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Galway Kinnell: Adamic Poet and Deep Imagist.

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GALWAY KINNELL: ADAMIC POET AND DEEP IMAGIST

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by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. FIRST POEMS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. TRANSITION: MYTHIC TO ADAMIC POET</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. THE DEEP IMAGE</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. THE ADAMIC MODE AND THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. BLACK LIGHT</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Galway Kinnell experimented with a number of poetic stances before he developed the methods which he successfully employs in *The Book of Nightmares* (1971). Developing from the American transcendental tradition, he yearns for a spiritual transcendence. His concept of the "moment of illumination" is derivative of Emerson and Thoreau; however, his basic assumptions about nature separate him from this tradition. *First Poems 1946-1954* does not demonstrate this difference. Instead, it reflects Kinnell's experiments with conventional poetic devices. As Kinnell began to become dissatisfied with these devices, he began to experiment with the mythic mode. *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960) demonstrates Kinnell's attempt to use the Christian tradition as a source of material. Concluding this collection, the long poem "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" represents the culmination of this experiment.

Kinnell's development from a mythic to Adamic poet can be demonstrated in the transitions which occur in *What a Kingdom It Was* (1960), *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock* (1964), and *Body Rags* (1968). At the same time, Kinnell was also experimenting with deep imagist technique. By the time he had written *The Book of Nightmares*, he had become an
Adamic poet and a deep imagist.

Kinnell tried various means of transcendence. First, he experimented with the Christian tradition. When he felt that he had exhausted the possibilities of such a tradition in his poetry, he turned to the idea of bonds: men-women, men-men, men-beasts. Ultimately, he was disillusioned with these possibilities. Bonds with the supernatural seemed impossible, and bonds with living creatures seemed to be doomed by their limitations. The only remaining possibility for transcendence was in the concept of a self-redeeming persona.

The persona of The Book of Nightmares is such a character. He begins and ends his journey on the same site, but in the course of the poem he manages to define his own path. He saves himself from the world of nightmares. In the novel Black Light (1966), Kinnell had experimented with a similar journey motif. Jamshid, the protagonist, is a precursor of the persona of The Book of Nightmares. Because Jamshid fails to understand the power of his own perceptions, he fails to save himself. Kinnell's Adamic persona, on the other hand, comes to the realization that transcendence through his own consciousness is the best way to accept the fact of death.
INTRODUCTION

Roy Harvey Pearce in The Continuity of American Poetry has said,

In one sense . . . the history of American poetry is the history of an impulse toward antinomianism. . . . Or, from a related point of view: That history is the record of a gradual but nonetheless revolutionary shift in the meaning of "invention": from "coming upon" something made and ordered by God, to "making" and "ordering"—transforming—something, anything, into that which manifests above all man's power to make and to order. . . . The antinomian drive to accept only one's own testimony as to the worth and authority of the powers—that-be became the "Romantic" drive to testify that one can really know only one's own power, and yet that an element of such knowledge is the realization that all other men have this power too.¹

The antinomian impulse became an organizing principle in American life. Although the early colonists had sought to expunge it, it became, as Pearce says, a source of "meaning," manifesting itself cohesively in the idea of "community" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Men desired community because, as their own authorities, they felt alone.

In 1634 Mrs. Anne Hutchinson declared that the Elect did not need to prove their election. They were already defined by their conscience and were therefore not subject to the law. The Puritan community quickly realized the latent

dangers in such a view. If a man were the sole custodian of his testimony, what would become of the institutions that guided and contained him? The antinomian controversy projected a view that was larger than the Puritan view of man as a weak, despicable creature. If a man were his own authority, he was then free from other men. The Puritan fathers shrewdly cast Mrs. Hutchinson from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Yet the urge to define oneself did not disappear.

Pearce calls the poetic mode generated by such an impulse the Adamic mode. The Adamic poet yearns for community because he sees himself as the center of his world; that is, he sees himself as being alone. "Meaning" emanates from him. Every man is the center of his own circle. Walt Whitman, Hart Crane, and Wallace Stevens see the transforming powers of a man's search to make himself meaningful. The search constructs the meaning. Other poets, the Mythic poets, such as T. S. Eliot, use a traditional mythos to give themselves meaning.

Galway Kinnell is an Adamic poet and deep imagist. The course of his poetry reveals a search for self-definition, and the motivation for such a search is inevitably bound to a desire for self-transcendence. Robert Bly has said that the "new American poets" are "about half-free" because "their poetry tends to restrict itself to certain mapped out sections
of the psyche."\(^2\) Such poets have depended on Pound, Eliot, and Williams, Bly maintains, rather than regaining "that swift movement all over the psyche, from conscious to unconscious."\(^3\) A central problem for the new American poet, then, is the discovery of the means by which to explore the unmapped sections of the psyche.

The creative act becomes the means. "Writing poems is a solitary occupation," Kinnell said in an interview.\(^4\) A poet realizes that, if he is creating a voice at all in a poem, he is recreating his own voice in new terms. The poem becomes a dialogue between parts of the poet's self. When Kinnell was asked if he ever sent poems to friends for criticism, he replied:

> There are three or four people I send poems to. . . . I've never found my alter ego, however, the person I could absolutely rely on. I guess nobody does.\(^5\)

Then he admitted that he writes for an alter ego, his ideal reader, that is, himself.

In order for one to transcend his limited view of himself, he must reevaluate his relationship to the world. In *Nature* Emerson wrote,


\(^3\)Ibid., p. 12.


\(^5\)Ibid., p. 207.
Turn your eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture... a pleasure mixed with awe.6

A new perspective can produce a moment of vision. This is the result, Emerson says, of lining up one's axis of vision with the axis of the world.

The theory underlying Kinnell's poetry is that self-transcendence is possible, and his poems reveal the process in moments of what Kinnell calls "tragic illuminations." The reader experiences such an "illumination" when the poet reconciles the tension in the creative process. Kinnell says:

Each poem develops in a tension between an abstract "meaning" and its living details. The problem of structure, of architecture, is the problem of reconciling these two into a poem.7

The structure of a poem depends not only upon the reconciliation but also upon the evolution of dynamic forces within the poem. In other words, the structure depends on the theme as well as on the organic evolution of a unifying vision within the poem.

Kinnell is clearly a product of American transcendentalism in this respect. In "The Snow-Storm" Emerson allows the sun, like the poet, to melt away the "frolic


architecture of the snow" to reveal the greater underlying unity of all things. The "slow structures" that are built by the snow correspond to Emerson's poem which emerges in the creative process, "the mad wind's night-work." In the essay "The Poet," Emerson says that "what makes a poem" is a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal it has an architecture of its own, and adorns nature with a new thing. The thought and the form are equal in the order of time, but in the order of genesis the thought is prior to the form.®

For the transcendentalists, form must be organic: It must grow as the theme manifests itself. Horatio Greenough in "Relative and Independent Beauty" said that independent beauty does not exist. If an artist tries to "prolong the place of beauty into the epoch of action... false beauty or embellishment must be the result."™ F. O. Matthiessen in American Renaissance points out that this passage demonstrates Greenough's belief in the connection between art and action. Matthiessen seems to be suggesting that art and action or art and life cannot be divided.

The poet's problem is not so much to produce a "new thing" as Emerson suggested; moreover, the poet recreates a response: his awareness of the tension and the subsequent reconciliation of the primary correspondences. It is not surprising that Kinnell considers Walt Whitman the greatest

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®Whicher, p. 225.

