
> an ex-spouse, the woman downstairs,
> or maybe the UPS man, will happen by,
> discover the collapsed creature,
> and never mind if it sleeps through
> its last clutches, bend down,
> and with the softest
> part of the face, which hides
> the hardest, Judas-kiss it,
> with a click, like a conductor's
> ticket-punch, this one here, God
> of our Fathers, this one is the one. (*CP*, 390)

The poem makes clear that treachery can come from anyone; be it a close personal relation, a friend or stranger, it is possible to view others through a scope of alterity, and therefore to characterise them in animalistic and dismissive language, as merely some "collapsed creature" in passing (*CP*, 390). Kinnell demonstrates that the physical act simultaneous with betrayal stems from sustained distrust emanating from our primal selves. Simply elucidated, it is the idea that the softest parts of our bodies—our lips, mouths, and cheeks— cloak "the hardest" (*CP*, 390), and perhaps most malicious of physical traits—our teeth and mandibles— that link us with our ancestral, animalistic tendencies of survival. These are not the "Lips that give way

[52] Countee Cullen, *Color* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925), 92-93.

so easily/ It's a shock to feel under them/ The hard smile of bones" depicted in Kinnell's sensuous "Poem of Night" in *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* (*CP*, 135). From one creature to another (and here, the salience of Kinnell's selected pronoun, "it"), suggests that discarding life becomes second-nature: "discover the collapsed creature,/ and never mind if it sleeps through/ its last clutches" (*CP*, 390).

Moreover, the cadence and quick-sated imagery of "with a click, like a conductor's/ ticket-punch" (*CP*, 390) shares striking commonality, not only with "the click/ of a wishbone breaking" (*CP*, 265) in "The Path Among the Stones" but most identically with Walt Whitman's "The Last Invocation." Both poets posit binaries of space configuring boundaries and liminality, with emphasis toggling between inside and outside the margins of certain action. Although expressed through gentle prosody, Whitman's poem seems torn between worlds as well, hinging on either delicately coming to one's end or clinging on to "mortal flesh"— "With the key of softness unlock the locks—with a whisper,/ Set ope the doors O soul."[53]

The changing of hands in this pointed betrayal is undeniable, identifying the mark through a kiss just as Judas did with Jesus before his captors; in one swift brush of lips, the disbeliever's ill-fated surrender takes place, relinquishing all ties with the earthly world, thereby offered up to God's will. Kinnell's perfunctory and matter-of-fact diction describing the exchange suggests that human life is objectively de-valued, and without much significance, "worthless" as the speaker states in "The Massage" (*CP*, 388). As such, the lowliest, through an act of self-harm, becomes concomitant with the Christ-figure, he himself betrayed and remanded. Kinnell's critical focus emerges as a depiction of the intertwined nature, not simply of Judas and Jesus as a contemporaneous and complex pair, but of the common individual's relationship to salvation, forgiveness, and duplicity. By putting all their indiscretions,

[53] Whitman, *The Complete Poems*, 336.

weaknesses, and fallibility into relief, Kinnell is better able to illuminate their shared humanity, and accordingly, to discredit omnibenevolence by mounting an indictment of God's cruelty.

It can be elucidating to contrast this poem with "Wait,"[54] a poem structured as an antidote to self-harm, a staving off of suicide, which is completely antithetical to "Judas-Kiss": "Wait, for now./ Distrust everything if you have to./ But trust the hours. Haven't they/ carried you everywhere, up to now?" (*CP*, 290) The speaker encourages the reader to place faith in time whereby one relies on or trusts its passage to enact the inevitable. More saliently, the reader is encouraged to believe in its incontrovertible ability to rescue and to heal. The further time progresses, the more restorative life becomes, allowing for the possibility to fulfil second chances, just as "Second-hand gloves will become lovely again;/ their memories are what give them/ the need for other hands" (*CP*, 290).

Moreover, in both "Judas-Kiss" and "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed," Kinnell seeks to replace a theocentric model of religion with a humanistic one. In "Judas-Kiss," this is manifested through a privileging and forgiving of flawed humanity as opposed to divinity, whereas "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed" modulates into the exchange of love of others, challenging neo-Platonic conventions by prioritising carnality and familial love above beauty or knowledge. In the latter, love is reserved for mortal beings, and is to be engaged with solely on earth:

> In the religion of love to pray
> is to pass, by a shining word, into the inner chamber
> of the other. It is to ask the father and mother
> to return and be forgiven. (*CP*, 392)

The poem registers a series of binaries, with Kinnell primarily surveying themes of abandonment and atonement. He teeters between a proliferation of light and dark, morning and night, love and forgiveness, mothers and fathers, and both inner and outer worlds of human existence. Situated within the detached space of a single room, the poem opens with

[54] Kinnell wrote this poem in a matter of hours under considerably urgent circumstances. He explains that his purpose in its composition was to appease a student's suffering (she had been contemplating suicide due to heartbreak). Galway Kinnell, "Wait," Poets Forum Awards Ceremony Reading, (October 2010), audio, 26:42. https://poets.org/text/video-galway-kinnell-poets-forum-reading

an anonymized, broken-hearted figure, a man on a hotel bed carefully positioning his "permanently sore" body "so as/ not to press through the first layer/ into the second" (*CP*, 391). Unlike "The Massage," in which the broken heart is inaccessible, we are apprised of this man's peculiar interiority of suffering as a living, breathing individual, in a somatisation of his pain. Once more, the body is a source of its own material geography, mapping sensations of pain, love, and fear. The man's innermost domain is an agonising and sorrowful construction of place through which pain radiates from his body onto the immobile bed. Kinnell achieves spatial displacement through an examination of isolation within this closed room, which belies both a sense of grounding, and of home. Symbolically, it is almost impossible to ignore the overtones of this chosen location—a generic hotel room—in which it is not uncommon to contemplate self-destruction or to enact it, for "suicide is the death by which man escapes from death."[55]

Through the man's enumerated locale, Kinnell broadens our interpretation; we extrapolate the where and why of this actual experience, the identity of this ambiguous figure, and perhaps even surmise about his socio-economic class. In contrast to the unidentified man in "The Massage," who we might assume has been living rough at the mercy of the elements, this man differentiates himself by his change in status, as one who can afford a night's stay in a hotel. The man comes upon an intense realisation that because he is still alive and alone, that light will illuminate and intensify the darkness of his inner world, repeating itself all over again: "Nor does it help to outlast the night—/in seconds after the light comes/ the inner darkness falls over everything" (*CP*, 391).

The published version of the poem in *When One* begins in medias res, whereas the archival, draft version of "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed" originates:

> He needs to pray.
> There is no secular solution. Doctors of today

[55] Kinnell continues that, "The modern man looks forward and sees that the end of all this struggling is just death. And so there comes over him an anxiety and a sense of futility, and then happens sometimes the short-circuit, and so it happens: suicide." Galway Kinnell, "Lecture, St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1976, audio, 47:26. The Galway Kinnell Recordings, 1960-2015 and undated (MS Am 3277, Box 2, Item 9). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

don't know about old ills, about the blows struck
with dead force, without emotion, without weakness,
without rancor, possibly without pain. He needs
to be gathered in the arms of existence,
as happened in childhood, when he prayed,
but long ago he himself in the name of truth denounced out of
existence the arms of existence.

He shifts on the bed cautiously
to keep from pressing down through the first layer
into the second, which is permanently sore.
To sleep, for him, is to lie
as immobile as possible
for as long as possible
~~thinking~~ bearing the worst.[56]

This version gives privileged knowledge through additional context, serving as an urgent signpost of the man's acute crisis, as well as creating a subtext for the poem which is otherwise inaccessible and unknowable to the reader. Initially, the man defaults to his prior connection with a holy being, substantiating the embrace of religion as intertwined and demonstrative of his very actuality. The specificity of this first stanza, as above, clarifies the irreconcilable tension between his faith and his renunciation of a higher entity. Through pared-down verse, Kinnell expresses: "He needs to pray./ There is no secular solution,"[57] an emphatically blunt and unmasked elucidation of the man's existential upheaval; the poem suggests that uncertain crisis may only be averted or eradicated by the act of being enfolded by a divine love. In this way "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed" gestures, rather effectively, to the realisation that will follow later in Kinnell's "When One." That is to say, if difficulties cannot be approached through the teachings of a secular world, then we must turn inevitably elsewhere in hopes of their resolution. Whilst the more-than-human lifeworld is devoid of religiosity (in the Christian configuration of a specific deity or a divine presence), it creates in turn its own set of achievable

[56] Drafts of the poem also reveal some significant changes including Kinnell's intention to create some breathing space within the poem by ordering it into numbered sections, splitting the poem into two at the lines, "On the wall ~~above him there~~ is the print/ of a woman in an orange serape." Galway Kinnell, "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
[57] Kinnell, "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed," MC 64.

spiritual guidance from the physical world, much like the wisdom of correspondence afforded by the Transcendentalists.

Kinnell's fixation with movement and contemplation in a small, confined space in both lyrical and metaphorical contexts continues to build as the poem progresses. Whilst noun and verb jumbles both break up and define the action, he resists any temptation to compartmentalise the poem into separate, stanzaic verse. Instead, Kinnell details the man's thoughts and movements with the specificity of a third-person omniscient narrator, rendering readerly discomfort as we follow the man's unsettled and nervous re-positioning: "He shifts"; "He wonders"; "He goes over"; "He feels around"; "He lies facedown" (*CP*, 391-392). Nevertheless, the poem leaves a certain open-endedness in interpretation, lacking clarity as to whether the speaker is to forgive his mother and father for any transgressions they have committed, or if he is indeed seeking their absolution for his own. Despite the extremity of his solitude, he is still able to ponder human relationships, advancing a small hope that his situation might be altered or improved.

The considerable lonesomeness of being apart felt in the poem is underscored by the repetition of the word "no": "He feels around—/ no pillow next to his, no depression/ in the pillow, no head in the depression" (*CP*, 391). The subject uses his tactility to both surmise and to quantify his loneliness, an overwhelming sense of loss defined through the hollowness and the negative spatiality of his physical environs. As readers, we suspect that there had previously been a partner occupying that space. This emptiness is further underscored by Kinnell's parallel description of a print hanging above the bed depicting a woman, "who sits half turned away, her right hand/ clutching her face, lies empty,/ or does it move in the hair of a man/ who dies, or perhaps died long ago" (*CP*, 391). The use of the man's hands patting around in the darkness lends to Kinnell's own version of a 'doubting Thomas' moment in which one must touch to decode what sight has already perceived; in order to give substance and physicality, one must disprove illusion.

Ultimately, we arrive at what the poem considers its fundamental truth, an aphoristic statement which expresses an intermingling between love, grief, and devotion: "Love is the religion that bereaves the bereft" (*CP*, 391). Love not only becomes interchangeable with religion, but acts as a particular strand which mourns the grieving, synonymous with a prayer for the living:

> No doubt his mother's arms still waver up
> somewhere reaching for him; and perhaps
> his father's are now ready to gather him
> there where peace and death dangerously mingle.
> But the arms of prayer, which pressed his chest
> in childhood—long ago, he himself, in the name
> of truth, let them go slack. (*CP*, 391-392)

Attending to Kinnell's lexicon, "there where" initiates a detailed description, almost as though "where peace and death dangerously mingle" (*CP*, 392) is a specific point we can identify cartographically. Kinnell thus positions the man in relation to the interstices of life and death, which have come to prominence in his work, particularly in "The Last Hiding Places of Snow," as previously explored in Chapter Two. Kinnell intimates a meditation on prayer through the verse, suggesting alternatives to it that might be discovered, given his renunciation of religious faith. In this religion predicated on unconditional love, the poem exposes clear barriers to accessibility, for not everyone feels or experiences love, least of all this man who hopes that death will come for him before morning; in this way, he may reach the end of his life, and not feel abandoned. The unfolding of each subsequent day of life hastens his desire for death to come claim him, by which he avows the voraciousness of his own self-destruction. As the poem draws to a close, the man glimpses the vitality and the light of life swelling, summoning him towards the other side where consciousness dims and the end lingers: "the daylight grows so bright the man sees/ the next darkness already forming inside it" (*CP*, 392).

Continuing with the isolated and exilic overtones that peregrinate through the volume, "The Ceiling" depicts an individual in hospital undergoing a mental crisis yet still retaining enough lucidity and introspection to articulate thoughts and desires. In contrast to the omniscient narrative structure of "The Massage," in which the man "lies bunched up,/ in a

corner, in remorse, eyes squeezed shut" (*CP*, 388), Kinnell elaborates the poem from the perspective of a lyric speaker. The speaker's body is elongated, lying flat on a gurney facing upwards; eyes wide and searching, he contemplates the ceiling. The poem opens slightly antagonistically through the avowals of the speaker, whose concerns present a counter to daydreaming through mordant verse, the tone of which feels equal parts whimpering and remonstration. Despite the unbroken stanzaic verse, "The Ceiling" is plainly divided into sections, seen in progression over five discernible parts, and represented as a series of disjointed observations by the lyric speaker. The first section makes an abrasive start:

> I don't like looking at
> this ceiling of sprayed concrete
> that would scrape the will out of anyone
> who had decided to rise and pass through— just as
> the trompe l'oeil of jagged rocks
> on the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library floor
> conjures up shattered flesh
> in someone thinking of climbing over
> those protruding balusters—
> cruciform steel rods baring their row
> of sharp crosses along the top, to interdict
> the Christians, and make others imagine
> being speared and hooked up halfway over. (*CP*, 403)

Viewed from our future vantage point as critical readers, one of the most striking reflections is Kinnell's speculative prescience—"shattered flesh/ in someone thinking of climbing over/ those protruding balusters" (*CP*, 403)—regarding NYU's 12-story flagship library, the Bobst.[58] The architecture, designed by Philip Johnson and Richard Foster, features an optical illusion-styled floor, a masterful series of interlinking blocks and stepping stones achieved through perspective and vanishing points; from the upper reaches of the top floors down to the lobby, it is as if one has been drawn into a relativity drawing by MC Escher.

[58] In 2003, the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library was the site of two student suicides. Both jumped to their deaths from the open-air crosswalks, prompting the university to install plexiglass to prevent future attempts. In 2009, a student successfully scaled the plexiglass, jumping from ten stories up. This third suicide led NYU to reconsider their safety measures, adding floor-to-ceiling perforated, permanent aluminium screens to assure the impossibility of any further incidents. Alyssa Goldberg, "Bobst Library's Enduring History of Suicide," *Washington Square News* (7 March 2022): https://nyunews.com/features/2022/03/07/nyu-bobst-library-suicide-history/

Much like the mesmerising feeling induced by the library's architecture, Kinnell's imagery is vivid with surface contrasts, enacted through "sprayed concrete/ that would scrape the will out of anyone," which he then juxtaposes with "jagged rocks," "sharp crosses," and the depiction of the "smooth-plastered ceiling" (*CP*, 403) of a childhood home, punctuated with cracks radiating outward. The speaker's sensory perceptions, as depicted in "The Ceiling," are not unlike those of other subjects Kinnell has featured previously, and most proximately, in *The Past*. "Break of Day" demonstrates how synaesthesia of vision and smell gives both context and texture to geographical imaginations in the work "in which reflections of a 40-watt ceiling bulb/ appear and disappear/…/ bobbing in blue milk" in "an atmosphere containing kerosene stink,/ chainsaw smoke, chainsmoke, wood smoke, wood heat" (*CP*, 344). In "Chamberlin's Porch" the lyric speaker expresses, "On three sides of the stretcher bed/ where I half sleep, rainwater runs down/.../ Rain putters down on wood shingles, now smattering, becoming a language,/ now slackening" (*CP*, 351). Through simultaneous experiences of vision, smell, and sound, Kinnell spatially defines and bounds his poetic subjects through the delimitations of their physical environments.

Similarly, "The Room" is both partition and refuge, a poem which elaborates a metaphorical chamber within the lyric speaker's psyche of real and imagined spaces, an isolated place of "solitary thinking."[59] Of all the preliminary poems, "The Room" seems the most fit to set the stage for "When One" that follows in Part IV. Kinnell initiates the poem through declarative and mechanically uninspired verse:

> The door closes on pain and confusion.
> The candle flame wavers from side to side
> as though trying to break itself in half
> to color the shadows too with living light.
> The andante movement plays over and over
> its many triplets, like farm dogs yapping
> at a melody made of the gratification-cries
> of cocks. I will not stay long. (*CP*, 410)

[59] Kinnell contextualises: "I don't think I've ever wanted to live a truly hermit's existence, although I have at some time or another, it hasn't been for the sake of the hermit-like existence, but for some other reason, some kind of experience of solitary thinking." Kinnell and Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, MS Am 3277.

For the reader, stepping into the poem becomes an entrance into a room, our second space of functional enclosure after "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed." The placement of the caesura mimics the action of a door closing permanently. As such, the poem demands a certain spatial understanding or mapping out to derive the orientation of the room. We imagine the layout, attempting to discern placement and location, as though we were the lyric speaker entering the room itself or leaving this experience behind. The candle acts as an instrument of truth, lending a spirit of piety and prayer to the environs, even as the physicality of the world still retains a sense of humour: "The candle flame's staggering makes the room/ wobble and shift—matter itself, laughing" (*CP*, 410). By the eighth line, the lyric speaker assures us, "I will not stay long" (*CP*, 410), both a resolute statement and an expression of pointed self-awareness of motivation, will, and action that provides a distinct sense of spatial attentiveness. The room stands as an object built around space by confining walls, giving or imparting shape to a flexible and unfixed spatial reality; once the door closes, it traps "pain and confusion" within its confines (*CP*, 410).

We are first introduced to the solitude imparted by a single room in Kinnell's work through "Room of Return" in *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, a poem replete with meticulously detailed flashes of commonplace images, projected from a small, westside apartment in Manhattan overlooking the Hudson River. The lyric speaker is positioned as both a voyeur and an exhibitionist cataloguing an unpretentious scene, "Where a naked light bulb/ Lights coat hangers, whisky bottles,/ Umbrellas, anti-war tracts, poems,/ A potted plant trimmed to a crucifixion" (*CP*, 120). "Room of Return" welcomes the reader into the space as a means of demonstrating that very little is needed to create a sense of home: "Room/ Where I switch the light on" (*CP*, 121). Despite the descriptions of this sparsely appointed apartment, an overarching softness is effectuated through the space as both a physical room and a source of fulfilment for the lyric speaker, gratifying our own readerly voyeurism through glimpses of identity, this "Tiny glimmer" (*CP*, 121). As a microcosm suspended within the city, the room brings light to the cloaked darkness, calming us with the

assuredness of its return; the speaker finds restorative regeneration of place rooted in the kinship of New York City.

In contrast to the "Room of Return," in which the reader is enfolded into the lyric speaker's experience, "The Room" presents with an assertiveness performing closer to hostility. Supported by spondaic, monotone statements without rhetorical accent or expression, each proclamation is chained together in a monologue directed towards the reader:

> I can't come back. I won't change.
> I have the usual capacity for wanting
> what may not even exist. Don't worry.
> That is dew wetting my face.
> You see? Nothing that enters the room
> can have only its own meaning ever again. (*CP*, 411)

The speaker clarifies that it is "dew" wetting his face, a defence mechanism to dispel any perception of the damp traces of tears, and an assertion of rationality over emotion.