American poet. In an article, "Whitman's Indicative Words," Kinnell wrote:

> An energy flows between Whitman and the thing. He loves the thing; he enters it, becomes its voice, and expresses it. But to enter a thing is to open oneself to it and let the thing enter oneself, until its presence glows within oneself. Therefore, when Whitman speaks for a leaf of grass, the grass also speaks for him. The light from heaven which shines in Whitman's poetry is often a consequence of these loving unions.\(^{10}\)

The light to which Kinnell refers is related to the "tragic illumination" that Kinnell himself tries to create in his own poetry. For Whitman and the transcendentalists, the moment of vision results from an appreciation of one of these "loving unions." In Section 2 of "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," Whitman speaks of

> The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme, . . . The glories strung like beads on my smallest sight and hearings.\(^{11}\)

The poet feels the great unity of all things—"the well-join'd scheme"—when he himself disintegrates; that is, when he is no longer himself, but something else, something that he has "entered" and become. In Section 8 of that poem, Whitman says:


What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face? Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?  

Not only is there a new "meaning" but there is also a new awareness of the older meanings: I am now a leaf. I know what the leaf is, and I know what I was. "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" ends with Whitman's words addressed to "objects":

> Keep your places, objects than which none else is more lasting
> ... beautiful ministers
> We use you, and do not cast you aside—we plant you permanently within us.

The appearances of objects—the phenomenal world—become beautiful ministers by becoming part of the perceiver or by allowing the perceiver to become part of them. Kinnell sees Whitman's emphasis on the importance of objects as being the same sentiment with which Rainer Maria Rilke writes in the Ninth Elegy of Duino Elegies:

> Here is the time for the Tellable . . .
> More than ever
> the things we can live with are falling away,
> and their place
> being oustingly taken up by an imageless act.

Rilke says that the poet must tell the angels about the world, the "tellable," not the "untellable" (nicht die unsägliche). Because man cannot hope to impress the angels with the glory of his feelings, man should astonish them by

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12Whitman, p. 124.  
13Ibid., p. 125.  
telling them of "things" (*Dinge*):

So show him

some simple thing, remoulded by age after age,
till it lives in our hands and eyes as a part
of ourselves.15

Rilke's *Duino Elegies* serve as the model for Kinnell's major
work *The Book of Nightmares*. Kinnell's original title for
this poem was "The Things," and he had intended to write a
poem about "real things" although he has confessed that *The
Book of Nightmares* "probably does try to tell the angels
about the glory of my feelings."16

Kinnell is concerned with how the "things" of the world
define him. In a sense, he is a poet of Nature. His view of
Nature derives from the tradition of American Transcenden­
talism. Kinnell's view of Nature is sometimes Emersonian.

In *Nature* Emerson says:

Philosophically considered the universe is
composed of Nature and the Soul. Strictly
speaking, therefore, all that is separate from
us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the
NOT ME, that is, both nature and art, all other
men and my body, must be ranked under this name,
NATURE.17

Man must look at himself "with new eyes," as Emerson says at
the end of that famous essay, in order to understand Nature,
the "Not Me." Kinnell searches in his poetry for self-
definition.

Kinnell's interest in a transcendental experience is

15Ibid., p. 77.  
16McKenzie, p. 209.  
17Whicher, p. 22.
related to his fascination with the attempt to authenticate the things of the world. He admires Theodore Roethke because Roethke's poems are full of "real things" and because Roethke is so closely linked with Whitman ("not because of form but because of his feeling for reality and his urgent need to express it"). In contrast, Kinnell reads Eliot but with less enthusiasm because he feels that there's something "withered" in Eliot's voice. "The physical world doesn't enter" Eliot's poetry, says Kinnell.

Kinnell searches the physical world for his own meaning through people and things. His poetry is based on an objective reality even when it reaches for spiritual answers. Like Emerson, however, Kinnell comes to be intrigued by subjective reality. In a skeptical moment, Emerson wrote:

> We have learned that we do not see directly, but mediately, and that we have no means of correcting these colored and distorted lenses which we are, or computing the amount of their errors. Perhaps these subject-lenses have a creative power; perhaps there are no objects... Nature and literature are subjective phenomena.

Can a man only know then what his "lenses" create? This creativity is what Roy Harvey Pearce calls "ordering"; that is, the antinomian drive to be one's own witness.

Poetry then is a two-way proposition. On the one hand, it restricts the poet's consciousness to his own being because it focuses attention on the most intimate relation-

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18McKenzie, p. 212.  
19Ibid., p. 209.  
20Whicher, p. 269.
ships: man and woman, man and man, man and beast, man and things. In each case there is one central intelligence which orders that which it takes in. On the other hand, poetry liberates the poet's consciousness by showing the poet that he is finally his own redeemer: his own liberator. The poet is freed from the authority of other men's visions and is capable of "making" or "transforming," as Pearce says, "something into that which manifests his power to make."

Yet the poet is not torn apart by these apparently opposing forces. The search for self does not necessarily lead to a futile disintegration of the personality, as T. S. Eliot believed. Charles Molesworth in an article, "James Wright and the Dissolving Self," maintains that the search may lead to a celebration of the self when, and only when, "the self . . . is willing to dissolve the ground of its own being." 21

The dissolution of the self leads to a celebration because it frees the searcher from the pre-ordered world of which he has been a part. Ezra Pound defined an image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." 22 When such a "complex" is presented instantaneously, "a sudden liberation" occurs, granting a "sense of sudden growth." The creation of an image is the


creation of a new meaning. In an early preface published in The Beloit Poetry Journal, Kinnell wrote, "Only meaning is truly interesting." Sherman Hawkins believes that Kinnell has more recently modified his definition of "meaning." In that early preface, Kinnell said that the meaning of a poem though it may be dimly predicted, emerges only in the creative act. The organizing principle comes into full being simultaneously with its embodying detail. In the successful process there is a unifying light, a single vision of meaning, what might be called its tragic illumination.23

But there is no creation if the "unifying light" does not work freely to move the poem to its moment of illumination. Sherman Hawkins calls the movement of Kinnell's later poems transfiguration or Platonic ascents. Hawkins sees a faint kinship with Yeats's system, and this similarity is not surprising since Kinnell himself has admitted the heavy influence of Yeats on his early poems. Yet more important is the similarity with the Platonic dialogue which Kinnell told Hawkins proceeds as a poem proceeds, using dialectic, images, characters. By the end of the whole thing has been raised to a new level: every statement is transformed, has a meaning beyond itself, like the phrases at the end of a great poem.24

At the beginning of Kinnell's poem "The Bear" (from Body Rags, 1968), the narrator says,


I sometimes glimpse bits of steam
coming up from
some fault in the old snow
and bend close and see it is lung-colored
and put down my nose
and know
the chilly, enduring odor of bear.

The poem begins with a new perspective—a bending toward the earth, reminiscent of Emerson's suggestion in *Nature*—that will lead to a moment of illumination, a final identification with the bear after what the narrator calls a "bear-transcendence," the result of sleeping within the slain bear's body. The narrator can then "rise up and dance" and "awaken." Through this awakening the narrator discovers in a moment of recognition the bond that joins man and bear. The movement of the poem follows the ascent of the narrator's consciousness. The conclusion of "The Bear" links "the rank flavor of [the bear's] blood" with "poetry . . . that sticky infusion . . . by which I lived." The structure of the poem depends upon the development of the transcendental experience. Poetry "infuses" meaning into the narrator's life; furthermore, the "infusion" is the force through which the narrator has lived. The final question of the narrator in "The Bear" --the rest of my days I spend/wandering: wondering"--is a question which arises out of his new meaning, the new identity that his experience has given him. His "tragic illumination" contains a reconciliation with reality ("I awaken I think"). He accepts that reality--"the sticky infusion"--by which he lives and also through which he can free himself. In the chapter "Higher Laws" in *Walden,*
Thoreau recalls a "strange thrill of savage delight" in his temptation to "seize and devour" a woodchuck that once crossed his path in the woods. But Thoreau sees the savage impulse as venerable as his instinct toward a spiritual life. He says, "I love the wild not less than the good."\textsuperscript{25}

Sherman Hawkins has called Kinnell a "religious poet without religion," that is, one whose idea of the sacred is not based on a traditional mythos. Kinnell's religious background is Congregationalist although he claims that his conception of transcendence derives from Plato and the Transcendentalists, particularly from Thoreau.\textsuperscript{26} Although Kinnell's poems sometimes refer to the person of Christ, they do not comfortably rely on the Christian myth any more than they rely on cornstalks in his "First Song" or sand dollars in "Sprindrift" or a girl, a blade of grass, or a star in "One Generation." The figure of Christ is another self with whom to establish a bond, one more source of meaning; but it is finally the poet's own vision, not Christ's or anyone else's, that establishes the meaning.