In his interview with Kinnell, Michael Silverblatt addresses *having* and *being* conceptually, broaching, "In 'The Room' you talk about the horror of having and realise in the course of the poem that having *is* being in some sense, even having nothing."[60] Kinnell's verse would seem to invoke Erich Fromm's distinction between *having* and *being* which is the central focus of *To Have or To Be?* (1976), a text in which Fromm approaches the inherent opposition between "two fundamental modes of experience, the respective strengths of which determine the differences between the characters of individuals and various types of social character."[61] Fromm clarifies that, "[t]he having orientation is characteristic of Western industrial society, in which greed for money, fame, and power has become the dominant theme of life."[62] Kinnell wrestles with these ideas explicitly, writing in "The Room" that "Having is destroying, according/ to my version of the vow of impoverishment" (*CP*, 410), a saintly contract conceived by his own design as a method of public self-deprecation. Given that the

[60] Kinnell and Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, MS Am 3277.
[61] Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), 14.
[62] Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, 17.

religious context by which one acquires the virtue of poverty is through a spiritual detachment from temporal goods, the notion of having as a means of obliteration is markedly severe.[63]

We may extrapolate from Kinnell's ethical and moral stances that he advocated for the ingrained senses of character and identity of ontological being, as opposed to the selfish impulses of industrialisation, commodification, and egotism. Returning to Silverblatt's assessment, and the room itself "in this brief, waxen light" (*CP*, 410), we grasp that being rich with cognitive, emotional, and bodily experiences, however transient, is synonymous with having, and can be fulfilling through its own willed actions: "*Being is having*. Having/ may be simply the grace of the shell/ moving without hesitation, with lively pride,/ down the stubborn river of woe" (*CP*, 410). The trochaic structure of the verse interplays with the categorisation of the music of nature as well as the harmony of notes subsumed in the background throughout the poem: "The andante movement plays over and over/ its many triplets, like farm dogs yapping/ at a melody made of the gratification-cries/ of cocks"; and "The flute/ that guttered those owl's notes into the waste hours/ of childhood joins with the piano/and they play" (*CP*, 410). Through these channels of experientiality, existence confronts its own sense of transformation, uniting abstraction and imagination with the rhythmic idiom animating life and psyche.

Subsequently, the room itself acts as an all-encompassing entity, which has the ability both to absorb meaning and to efface significance by appropriating a collection of all that is housed within it. Customary to Kinnell's exploration of the intersectionality of real and imagined spaces, he presents these lacunas of confinement as tense intersections, resulting in indecipherable paradoxes beyond the scope of human agency to resolve. The lyric speaker announces, "At the far end,/ a door no one dares open begins opening./ To go through it will awaken such regret/ as only closing it behind can obliterate" (*CP*, 410). By this admission, we may equate the room as a designated place of self-awareness and consciousness. As the

[63] Romaeus W. O'Brien and O. Carm, "The Vow of Poverty and Its Civil Law Implications," *The Catholic Lawyer* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1962): 110.

lyric speaker ponders existence—the purposeful having and being—spiritual enlightenment is bridged with the lowly, uniting both interior and exterior mindfulness, perception, and the psychologically defined spaces of Kinnell's geographical imagination.

Genre Theory and Kinnell's Pivotal Poem

In "Poem Not an Elegy in a Season of Elegies" (2020), a (non)elegy for Kinnell and several others, Robert Hass declares, "When Galway died,/ The earth should have groaned, it should have loosed/ Lions in the civil streets."[64] Hass's text creates a dialogue between poetic intention and traditionality, calling our attention to the self-consciousness of poetic form and relaying that poems need not adhere neatly to these constructs. This area of scholarship holds great interest for Kinnell's "When One" in terms of its classification and significance, as well as its generic placement within both post-1945 US poetry, and his oeuvre more generally. As a poet, Kinnell contemplated and emphasised lyric in his work, often wrestling with the constructed artifice of persona poetry whilst substantiating experientiality and authenticity. Given its reconceptualization of subjectivity and authorial speaker, "When One" may be analysed within a changing reception and analysis of lyric poetry in literary theory.

Sparking worthwhile, and oft-times contentious debate, Jonathan Culler's seminal text *Theory of the Lyric* (2015) discards two conventional and predominant premises of the lyric model. In efforts to redefine the concept of lyric poetry, Culler rejects both the lyric as the "expression of the subjective experience of the poet" as well as the "representation of the discourse of a fictional speaker who is not to be identified with the poet."[65] As an alternative, he advocates concepts of re-enactment, focusing on epideictic (lyrics of praise), and public discourse (lyrics of meaning and value).[66] Culler's theory, in part, derives from his analysis of

[64] Robert Hass, *Summer Snow* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2020), 56.
[65] Francesco Giusti and Jonathan Culler, "The Lyric in Theory: A Conversation with Jonathan Culler," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (27 May 2017): https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-lyric-in-theory-a-conversation-with-jonathan-culler/
[66] Jonathan Culler, "Theory of the Lyric," *Nordisk poesi* 2, no. 2 (December 2017): 122.

John Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), and his reassessment of how to apply Austin's conceptions of performatives as theoretical models for lyric.

Insisting that lyrics are constructed for iterability, and by extension, memorability, Culler writes:

> In sum, the model of lyric as intense expression of the subjective experience of the poet does not fit a great many poems, ancient or modern, and, more important, it leads away from the language of the poem to an experience of the poet, which a reader is supposed to reconstruct. But our attention should be directed to experiencing the poem itself as an event, not to discovering what the author might have experienced.[67]

As such, his insistence that poetry is not necessarily fictive or temporal in nature—the utterance is one that takes place in the present—increasingly opens up channels within cultural poetics, as well as in relation to more contemporary theories, assessments which demonstrate an implicit tension between exegesis and isogesis. Most saliently, Culler asserts that the reader assumes the position of the speaker as a re-performer of the lyric text. It is important to distinguish that in Culler's assessment, not every poem will necessarily create a character or figure as such, who could, through way of narrative or novelistic rapportage, supply a context or voice for the utterance.[68] Culler cites William Carlos Williams' "The Red Wheelbarrow" as a specific example in which the poem does not create a specific speaker-character, but rather acts wholistically as a presumptive statement about the generalities of our world.[69]

Wit Pietrzak underscores Culler's distinction as a "non-mimetic"[70] or non-representational ontology whereby a lyric is regarded as an attempt to be itself the event rather than the depiction or portrayal of the event. He naturally extends his synthesis to issues of empathy, suggesting that empathy is thus re-performed and internalised in the reader through a process of embodiment that is continually disoriented in our capacities to enact it.[71] Hannah

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[67] Culler, "Theory of the Lyric," 122.
[68] Consider counter examples such as Frank Bidart's "Herbert White" from *Golden State* (1973) and "Ellen West" from *In the Western Night: Collected Poems* (1990), in addition to Sally Wen Mao's deliberate characterisations and personas achieved through her "Anna May Wong" series of poems in *Oculus* (2019).
[69] Culler, "Theory of the Lyric," 123.
[70] Wit Pietrzak, "Lyric Poetry and the Disorientation of Empathy," *Journal of Literary Theory* 16, no. 2 (2022): 356.
[71] The idea of empathy as a bridge across gaps of otherness is addressed specifically in Chapter One of this thesis. Here, I would call our attention to three different types of empathy: affective; cognitive; and compassionate. Most empathy, derived in the lyric sense, is a combination of affective and cognitive. John Gibson confers empathy in literary aesthetics as what he deems "a form of imaginative perspective-taking." John Gibson,

H. Kim and John Gibson problematise Culler's theory in that it does not hold currency in specific examples of lived experience. For example, in the re-performance of a poem, the "self-substantiating 'I'"[72] cannot necessarily be replaced by any and all readers, and in many cases, does not apply. They use the pertinent example of Langston Hughes's "Dinner Guest: Me" (1965) to reinforce the impossibility of inhabiting another's experience, or to have one individual stand in for the lived experiences of a non-dominant group: "I know I am/ The Negro Problem/ Being wined and dined,/ Answering the usual questions."[73] Chiding the fictionalisation or 'trying on' of others' experiences through the mask of a lyric 'I,' Kim and Gibson suggest a two-fold solution whereby we take up the *genuine* claims of Hughes's poem, and others like it, to create a readerly impression which can then be considered vis-à-vis a shared, actual world.[74] Looking to more recent lyrics, we might call upon Ada Limón's lyric "Carrying" (2018), which details infertility from a raw and vulnerable place, or Chen Chen's body of work which draws upon the braiding of the immigrant, queer experience with American culture.

Placing "When One" alongside Culler's structural framework, and the attendant critical responses to his theorising, not merely underscores Kinnell's sophistication and originality in his interlocution with poetic form, but to lyric genre more pointedly. Through this poem, Kinnell opens new textual geographies of psychic and corporeal dislocation which allow for a re-orientation of the self, as well as for explorations of the lyric in which the inclusive self is not solely rooted in a lyrical 'I' but rather, in a "floating" one.[75] Whilst admittedly John Ashbery and Kinnell, although contemporaries, were quite disparate poets,

"Empathy" in *Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Literature*, eds. Noël Carroll and John Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2016), 234.

[72] Hannah H. Kim and John Gibson, "Lyric Self-Expression," in *Art, Representation and Make-Believe: The Philosophy of Kendall L. Walton*, ed. Sonia Sedivy (New York: Routledge, 2021), 101.

[73] Kim and Gibson, "Lyric Self-Expression," 101.

[74] Ibid.; emphasis in original.

[75] This term originates with Bonnie Costello. See Bonnie Costello, *The Plural of Us: Poetry and Community in Auden and Others* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Culler references Costello's work on Ashbery, specifically her theorising of his "floating *you*." Jonathan Culler, "Encounters with Lyric Form (transcript)," *Curated: Thinking through Literature* (1 December 2022), audio, 15:22.
https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/jonathan-cullers-talk-encounters-lyric-form

Ashbery's ethos is illuminating here because he, too is preoccupied with the subjectivity of consciousness, advancing that "we are somehow all aspects of a consciousness giving rise to the poem."[76]

Here, we are calling upon an indexical rationale whereby there is a slippage in connotation and pronoun selection. This floating self suggests a flow between single and plural pronouns, so that the "I" and the collective "we" can be contained within the "one."[77] The first strophe of "When One," which resembles each subsequent one (originally eleven strophes in total), in the recurrence of its cyclical beginning and ending lines, reads thus:

> When one has lived a long time alone,
> one refrains from swatting the fly
> and lets him go, and one is slow to strike
> the mosquito, though more than willing to slap
> the flesh under her, and one hoists the toad
> from the pit too deep to hop out of
> and carries him to the grass, without minding
> the poisoned urine he slicks his body with,
> and one envelops, in a towel, the swift
> who fell down the chimney and knocks herself
> against window glass, and releases her outside
> and watches her fly free, a life line [sic] flung at reality,
> when one has lived a long time alone. (*CP*, 421)

By Kinnell's employment of rather distinct phrasing using the singular pronoun "one," we acknowledge the absence of the lyrical 'I,' in addition to a more generalised application and universality in address, which also lends a tinge of formality poetically as well. As readers, we might wonder what precisely the subjective consciousness is depicted here, and whether it is subsumed by the inclusion of a pronoun typically uncharacteristic in Kinnell's work. His decision not to employ the lyrical 'I' is not merely about signalling universality or community, but what Kinnell deems in his own style as simply a turn toward the actual, and an attempt to attend to the real creatures and things of the earth.[78]

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[76] Culler, "Encounters with Lyric Form."
[77] In previous versions, Kinnell does infiltrate the verse with gendered pronouns: "becomes a stranger to his own kind,/ feels contempt at his or her own species's [sic] contempt/ for all the other [sic], disgust at general indifference,/ and, alas, a little speration [sic] even from the few friends/ that have save [sic] one and made one's life a life." Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.
[78] Galway Kinnell and Bette Tomlinson, "Interview with Galway Kinnell," *CutBank* 1, no. 39 (Winter 1993): https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss39/30

Moreover, this is not an effacement or simple erasure of the 'I' but a transposition that extends to a heretotelic voice. Language is used as a sheaf or carapace to impart a protective quality, a method to stave off the exilic distress of a psychologically constructed world; through non-mimetic events of poetic enunciation, we may attend to the written verse itself, and not to its fictional dimensions.[79] Given the nature of extant biographical and psychopathological contexts, there is a mutual exclusivity which we must welcome and nourish independently as readers of Kinnell's poetry. Whilst Kinnell's adhesion to Keatsian negative capability throughout his work denies methods of the persona poem, we can perhaps state here that "When One" cleverly draws from a co-terminal autobiographical stance, housed in a language of genuine shared experience which is applicable to "one" and therefore to *anyone*.

The genesis of the poem through its early drafts begins in handwritten, incomplete pages; it transforms into single-spaced, typed text, and then begins to stretch out into stanzas as the work goes on. Whilst the stichic format does not designate breaks between the verse lines, in between the verse there are some turns in the writing that create natural pauses. These allow us to intimate Kinnell's development of a separation into strophes, and the division of ideas or structure, which we find enumerated in later drafts. The texts exhibit an almost automatic quality in their production, and a shifting linguistic structure (like chiasmus) that seems syntactically unbalanced; archival manuscripts reveal other structural phrasing he was developing in attempt to provide some variation in the verse. As an example, from the earlier manuscript drafts, before he introduced numbered, strophic structure into the poem, Kinnell varied his clauses between "When one has lived alone a long time," "When one has lived long a long time," and "When one has lived alone so much."[80] Despite this variability of diction, these alternating phrases do not achieve the rhythmic cyclicality that makes the poem most memorable.

[79] Culler, "Theory of the Lyric," 120 and 122.
[80] Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.

Further, in the 1990 volume, each strophe is numbered, and is given its own separate page, an editorial choice which serves to enhance Kinnell's usage of anaphora as rhetorical movement. This paces the reader, and thereby affords adequate contemplation for each piece to breathe as a kind of resounding litany or metapoem, turning in upon itself with every subsequent verse, appearing and then reappearing along a chain, as a continuum. *Collected Poems*, in contrast, does not afford each strophe its own page, thereby altering the solitary aspect emphasised by the original layout, one which gives metaphorical currency to exilic space.

Kinnell is adept in conjoining the rituality of circularity and repetition with drumming, alliterative, and rhythmic verse— "and watches her fly free, a life line flung at reality" (*CP*, 421) or, "in the daylight of being made one: kingdom come" (*CP*, 425)— recalling the kind of iterative quality of lyrics emphasised by Culler in his reassessment. Even in its inchoate stages, the stichic verse of "When One" contributes to the feeling of a thematically separate event. This incantatory nature of the poem reveals itself in early drafts, both through its repetition of gender-neutral and indefinite pronouns. "One" is repeated, either as "one" or as "someone" a total of twenty-five times over the course of fifty-eight lines,[81] and through its leitmotif summoning the Gregorian chant, *Ave Verum Corpus*.[82]

These drafts of the poem indicate that Kinnell originally began from this non-identifiable "one," and not through a substantiation of the typically lyric "I." The tone of this early text itself reveals a pronounced tension, Kinnell's tone wrought with angst and grit, and an overt darkness contrasted against the sheer sublimity of this musical piece. Here, a great rhetorical shift, and Kinnell's transition to the end of an early draft manuscript:

> But the presence of ave verum corpus in memory
> the sacred chant by which one's own species joins
> the chante of the pondm [sic] at dusk, or the backs of trees,
> or the little bugles coming down from the sky

[81] We should also note Kinnell's mixed usage of pronouns: one, him, her (before he settles definitively on "one").
[82] Translated as "Hail true body," the Eucharistic chant originated in the Middle Ages, coming to prominence at the consecration portion of Christian mass. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's version (1791), composed during the last few months of his life, has popularised it in both secular and ecclesiastical domains. https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/ave-verum-corpus-lyrics/

> Or from leafy boughs, but puruer [sic], being commanded
> by the Creator Spirit, the very genes,
> and yet lacking in glory, lacking that halo of self-knowing
> around the human bodyw [sic] when it sings the chant
> and shall seek out the singer's brow even standing in
> amid the flames of hell: glory glory.
> When one has lived a long time alone,
> it is one's prayer, one's faith, that eventually
> the total belonging to the kingdom of strangers,
> creatures of the planet, wil [sic] lead, this side of death,
> go ghd cddp [sic] fierce love of one's kind, and of sone [sic] self.[83]

Through his references to this chant, Kinnell defaults to the exaltation of the human voice, most elevated at the consecration of the Eucharist during mass. There is also the sense that the near-perfection of the human instrument, in tandem with those mirrored reverberations and sounds within nature, can enact purity in lyrical, poetic form as well.[84] Kinnell celebrates, "the total belonging to the kingdom of strangers," a longing for "the halo of self-knowing"[85] to wrap and to envelop the human body, and not merely to signify the glow of a divine presence. The halo, as a protective ring, suggests that to know oneself is itself a position of sanctity and sublimity, underscoring this individualistic, experiential exile of body and mind.

True to the ambulating quality of Kinnell's "When One," temporality is amorphous and free wielding. We do not possess, nor are we given any referential context by him; "a long time," despite its anaphoric expression throughout the text, serves only to obfuscate duration and occurrence. Time is a completely subjective measure determined by one's own personal sense in reading the poem, and repetition of this phrase does not bring us closer to its approximation. In addition to nebulous temporalities, we have no bearings on precise locations of space and place, only a general approximation of sequestered life through the universality of experience. As such, Kinnell achieves near-absent spatial and temporal deixis in the poem, for what is proximal or distal is nearly impossible to discern.[86] This allows us to

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[83] Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.
[84] In a letter to Kinnell, Olds paraphrases his own words back to him: "I know what you've said about our chance to speak as the angels do, the gods." Olds, "Fax to Galway Kinnell," 17 March 1989, MC64.
[85] Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.
[86] Yi-Fu Tuan precises that place is a special kind of object in that it is "a concretion of value" or an object in which someone can dwell. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 12.

expand our understanding such that spatially, Kinnell's real and imagined constructions of exile, are not dictated by affective or emotional valences, but existing in consciousness, as though suspended at will. In a surprising turn, both temporal and spatial deixis (or their definitive lack) prove capable of introducing experiential subjectivity into the poem.

Although Culler emphasises the lyrical present in twentieth-century verse, Kinnell shows how one might straddle the present and past to achieve fluid temporalities that are both intemporal whilst also crossing time continuums. Both his titular volume and eponymous poem, through the candid, declarative statements, have footholds in the past. In crafting the title of the poem, and its repetition of this specific phrasing throughout, Kinnell uses the present perfect. This verb tense linguistically and temporally encompasses the entirety of the past, the current moment, and looks forward to the future. By its suggestion, the experience will have occurred in the past, but it also offers the notion that one is living alone in the present, an experientiality which might be continuing as an uncertain future event. Kinnell does not use the past tense ('lived') or even a past perfect tense ('had lived') because neither of these are amenable to composing a verse that traverses scope and time.

In "When One," empathetic experience is initiated from a place of alterity, such that the reader does not have to synthesise Culler's steps of re-performance and re-enactment. Rather, Kinnell begins organically from an initial step of otherness which is already discursive in nature; the universalised "one" is contextualised quickly and simply in temporal and spatial terms: "a long time"; and "alone." These lack specificity and perhaps context, leading to a string of hypotheticals in the reader-response through which we ponder questions of solitude and its underlying causativeness, queries that might arise from the interrogation of open modes of discourse around empathy. In the end, Kinnell's "When One" is not so much a reduction or near-dissolution in subjectivity necessarily, as Culler would argue, but rather forms new pathways of perspective by its universalised, inclusive nature.

The Parlance of the American Sonnet

Whilst there may be an extant impulse to categorise lyric somewhat ahistorically, by applying a set of technical parameters or frameworks to decouple lyric from its Romantic inheritance, a preoccupation, as Charles Altieri advances, which examines why poets choose to participate in a particular mode of writing or verse form, or to commit certain ideas to literary practice.[87] The sonnet has garnered manifest interest over the last few years as a field of increased discovery, enthusiasm, and interrogation surrounding poetical engagement. Much like the probing into lyric and its inherent definitions, scholarship of the sonnet has flourished through a proliferation of influential volumes on the form, including: *The Art of the Sonnet* (2011) by Stephanie Burt and David Mikics; Stephen Regan's *The Sonnet* (2019); *Form of Contention: Influence and the African American Sonnet Tradition* (2020) by Hollis Robbins; and lastly, but perhaps most crucially for a discussion and inclusion of Kinnell, *The American Sonnet: An Anthology of Poems and Essays* (2023) edited by Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith.

Although Kinnell's "When One" can be defined in the first instance as lyric, demonstrating its coalescence and interlocution with evolving literary criticism, more crucial to our understanding of the poem is its invocation and employment of the sonnet form. More specifically, we attend to how his appropriation of this convention and his detailed engagement with its meanings hold implications for his work. Our interests lie in Kinnell's navigation of the form: firstly, as a means of encapsulating ideas and private sentiment alongside thematical considerations; secondly, in its relation to and appropriation of American sonnet subversion; and, most saliently, the quizzical *how* and *why* he challenges conventional form to access real and imagined spaces of the psychogeographical.

The specific terminology of 'American Sonnet' originated with Wanda Coleman in the 1980s, first collected in *African Sleeping Sickness: Stories and Poems* (1990), and successively in

[87] Charles Altieri, "The Lyrical Impulse," *Journal of Literary Theory* 11, no. 1 (March 2017): 12-21. https://doi.org/10.1515/jlt-2017-0002

American Sonnets (1994). In Coleman's construction, each poem is called "American Sonnet" and assigned a number, at times inverting the form and beginning with couplets, adapting both basic Petrarchan and Shakespearean versions. She styles her verse after literary figures such as Herman Melville, Robert Duncan, Robert Mezey, and William Blake, soliciting in "American Sonnet 38": "what sport will purchase liberty?// doth he who caged the beast cage me?"[88] Through its syntactical and lyrical dynamism, 'American Sonnet' has come to bear synonymity as a subversive term and lyrical incarnation of protest and rebellion, raised to a poetical anthemic. Regan, by attribution of a cultural distinction, believes that American writers are more inclined to give voice to feelings of dislocation and desolation.[89] His statement underscores a key attribute of this thesis, namely that Kinnell's practice, as a post-1945 poet, reappraises uncertainties of place and space through an exploration, and even renegotiation, of complex geographical imaginations.

In recent years, the sonnet form has exploded in its deployment among literary practitioners, cultivated in part by its capaciousness to authenticate engagement, due to its reputation as a form which marries dissonance and innovation. Malech and Smith's volume attests to the sonnet as a "poetic bellwether," compiling works which have long been used as a method of interrogation between prosodic and thematic conventions, ones which take part in a transhistorical discourse in which marginalised writers stake both literary voice and social space.[90] Sonnets figure significantly amongst distinguished contemporary American poets, exemplified by Terrance Hayes's *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* (2018), a collection of over seventy sonnets composed after the 2016 US presidential election defeat of Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump; Billy Collins' wry, cult classic "American Sonnet" (1989),

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[88] Wanda Coleman, *Heart First Into this Ruin: The Complete American Sonnets* (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 2022), 40. In her introduction to Coleman's collected sonnets, Mahogany L. Browne inquires, "What is an American sonnet besides fourteen lines, looser in its musicality and inventive in its ability to transform the tradition into a handheld microphone, a makeshift podium, or the people's anthem?" Ibid., xviii.

[89] Stephen Regan, "Broken Hearts and Broken Homes: The Desolation of the American Sonnet," in *The American Sonnet: An Anthology of Poems and Essays*, eds. Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2022), 314.

[90] Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith, introduction, *The American Sonnet: An Anthology of Poems and Essays*, ed. Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2022), 1-2.

which skilfully interchanges love sonnets with the act of sending post cards; and Limón's "Instructions on Not Giving Up, which manifests intertextuality with Kinnell's "Wait"—"the leaves come. Patient, plodding, a green skin."[91] Diane Seuss's volume *Frank: Sonnets* won both the Pulitzer and the National Book Award in 2022, declaring in brutal honesty, "A sonnet is a mother./ Every word/ a silver dollar. Shit in one hand, she says. Wish in another."[92] What were once considered epigrammatic turns, or pithy, reconciliatory statements reserved for the end of a sonnet may now serve as a point of departure, as epitomised by Oliver de la Paz's *The Diaspora Sonnets*, longlisted for the 2023 National Book Award.

Indeed, the sonnet had been a much-contested form between Hughes and Cullen, with Hughes maintaining that it was a 'white' form, countering it with "Seven Moments of Love: An Un-Sonnet Sequence in Blues" (1939). Cullen, by contrast, believed one could inhabit any form of poetics; as such, he was known for his sonnets and ballads, including "Yet Do I Marvel" (1925). As James Smethurst distils, many believe the pair to represent essentially "two antagonistic strands of Harlem Renaissance thinking" as relates to the role of Black artists, African American Literature, and essentially, the notion of an extant "Negro Literature."[93]

Burt and Mikics substantiate that sonnet is "a shape where strong emotion might make sense, where lyric invention might still take place."[94] Both cite Gwendolyn Brooks as a marker who re-instated the inheritance of the sonnet form once modernism became codified into poetics, adapting it into the parlance of Black American speech. Brooks's "the sonnet-ballad" (1949) is one such remedied example, amongst many others in *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945) and

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[91] Kinnell's poem urges, through a lilt of iambic pentameter and couplet rhyme: "Only wait a little and listen:/ music of hair,/ music of pain,/ music of looms weaving all our loves again" (*CP*, 291). Limón earned her MFA from NYU Graduate School's Creative Writing Program, studying under Kinnell, Levine, Olds, and Ali. In an interview with *Tin House* (podcast) she revealed, "…they were wise to me, and they were wise and their poems were wise. But it wasn't that they were necessarily doing that, it was that their poems had some kind of wisdom within them." Ada Limón and David Naimon, *Between the Covers: Ada Limón Interview*, 19 May 2022, audio, 2:23:34. https://tinhouse.com/podcast/ada-limon-the-hurting-kind/

[92] Diane Seuss, *Frank: Sonnets* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2021), 117.

[93] James Smethurst, "Lyric stars: Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. George Hutchinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 112.

[94] *The Art of the Sonnet*, eds. Stephanie Burt and David Mikics (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 25.

Annie Allen (1949). Such a return to embracing traditional forms was *de rigueur* as the sonnet could be re-approached on modernist terms, dispelling the dispute between those who rebuked its formality, and those who favoured its traditions.[95] Edward Hirsch imparts a similar observation, asserting that Brooks "stages a confrontation between the generic or communal expectation of the form and the individual's resistance to it...She created vessels so that she could break them."[96]

In assessing why the sonnet form would hold popular value in our current age, Burt and Mickics attest to its generousness as a form to encapsulate a multiplicity of perspectives and thematical range, from the English Renaissance to the present day:

> The sonnet is secular, fit for records of day-to-day life, in sequences by contemporary poets ranging from Marilyn Hacker to Bernadette Mayer to Paul Muldoon; the sonnet is devotional, fit for the sublime, in Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1922), and more recently in the work of Donald Revell; while for e.e. cummings, John Berryman, and many others, it remained just right for erotic love. No poem, and few poets, can incorporate all those traditions at once. What until Wordsworth looked like a continuous story has become a dense portfolio from which individual poets and poems take their own stories about how to use the form.[97]

That the sonnet is seductive by virtue of its expansiveness and thematical breadth speaks to its lasting and duration, occupying its ongoing role within poetics as a form that can account for experience. But we must also acknowledge the more literal aspect of Kinnell's usage of sonnets as textual objects or as Hirsch suggests (borrowing from Italian), "Each stanza in a poem is like a room in a house, a lyric dwelling place,"[98] which metaphorically and spatially, in crafting a poem within these parameters, creates an interiority of that experience. By extension, this reinforces an inherent cognitive dissonance of being concurrently outside and inside, where inside is contemporaneous with containment, of being inhabited, and filled to capacity. Regan corroborates that sonnets repeatedly draw comparisons visually and architecturally because of their inversion between scope and scale,[99] a notion of confined spatial proportion

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[95] Burt and Mikics, *The Art of the Sonnet*, 22-23.
[96] Edward Hirsch, *The Heart of American Poetry* (New York: Library of America, 2022), 275.
[97] Burt and Mikics, *The Art of the Sonnet*, 21.
[98] Sam Anderson, "Sex, Death, Family: Sharon Olds Is Still Shockingly Intimate," *The New York Times Magazine* (12 October 2022): https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/12/magazine/sharon-olds-poetry.html
[99] Regan, "Broken Hearts and Broken Homes," 313.

and poetic theme which Kinnell incorporates rather overtly, declaring: "When one has lived a long time alone,/ among regrets so immense the past occupies/ nearly all the room there is in consciousness" (*CP*, 422). Kinnell's line delivers competing senses of grandeur and restriction, between the dwindling space of an abstract consortium of conscious thought, and the overwhelming, irremediable acts over the span of life.

From the chain of sonnets, we would intimate a narratological structure of deeply interrelated events or parts of the poem speaking to one another. In Kinnell's poem, each thirteen-lined strophe acts as an individual prayer, a reflection, or a verbal event. As readers, we naturally build in expectation to a volta, or to some kind of expression of clarity that we anticipate at the end of the poem. Given the eleven strophes in the original version in both *The Atlantic* and *When One*, and then its subsequent reduction to ten strophes with Kinnell's elimination of the fourth in *A New Selected Poems* (paperback version), where to pinpoint an epigrammatic turn is problematised. However, our method cannot be derived structurally from within the sonnet corona. Readers may decode the volta thematically and by tone, through the unexpected discovery from one stanza to the next. Each integral sonnet-stanza upholds narratological structures as a series of events, partitioned, and yet still linked by a comprehensive schema that hurtles the poem to its acute resolution in the final strophe: "When one has lived a long time alone,/ one wants to live again among men and women,/ to return to that place where one's ties with the human/ broke" (*CP*, 425).

Addressing the enduring self-metaphorising of the sonnet form, Jahan Ramazani probes whether a sonnet can function as a "space of both involuntary confinement and welcome refuge within a larger enclosure," invoking geographical tropes.[100] His inquiry recalls Williams' distinction pertaining to the sonnet form's restrictive enclosures that erase the subject: "Forcing twentieth-century America into a sonnet—gosh, how I hate sonnets—is like putting a crab into a square box. You've got to cut his legs off to make him fit. When you get

[100] Jahan Ramazani, "Self-Metaphorizing 'American Sonnets,'" in *The American Sonnet: An Anthology of Poems and Essays*, eds. Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2022), 133.

through, you don't have a crab any more [sic]."[101] In this specific reference, Ramazani is looking to Hayes's suggestion within his own poetry that the sonnet is a box, a gaol, or an enclosure. As Hayes writes so intently, "I lock you in an American sonnet that is part prison,/ Part panic closet, a little room in a house set aflame/…/ Voltas of acoustics, instinct & metaphor. It is not enough/ To love you. It is not enough to want you destroyed."[102] Similarly, Carl Phillips seems to reinvigorate a dialogue with Brooks querying in "Whose Sonnet? (A Transgression)": "if I write a sonnet, I haven't broken the white, hetero cage, as it were; I've simply written my Black, queer perspective from *within* the cage. How to reckon with that?"[103]

Whilst the context for this exploration is rooted in the critical awareness of systemic racism and violence, and what Malech brings into relief as the oppositional potential of the American sonnet intranationally, as a questioning of America itself, this also has potential implications for framing Kinnell's context of the poem as suggesting exilic imprisonment and an interior inquiry of isolation and refuge—a "lyric of self-consciousness, or of the self in conflict,"[104] or as Dickinson maintained in lyric 1695, "There is a solitude of space."[105] Kinnell thus employs the destabilisation of the sonnet form to call attention to the metaconstructions of his poetics, striving to derive empowerment through the restaging of an iconic verse form. Whilst true that there is an overwhelming centrality of this text to the eponymous volume, it is also an intellectual exercise predicated on a lexical construction of landscape, and the abstraction of self-imposed exile, as well as its attendant psychogeographies.

In terms of the structuration of the poem, as well as what it is doing as a form, Kinnell's choice of thirteen lines, as opposed to the requisite fourteen, suggests his preference

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[101] William Carlos Williams, *Interviews with William Carlos Williams*, ed. Linda Welshimer Wagner (New York: New Direction, 1976), 30. See Paul Bowers, "John Montague and William Carlos Williams: Nationalism and Poetic Construction," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 20, no. 2 (December 1994): 29-44.
[102] Terrance Hayes, *American Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 11.
[103] Carl Phillips, "Whose Sonnet (A Transgression)," in *The American Sonnet: An Anthology of Poems and Essays*, eds. Dora Malech and Laura T. Smith (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2022), 201-202.
[104] Paul Oppenheimer, *The Birth of the Modern Mind: Self-Consciousness and the Invention of the Sonnet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.
[105] Emily Dickinson, *The Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 691.

for an irregularity of form which still upholds a sense of thematic organisation, albeit whilst countering the rigidity of structure, and denying the adhesion to set schemes in closed, fixed forms. A cyclical sonnet composed of fourteen lines would undoubtedly be too 'on-the-nose,' eliminating resistance and tension through its conformity. More specifically, it would mislead our apprehension of Kinnell's poetics which often discard manipulating, formal conventions in favour of poetry defined on his own terms, as demonstrated in his *Sheffield Ghazals*. Kinnell desires the textual repressions of the sonnet to further articulate and to amplify his containment. However, he cleverly leaves off a line in each sonnet to suggest a path to his own freedom and liberation, and metaphorically, to 'write himself out' of this exilic period.

"When One" can be characterised most fittingly as a sonnet corona or crown, bearing resemblance in its structure to *La Corona* (1607) by John Donne and his "Holy Sonnets," or Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* (2006). Through these chains of sonnets and sonnet cycles, Kinnell welcomes a shared commitment to the cyclical form as well as maintains an indelible line of poetic contact, from Shakespeare's quarto of 154 sequences (1609), to Robert Lowell's fourteen-liners of *Notebook 1967-1968* and *History* (1973), to Adrienne Rich's *Twenty-One Love Poems* in *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (1978) and Carruth's *Sleeping Beauty* (1982), to John Berryman's love-struck poems to Lise which continue the sequential tradition of Sir Philip Sidney: "Passion sought; passion requited; passion delayed; and finally, passion utterly thwarted."[106] In Kinnell's version, each strophe or individual sonnet repeats the last line of the previous one, contributing to the overall expansion and investigation of the theme. The stichic verse is linked to each other by the repetition, with the concluding line of the poem neatly tying up the parcel, repeating the title and that of the first. Evidentiary argument is presented in approximate stages which act almost as a prism, displaying multiple facets of an experience, but steeped in a single entity. Analogously, the poem also shares similarities with the *rondel*, a French medieval lyric of repetitious refrain usually written in three verses, varying

[106] John Berryman, *Berryman's Sonnets*, ed. Daniel Swift (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), ix-x.

from eleven to fourteen lines, but commonly composed of thirteen lines. As a skilled translator of Villon,'[107] Kinnell was conversant with the *rondeau* as well as ballade forms, and whispers of these configurations can be intimated here.

The poem moves through a proliferation of animals (amphibians, reptiles, birds) and insects,[108] gendering each male or female, which will later serve as a reminder in the concluding portion of the poem that "they all live to mate with their kind," a unity the poet may duly access through a rediscovery of common language "where lovers speak,/ on lips blowsy from kissing, that language/ the same in each mouth" (*CP*, 425). Although there might be some allegorical assumption involved, each close study of habits and behaviours— "one falls to poring upon a creature,/ contrasting its eternity's-face to one's own" (*CP*, 422)—brings the poet away from the anthropocentric and closer to embracing biocentrism concerning the consciousness of those creatures under examination. The interrelated sonnets utilise form as propulsion, thereby working in tandem to propel thought, as the poem's inquiry of isolation and refuge inexorably reveal greater observation and kinship with the more-than-human world. Attending to the overarching imagery and symbolism in the poem, Kinnell employs the material presence of the snake expressly as a portent of the transformation process, throwing its skin to find growth in a signification of rebirth. The snake figures as a primary subject in five strophes; its preponderance connotes Kinnell's preoccupation with the mystical capacity of this creature, and how it is most closely allied with the ethos of the poem.

Further, the archival drafts of the poem are particularly relevant in our discovery of the construction of this verse, and its thematic development. In the typed portion (Appendix 8), at a point in the writing process in which Kinnell began the phase of separating the verse into irregular stanzas, working towards the poem's signature, cyclical style, he reveals the transformative, morphic trope guiding his composition:

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[107] Kinnell offers a definitive translation of Villon, with accompanying notes. François Villon, *The Poems of François Villon: New Edition*, trans. Galway Kinnell (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1977).

[108] The poem presents an impressive array to this end: fly, mosquito, toad, swift, snake, mourning dove, peabody (sparrows), tree frogs, grasshoppers, polliwogs, flycatcher, woodpecker, grouse, pig, porcupine, worm, butterfly, hermit thrush, and bullfrog.

> When one has stood apart from one's kind a long time
> one notices that solid forehead so massive there is no reeom [sic]
> for a nose,
> the skin, here where it ruptures when the snake ungloves itself
> of itse [sic] old life and becomes new
> and yet kepps [sic] on growing old,
> One sees the differences between that face and one's own
> and counts them, and counts on them,
> and makes much of them,
> that is a snake, this is a man.[109]

Kinnell's handwritten edits precise "for it is necessary to know/ this is a snake, and this is a man."[110] There is an underlying sense of admiration twinged with envy, pursuant to the snake's ability to shed an old skin. Kinnell creates a lively image of visual rhetoric in this excerpt, as the animal disrobes its extant, exterior sheath, "when the snake ungloves itself/ itse [sic] old life." As such, through this literal and metaphorical shirking of the past, the snake retains the accrued knowledge of its corporeality whilst still fulfilled with the promise of continued life and vigour. At the same time, we deduce that the human consciousness of the poem, —still its own distinct entity, and divergent from the snake at this juncture—longs to do the same through a redemptive arc of physical and linguistic import, one which effectively enmeshes extrication and renaissance "in the exile that deepens" (*CP*, 425).