The poet annihilates his old footing in reality by creating a new one. Michael Hamburger in \textit{The Truth of Poetry} has said that much of the new American poetry has one


\textsuperscript{26}Hawkins, p. 63.
common feature: its dynamism.\textsuperscript{27} The process of art "apprehends objective realities." This is what Charles Olson means when in his essay "Projective Verse" he says that the poet must use the process "of one perception leading immediately and directly to a further perception" so that the poem will "move, instanter, on another."\textsuperscript{28} Olson uses the ungrammatical comparative "instanter" to indicate that the process is "another" kind of perception. In his essay "Proprioception" Olson writes that "identify" is "supplied" when the "ego is washed out"; that is, the poet apprehends objective realities by "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the ego."

This "washing out" of the ego is the willful dissolution that Molesworth claims leads poets such as James Wright to celebrate the self. In Olson's terms, the poem is not only an "energy-construct" but also an "energy-discharge."

The vector "carries . . . the form which makes one able . . . to issue from the 'content' . . . all the lightning."\textsuperscript{29} This vector is what Robert Bly calls the "deep image."


The "deep image," says Molesworth, connotes the non-discursive, the archetypal. This image is not attached to the surface of the poem. It is not a photographic detail. Kinnell has said that William Carlos Williams' adjectives remain at the surface of a poem. In one of Williams' most important poems, "The Red Wheelbarrow," almost everything concerning the poem depends upon the details of the image at the surface of the poem:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens

Critics such as Charles Molesworth and Louis Zukovsky have pointed out that it only takes Williams four words ("so much depends/upon") to shift the level from the surface to an understanding which includes the surface and "what is under it." But the famous image in "The Red Wheelbarrow" depends too much on the surface.

The reason that Kinnell prefers Whitman to Williams lies in the way in which Whitman's words are aimed not at the objects but into the objects. Williams' poem "Spring and All" moves toward the arrival of spring by a "quickening" revelation:

One by one objects, are defined--
It quickens: clarity . . .
Still, the profound change
has come upon them: rooted they
grip down and begin to awaken.

The poem reaches a kind of illumination, much closer to
Kinnell's ideal poem than is "The Red Wheelbarrow." The
descent into the ground suggests the attempt to identify the
life within the thing being apprehended. But Whitman reaches
into the object. Kinnell particularly admires this passage
from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

I too many and many a time cross'd the river of old,
Watched the Twelfth-month sea-gulls, saw them high
in the air floating with motionless wings,
oscillating their bodies,
Saw how the glistening yellow lit up parts of their
bodies and left the rest in strong shadow.
Saw the slow-wheeling circles and the gradual edging
toward the south,
Saw the reflection of the summer sky in the water,
Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,
Look'd at the fine centrifugal spokes of light
round the shape of my head in the sunlit water.

Kinnell says that Whitman is not interested in words
as words. Unlike Ezra Pound's "literary, referential, and
etymological" love of words, Whitman's interest is in words
as "entities which could only become physical through
absolute attachment to reality."

The sea-gulls in the
Whitman passage are defined by "their oscillating bodies."
The image is extended as they fly in "slow-wheeling circles,"
their bodies picking up the light as they move. Suddenly
the narrator sees the transfiguration: the "shimmering rack
of beams" become "centrifugal spokes of light" around his
head in the water. The image of the circle is the vector of

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force which carries the energy of this passage in the poem. The dissolution of one image into another is Olson's energy-construct-energy-discharge. The process is a non-discursive step. Kinnell says that, when Whitman is at his best, his words

\[
\text{do not merely try to categorize, give colors, shapes, likenesses. They try to bring into language the luminous, nearly unspeakable presence.}
\]

The words do not remain at the surface. In McKenzie's interview with Kinnell, Kinnell said that Williams' adjectives remain on the surface but that Whitman's "enter the thing and feel out some inner quality. . . . The adjective enters the things, or makes them live, or relates their lives to ours."31

In Whitman's poem the sun lights up the bodies of the sea-gulls and later dazzles the beholder's eyes. The "presence" of the image is "luminous" because it enlightens the poet and the reader to an apprehension of the life within the image and subsequently within the perceiver who finds himself within the image. The "presence" is "nearly unspeakable" because it is a primary confrontation: the non-discursive apprehension of the bond: sea-gulls and light, the beholder and light. The energy of the image is carried beneath the surface of the words so that what was true of the sea-gulls must be true of the beholder with his halo.

\[31\text{McKenzie, p. 215.}\]
But Whitman is not concerned with a description of either image for its sake alone. He is concerned with the process in which one discovers or creates his own ultimate meaning. Charles Olson has said, "Art does not seek to describe but to enact."32 Art attempts to authenticate one's experience, but it is more than an expression of one's consciousness. It becomes a means of discovering more than one's consciousness; that is, it leads into one's unconscious. Michael Hamburger believes that the recent trend in American poetry to return to Nature is "bound up with the need to get rid of 'ego systems.'"33 Olson, Duncan, and Creeley are examples of poets seeking to make "organization" of their poems "something more than an ego system."34

The poet seeks to enact a new meaning. Richard Howard says that Robert Bly

writes lines, with all that the linear implies of a setting out, a movement in search of a form rather than within a form.35

If American poets are turning again to Nature in an attempt to find more than an "ego system," many of them are nevertheless pursuing self-definition. James Dickey says,

All poetry . . . is nothing more or less than an attempt to discover or invent conditions under which one can live with oneself.36

33 Hamburger, p. 287. 34 Ibid., p. 286.
For Galway Kinnell, the pursuit of these conditions is also the pursuit of the transcendental experience.

Kinnell has said:

I often find myself floundering. My poems are attempts to find myself again. So I start off but I don't know where I'm going. I try this avenue and that avenue, that turns out to be a dead end, this is a dead end, and so on. The search takes a long time and I have to backtrack often.37

The bulk of Kinnell's poetry moves in this direction. His major poem The Book of Nightmares identifies itself at its conclusion as the "concert of one divided among himself." If the poet feels divided, he nevertheless sees a harmony among the parts of himself.

The central keys to understanding Kinnell's poems, then, lie in the two principal techniques which he uses to define himself. He is an Adamic poet and a deep imagist. Chapters II and III will be concerned with the experimentation with techniques through which Kinnell began to develop his own poetic voice in the Adamic mode and the deep image. Chapter II will show how Kinnell's early poems, particularly First Poems, were experiments with conventional poetic techniques. Chapter III will show how Kinnell developed from a mythic into an Adamic poet. Chapter IV will define the term "deep image" and show how Kinnell's use of this technique can be traced through the development from his early poems to more recent ones. Chapter V will demonstrate

37McKenzie, p. 217.
the Adamic mode through which Kinnell achieves his con-
summate poetic voice in *The Book of Nightmares*. And,
finally, Chapter VI will show how Kinnell's only novel was
another experiment which led him into *The Book of Nightmares*.
Kinnell's development has led him into the Adamic mode.
Without his discovery of this mode, he would never have
written his greatest work thus far, *The Book of Nightmares*. 
CHAPTER II

Kinnell's earliest poems reveal the marks of a young poet struggling to achieve a poetic identity. In his preface to *First Poems 1946-1954*, Kinnell speaks of the "energy" and "excitement" with which he wrote poetry before he was thirty years old. In the earliest poems this exuberance reveals a tension between Kinnell's desire to create poetry and his youthful inability to translate his energy into a distinctive poetic idiom. A major pitfall of young poets is that of writing what they think is expected; that is, young poets are especially vulnerable to conventional "poetic language."

The major themes of *First Poems* include disappointment in love, the search for a place of comfort, and the new awareness which results from awakening from a dream. "Two Seasons," "A Walk in the Country," and "Passion" are concerned with the loss of innocence which results from the discovery of the limitations of love. "Told by Seafarers" and "The Comfort of Darkness" show how the disappointed lover seeks a place of comfort to which he can retreat from the turbulence of experience. "Island of Night" and "Night Song" confirm the impossibility of a lasting comfort by showing that once one has awakened from his dreams he begins
to discover the extent of his loneliness. "A Winter Sky" reiterates this resulting new vision.

In Part I of First Poems, Kinnell tries to use conventional techniques to convey conventional themes. Neither the language nor the subject matter of these poems is particularly memorable, but it is in these early poems that the reader can see Kinnell searching for the context out of which he will later define his poetic persona. The context of these early poems is generally a natural setting: sunsets, children's games in the woods, moonlit nights, walks in the country, campfires, lovemaking in the sand. The most interesting poems of this group include those poems which deviate from the traditional natural setting: "Island of Night," "Conversation at Tea," and "Meditation among the Tombs." Another poem, "A Winter Sky," is also more successful than most of the collection because it suggests how Kinnell was beginning to break with the conventions which dominate his early work. The language of Kinnell's early poems ranges from the predictable seasonal images of "A Winter Sky" to the almost indecipherable hallucinatory images of "Island of Night." None of these poems are finally as distinctive as his later work, and in not even the most daring of these is there any of the intense starkness that characterizes Kinnell's best writing.

The poem "Two Seasons" exemplifies the basic problem of the early poems. Kinnell exerted metrical and structural control over the poem in a way which lays bare its theme in
two parts of two stanzas each and cramps its lines into a straining iambic pentameter scheme rhyming abbab/cddcd/etc. The theme is seasonal. Part 1 deals with summer evening; part 2, with winter morning. The summer season offers him an innocence that is defined by its wildness ("The stars were wild . . . And [I] found your silent woman's heart grown wild"). The wildness is generated by the fear of what is to come; that is, the consequence of breaking through innocence. His lover is "afraid" but speaks out because she is tired of innocence (of being "undefiled"). But the summer is "dying" and innocence is doomed to burn itself up like the stars that go "burning down the sky." The first part of this poem tries to bring together two opposing views: Innocence is wearisome but it is also exciting. The chief image of the stars going wild and burning themselves out is embarrassingly simplistic in light of the problem that it pretends to solve: The narrator sees falling stars in his lover's every gesture or word. His excitement is reflected in nature.

The second part of this poem again succumbs to the pathetic fallacy when the lover's emotions are "blown about in fitful winds." The seasonal change now juxtaposes winter's "wasting" experience to summer's "dying evening." His lover's heart is now "worn," no longer weary but also no longer wild. The sadness of part 1 is echoed in part 2 when the lover's eyes tell the narrator that she wishes that she could regain her innocence. Again the most prominent image
is unoriginal: Innocence is lost and the defiled lover wishes to be pure again, "white and silent as the snow."

Here, as in many of Kinnell's early poems, a conventional image is expected to convey a conventional theme under the burden of supposedly conventional poetic diction. "Two Seasons" is heavily alliterative in a way which is frequently distracting: "the low lake," "were wild," "were weary," "Watching the wind," "smoke snow," "Burst beauty," "wasting winter's," "worn heart wished . . . it white," and "silent as the snow." The lake does not benefit by being "low." The bursting of beauty seems more a continuation of violation than of the resolution that he seems to be trying to suggest in the ensuing winter (and now like spring) season. The "smoking" wind casting the snow across suggests a paradoxical coupling of heat and cold that Kinnell uses in later poems for a different effect but here seems merely to have arisen from the unfortunate occasion of repeating the "s" sound.

His choice of words in these poems too often seems uneven. In "A Walk in the Country," he attempts to be colloquial when he writes, "She said it was nice. It was." But in the same poem he uneconomically uses a metaphor that one might find in greeting-card verse. He refers to his lover as "What only an arm held close." His closeness to the woman emerges as he senses what she appreciates in their walk, the "niceness" of the day. Despite the ripening berries and rickety horses, the poem suffers from a vagueness
implicit in Kinnell's diction. He does not convince the reader that the narrator is walking simply "to please." Instead, by the end of the poem, the narrator suggests in a way different from the woman's that he vaguely intuits "Beauty" and the day's "niceness" when he speaks of the "shortness/That makes us all and under like that grass." The line sounds very much like the Gerard Manley Hopkins' prepositive attributive—"Of the rolling level underneath him steady air" in "The Windhover"—and the syntactical complexity conflicts with the colloquial idiom of "She said it was nice. It was." The poem reveals an unevenness of diction and syntax while at the same time it strains to convince the reader of an experience, a moment of "illumination," that only the more mature Kinnell will be able to write about more convincingly.

"Passion" is a poem that seems to be an extension of "A Walk in the Country." At the end of the walk, the lovers "whisper of their love" in a conventionally romantic setting: stars, embers, pine-needled ground. The poem ends ambiguously with a reference to a "light out of the east" falling on the scene. The reference has been preceded by the assertion that the stars are fixed in their right course. If, then, one of the stars falls when the dove cries out over the lovers, the narrator must "search" with "newness" for "the passion of the stars." Here is one of the major themes of the early poems. The "new eyes" reflect the awakening from innocence, from the dream. But, if the light
refers to the sun's rising in the east, then the passion of the stars is obscured and the eyes will not find what they are searching for. It seems in either case that the darkness, that is, the innocence, suggests the way to the sensation of seeing with "new eyes" that which is being extinguished, the "extinguished sight" or the light of and therefore the "passion of the stars." The poem "The Comfort of Darkness" uses the same image to develop this theme. The narrator is passing into the dream world as the bird-like darkness flies in and attacks his heart with "cold talons." In the cold innocence he turns to his lover whose "bright hands" dissolve the "cries" of the darkness. Again, experience removes the wild threat of innocence by utilizing the energy of that innocence. The narrator is left in repose, weary from his struggle as in "Two Seasons."

The motif of the place of comfort repeats itself in "Told by Seafarers" in the reference to the lovers lying together in the "grass oasis," and once again the vision comes through distorting lenses, a medium through which the narrator must search to see clearly. Here the distortion comes through the sea's distortion of the image of the moon on the water. In "The Feast" it is purple light in which the shapes "flash and fade" that transforms the love feast from one state, bodies in the sand, to another, the imprint left in the sand. Similar transformations are brought about by the "flute of memory" in "Passion" or "the light falling endlessly from you, like rain" in "The Comfort of Darkness."
or "that wistful part of you, your sorrow" in "Two Seasons."
In each case the distortion occurs as a change in time. Each experience is translated from one moment to another, generally a movement that is derivative of the impulse to find a more comfortable state, an idyllic place such as the oasis in "Told by Seafarers." But the movement does not guarantee satisfaction. In fact, the result is more often than not in these poems a failure to achieve full satisfaction.

The seasonal changes reflect the cyclic nature of the quest, just as making love implies an act that reaches a culmination, a turning point in the experience. The poems roughly follow the same scheme: this moment, that moment. Thus, the idea of a dream works well in "Island of Night" which begins in the dream world, the world of innocence that fascinated the young Kinnell, and moves into the world of being awake, the place where the comfort has been taken away. But "Island of Night" succeeds even less than the other poems of the group because its hallucinatory imagery is pulled back near the end and the poem becomes another hymn of praise to love:

I awoke
And touched you and your eyes opened
Into the river of darkness around us
And we were together and love happened.