Keatsian negative capability flows freely throughout the poem, most prominently expressed by Kinnell in Strophe 4 when "taking note of the differences,/ exaggerating them, making them everything,/ until the other is utterly other/.../ going over each difference again and this time/ canceling it, until nothing is left but likeness/ and suddenly oneness" (*CP*, 422). By drawing attention to the interchangeability or self-perception that is concomitant with the functional, predatory attributes of a snake within greater ecology, he calls upon its putative meaning in religious and mythological contexts. Kinnell's choice of animal returns us to Thoreau's consideration of our animal vestiges in "Higher Laws":

> We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the

[109] Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.
[110] Ibid.

> worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature.[111]

Thoreau perceives this animality as something reptilian and erotic, a proposition of control over our bodies and an ultimate test of purity. Despite his resignation towards organised religion and the Church itself, Thoreau was deeply devout.[112] Whilst his observations do return us to an obvious religious iconography (Satan) or symbology of the serpent and temptation in a Christian archetype, they are conversely perceived as positive forces across ancient and indigenous cultures.[113] In this specific instance in "When One," Kinnell highlights the animal's physically isolated self, an elusiveness and singular strangeness that draws it outside the boundaries and limitations of propriety very distinctly: to be on the outside of the animal world, looking in.

Concurrently, we might consider the snake's physical proximity to matter, and the silken, slithering undulations of its body, pressed flush against the ground, as a consideration of its own material geography shaped by habitational adaptation and survival. Referencing Kinnell's more famous porcupines, snouts low to the soil, and starfish burrowing in the tidal mud, Bly notes that Kinnell's work does not advocate ascension, but rather a descension, as it were. Preferring an earthly route, Kinnell's literary practice exhibits that there is no path to heaven derived from purity. What Hall attributes to an ambivalence in Kinnell, or the anti-transcendent stance taken by Lee Zimmerman (as explored in Chapter One), are perceived as a conversation of sustained tension by Bly.[114] By carving out tunnels, or what seem both active graves and geological artefacts that remember corporeal shape, Kinnell connects the writhing and the contracting of the snake to his previous work: the mapping out of the man's body in "The Massage"; the breeding of graves in the dirt in "The Supper After the Last"; kneeling on

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[111] Thoreau, *Walden*, 210.
[112] "Thoreau's Religious Views," *Walden.org*, The Walden Woods Project, https://www.walden.org/what-we-do/library/thoreau/thoreaus-religious-views/
[113] In Mesoamerican mythology, Quetzacoatl, the son of Coatlcue (mother goddess) is a feathered serpent deity from which all wisdom and knowledge stemmed. He took a human form that he might teach ancient peoples how to plant maize, construct temples and houses, and forge metal. Diane Morgan, *Snakes in Myth, Magic, and History: The Story of a Human Obsession* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 166-167.
[114] Robert Bly, *American Poetry: Wildness and Domesticity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 191 and 194.

"scorched earth/ in the shapes of men and animals" (*CP*, 248) as depicted in "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible"; and the shape-shifting Persian carpet, conforming to Ali's remains in *Black Light*.

Ultimately, Kinnell removes the fourth strophe of the poem which appears in all published versions preceding *A New Selected Poems* (2001) paperback edition. In this section, he did well to emphasise a sense of entrapment, attending to the specificity of diction in the poem and the penetration of music absorbed into the body of the snake as "a metaphor [which] assures us that existence is song":[115]

> When one has lived a long time alone,
> one holds the snake near the loudspeaker disgorging
> gorgeous sound and watches him crook
> his forepart into four right angles,
> as though trying to slow down the music
> flowing through him, in order to absorb it[116]

The contortion and constriction of the snake's body, held by human hands, reaffirms its bodily confinement, despite any agency suggested by the snake to assert its physical will. By design, "forepart into four right angles" reinforces an absence of spatial agency, and conjures one being penned in by the four walls of a room, recalling preamble poems such as "The Room" and "The Man on the Hotel Room Bed."

By the eighth strophe, the voice of the poem finds itself intertwined with the livelihood of the snake, quarantined from its own human species and hurtling out of control:

> When one has lived a long time alone,
> sour, misanthropic, one fits to one's defiance
> the satanic boast, *It is better to reign*
> *in hell than to submit on earth*, and forgets
> one's kind—the way by now the snake does,
> who stops trying to get to the floor and lingers,
> all across one's body, slumping into its contours,
> adopting its temperature—and abandons hope
> of the sweetness of friendship or love,

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[115] Joyce Dyer quotes from an extended version of "Wait" from *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words* in *Three Books* (1993) to underscore her assertion that our capacities for what is loved, sacred, mortal or painful are the true music of our lives: "Be there to hear it, it will be the only time,/ most of all to hear/ the flute of your whole existence,/ rehearsed by the sorrows, play itself into total exhaustion." Joyce Dyer, "The Music of Galway Kinnell's *Mortal Acts, Mortal Words,*" in *Critical Essays on Galway Kinnell*, ed. Nancy Lewis Tuten (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 190.

[116] Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone," MC 64.

> before long can barely remember what they are,
> and covets the stillness of inorganic matter,
> in a self-dissolution one may not know how to halt,
> when one has lived a long time alone. (*CP*, 424)

It is a steep decline into what is utter desolation and loneliness as the exilic reaches its apogee. Primed by the preamble poems, we discern the roles confinement and seclusion play in purifying Kinnell's verse by imposing structure and order as the text progresses. The voice of the poem giving rise to our collective consciousness is a distant, omniscient one, which conflates all of one's experience with the lifeworld, and the overarching community of humankind. Once more, Kinnell's tension with persona poetry, and his experimentation with lyric are brought to the fore, as he moves through the acute stages of clarity and realisation within the domestic housing of the mind and the body in real and imagined spaces.

Colloquy: Toward an Ecology of Writing

At a joint poetry workshop held with Hall in Asilomar in 1997, in which Kinnell addresses the influences of Whitman and Dickinson as literary progenitors in American poetry, he references the final lines of Muriel Rukeyser's poem, "St. Roach":

> The last line is 'I reach, I touch, I begin to know you.' [Malcolm] Cowley called Whitman's line ['I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.'] the greatest line of poetry written in English on this continent, but actually, I think Muriel Rukeyser's line might be better because she had the advantage of the male half of knowing, put together with her half of knowing, to produce a more tentative line than that very assertive: 'I am the man, I suffer'd, I was there.' I touch…I reach…I touch…I begin to know you. There is something more exact in her line than in his.[117]

Kinnell praises her for her tentativeness, a tempering of the Whitmanian bravado, and a demonstration of how writers can work in tandem by harnessing plural sensibilities. Whilst Kinnell's framing seems to uphold identity binaries of traditional male/female gender roles or what he deems a 'bisexuality,' as we've traced through "Flower of Five Blossoms" in Chapter Two, he does, however, precise an "all-gendered sensibility" for the poet. Conjured from a

[117] Kinnell and Hall, "Talk and Discussion," MS Am 3277.

true universality of voices, it is "a way of knowing and a way of feeling for the other," one which would encompass rather than be exclusionary.[118]

Such unification of all human sensibilities can only be achieved through a community of writing, a democratisation of skill and experience, which Kinnell not only advocated, but sought out as vital to his practice, and to his engagement with his fellow poets. This assemblage and convening of peer voices finds clarity throughout his career, evidenced by the continual development of an intellectual inheritance that frames these relationships. Sparked in his early Princeton days through his friendship with W.S. Merwin and mentorship by Charles Greenleaf Bell, and then brought to the fore in his editorially collaborative relationships with Nader Naderpour and Irage Khojandi in Iran, Kinnell's own trajectory as a poet is bolstered by such social-dependent infrastructure. His professional vocation belies the solitary "American bard" Whitman championed in his Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, reinforced instead by his long-standing teaching career and mentorship.

As pertains to *When One*, peer-responses of Carruth, Bly, Hall, and Olds underscore the types of sociological frameworks which are fundamentally critical to the creative ecology of writing processes.[119] In Van Hulle's investigation surrounding "collaborative revision," and the associative structures exacted from these editorial coalitions, he cites T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound as exemplars, among other writerly relationships such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.[120] There is, however, a slight difference in dynamic amongst the relationships Van Hulle discusses, as they constitute mentors or masters, and their corresponding acolytes or amanuenses, and not necessarily an equal distribution of weight or clout amongst writerly peers. In drawing our own analogies, we might call upon similar relationships in the re-working and cooperative revisions between Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop (who was both a "lodestar"

[118] Schumock and Kinnell, *Across My Desk*, MS Am 3277.
[119] Van Hulle, *Tracing Creativity in Literature*, 95.
[120] Ibid., 82 and 98.

and an "antipode" for Lowell),[121] as well as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Further, it explicitly transgresses the highly cooperative nature of what are essentially ethical and reciprocally configured sociological frameworks. Such scaffolding in writing is represented predominantly through diegetic exchanges which are usually quite personal and kept to the confidences of each writer. These interrelated texts often reach academic and public consumption through epistolary writing or archival documents. Ultimately, these methods of discovery reveal both the innerworkings and dynamics of literary relationships through a history of textual geneses.

However, there are two distinct challenges posed by the evolution of Kinnell's texts within creative ecosystems. The first is a concept brought by Hall during a joint lecture with Kinnell, in which Hall details, rather astutely, that the moment we show our poems to someone else, that another consciousness enters the poem,[122] thereby changing the focus from a single consciousness to a dual or even multiple one. Kinnell has internalised and demonstrated some of Hall's discourse, most notably through his floating pronouns in "When One" which constitutes a universal consciousness in the poem.

From this unintentional insertion of consciousness, we may extrapolate that due to this renewed or expanded cognisance, texts may become tinged with or belong to someone else's voice, complicating the notion of the lyric poem. Therefore, it gives credence to an interrogation of how we modulate these traces or irregularities, and to what degree we can discern the particularities of who is speaking, or to evaluate to what extent this eventuation is present in the work. Whilst we can affirm the impossibility of leaving absolutely no traces in a text, it requires a delicate balance to temper the mark of another poet's hand in one's own sphere of creation.

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121 Thomas Mallon, "Theirs Truly: The Lowell-Bishop Letters, *The Atlantic* (April 2009): https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/04/theirs-truly-the-lowell-bishop-letters/307315/

122 Kinnell and Hall, "Talk and Discussion," MS Am 3277. We should also note that Kinnell's lexical choices of "dissolution" and "consciousness" are prominent in "When One."

In "A Song Near the End of The World," collected in *Balladz* (2022), Olds registers these layers of sympathetic consciousness with Kinnell:

> Galway and I were mates, in a way—a friendship that
> could bear
> strong hugs. To me, a male—bear
> or human—was an unknown, like my husband, like Galway. I
> bore
> many poems by Galway, and he bore
> many by me.[123]

Here, she applies a touching and clever metaphor to describe her partnership with him, a witty conceit established by referencing "The Bear," a popularly anthologised piece through which he has gained prominence as a poetic figure. More emphatically, Olds draws upon her close working relationship with Kinnell, likening their joint processes of generating poems together to childbirth, signalling both anguish and euphoria, and the collaborative efforts to bring them forth into the collective cognisance of the wider world, through publication.

Indeed, Kinnell figures as a remarkable presence throughout *Balladz,* from his conversance with the ghazal form reverberating through "Ghazal Confessional" in the *Album from a Previous Existence: Part Two* to Olds's elegy for him, poised between surprisingly coy and playful verse in "Looking for Galway on the Vermont Mountainside" as she searches for the grave of her "best friend":[124]

> But I could not
> find the grave. Where *are* you, I cried out,
> under my breath, where are you. I was not
> a mother who has lost her child in a crowd,
> I was never, to him, a mother, always
> like an aunt, though younger, warm but stern,
> but not a sister, not family—
> a stranger, a fellowe [sic] stranger."[125]

The perception of Kinnell and Olds engendering poetry as a corresponding pair, and in the reference of the quotation, the specificity of diction, using "fellowe" (an archaic Middle

[123] Sharon Olds, *Balladz* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022), 44.
[124] Olds, *Balladz,* 149.
[125] Ibid., 148.

English spelling) to articulate that kinship, suggests the interchangeability of being intellectually inherent and inextricably linked to one another's process of creative output. For Olds and Kinnell, the *When One* volume is forged through a fostering of ideas, and consistence in shouldering the tremendous responsibility of a book that is essentially one of Kinnell's masterworks. The consensus emerging from the overall evaluation amongst Carruth and Bly is that *When One* forms Kinnell's magnum opus; underscored by Olds's affirmation in her notes, it is an attestation of some of his greatest achievements to-date:

> May all the at-home-on-earth happiness the book cries out (often calmly) for in longing come to you. Why couldn't the earth thank her singer with that?! (You see I am become romantic —a convert—beginning to see in matter glimmers of spirit!) It's a great book, it's <u>new</u>, it's <u>fresh</u>, it has <u>shaken off</u> its bark & one sees the raw green (the heart of the tree). I am so proud of you & so happy for you!!![126]

Olds, in her capacity as both a close friend and colleague, is afforded a larger and more foundational responsibility to the production of the book, in addition to the epigenetic process of reviewing the manuscript, once Kinnell was comfortable with sharing the completed work. Her exchanges with Kinnell followed a formulaic practice whereby it was a process of back-and-forth composition, of workshopping and revising individual poems, and essentially, bearing a significant relationship to the building blocks of the text in its final iteration. Given Kinnell's propensity to endlessly revise, and the inordinate number of drafts of the eponymous poem, Olds's role was to maintain consistency and essential stability. Her enthusiasm for the viability of the collaborative process from start to finish provided a springboard for Kinnell, in which his vulnerabilities were methods of achievement, and not weakness. Concurrently, Olds also stood her ground, at times being defiant enough in her stance so that Kinnell's prosody could attain its best version.

As such, Olds became synonymous with both editor and readerly audience, assisting to create what would later become the very social reception of Kinnell's text during a trying period of exile in which he retreated from that world, but paradoxically strove to access the

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[126] Galway Kinnell and Sharon Olds, manuscript copy of *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*, 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

public at large. She is the decisive balance of what makes an individual an appropriate and accomplished advisor in her selected role relative to the volume. In her comments, she does not come from a place of self-referentiality but instead, attempts to read as though an unacquainted reader would, with a sense of curiosity and precision, whilst keeping Kinnell's tendency to wallow or to become overly sentimental, at bay.

Through examination of other supporting critical notes and commentary surrounding this volume, it is most useful for our purposes to attend to Bly and Carruth, in addition to Olds, in their respective contributions and responses to the draft manuscript. Each were given a copy in its entirety, subsequently composing notes, commentary, as well as giving considered suggestions, and sometimes painfully honest critiques. In many ways, their critical relationship and singular familiarity with Kinnell's work informs *When One* in context with and in juxtaposition to their poetry, as well as that of their contemporaneous peers. As a group, they provide in-depth and invaluable contributions for the reception of Kinnell's volume at a tenuous inflection point in his literary career.

Carruth's overall commentary is rather perfunctory, and his suggested editorial revisions of the manuscript are scant. There are minimal edits expressed through varying degrees of import, such as his suggestion that Kinnell change the spelling of "whisky"—"American is 'whiskey"'—and admonishment over adjectival constructions.[127] One such example Kinnell pens in "The Tragedy of Bricks" is the word "a-shine"—"the full moon sparkling and a-shine/ lays out across the imperfect world/ everything's grave."[128] Carruth responds, "Myself, I don't like this archaic way of making adjectives, even when there's an intended rhetoric behind it."[129] Accordingly, Kinnell removes the verb and adjective pair yet retains the chiasmus-like nature of syntactical order, which rescues the line from an excessively

[127] Galway Kinnell and Hayden Carruth, manuscript copy of *When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone*, 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
[128] Kinnell and Carruth, manuscript, MC 64.
[129] Ibid.

overt simplicity: "Suddenly the full/ moon lays out across the imperfect/ world everything's grave" (*CP*, 378).

Attending to the seventh strophe of "Memories of My Father," Carruth raises concern over Kinnell's selected preposition of "into" to postulate ontological awareness of consciousness, and what he believes evokes the opposite of its intended meaning: "Then the lost one/ can fling itself outward, the million/ moments of presence can throw themselves into consciousness, freely…" He responds in turn, "Sounds to me as if what you mean is 'out of' rather than 'into.' If you mean 'into' then I think you must say explicitly that the consciousness is briefer than brief and once for all."[130] Kinnell takes heed of Carruth's note, instead changing the preposition to "through," conveying a transversal which marries both movements of 'in' and 'out.'[131]

In a letter, dated 4 January 1990, Carruth returns his copy of the edited manuscript accompanied with a letter to Kinnell summarising his impressions. Carruth, recollecting the complicated nature of his own psychiatric breakdown— "[s]ometimes it seems as if I blew away what powers I had when I overdosed myself and spent a few hours among the dead"— writes in part:

> Your poems knock me out…In the recent poems you have never written so spontaneously before, with such originality of inner perception. And the kind of intensity that comes from spontaneity is conspicuous, the urgency of impromptu images and phrasings…This is definitely your strongest book so far and shows you at the height of your poetic course, everything integrated and completely functional…I've made a few marks on your manuscripts but not many. None in the final sequence. At first reading I was put off by section 7 of the sequence because of its presumptuousness, but then section 8 rectifies that, so it's okay. It's a wonderful poem and deserves to be the title poem of the collection.[132]

Carruth's referral to the "presumptuousness" of the seventh section most likely is at odds with an abrasive stanzaic dynamic. Whilst he does not reference human reason in a hierarchical scheme, Kinnell does portray a default to human exceptionalism or privileging of evolutionary

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[130] Ibid.
[131] This revision is reflected in the original publication in 1990, and in all subsequent published versions, which suggests that the particularity of this line was resolved to Kinnell's satisfaction.
[132] Carruth to Kinnell, 4 January 1990, MC 64.

position. Here, we should take careful note of textual variation. As mentioned previously, Kinnell removed the fourth section in the paperback edition of *A New Selected Poems*, such that Strophe 5 became Strophe 4, and the other sections followed suit in the re-ordering. *Collected Poems* reflects this change; the section to which Carruth refers is in fact six and seven in this volume. It is true that Kinnell tempers this in the following stanza, but the overall tension Kinnell establishes between the two stanzas is necessary to sustain the disparate sense of still feeling apart from the non-human world. The particularities of this line continue to require further resolution, as Kinnell changes it to "as the oddly conscious one among these/ others" in *A New Selected Poems* (hardcover), and then to "as the most self-conscious one among these/ others," in the paperback edition, a final change which also appears in *Collected Poems* (*CP*, 423).

The close-knit circle of peers surrounding Kinnell are especially useful in encouraging his authentic voice to emerge whilst preserving their poetic singularities. Compared with the unexacting revisions suggested by Carruth, Bly's commentary on the entirety of the manuscript is somewhat peremptory, marking "eight poems for possible omission" or reformulation (Appendices 9A and 9B).[133] These poems include: "The Tragedy of Bricks"; "Kilauea"; "Alone in Rio"; "Waking in Flight"; "Streets of Gold"; "The Cat"; "The Well-Tempered Clavier"; "Peaches and Cream"; and "Judas Kiss." Bly, referring to "Streets of Gold," notes that "[t]he last line is too close to Don's"[134] (Hall), an acknowledgement that brings into relief the complicated and often ambiguous ways in which poets may absorb subconscious influence, or strike a fine balance with literary allusion.

His facility as an honest advisor to Kinnell is lightened by his self-deprecating humour: "I may be wrong but don't take my ideas too seriously – I doubt if you would make that mistake anyway!"[135] Indeed, Kinnell chooses to eliminate four of the suggested eight from the final, published edition: "The Well-Tempered-Clavier," "Alone in Rio," "Peaches and

133 Robert Bly to Galway Kinnell, letter, 3 January 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.
134 Bly to Kinnell, 3 January 1989, MC 64.
135 Ibid.

Cream," and "Waking in Flight." These poems, along with previously excluded poems from an earlier manuscript draft of *When One* including "Haleakala," "Blue Sky," and "Ravello" all remain uncollected. Of crucial import is Bly's reflection that Kinnell "is going ahead of everyone with his genuine sadness,"[136] an assertion which demonstrates not merely Kinnell's depth of skill to convey these emotional valences stripped bare through language, but of having reached a place where others may follow or learn from his own process of authentication in his craft.

As a published poem, "When One" progressed through various iterations, altered through five stages of publication from its first appearance in *The Atlantic*, with accompanying illustrations by David Diaz, to its final version in *Collected Poems*. Of his peculiar revision process, Kinnell states of his instinctual praxis:

> I go through many drafts, changing the poem both structurally and in detail. I do this all aloud, muttering. Some poems never seem right in my mouth and eventually I discard them. If I read through the whole poem and it seems right, and I put it away, and later read through it again, and I still feel no urge to change anything, then it might be finished. That's the only way I know. This can happen after ten drafts, or after two hundred.[137]

What is remarkable about *When One*, especially as relates to the eponymous poem, is the sheer number of drafts written, and the notion that even then, after that measure of composition, that the decisiveness of a published form proved somehow dissatisfying or inadequate to Kinnell. After its initial publication, he continued to make significant revisions, removing an entire canto, in addition to rearranging the structure of the poem itself. These modifications resulted in the ten strophes included in *Collected Poems*, and the single, polished version of the poem most likely to endure.

Keith A. Roberts sustains that writing is "a profoundly public activity, shaped by many norms and by the social context in which it will be read."[138] Pierre-Marc de Biasi underscores

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Kinnell and Shepard, "An Interview with Galway Kinnell," 45.
[138] Keith A. Roberts, "Toward a Sociology of Writing," *Teaching Sociology* 21, no. 4 (October 1993): 317.

his point, stating that the *bon à tirer* when the author debuts the finished, published work under a watchful, public eye casts subsequent revisions in a different light:

> By contrast, postpublication modifications are made in a public sphere where the book's reality cannot be ignored: they successively affect equally definitive textual versions of the 'same' work, each of which can claim the status of a completely separate text each time, without it's [sic] being in general possible to recognize the logic of a process comparable to the pre-textual one between them."[139]

Attending to our approaches to Kinnell scholarship, we would be remiss to ignore the challenges surrounding his unremitting revisionism. Kinnell has shared his crafting of 167 drafts of this poem, a flurry of writing housed in teeming boxes, which his archives bear out. The multiplicity of his writing builds textual awareness in the precursive stages of poetic conception, assisting in decoding the diachronicity his work yields. However, much like Whitman's tinkering with *Leaves of Grass*, the constant second-guessing and deliberating among the profusion of drafts can be a detriment to achieving an enduring body of work that maintains high value to both poet and reader whilst achieving lasting public reception.

Indeed, collaboration opened Kinnell's process, transforming him from being locked within the interiority of a substantial, and disquieting, poetic exile, to crossing into a socially motivated, collaborative environment in which a privileging of the work was paramount, and foundational, to his literary practice. Most saliently, the constructive participation and contributions of his peers—Bly, Carruth, Hall, and most crucially, Olds—ventures past conceptions of intertextuality and allusion, to the creation of an ecological writing system wholly new, and a successful sociological framework. Taking our cue from Kinnell's dominant lexicon regarding "dissolution" and "consciousness" in "When One," we can apprise a simultaneity and an interrelatedness of poetic voices as compelling, synergistic relationships which induce the epigenetic unfolding of the *When One* volume into rich and compelling textual histories.

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[139] Pierre-Marc de Biasi and Ingrid Wassenaar, "What is a Literary Draft? Toward a Functional Typology of Genetic Documentation," *Yale French Studies* no. 89 (1996): 40-41. See also Dirk Van Hulle, "Creative Concurrence: Gearing Genetic Criticism for the Sociology of Writing," *Variants* 15-16 (July 2021): 45-62.

Conclusion

"Kiss/ the mouth that tells you, *here*,/ *here is the world.*" (*CP*, 254)

–Galway Kinnell, Section VII:
"Little-Sleep's Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight

Spiralling back in our inquiry, much like Kinnell's repeated engagement and revisitation of thematization, forms, and modalities throughout his literary oeuvre, we return to the first strophe of "The Shoes of Wandering":

> And I walk out now,
> in dead shoes, in the new light,
> on the steppingstones
> of someone else's wandering,
> a twinge
> in this foot or that saying
> *turn* or *stay* or *take*
> *forty-three giant steps*
> *backwards*, frightened
> I may already have lost
> the way (*CP*, 226)

As our allegorical entranceway into this thesis, and one indicative of the intersecting relationship between intellectual inheritance and the geographical imagination, the poem displays the characteristic relay between disorienting conditions of uncertainty and of dislocation. The speaker's geospatial containment and conscious self-reflexivity allow for a lyric permeability to pierce through, awakened by a context of ancestry, belonging, and legacy. Through the itinerance of these guiding, mythological, and spiritual missionaries— "on the steppingstones/ of someone else's wandering" (*CP*, 226)—we distinguish a sensibility that runs notably through Kinnell's work, to wit: a preoccupation with spatial entanglement. Such considerations are consistent with placiality and locativeness, each suggestive of a poet's implicit desire for emplacement. From a young man's cognitive quest for a lost soul's embodiment in "Conversation at Tea," and the yearning of Jamshid's boyish nostalgia for the *immanzadeh* with his childhood friend Varoosh in *Black Light*, to an entreaty to rejoin the human

species and the lifeworld in "When One," we see each as emblematic to Kinnell's singular and defining vision. Kinnell, therefore, demonstrates his commitment to a creative landscape—equal parts figurative and literal—that develops and thrives through its interactions with others, both past and contemporaneous.

Over the course of this single-author study, Kinnell's poetics of relationality are located in a myriad of ways, primarily through a textual exegesis of content, form, and meaning, privileging his attention to spatial negotiation, and subsequently bringing its significance in his body of work to the fore. Touching upon nearly eighty poems exemplative of Kinnell's literary development from 1948-2006 including "The Last River;" "When the Towers Fell"; "Memories of My Father"; *Sheffield Ghazals*; and "When One," to cite a representative few, in addition to his novel *Black Light*, and ethnographic prose writing and journalism, the thesis proffers sensitive, close readings. Attending to detailed analysis, it also considers the genesis and the diachronicity of texts as well their overall contribution to context and to generic placement. These include transitory and interstitial spaces of elegiac poems; American sonnet that challenges prescribed form; and the Persian ghazal, which has grown from a canonically spiritual exaltation of beauty and love into a personal one of New England prosody.

From Kinnell's earliest poems, and throughout his unfolding body of work, his engagement with the complex geographical imagination through real and imagined spaces has played an evolutionary role in his emergent ethos. Kinnell's articulation of material and psychogeographies, particularly related to the four main areas assessed in this project, uphold the spatial interactivity made manifest in his work, and in his own identity as a relational poet. His poetry transforms social and poetic spaces, from misanthropic isolation and transnational discourse to a colloquy of peers, criticism, and collective transformation.

Ultimately, the work of this project has been to trace numerous questions throughout, by thinking through and with several queries and points of analysis that have acted as guideposts to inform the research process. For example, what does intellectual inheritance

reveal about the importance of space, place, and landscape in Kinnell's work, and how does it specifically contribute to eliciting a geographical imaginary? Additionally, what are the specific poetic outputs displayed in his work with respect to prosodic form, and his own sense of literary genesis? How are these four categories—marginalisation and exclusion; sensorial witness; identity; and exile—endemic to Kinnell's work, and illustrative of his poetic development, peer relationships, and his demonstrated sociological frameworks of writing? Finally, how does the confluence of these thematical underpinnings expand our comprehension of real and imagined spaces, in which Kinnell supposes, narrates, and imagines such that we deepen our engagement with his literary praxes?

The thesis began by countering T.S. Eliot's notion of a *lingua franca* with that of Kinnell, offering Kinnell's break with the New Critical paradigm, and his assertion of a late modern sensibility as underlying values concomitant with his poetic progression in a fragmented world of dislocation and uncertainty. Moreover, it emphasises the profoundly social aspect of Kinnell's approach which pervades his texts, both in poetry and in prose. Our interrogation then extended into a consideration of Kinnell's verse as a living craft, an *ars poetica*, whereby linguistic devices coupled with actual affordances and deficiencies of writing are honed within an ecosystem of Kinnell's unique making. Most substantially, the study has engaged with critically elided areas of Kinnell's work, specifically as relates to his experiences and creative outputs as an expatriate in Iran, in addition to a broad collection of new archival materials—from videotaped oral histories, interviews, and lectures to a wealth of travel writing and photographs—all of which round out the facets of an extraordinary career. Our extended study of Kinnell crystalises his relation vis-à-vis a poetics of relationality, of positioning himself in spatial mediations, awareness, and humanistic encounters, whether that be reaching back across centuries of tradition to precursors, or activated transnationally through translation, poetics, and expository prose.

The constraints of a doctoral thesis are exacting in that a line of inquiry is developed over a course of several chapters, following a specific narrative intention, a methodological

course of study, and a concise resolution of ideas. However, in refining this study, it has also clarified that given the scope of the project, some difficult exclusions were made, such as other poets who could have undoubtedly added supplementary texture or perspective in building Kinnell's intellectual inheritance as a methodological framework. Wallace Stevens, in particular, emerged as a surprising shadow and compatriot within Kinnell's texts, and a purveyor of the common and fertile ground of the geographical imagination; whilst Stevens has assumed some pride of place in various sections of the thesis, a dedicated chapter to him would certainly have been a welcome, if extraneous, addendum. Similarly, Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane or Theodore Roethke could have weaved themselves into these pages beyond their cursory involvement. Kinnell's inheritances were indeed varied and many, and his poetry provides a rich, intertextual tapestry for further encounters. With the imminent arrival of Kinnell's centenary in 2027, and the full trajectory of his life, works, and archives, future Kinnellian studies may find its footing through additional compendiums of essays, volumes of correspondence, or even a dedicated critical biography that could blend his aesthetics with an interpretive lens of historical and cultural contexts to reveal greater insight.

On an ordinary Tuesday in February 1974, Kinnell hosted "An Evening of Persian Poetry with Galway Kinnell and Nasser Rastegar-Nejad" at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, sponsored by the Academy of American Poets.[1] Kinnell compiled a plethora of preparatory notes and translations; his papers, including the single-sheet program for the event, comprise ninety-nine pages, unsurprising given Kinnell's propensity for unabridged versions. The performance featured translations by Kinnell and W.S. Merwin, poems (Hafez, Nosrat Rahmani, and Forough Farrokzad), recordings of Persian carpet-weaving chants, as well as Rastegar-Nejad playing the santur. Looking back on this occasion, Kinnell appears at the height of his own triumphant poetic and translative enterprise. That momentous evening,

[1] Galway Kinnell, Program for "An Evening of Persian Poetry with Galway Kinnell and Nasser Rastegar-Nejad," 26 February 1974, Guggenheim Museum, New York. Galway Kinnell Manuscripts, 1936-1980, LMC 1678, Box 14, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

as with so many of his collaborations with the literary community throughout his career, is suggestive of a poet giving freely of himself, one who wishes the same recognition for the brilliant contributions which so markedly constellate his own poetic cosmography. Despite many critics and scholars cataloguing mortality and demise as essential, underlying themes of his oeuvre, Kinnell's authenticity is to be found in creative spaces of cooperation, critique, and exchange, along with his boundless considerations of poetic relationality and human connection which transmogrify his writings and fuel his compositional endeavours.

Following Kinnell's death from leukaemia in 2014, there was a very palpable and public outpouring by his immediate community of writers. Manifest efforts to both eulogise his life and memorialise his literary contributions were put forth across national journals, newspapers, and radio. C.K. Williams, a close friend of Kinnell's for over half a century, summated the multitude of accomplishments and accolades Kinnell had earned most deservedly:

> Galway Kinnell was one of, if not the most, admired poets of his time. His awards were many—the Pulitzer, a MacArthur, the American Book Award—but, beyond all that, there's no one whose work has so often and with such consistency brought into the world a sense of wonder and exaltation, no one who so often discovered rich new harmonies of poetic language, no one who devised so many metaphors that resonate through so many levels of materiality and spirit, uniting the physical with the moral and passion with thought. In short, there's no one whose work has elaborated so ample and comprehensive a vision of the lives we've lived.[2]

Joy Harjo previously hailed Kinnell as a "poet warrior" for exercising a direct influence on her work alongside Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lord, and Richard Hugo, with "the shine of his compassion" instrumental in her changing her vocation from a painter to a poet.[3] Ada Limón, current US Poet Laureate succeeding Harjo, as well as former student of Kinnell, Sharon Olds, and Philip Levine in the NYU Creative Writing Program declared, "I'm wordless…Except,

[2] C.K. Williams, "Postscript: Galway Kinnell," *The New Yorker* (30 October 2014): https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/postscript-galway-kinnell-1927-2014
[3] William Pitt Root, "About Joy Harjo," *Ploughshares: Poems and Stories edited by Joy Harjo*, no. 95 (Winter 2004-2005).

these poems. His poems. These still-singing poems that will go on and on if we keep them alive with our grateful mouths."[4]

More recently, Vievee Francis' fourth volume of poetry, *The Shared World* (2023), which figures in Chapter One as a testimony to Kinnell's commitment to civil disobedience and social justice, pays homage in large part to Kinnell. Francis affirms, "Among African American poets, we have our own narrative about Galway, because it is my understanding that Galway was good to us. I want to honor that, too, I'm talking about lineage [...] I am part of his lineage. Lineage is who we study, who we care for and who cares about us. Who speaks to us when we write."[5] That Kinnell's literary opus holds resonance with today's working poets attests to his singularity as a literary practitioner; it expands the breadth of his work, in addition to his stimulating and dynamic influence as a major precursor to a subsequent generation. By transcending thematical considerations of verse culture, his legacy also speaks to the collaborative affordances of his poetic sensibilities, techniques, and dedication as an educator.

In Kinnell's final volume *Strong Is Your Hold*, a collection we might typify as somewhat incongruous, bridging a prevailing thanatophobia with the weight of doleful threnodies, then juxtaposing them with light-hearted reflections and worn-in, sexual comfort in other poems, we situate Kinnell in the twilight of his poetic career. In the concluding stanza of "The Stone Table" he rationalises attempts to tether oneself to the earth:

> I, who so often used to wish to float free
> of earth, now with all my being want to stay,
> to climb with you on other evenings to this stone,
> maybe finding a bear, or a coyote, like
> the one who, at dusk, a week ago, passed
> in his scissorish gait ten feet from where we sat—
> this earth we attach ourselves to so fiercely,
> like scions of Sheffield-Seek-No-Furthers
> grafted for our lifetimes onto paradise root-stock. (*CP*, 495)

[4] Sam Hamill, Ada Limón, Robert Wrigley, Jennifer L. Knox, C. Dale Young, Natalie Diaz, Dana Levin, and Lytton Smith, "On Galway Kinnell," *Los Angeles Review of Books* (3 November 2014): https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/galway-kinnell-2/

[5] Jim Schley, "Vievee Francis Discusses Her Poetry Collection *The Shared World,*" *Seven Days* (26 April 2023): https://www.sevendaysvt.com/arts-culture/vievee-francis-discusses-her-poetry-collection-the-shared-world-38094212

Whilst "The Stone Table," in a rhetorical sense, retains special connection to Kinnell as a place of return and sacred, quotidian practice, it also holds resonance as his actual place of burial on his property in Sheffield, the interminable wide-open space through which Olds rambles "through the wild grasses" and "smooth declivities" in "Looking for Galway on the Vermont Mountainside."[6]

Despite the editorial prominence of "The Stone Table" in *Strong Is Your Hold* as the opening poem of the edition, another unassuming poem dangles in the balance, one that is a directive for us from Kinnell himself, a plan he lays out in "Promissory Note":

> If I die before you
> which is all but certain
> then in the moment
> before you will see me
> become someone dead
> in a transformation
> as quick as a shooting star's
> I will cross over into you
> and ask you to carry
> not only your own memories
> but mine too until you
> too lie down and erase us
> both together into oblivion. (*CP*, 534-535)

Just as William Carlos Williams' "This Is Just To Say," the simplicity of the poem seems almost a nuanced, apologetic afterthought, casually inserted at the close of Section IV, and perhaps deliberately so. Yet the muscularity of Kinnell's verse (as previously noted by Sarah Cahill), coupled with his characteristic prosody capable of evoking potent, visceral reactions careens through a stichic stanza whose ocular minimalism and rectangularity on the page bring us to a common purpose. Throughout this thesis, it has been made mention of Kinnell's bequeathing of materialities. His last wills and testaments find purpose in poems such as "Reading a Poet's Last Will"; "The Dead Shall be Raised Incorruptible"; and "Testament of the Thief." However, in "Promissory Note," Kinnell submits a modified final request, offering its very self as currency; it—the poem—as the eponymous promissory note through which,

[6] Olds, *Balladz*, 148.

in our readerly encounter, we enter into a binding social contract with Kinnell, an implicit Hammurabic code by which he asks us to hold his work in trust. Certainly, Whitman's embrace, and that of the "mortal flesh" and "love" to which "The Last Invocation" famously declares its allegiance are strong over Kinnell, but our engagement as custodians of his legacy—one last act of poetic guardianship—is unyielding.