The "beautiful island" of the narrator's dream is invaded by a sudden burst of color that comes with the hooves of the black horses thundering across the desert. The narrator finds love in his awakened state, here in the darkness, and
asserts afterward his amazement that nature, "the down-tearing gods" (the black horses that rush at him in the dream), allows him to construct his place of repose—the "islands of night"—in the midst of the gods' descent from the dark caves into the desert. But Kinnell becomes so preoccupied with the juxtaposition of his images of rising and descending that he ends the poem with an ornamentally overloaded couplet:

The down-tearing gods, who also let us lift
These islands of night against their downward drift.

In this poem that is syntactically direct ("I saw in a dream . . . it was night . . . I awoke"), a conclusion that jars the mind back and forth seems to break the tone of amazement by reverting to the surrealistic technique introduced by the hallucinatory image of the horses. Kinnell has two kinds of syntax and diction working against the unity of a poem that contains one of the most potentially interesting images in his early poems. The repose at the end is thematically related in its uneasiness to his other poems of this period, yet here the conclusion seems to disrupt the tone of the poem, not simply the repose in the experienced narrator's mind.

A poem which lies at the other extreme is "Night Song." It possesses none of the imaginative imagery of "Island of Night" but concludes its dreamlike development with a similar didactic awakening: "And I know the lonely are afraid in their beds." This line is thematically related to "I do not wonder that men should bless/The down-tearing
gods." In each poem the moment of awakening relates the character's position to the loneliness of other men. The character is able to understand why men fear or believe when they are facing such loneliness. Yet in "Night Song" the narrator is more confused. "I cannot think who is guilty/One or the other, both." The spinning phonograph record corresponds to the black horses in its suggestion of an image that moves in on the narrator's mind, but the narrator's dream is not equated with innocence. The fragment of the song on the record suggests that the narrator has already experienced pain: "leaving me/Blue blue Jezebel." He has been left behind by the woman and is no longer certain why he is in his present state; that is, the question of guilt or innocence is unresolved. The poem turns in its second part to the opposed state, here represented by the rain outside. The poem concludes with a series of images of those that "get pity": the poor, the unfed, the unsheltered. The only resolution of the poem is the realization of the narrator that "the lonely are afraid in their beds." The poem ends apparently in the same place where it began, and the problem suggested in the first line goes unanswered. Whereas "Island of Night" suffers from a profusion of complicated images, "Night Song" suffers from a lack of development. Yet both poems deal with the same theme, for the latter poem is surely another representation of the island on which the lonely must live.

Of these early poems "A Winter Sky" more typically
places the sight of the narrator's "new" vision in the context of making love. The first two stanzas echo his early technique, the first stanza beginning "Behind," the second, "Before." What lies behind the lovers is the "gold of a great season," fall, represented "Behind our back" as "the golden woods." The lovers are resting by the woods, apparently after a high point in their love-making season. They are watching the "dying afternoon," the passing of their energy in experience. In contrast, in front of them lies the brown marsh, waste, and dry grass. As hunters are watching for ducks, the lovers are watching the sky for the passing of this season.

At the core of the poem, structurally the third of five stanzas, the lovers are carried away with the moment and falsely believe that there will be no end to their season. But the poem shifts to the "other" vision. One of two ducks flying across the sky is shot by a hunter and it falls "like snow in winter." The other duck neither looks back at nor understands the loss of its partner, and so it continues its flight "alone in winter." The duck is like the persona that is emerging in these poems. The poet or lover experiences one moment, one season, and flies on to another, but unlike the duck the persona sees or tries to understand that which he has passed through. The poem concludes with the lovers' departure from the scene, the empty sky emblematic of the empty winter season that lies ahead for them.
"A Winter Sky" contains all of the themes of this early period. It is seasonal; the main characters are lovers; the narrator "sees" through a distorting lens the difference between one moment and another. It also contains some of the typical techniques of the other early poems: poetic diction, traditional images, and conventional rhyme and structure.

The language of this poem is typical of Kinnell's early work. The "dying afternoon" here echoes the "dying summer" of "Two Seasons." The "long, beautiful fall" again echoes the "beauty of your spirit," as it echoes the "beautiful island" of "Island of Night." The "golden light" is related to the "purple light" in "The Feast." In fact, every poem of this group except "Told by Seafarers" and "The Comfort of Darkness" refers to lovers talking, walking, and remembering, and those two exceptions refer to lovers lying together under the spell of a movement through the darkness (darkness sweeping through the streets in "The Comfort of Darkness" and children going to sea on the moonlit water in "Told by Seafarers"). The language of "A Winter Sky" also contains some of the problems of the other poems. He vacillates between outworn images—"beautiful fall" and "dusky light"—and more intricate wordplay—"And the hunters' blinds were watching/For traffic on the blinded marsh" (the kind of problem that weakened the conclusion of "Island of Night"). Once again his images do not completely succeed: "Fall covered the land like a winter" suggests the latent
death in fall, but the simile, using one season to develop another, seems too narrow to be interesting; that is, it does not really extend itself through a new correspondence. In contrast, the metaphor of the wind smoking snow in "Two Seasons" seems to have gone too far in the other direction; that is, the correspondence is strained, "smoke (heat) creating an unnecessary tension with "snow" (cold).

"A Winter Sky" seems, however, to be the most successful poem of the early period, and Kinnell has put it at the end of Part I in *First Poems*, perhaps because in its relative simplicity it signals the way for the starkness that readers will find in his later work. The poem is less ornamental than the others. Alliteration, for example, is less obtrusive, the most heavily alliterative line in this poem being "Cattails, waste of the close-cropped marsh."

"A Winter Sky" is both thematically and structurally interesting. Thematically, it represents a statement of the motif of the narrator's search for a context by which to define himself. In "Two Seasons" he searches his lover's eyes and voice for an answer that she does not give willingly. He sees the answer as regret in her eyes. He does not yet understand the nature of his question. In "A Walk in the Country," he senses the same distance from his lover, but now he listens to the "green" around him and he hears an answer from the meadowlark and "other thing" that "speak sharp of shortness," that is, that speak distinctly but succinctly of the level at which he, his lover, and the
grass give meaning to one another. The equality which "makes us all and under like that grass" is the common denominator which answers his question in the first stanza of that poem. Why does not Beauty touch us equally? The answer implied in the poem is that people must listen for answers. The first stanza suggests, "Let's walk where birds glide." Kinnell is referring to the necessity of seeing with "new eyes," as he says in "Passion."

His first definitions of self are, naturally enough for a young poet, sexual and elemental. The fair girl that the narrator lies with in "Told by Seafarers" learns with him "how the sea rises," but a more important concern of this poem is what nature teaches about life:

When the moon lies full on the sea  
It is a time when the life-bearers

Abound in the deep, and a pillar  
Of water from the rocking sea  
Rises, as the god sea  
To the moon is an unerring sailor.

The god teaches that the lovers lie in an oasis but that they must realize that they may be deceived by the sea's disguises. A wave may look like a pillar or water threatening the seafarer unless he realizes how the elements may distort the phenomenal world, for example in this poem with the "sea's disguises."

The poem "Passion" demonstrates how the elements may work in conjunction with the body. "Overhead the stars stood in their course." The lovers' bodies are touching. The "whisper" of their love is the only sound they need, but
it joins with the noise of a small animal which sounds like the breath of the narrator's lover.

"The Feast" and "The Comfort of Darkness" both depend on the image of body heat to demonstrate how the narrator feels his identity merging with his lover's. "Your bright hands [melting] into mine" in "The Comfort of Darkness" and the sand turning cold and the body warming in "The Feast" demonstrate the extension of the narrator's image of himself. But in both poems Kinnell uses the elements to explain the merging: "Light falling endlessly from you, like rain" in "The Comfort of Darkness" and "A few pebbles wearing each other/Back into sand [that] speak in the silence" in "The Feast."