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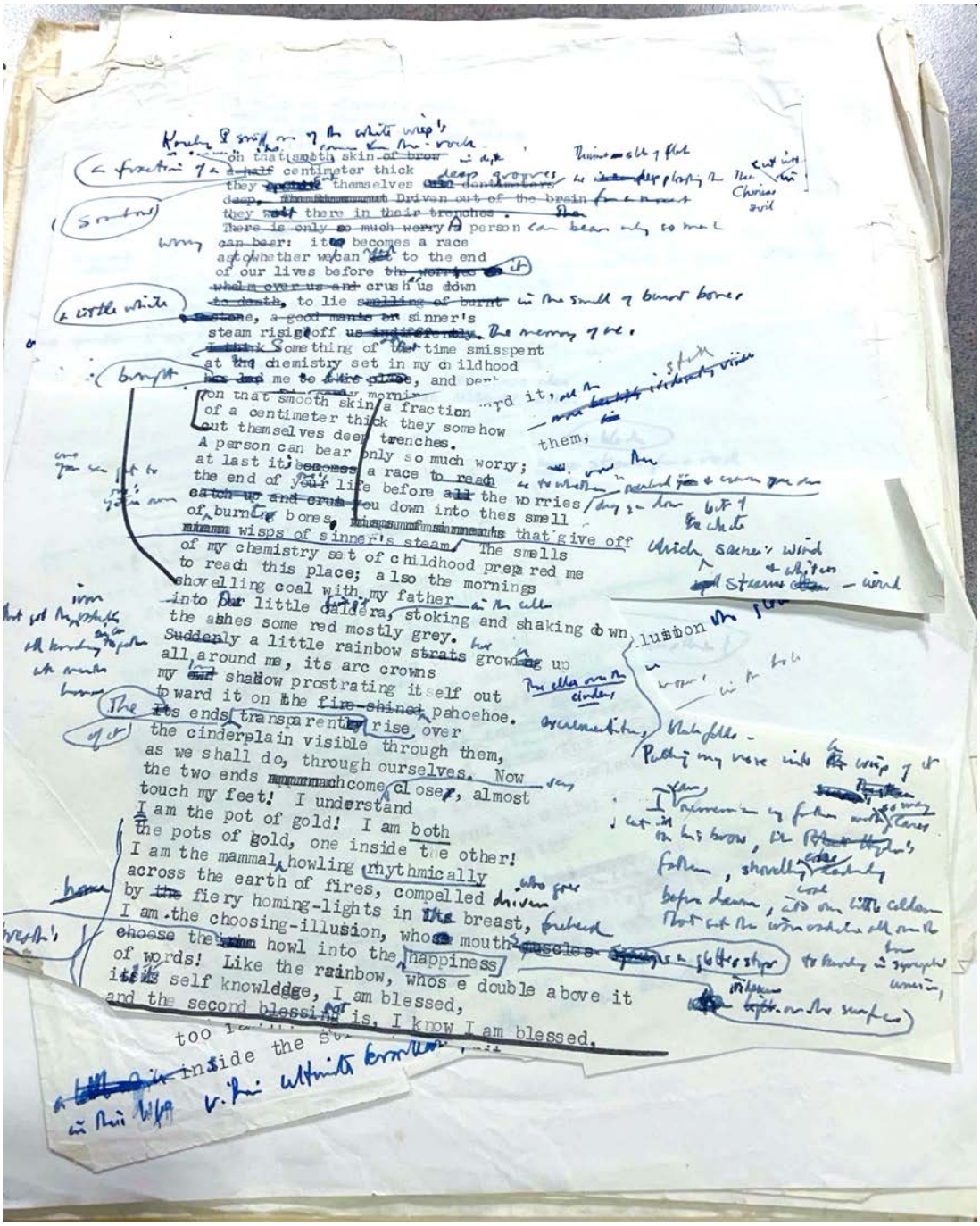
Appendix 1

Manuscript draft of "Kilauea" provisionally titled, "Kilauea Crater"

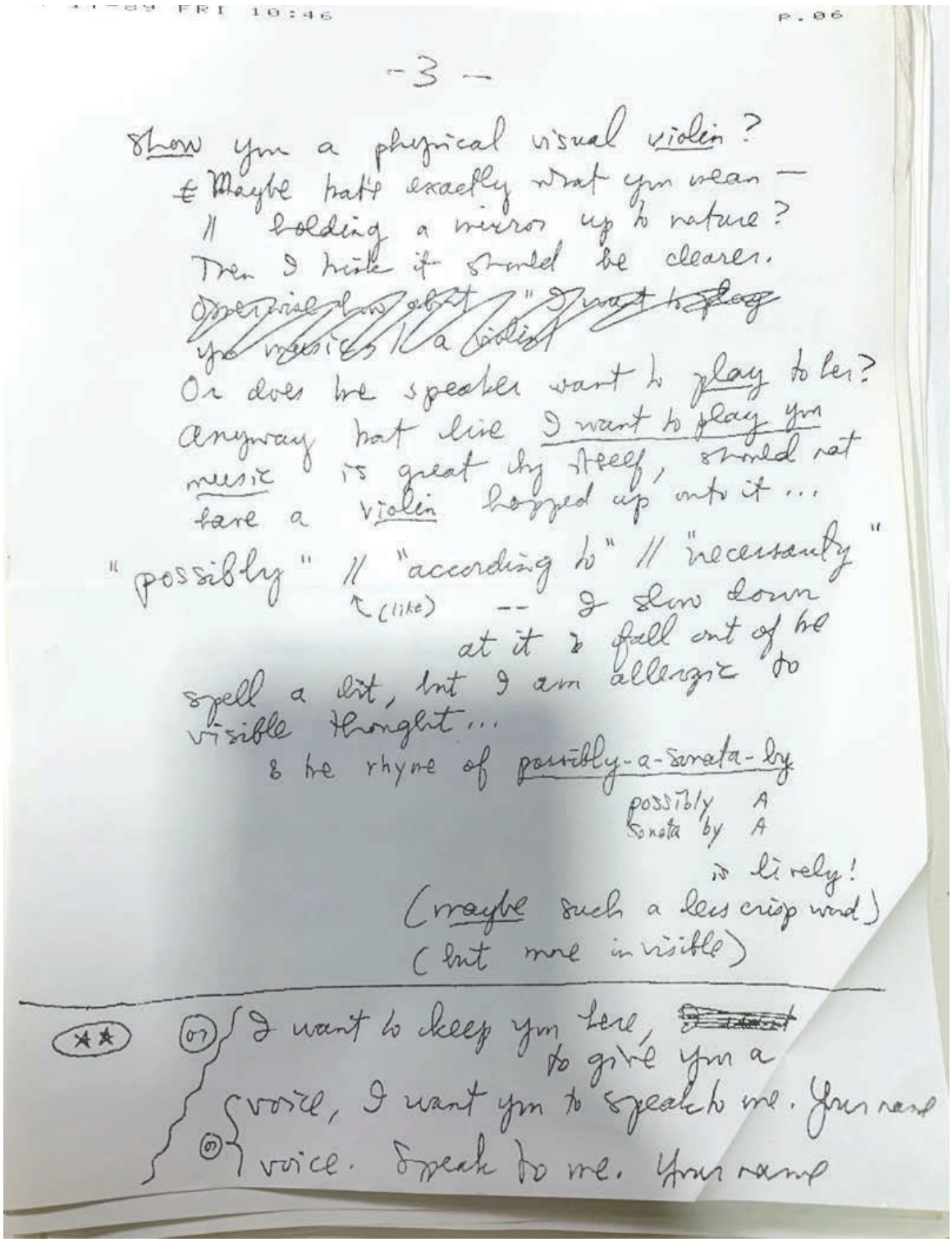


on that smooth skin of brow
a fraction of a centimeter thick
they themselves deep grooves
deep, Driven out of the brain
they there in their trenches.
There is only so much worry A person can bear:
can bear: it becomes a race
as to whether we can get to the end
of our lives before the worries
whelm over us and crush us down
to death, to lie smelling of burnt
bone, a good meal or sinner's
steam rising off us
Something of that time smisspent
at the chemistry set in my childhood
and me to the close, and per
on that smooth skin a fraction
of a centimeter thick they somehow
out themselves deep trenches.
A person can bear only so much worry;
at last it becomes a race to reach
the end of your life before all the worries
catch up and crush you down into thes smell
of burning bones,
wisps of sinner's steam that give off
of my chemistry set of childhood prepared me
to reach this place; also the mornings
shovelling coal with my father
into the little caldera, stoking and shaking down
the ashes some red mostly grey.
Suddenly a little rainbow strats growing up
all around me, its arc crowns
my and shadow prostrating itself out
toward it on the fire-shined pahoehoe.
The its ends transparently rise over
the cinderplain visible through them,
as we shall do, through ourselves. Now
the two ends come closer, almost
touch my feet! I understand
I am the pot of gold! I am both
the pots of gold, one inside the other!
I am the mammal howling rhythmically
across the earth of fires, compelled
by the fiery homing-lights in the breast,
I am the choosing-illusion, whose mouth
choose the howl into the happiness
of words! Like the rainbow, whose double above it
its self knowledge, I am blessed,
and the second blessing is, I know I am blessed.
too
inside the

Galway Kinnell, "Kilauea" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 2

Fax from Sharon Olds to Galway Kinnell, 17 March 1989 re: "Flower of Five Blossoms"



-3-

show you a physical visual violin?
€ Maybe that's exactly what you mean —
// holding a mirror up to nature?
Then I think it should be clearer.
~~Or perhaps how about "I want to play~~
~~you music // a violin~~
Or does the speaker want to play to her?
Anyway that line I want to play you
music is great by itself, should not
have a violin hopped up onto it...
"possibly" // "according to" // "necessarily"
↑(like) -- I slow down
at it & fall out of the
spell a bit, but I am allergic to
visible thought...
& the rhyme of possibly-a-sonata-by

possibly A
Sonata by A
is lively!

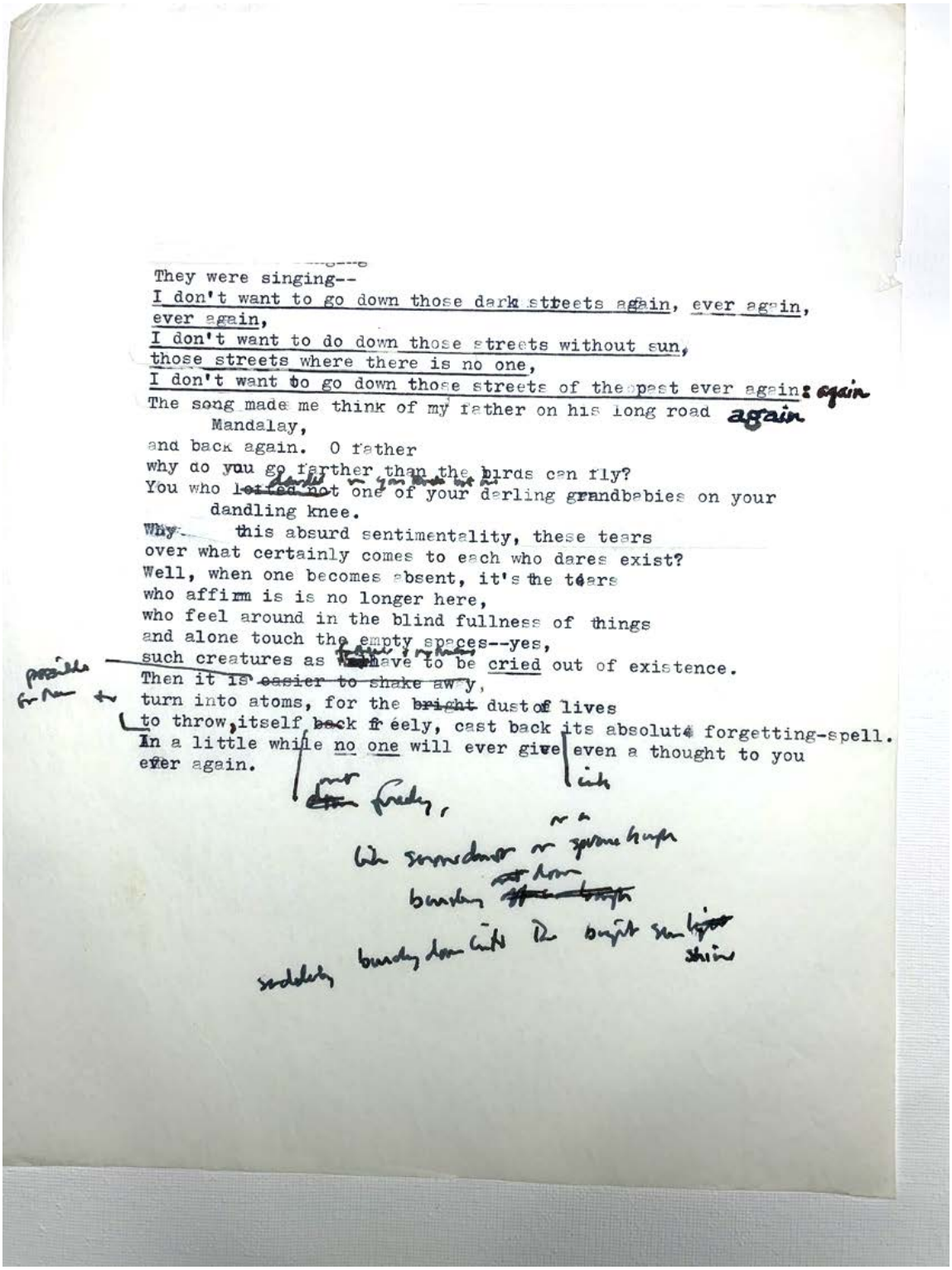
(maybe such a less crisp word)
(but more invisible)

(07) I want to keep you here, ~~[illegible]~~
to give you a
(08) voice, I want you to speak to me. Your real
voice. Speak to me. Your name

Sharon Olds, "Fax from Sharon Olds to Galway Kinnell," 17 March 1989 [originally hand-dated 15 March 1989], Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 3

Manuscript draft of "Dark Streets"

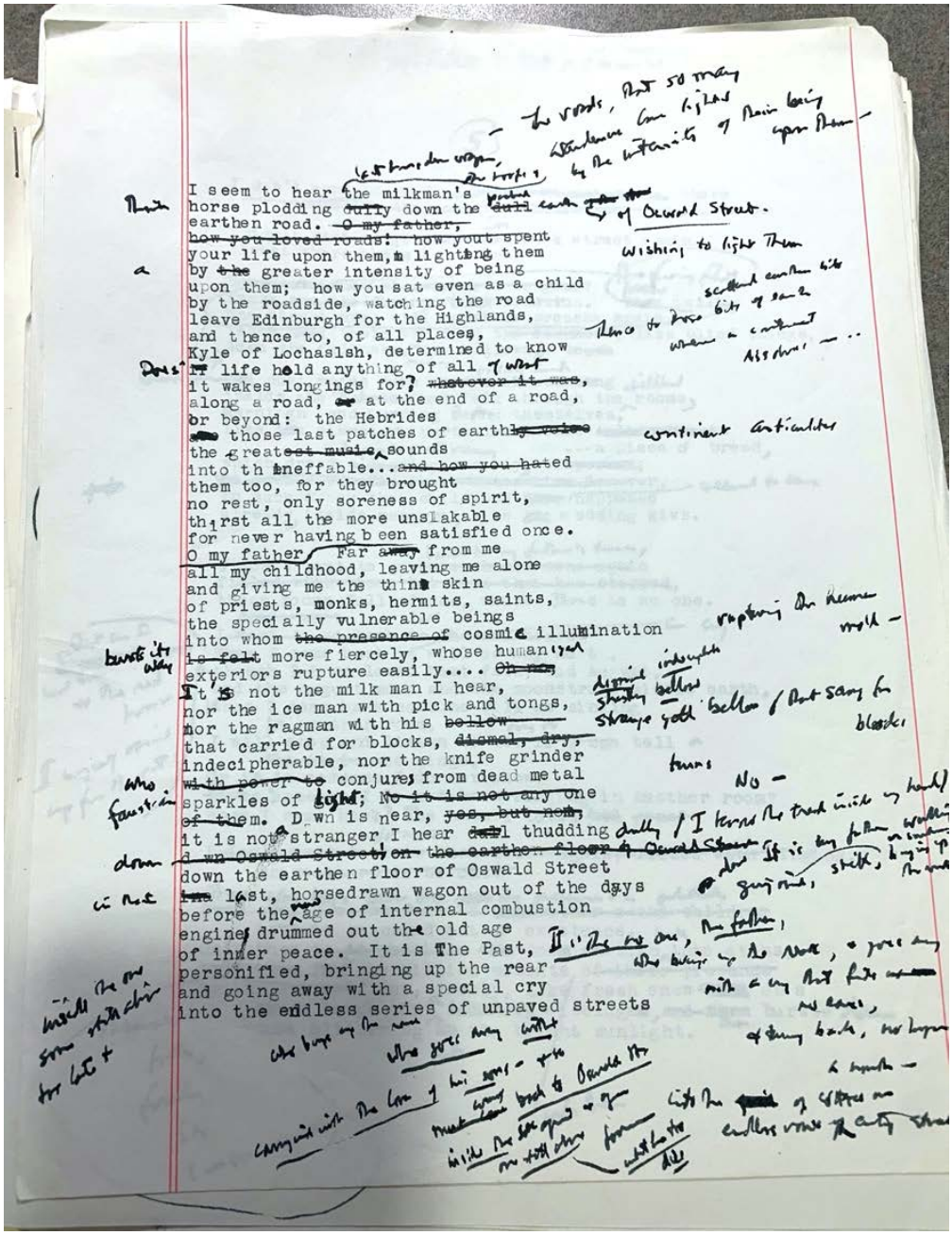


They were singing--
I don't want to go down those dark streets again, ever again,
ever again,
I don't want to do down those streets without sun,
those streets where there is no one,
I don't want to go down those streets of the past ever again: again
The song made me think of my father on his long road again
Mandalay,
and back again. O father
why do you go farther than the birds can fly?
You who [cried] not one of your darling grandbabies on your
dandling knee.
Why this absurd sentimentality, these tears
over what certainly comes to each who dares exist?
Well, when one becomes absent, it's the tears
who affirm is is no longer here,
who feel around in the blind fullness of things
and alone touch the empty spaces--yes,
such creatures as [have] to be cried out of existence.
Then it is [easier to shake away],
turn into atoms, for the [bright] dust of lives
to throw itself back freely, cast back its absolute forgetting-spell.
In a little while no one will ever give even a thought to you
ever again.