All of the poems in Part I of First Poems are concerned with a basic shift of perception which suggests the seeds of what is later to become Kinnell's poetic persona. The structures of these poems generally reveal this shift. The modified Italian sonnet "Island of Night" is perhaps the clearest example. The octave is concerned with the dream; the sestet, with the awakened state. "The Comfort of Darkness" is also divided into two parts. The first part (ababcddc) shows how darkness acted in the past ("swept," "Closed," "sank") to terrify the narrator's dream. The second part (efefghgh) provides the shift to conditional verbs ("Could stay," "Could melt"). He finds a new terror to awaken him, the comfort of darkness (the "ice-cold, unfreezable brine"), to melt the old terror (the darkness of
his dream). "A Walk in the Country" is divided into three stanzas, each with its own rhyme scheme, but each stanza has a grammatical construction that points out the way to the theme: stanza 1, "only me"; stanza 2, "What only an arm held close"; stanza 3, "only in the close/Green around me."
The progression is from the narrator to his lover and finally to nature where his new perception is the only answer that he can find in this poem to explain the differences between himself and his lover. "Told by Seafarers" uses a structure similar to that of "Two Seasons": two parts of two stanzas each. This poem focuses first on what "is told by seafarers" and then finally on what the narrator and the girl can perceive as they lie together in the idyllic place of comfort, the oasis. "The Feast" is more complicated in that it moves from two lovers in its first section to an elemental correspondence in the pebbles of the second stanza to the lovers' shapes left in the sand, suggesting in the third stanza that the feast is over. One moment has passed, leaving it a relic in the sand. Kinnell writes in the last stanza, "If love had not smiled we would never grieve."
Once again, he is concerned with loss. Yet the perception after the loss helps him to appreciate what has happened.

The structure of "A Winter Sky" contains this basic pattern opposing one moment to another. The rhyme scheme helps to reinforce the theme by repeating the words in the first, third, and fifth lines of each stanza, each of the first four stanzas using a characteristic word ("woods,"
stanza 1; "marsh," stanza 2; "fall," stanza 3; "winter," stanza 4). Each stanza represents a period of stasis within a larger cycle, yet in the fifth stanza this scheme is violated so that the first, third, and fifth words become "woods," "march," and "bird." Thus, though the seasons seem to offer continuity ("There is never an end to fall."), the poem breaks open at its conclusion with "the sky empty without cloud or bird." This technique is not especially characteristic of Kinnell's poetry in general, but it does demonstrate an attempt to relieve his poems of the prosodic tightness that he was developing. In his preface to First Poems, Kinnell refers to "those arduous searches for the right iambic beat and the rhyme word" in his early writing that "seem now like time which could have been better spent."¹

Thus, "A Winter Sky," coming at the end of Part I of First Poems, seems to signal a kind of turning point in Kinnell's development; however, he did not yet suddenly begin to follow the course that this poem suggests. There still remained techniques that he would experiment with before achieving his mature idiom.

It seems clear that Kinnell did not realize the direction that he would be following. "A Winter Sky" concludes Part I of First Poems with a kind of uncertain

experimentation that is apparent in the two poems that comprise Part III, "Conversation at Tea" and "Meditation among the Tombs."

In First Poems, Kinnell is generally ambivalent toward the shift in perception. The shift results from a disappointment, but it also suggests a change which brings knowledge. In "Conversation at Tea," the growing disillusionment convinces the persona that his "war on every grain God made" will somehow keep him from being annihilated:

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.

The persona is Kinnell's version of J. Alfred Prufrock. The echoes from Eliot's poem are obvious. Kinnell's character wonders if his words are Prince Hamlet's. Then he says, "Do not ask who said them first." The authoritarian voice in Kinnell's poem is an adaptation of Prufrock's shakey voice: "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'/Let us go and make our visit." Kinnell's character drinks tea and wonders about old age, and rather more forcefully than Prufrock—"For I have known them all already, known them all"—he says, "I have been all these hearts, and more." Like Prufrock he says, "I am old" but concludes not that he is an old fool wearing the bottoms of his trousers rolled but that he is an old man who is wise from his experience in "waging w.r" against life: "I am old/
But quite perceptive."

"Conversation at Tea" emphasizes the old man's new awareness of the folly of his earlier illusions, particularly
concerning friendship. The character goes through a list of friends with whom he is no longer close. He is alone in his old age, "conversing with an angel," not with men. One particularly interesting image reiterates the disappointment which necessarily seems to follow the new awareness:

as if
Your dreams had lain
In puddles, stained
By themselves, like cigarette [sic] butts in the rain.

The image is interesting in that it demonstrates one of the first attempts to throw off the convention of poetic diction. The soggy cigarette butts are like the tea which the character says is getting cold. More importantly, they are like the friendships which lose their strength in time. Thus, a couplet found in the middle of the poem loses its strength by the poem's conclusion: "Let's agree, now we are together,/Friendship is forever." The conclusion confirms the character's new vision. Friendship is simply an illusion from which one must wake. Furthermore, the tone of the conclusion is oddly optimistic:

[When] poet-men . . . sing like lords
Of giant-gods who pace
The mountain-tops. Then I will write my peace.

The character's disillusionment with human relationships does not prevent him from hoping that he can create his peace by writing poetry. This combination of optimism is characteristic of the early Kinnell who tried to find peace through a reconciliation of natural forces.

This attempt is obvious in the poem "Meditation among
the Tombs." The conclusion of this poem allows the persona to see both the sun and the moon in the sky at the same time. Charles Bell has said that this poem was Kinnell's first serious attempt at poetry and that Kinnell, still under the heavy influence of Yeats, carried this poem around, revising it for a number of years, particularly during his undergraduate days at Princeton University. The polar images of sun and moon lead the persona to conclude, "We are not misers in our misery." The reconciliation of opposites reaffirms Kinnell's youthful hope that his pain will not be fruitless. A reference to Yeats' gyres suggests that there is a point beyond which pain will no longer be pain:

as you near
The end, the furrows of your age will disappear
And everything that prods you to a sudden grave
Will take a counterclockwise turn,
Strange reversal you will learn,
Until your limbs are youthful, and your heart's brave.

Section 3 of the poem suggests the dilemma forced upon the character by the aging process, in other words, by the transitoriness of existence. This section consists of a dialogue between an old man and a youth. The old man tells of the loss of his wife in childbirth. The doctors had given him a choice between the unborn child and the wife's safety in a dangerous delivery--"a dead creation or a dying love." The old man obviously chose the "dead creation" because section 4 addresses the youth as "my child." The old man's vision includes the misery of experience, his wife's death, but he also sees the continuation of life. The child's survival is a sign of the cycle which finally
convinces the old man that men do not have to be "misers in their misery." The epigrammatic play on words is another example of Kinnell's early experimentation with conventional poetic devices. More importantly, however, the phrase suggests Kinnell's recurring desire to find order in the universe.

In First Poems this desire was a handicap. Kinnell's use of traditional poetic devices as well as his attempts to convince the reader of the genuineness of his awakening experiences in Nature work against the success of these early poems. Kinnell had not yet defined either himself or Nature sufficiently to write convincingly about an experience that he was very much still trying to achieve. He was more successful when he broke through these handicaps, as he did in the imagery of "Island of Night" or in the less rigidly prosodic experiment in "A Winter Sky." The limitations of his early poetry suggest that Kinnell was struggling toward a vision that was basically not comfortable within the confines of his early poetic techniques.
CHAPTER III

Charles Bell, Kinnell's friend and mentor, once said that of the poets born in the 1920's and 1930's Kinnell "is the only one who has taken up the passionate symbolic search of the great American tradition."¹ The claim is a gross overstatement, but Kinnell is, above all else, a searcher. Ralph J. Mills, Jr., has said that for poets such as Roethke, Berryman, Wright, Sexton, and Plath

the pursuit of personal vision often leads toward a precipitous, dizzying boundary where the self stands alone, unaied but for its own resources. . . . the poet . . . is thrown back upon his own perceptions. His art must be the authoritative testimony to a man's own experience.²

In the development of Kinnell's poetry, this search has been modified from a mythic vision to an Adamic one. In his early poetry he consistently falls back on the Christian mythos. This poetic mode reached its culmination with the poem "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World" at the conclusion of What a Kingdom It Was (1960).


The more he experimented with this mode, the more dis- satisfied he became. Even in this early collection, Kinnell was searching for a more satisfying way to define his poetic voice. A large number of poems demonstrate this attempt in the frequent appearance of the theme of bonds. Going beyond the simplistic "bonds" of First Poems, Kinnell expands his vision by analyzing his relationships with people and animals. As The Book of Nightmares demonstrates, such bonds are not sufficient. The poet yearns for something more reliable. Thus, without God, humans, or beasts, the poet turns to himself. Rejecting the mythic mode and realizing the limitations of bonds, Kinnell then turns to the Adamic mode. The development of this mode is found in Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock (1964), but it reaches its fruition in The Book of Nightmares. The appearance of the antinomian urge to be one's own authority is surely indicative of what Bell means by his overstated claim.

Kinnell's use of Christian mythology defeated itself. He tried to draw on a tradition which is alien to his basic philosophical stance. Donald Davie sees the problem in this way:

Galway Kinnell is a man who hungers for the spiritual, who has no special capacity for spiritual apprehensions, who has been culturally conditioned moreover to resist the very disciplines that might have opened him up to the spiritual apprehensions he hungers for.3

Yet Davie's criticism is too simplistic. Even though Davie pretends to dismiss philosophical differences, still he accuses Kinnell of being "morally ambiguous." A fairer criticism would seem to be based on Kinnell's lack of irony, rather than on his failure to approach Christianity on adult terms. Charles Molesworth has said that post-Modernist poetry runs the risk of being sentimental since it lacks the sting of irony. As a result of this decreased irony, even when Kinnell is not sentimental, he runs the additional risk of a didacticism which Molesworth says is sometimes close to the "evangelical."

The early poems repeat Kinnell's theme of desire for an absolute in which to believe. The title of What a Kingdom It Was suggests the development of Kinnell's attitude toward Christian tradition. For Kinnell the kingdom no longer exists. Though Kinnell feels that the Christian church is a dead institution, Christianity offers the poet a way of looking at existence. Kinnell's apocalyptic vision develops from a context which, ultimately for him, will not support itself. Instead of directing his attention toward a supreme being, Kinnell develops his poetic stance from the birth of the self, not from the death of self which


6Ibid., p. 238.
Christianity demands. Thus, from his earliest poems, Kinnell tries to use an idiom which is antithetical to his ontology. "Easter," "First Communion," "The Supper after the Last," and "To Christ Our Lord" are four examples from *What a Kingdom It Was* which demonstrate how Kinnell's use of the Christian mythos was a mistake from the beginning. Even prior to this collection is "Primer for the Last Judgment," an example from *First Poems*. In these five poems, Kinnell's desire for transcendence is frustrated and the results are polemical. These attempts do, however, lead Kinnell into the long poem "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World." The success of this poem depends in part on the mythic structure. Even more important to Kinnell's development, however, is the dead end to which this poem brings him. It signals the exhaustion of Kinnell's use of the mythic mode.

Underlying the mythic poems is Kinnell's dissatisfaction with the realities of Christianity. "Primer for the Last Judgment" is divided into two parts. The first part is concerned with the promise of Christianity to save the men at the time of the apocalypse. Men wait for the Last Judgment with the hope that they will be saved. The second part of the poem demonstrates how the realities of war are proof that men's hopes are vain. The juxtaposition of the promise with the denial of its worth draws out the lesson for the reader. The poem as a "primer" teaches that the Last Judgment will not be followed by salvation but by
"liquidation." The poem "Easter" teaches the same lesson. This poem juxtaposes the drowning of a nurse with an Easter sermon. Kinnell tries to comfort those who listen to the sermon: "Do not . . . be all together sorry/That the dream has ended." For Kinnell the dream is the illusion of the resurrection. The promise of Christianity has dissolved, and salvation—"grace"—may be discovered in life, "the floating days" rather than in an after-life. In the poem "First Communion," a child's disillusionment results from his realization of the distance between what he wishes to feel after receiving communion and what he does feel as a result of hearing family gossip. The realities of his relatives' vices make the child doubt the redeeming capabilities of the ritual. Jesus becomes a "pastry wafer"; the church, "a disappointing shed." Jesus assumes a more powerful role in "The Supper after the Last," but he becomes a "bearded/Wild man guzzling overhead" who finally turns into a mirage. The last supper consists of rosé and chicken; the promise of the resurrection becomes only the promise of death:

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.

Kinnell's denunciation of Christ is not satirical. It is the straightforward language of a diatribe: "You are the flesh; I am the resurrection, because I am the light." In "the Descent" Kinnell again uses straightforward Biblical
texts: "In the cry [of the fisherbird] Eloi! Eloi! flesh was made word." But Kinnell seems to realize the shallowness of his Christian poetry because in this poem he tries to achieve an irony which is missing in most of these poems. Christ's last words were "Eloi! Eloi!" The Gospel of John says that the Word was made flesh in the beginning. Thus, at the "end," Kinnell reverses the process: The flesh becomes the "word." The flesh is finality. The symbol of Christ "stands in a desolate sky." There is no salvation; there is only death. An earlier poem, "To Christ Our Lord," also uses a bird to symbolize Christ (obviously a debt to Hopkins' "The Windhover" from which the title is taken). A young boy kills the bird on Christmas morning to eat it for the holiday meal. He finally eats the sacramental meal but has to force himself due to "his stricken appetite." The loss of appetite suggests the boy's repulsion for a dead Christ-symbol on the feast of Christ's nativity. The presence of death ruins the day for him, and it will destroy his belief in God. There are no absolute answers to the boy's questions. "He wondered again/. . . and nothing answered." In each of these poems, Kinnell uses the language of Christianity to announce his dissatisfaction with its claims.

Sherman Hawkins sees two advantages in Kinnell's use of Christian myth: (1) In contrast to Yeats's system, Christianity is a "public mythology" and (2) "exploitation
of such a mythology need not imply belief." On the other hand, Donald Davie sees a liability in a poet's exploitation of a system of beliefs which the poet does not embrace. Davie says, "A poet who thrashes about in a manifest self-contradiction cannot but do damage to the language he bends to his purposes." For Kinnell the limitations outweigh the advantages. The chief reason for Kinnell's failure in these poems is his evangelical tone. Even though Modernists like T. S. Eliot use a myth which they may not believe in, they gain force by their ironical use of language, as Molesworth demonstrates. Kinnell's seriousness, as a result, dulls these poems without compensating for the tension which Modernists achieve with irony. When Kinnell succeeds, as in "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," the success is, moreover, a result of his experiment with forms rather than of his handling of the mythic mode.

Hawkins points out the basic Platonic structure of Kinnell's early poems: a progression of physical detail toward symbolic meaning. Such a structure focuses the force of the poem on a moment of insight. Yet Kinnell was essentially moving away from such predetermined conceptions of form. The moment of insight arose more in the course of the poem's "progress" than from a startling moment of

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8Davie, p. 21.
revelation at the poem's conclusion. Kinnell once said that "The Supper after the Last" was significant point of departure in his development. He included this poem as his choice in Paul Engle and Joseph Langland's Poet's Choice. His explanation for the choice indicates what he was moving toward:

I mean this poem [makes a fresh start] towards a poem without scaffolding or occasion, that progresses through images to a point where it can make a statement on a major subject.9

Only in the light of Kinnell's use of the deep image does this statement make sense, for Kinnell's Christian poems actually depend upon the mythic scaffolding, especially in "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World."