Galway Kinnell, "Dark Streets" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 4

Manuscript preparatory draft of Strophe 2 — "Memories of My Father"

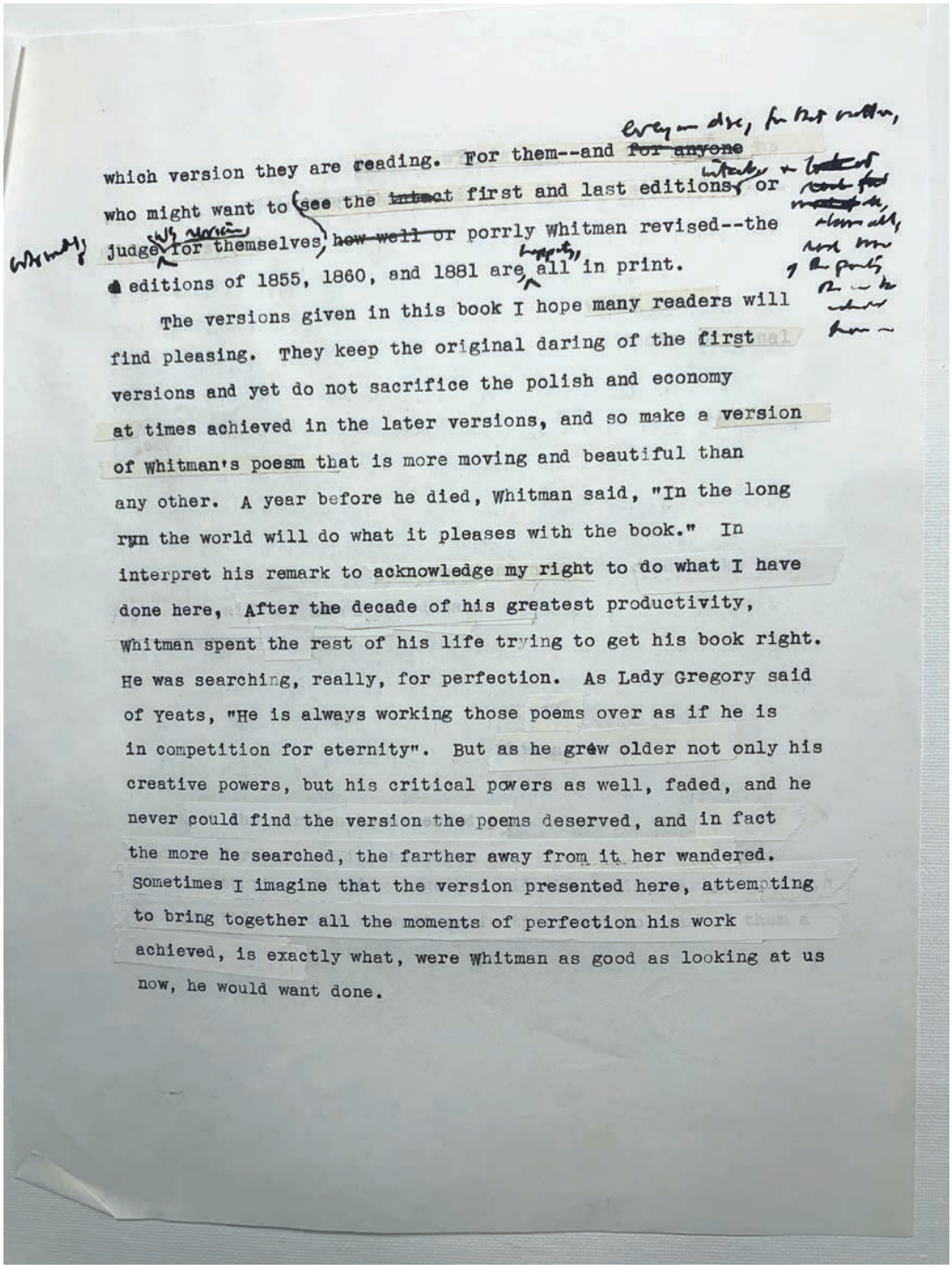


I seem to hear the milkman's
horse plodding ~~dully~~ down the ~~dull~~
earthen road. ~~O my father,~~
~~how you loved roads:~~ how you spent
your life upon them, lighting them
by ~~the~~ greater intensity of being
upon them; how you sat even as a child
by the roadside, watching the road
leave Edinburgh for the Highlands,
and thence to, of all places,
Kyle of Lochalsh, determined to know
~~if~~ life held anything of all ~~that~~
it wakes longings for; ~~whatever it was~~,
along a road, ~~or~~ at the end of a road,
or beyond: the Hebrides
~~and~~ those last patches of earth ~~where~~
the ~~greatest music~~ sounds
into th ineffable... ~~and how you hated~~
them too, for they brought
no rest, only soreness of spirit,
thirst all the more unslakable
for never having been satisfied once.
O my father, Far ~~away~~ from me
all my childhood, leaving me alone
and giving me the thin skin
of priests, monks, hermits, saints,
the specially vulnerable beings
into whom ~~the presence of~~ cosmic illumination
~~is felt~~ more fiercely, whose human
exteriors rupture easily.... ~~Oh no,~~
It is not the milk man I hear,
nor the ice man with pick and tongs,
nor the ragman with his ~~hollow~~
that carried for blocks, ~~dismal, dry,~~
indecipherable, nor the knife grinder
~~with power to~~ conjures from dead metal
sparkles of ~~light~~; ~~No it is not any one~~
~~of them.~~ Down is near, ~~yes, but now,~~
it is not stranger I hear ~~dull~~ thudding
~~down Oswald Street on the earthen floor of Oswald Street~~
down the earthen floor of Oswald Street
~~the~~ last, horsedrawn wagon out of the days
before the age of internal combustion
engines drummed out the old age
of inner peace. It is The Past,
personified, bringing up the rear
and going away with a special cry
into the endless series of unpaved streets

Galway Kinnell, "Memories of My Father" drafts, 1989, Box 16a, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 5

Archival draft of Kinnell's "Foreword" to Essential Whitman (1987)



which version they are reading. For them--and ~~for anyone~~ who might want to see the ~~intact~~ first and last editions, or judge for themselves ~~how well or~~ porrly Whitman revised--the editions of 1855, 1860, and 1881 are all in print.

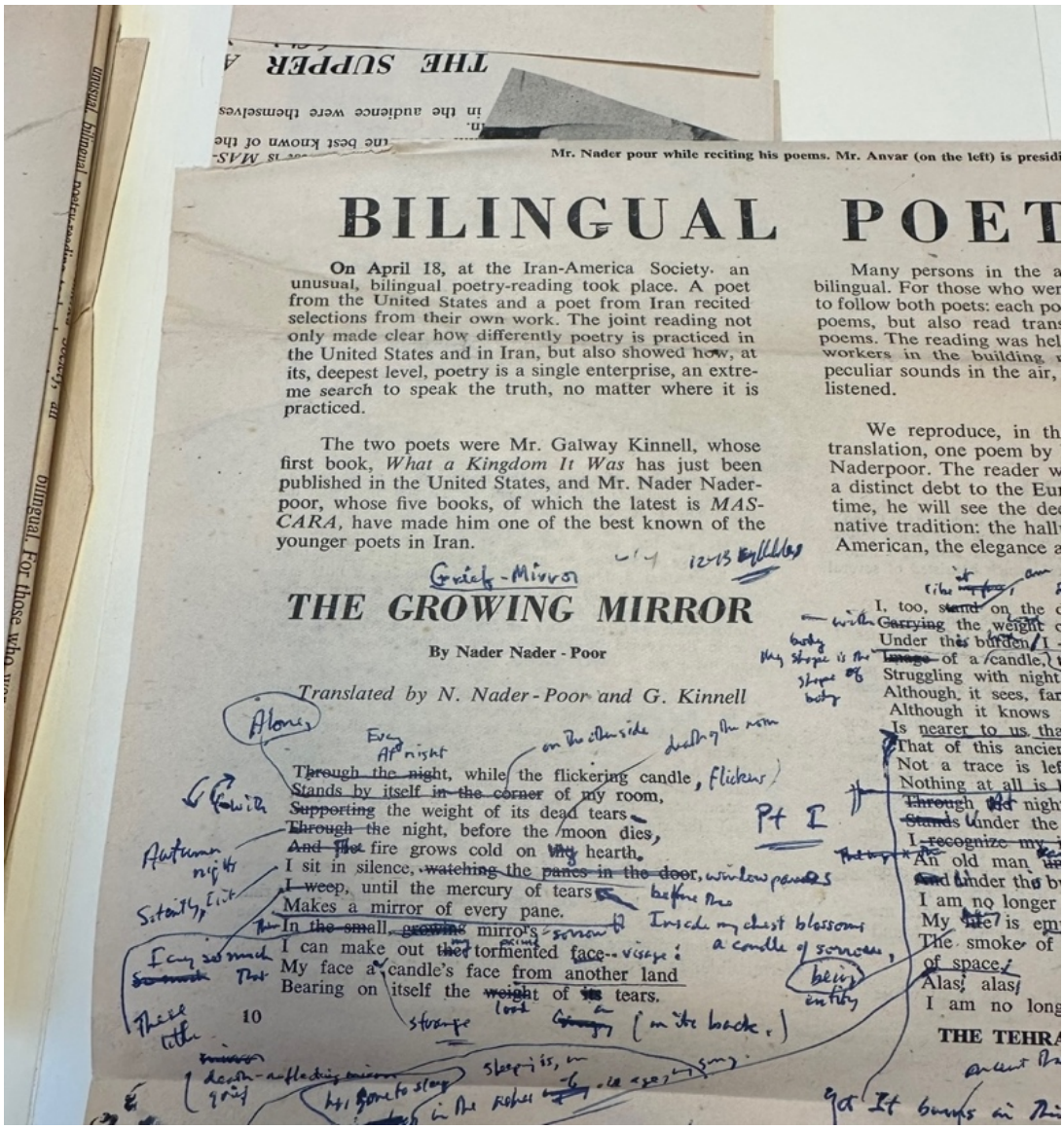
The versions given in this book I hope many readers will find pleasing. They keep the original daring of the first versions and yet do not sacrifice the polish and economy at times achieved in the later versions, and so make a version of Whitman's poesm that is more moving and beautiful than any other. A year before he died, Whitman said, "In the long run the world will do what it pleases with the book." In interpret his remark to acknowledge my right to do what I have done here, After the decade of his greatest productivity, Whitman spent the rest of his life trying to get his book right. He was searching, really, for perfection. As Lady Gregory said of Yeats, "He is always working those poems over as if he is in competition for eternity". But as he grew older not only his creative powers, but his critical powers as well, faded, and he never could find the version the poems deserved, and in fact the more he searched, the farther away from it her wandered. Sometimes I imagine that the version presented here, attempting to bring together all the moments of perfection his work achieved, is exactly what, were Whitman as good as looking at us now, he would want done.

Galway Kinnell, *Essential Whitman* drafts, 1987, Box 21, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 6A

"The Growing Mirror" by Nader Naderpour; translated by Galway Kinnell

Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450). Houghton Library, Harvard University.



Mr. Nader pour while reciting his poems. Mr. Anvar (on the left) is presidi

BILINGUAL POET

On April 18, at the Iran-America Society, an unusual, bilingual poetry-reading took place. A poet from the United States and a poet from Iran recited selections from their own work. The joint reading not only made clear how differently poetry is practiced in the United States and in Iran, but also showed how, at its, deepest level, poetry is a single enterprise, an extreme search to speak the truth, no matter where it is practiced.

The two poets were Mr. Galway Kinnell, whose first book, *What a Kingdom It Was* has just been published in the United States, and Mr. Nader Naderpoor, whose five books, of which the latest is *MASCARA*, have made him one of the best known of the younger poets in Iran.

Many persons in the a bilingual. For those who wer to follow both poets: each po poems, but also read trans poems. The reading was hel workers in the building peculiar sounds in the air, listened.

We reproduce, in th translation, one poem by Naderpoor. The reader w a distinct debt to the Eu time, he will see the de native tradition: the hall American, the elegance a

THE GROWING MIRROR

By Nader Nader - Poor

Translated by N. Nader-Poor and G. Kinnell

Through the night, while the flickering candle
Stands by itself in the corner of my room,
Supporting the weight of its dead tears
Through the night, before the moon dies,
And the fire grows cold on my hearth.
I sit in silence, watching the panes in the door,
I weep, until the mercury of tears
Makes a mirror of every pane.
In the small, growing mirror's sorrow
I can make out the tormented face
My face a candle's face from another land
Bearing on itself the weight of its tears.

I, too, stand on the
Carrying the weight
Under this burden
of a candle,
Struggling with night
Although, it sees, far
Although it knows
Is nearer to us, tha
That of this ancie
Not a trace is le
Nothing at all is
Through the nigh
Stands under the
I recognize my
An old man
and under tha
I am no longer
My fire is em
The smoke of
of space,
Alas! alas!
I am no long

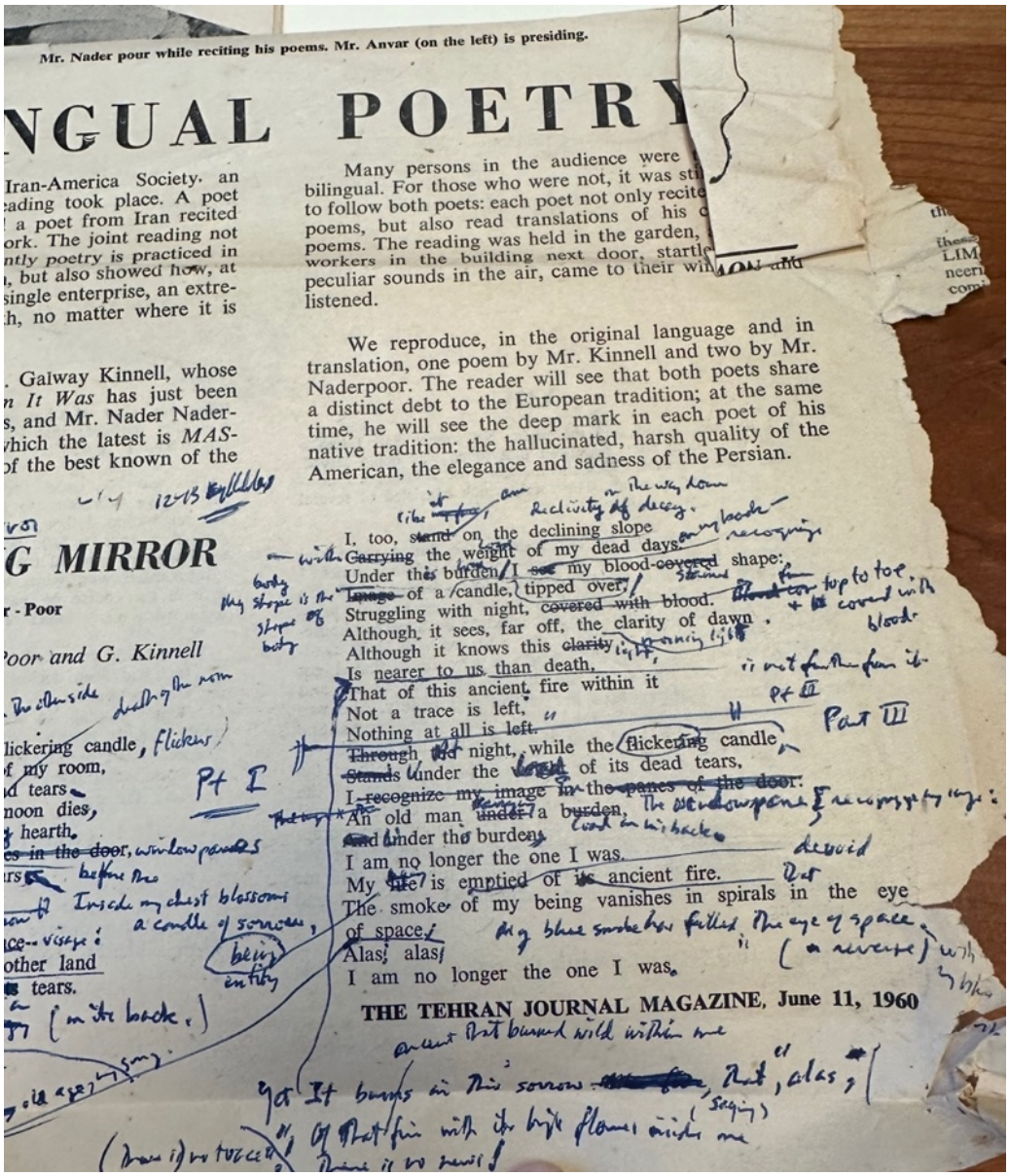
THE TEHR

Nader Naderpour, "The Growing Mirror," trans. Galway Kinnell, *The Tehran Journal* (11 June 1960): 10.

Appendix 6B

"The Growing Mirror"/ "The Grief Mirror" by Nader Naderpour; translated by Galway Kinnell

Galway Kinnell Collection of Photographs and Writings on Iran, 1959-2013 (MS Am 3450). Houghton Library, Harvard University.



Mr. Nader pour while reciting his poems. Mr. Anvar (on the left) is presiding.

NGUAL POETRY

Iran-America Society. an ading took place. A poet a poet from Iran recited ork. The joint reading not ntly poetry is practiced in , but also showed how, at single enterprise, an extre- h, no matter where it is

. Galway Kinnell, whose n It Was has just been s, and Mr. Nader Nader- which the latest is MAS- of the best known of the

G MIRROR

r - Poor

oor and G. Kinnell

lickering candle, flickers f my room, d tears noon dies, hearth. es in the door, window panes rs before the Inside my chest blossoms a candle of sorrows, ce-- visage other land tears.

Many persons in the audience were bilingual. For those who were not, it was st to follow both poets: each poet not only recite poems, but also read translations of his poems. The reading was held in the garden, workers in the building next door, startle peculiar sounds in the air, came to their win listened.

We reproduce, in the original language and in translation, one poem by Mr. Kinnell and two by Mr. Naderpoor. The reader will see that both poets share a distinct debt to the European tradition; at the same time, he will see the deep mark in each poet of his native tradition: the hallucinated, harsh quality of the American, the elegance and sadness of the Persian.

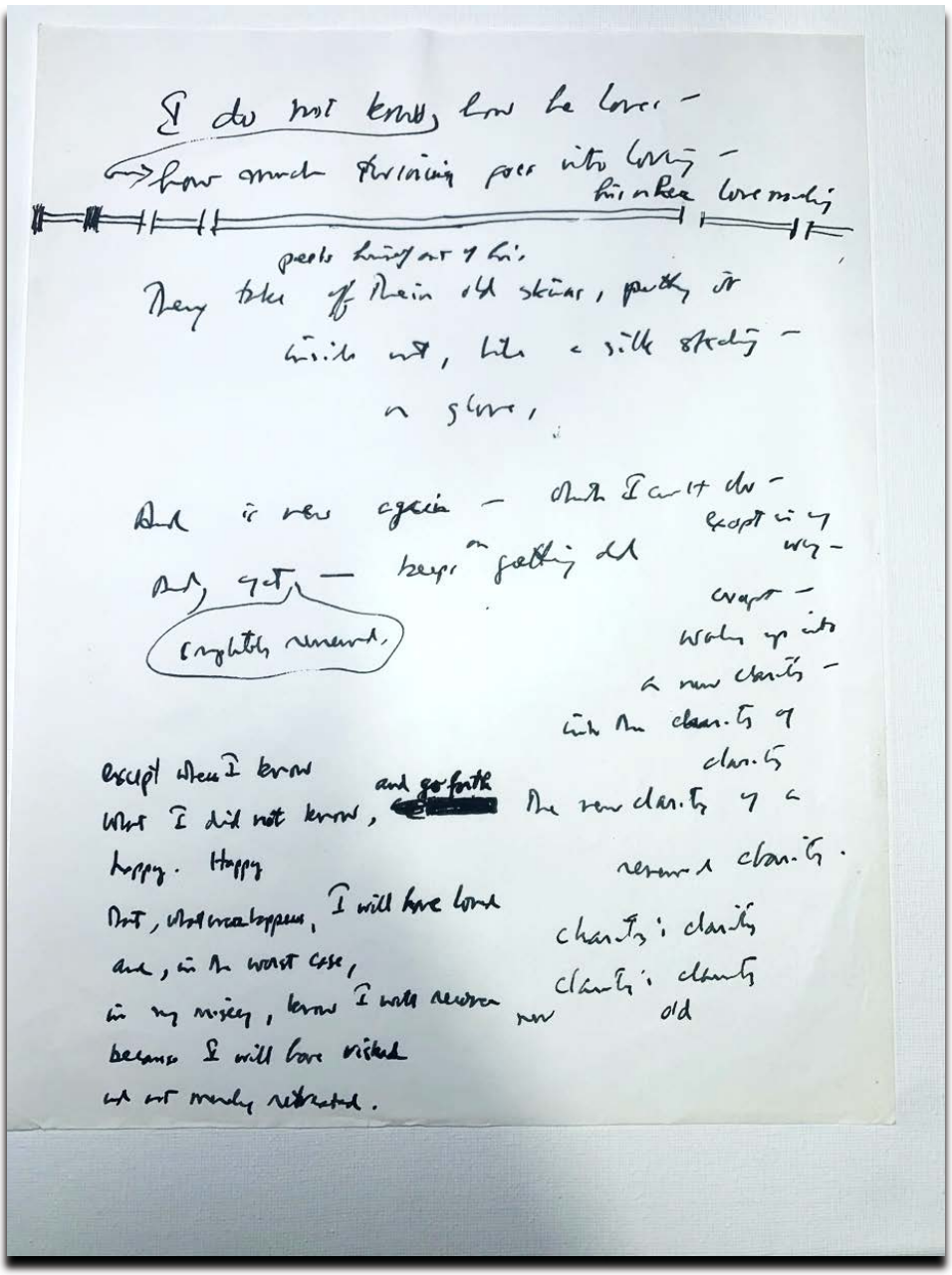
I, too, stand on the declining slope
Carrying the weight of my dead days.
Under this burden I see my blood-covered shape:
Image of a candle, tipped over,
Struggling with night, covered with blood.
Although it sees, far off, the clarity of dawn
Although it knows this clarity
Is nearer to us than death,
That of this ancient fire within it
Not a trace is left,
Nothing at all is left.
Through the night, while the flickering candle
Stands under the weight of its dead tears,
I recognize my image in the panes of the door:
An old man under a burden,
And under the burden
I am no longer the one I was.
My life is emptied of its ancient fire.
The smoke of my being vanishes in spirals in the eye of space;
Alas! alas!
I am no longer the one I was.

THE TEHRAN JOURNAL MAGAZINE, June 11, 1960

Nader Naderpour, "The Growing Mirror," trans. Galway Kinnell, *The Tehran Journal* (11 June 1960): 10.

Appendix 7

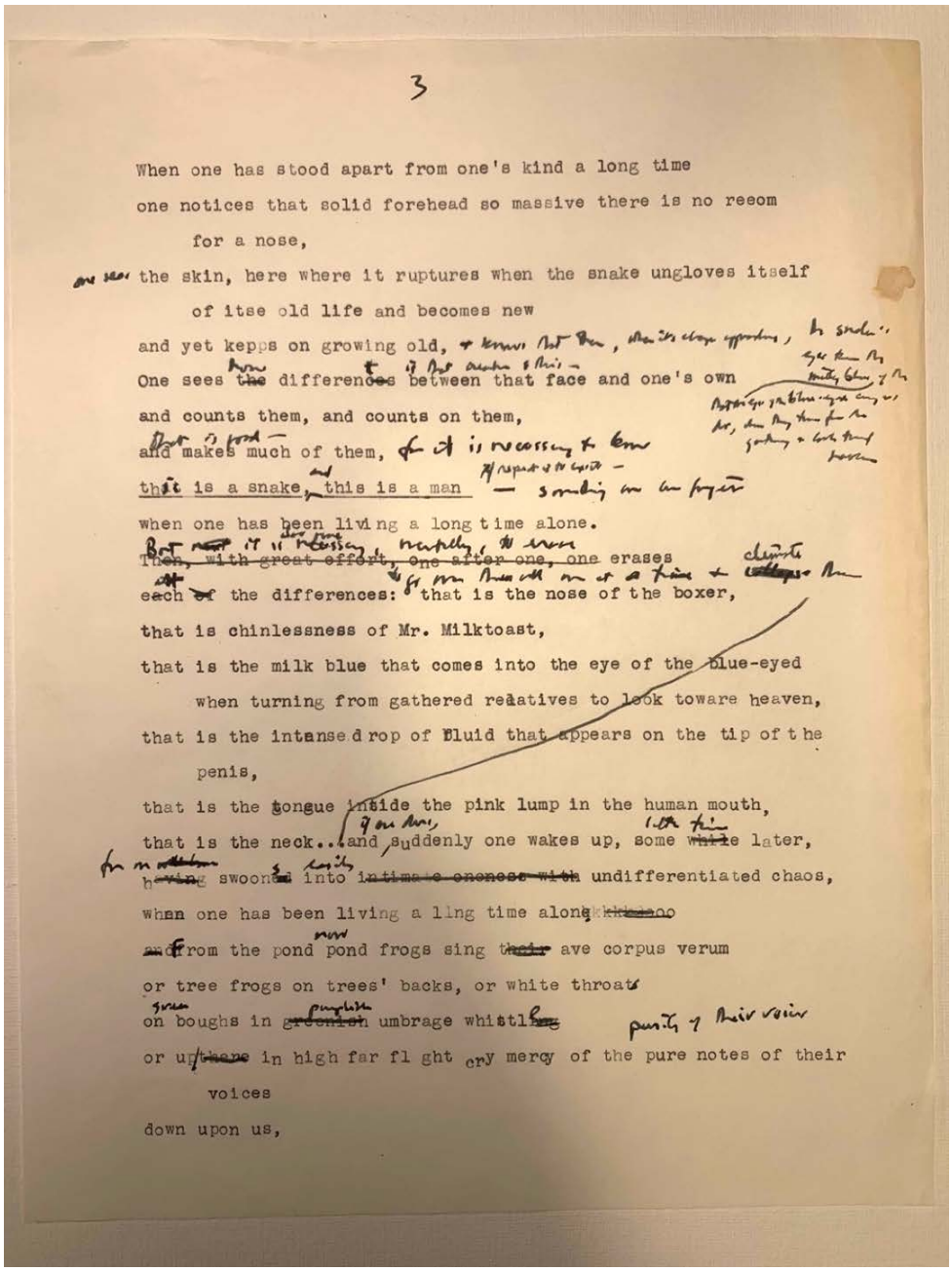
Preparatory notes for "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone"



Galway Kinnell, handwritten notes, 1989, Box 18, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 8

Manuscript draft "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone"



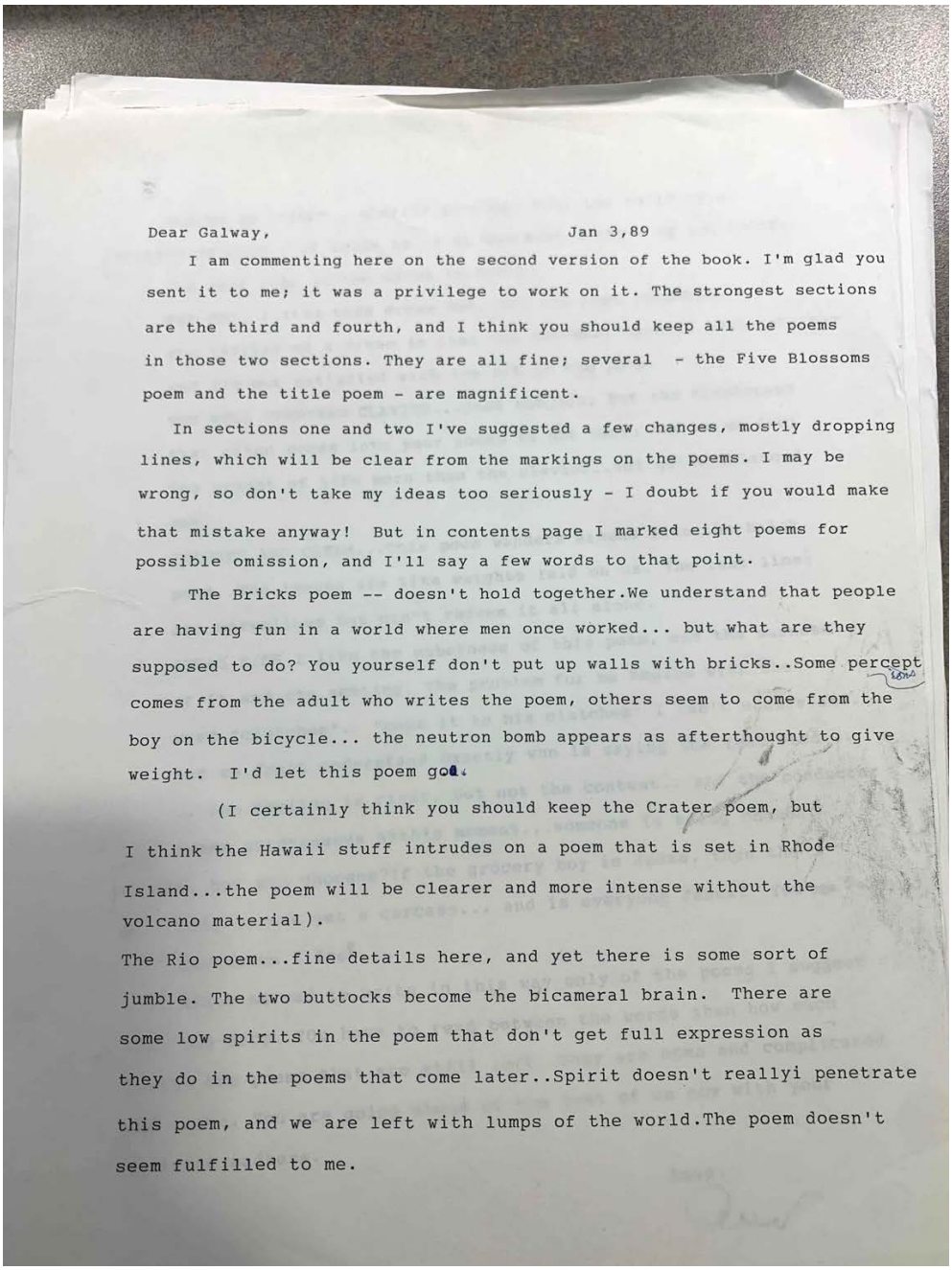
3

When one has stood apart from one's kind a long time
one notices that solid forehead so massive there is no reeom
for a nose,
the skin, here where it ruptures when the snake ungloves itself
of itse old life and becomes new
and yet kepps on growing old,
One sees the differences between that face and one's own
and counts them, and counts on them,
and makes much of them,
that is a snake, this is a man
when one has been living a long time alone.
Then, with great effort, one after one, one erases
each of the differences: that is the nose of the boxer,
that is chinlessness of Mr. Milktoast,
that is the milk blue that comes into the eye of the blue-eyed
when turning from gathered reaatives to look toware heaven,
that is the intanse drop of fluid that appears on the tip of the
penis,
that is the tongue inside the pink lump in the human mouth,
that is the neck.. and suddenly one wakes up, some while later,
having swooned into undifferentiated chaos,
when one has been living a ling time alone
and from the pond frogs sing their ave corpus verum
or tree frogs on trees' backs, or white throats
on boughs in umbrage whistle
or up there in high far flight cry mercy of the pure notes of their
voices
down upon us,

Galway Kinnell, "When One Has Lived a Long Time Alone" drafts (1989), Box 18, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 9A

Letter from Robert Bly to Galway Kinnell (3 January 1989)



Dear Galway, Jan 3,89

I am commenting here on the second version of the book. I'm glad you sent it to me; it was a privilege to work on it. The strongest sections are the third and fourth, and I think you should keep all the poems in those two sections. They are all fine; several - the Five Blossoms poem and the title poem - are magnificent.

In sections one and two I've suggested a few changes, mostly dropping lines, which will be clear from the markings on the poems. I may be wrong, so don't take my ideas too seriously - I doubt if you would make that mistake anyway! But in contents page I marked eight poems for possible omission, and I'll say a few words to that point.

The Bricks poem -- doesn't hold together.We understand that people are having fun in a world where men once worked... but what are they supposed to do? You yourself don't put up walls with bricks..Some percept comes from the adult who writes the poem, others seem to come from the boy on the bicycle... the neutron bomb appears as afterthought to give weight. I'd let this poem go.

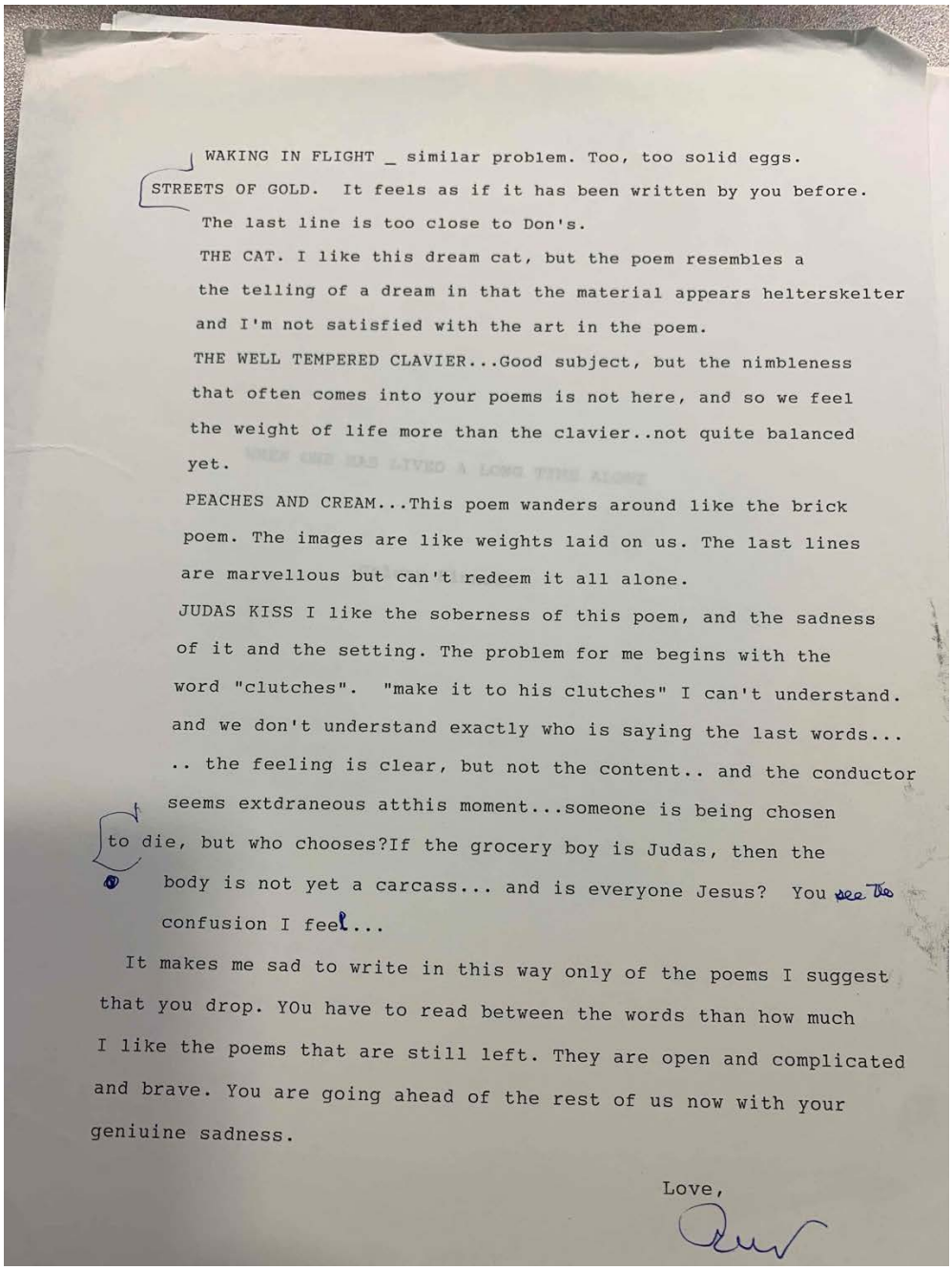
(I certainly think you should keep the Crater poem, but I think the Hawaii stuff intrudes on a poem that is set in Rhode Island...the poem will be clearer and more intense without the volcano material).

The Rio poem...fine details here, and yet there is some sort of jumble. The two buttocks become the bicameral brain. There are some low spirits in the poem that don't get full expression as they do in the poems that come later..Spirit doesn't reallyi penetrate this poem, and we are left with lumps of the world.The poem doesn't seem fulfilled to me.

Robert Bly to Galway Kinnell, letter, 3 January 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.

Appendix 9B

Letter from Robert Bly to Galway Kinnell (3 January 1989)



WAKING IN FLIGHT _ similar problem. Too, too solid eggs.
STREETS OF GOLD. It feels as if it has been written by you before.
The last line is too close to Don's.
THE CAT. I like this dream cat, but the poem resembles a
the telling of a dream in that the material appears helterskelter
and I'm not satisfied with the art in the poem.
THE WELL TEMPERED CLAVIER...Good subject, but the nimbleness
that often comes into your poems is not here, and so we feel
the weight of life more than the clavier..not quite balanced
yet.
PEACHES AND CREAM...This poem wanders around like the brick
poem. The images are like weights laid on us. The last lines
are marvellous but can't redeem it all alone.
JUDAS KISS I like the soberness of this poem, and the sadness
of it and the setting. The problem for me begins with the
word "clutches". "make it to his clutches" I can't understand.
and we don't understand exactly who is saying the last words...
.. the feeling is clear, but not the content.. and the conductor
seems extdraneous atthis moment...someone is being chosen
to die, but who chooses?If the grocery boy is Judas, then the
body is not yet a carcass... and is everyone Jesus? You see the
confusion I feel...
It makes me sad to write in this way only of the poems I suggest
that you drop. YOu have to read between the words than how much
I like the poems that are still left. They are open and complicated
and brave. You are going ahead of the rest of us now with your
geniuine sadness.

Love,

Robert Bly to Galway Kinnell, letter, 3 January 1989, Box 20, Galway Kinnell Papers, MC 64, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire, Durham, USA.