"The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World," published as the conclusion to What a Kingdom It Was, demonstrates the basic difficulties in Kinnell's use of the mythic mode. This long, ambitious poem is divided into fourteen sections roughly corresponding to the fourteen stations of the cross. Each section corresponds to an intersection on the Avenue C in New York City. Avenue C is one of the worst parts of Manhattan, a slum filled with poor Jews and Puerto Ricans. Like the Biblical "manger," it is a paradoxical place for Christ to appear. The theme of the

poem concerns the desire for deliverance, and Kinnell uses a
walk along Avenue C as a metaphor for the search for this
deliverance. The mythic structure of this poem, however, is
not simple.Unlike Kinnell's other Christian poems, "The
Avenue" is heavily ironic. If the poem succeeds, the success
depends upon its satirical elements, but even in this
respect, the mythic machinery intrudes.

"The Avenue" is tighter in structure than critics such
as Ralph J. Mills, Jr., and Sherman Hawkins claim. The poem
seems to be loose in narrative structure because the central
color character seldom emerges. He is not specifically referred
to as "I" until section 9. Section 12 addresses the reader
--"You"--and section 14 includes both points of view--"We."
The poem utilizes the journey motif, but it does not match
either the psychological or spiritual dimensions of The Book
of Nightmares or "The Last River." The rigidity of the
mythic structure depends upon a scheme which Kinnell will
discard after this poem.

The mythic scheme is blatant. Everyone is involved in
the search for salvation. Section 1 indicates a panoramic
effect by including birds, a woman, and a man. Each of
these creatures makes its own absurd sound ("pcheek . .
tic . . . tooo"). Each creature is part of the kingdom.
Each one desires to make more sense than the absurdity of
his sounds. The baby birds, for example, "cry," and the
"motherbirds thieve the air/To appease them." Section 2
defines the character of the old Jewish man who prays that
the Catholic embalmer will not bury him in Egypt. Eleven children (named for eleven of the twelve tribes) play around him. He is the twelfth tribe, lost in the metaphorical wilderness of New York City. He is seeking the land of milk and honey. The theme of the search for salvation reappears in a number of images. A boy "fishes at the sky"; that is, he flies a kite from a rooftop. Pigeons flying around him also "seek the sky." The old man, the boy, and the pigeons are seeking the spiritual—that is, a kingdom other than the world. The conclusion of this section utilizes the Icarus myth to demonstrate what happens when people try "to fly from this place." Unlike Icarus who "fell" into the sun, the kite falls into the sticky blacktop of the street to be trapped in the ugliness of the world. Section 3 corresponds to the station of the cross in which Christ meets Mary. She is an old crone selling newspapers from on top of an orange crate. She is a hideous figure, not the mother of God, but the mother of murderers and madmen. Further along the way, the reader meets another crone, who buys a pickle, wraps it in newspaper, and stares at the pickle stain when she gets home. She corresponds to Veronica who wiped the face of Christ on his way to Calvary. The imprint of his face is left on the cloth like the pickle stain which the crone stares at.

Sherman Hawkins says that Kinnell uses these examples to transform the walk into an archetypal movement. Hawkins may be overstating the case. Rather than expanding the
consciousness of the poem, Kinnell seems to limit his poem by imposing the control of Christian mythology. When he deviates from his scheme, as he does in section 7, he sometimes creates a more interesting image. The old black man who sits outside the Happy Days Bar and Grill sings "Over Jordan." He is seeking deliverance but becomes silent as he "Stares into the polaroid Wilderness" through his sunglasses. This section then closes with a reference to "villages on the far side of the river." The river is not the Jordan, however, and the villages consist of Auschwitz, Belsen, Dachau, and other sites of the Nazi death camps. Deliverance beyond the river consists of annihilation. Annihilation by fire is a major motif of this poem, and in section 9 children set fires in garbage cans. The image is transformed into the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac. In Kinnell's version, Isaac burns, and Abraham

Stood in terror at the duplicity...[of]
The Lord [who] turned away washing
His hands without soap and water
Like a common housefly.

God becomes a kind of Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of the sacrificial offerings (Isaac, Christ, and humanity). In section 10 Gold's junkhouse burns and the remnants of the holocaust reveal that "everything/That may abide the fire
was made to go through the fire." Afterwards, there is only the residue and no one "knows for sure what is left of him." Kinnell has placed the apocalypse, the destruction of the world by fire, before the crucifixion. This position follows Kinnell's belief that there is no resurrection of the body.
Man consists of ashes only. The crucifixion scene is represented by fish nailed to a board so that they can be scaled. Only when the scales are removed do the fish become "flesh for the first time in their lives." Christ—symbolized traditionally as the fish—becomes "flesh" when he is stripped. Kinnell is saying that the meaning—the Word—exists only in the flesh. There is no transcendence beyond life. The death of Christ is announced in the cablegram from the Nazi officer to Frau—. The announcement obviously covers up the true facts (that the patient did not die in a hospital but in an incinerator). The closing remark of the cablegram has a double meaning: "The deceased voiced no final requests." Christ's last gesture was completely unselfish in that he died for men, but his death was meant to be a request for man's salvation.

Section 12 returns to the panoramic life: A child cries; a man on top of a building threatens to jump; death bells ring. The world laments the death of Christ but "lies back, expecting the visitation," the return of Christ from the grave. In section 13 a garbage truck carries away the remains, and section 14 concludes with the Jews' laughter:

In the nighttime of the blood they were laughing and saying, Our little lane, what a kingdom it was!

The Jews are laughing because Christ's kingdom is finished. It was only a transitory kingdom. The spiritual search ends in the kingdom of this world. The only possible transcendence consists of the
instants of transcendence [which]
Drift in the oceans of loathing and fear, like
. . . the feverish light
Skin is said to give off when the swimmer drowns
at night.

There are no transformations because Avenue C is "God-forsaken." The plural pronoun "We" near the conclusion of the poem suggests the mass of humanity which dispersed with the collapse of the Christian dream. Kinnell has exhausted the possible uses of Christian imagery in his poetry. It does not have enough meaning for him. By denying the divinity of Christ and the resurrection of the body, he has reached a dead end with the mythic mode. As Donald Davie has suggested, Kinnell might have done better to avoid entangling himself with a system for which he has such disregard: "He should not, having turned his back on the Christian dispensation, continue to trade surreptitiously in scraps torn arbitrarily from the body of doctrine he has renounced."¹⁰ The liabilities of using an idiom in which one does not believe are obvious. Without the Christian sense of irony, many Christian ideas become absurd. For example, without the redeeming figure of Christ, he who humbles himself will not be exalted. Such a humbled man will merely remain humbled. At the conclusion of "The Avenue," the "drowned suffer a C-change,/And remain the common poor." They are not transformed by the "C"—Christ, the Avenue C, or the literal "sea." Thus, without a sense

¹⁰Davie, p. 17.
of Christian irony, these poems run the risk of becoming sentimental—such as the "spent heart" in "Primer for the Last Judgment"—or polemical—such as the lines "I would speak of injustice, I would not go again into that place" in the poem "First Communion." In addition, his poetry reaches a low point in ugliness in "The Avenue." He could not pervert the Christian myth any farther. Thus, he gives it up and turns to other possible "avenues" of transcendence.

Following the lead of his friend Charles Bell, Kinnell then turned to the idea of the American frontier. He even tried to publish a collection of poems about the West, but this collection was never accepted for publication. Apparently some of these poems have found their way into Kinnell's other collections. "The River That Is East," "Westport," "The Homecoming of Emma Lazarus," and "One Generation" show how Kinnell was trying to develop along the lines in which Bell was writing in Songs for a New America. In "The Avenue" Kinnell strained to create an all-encompassing picture of the American spirit. His success was limited by the mythic scaffolding onto which he built his poems. Similarly, his poems about the American frontier demonstrate the failure to achieve a personal transcendence.

The first poem in What a Kingdom It Was is "First Song." The theme of this poem is joy, and each of the three stanzas ends with the word "joy." The boy in the poem discovers the "fine music" of dusk in Illinois. The Midwest represents the tranquility which the American experience
promises. Another poem in *What a Kingdom*, probably intended for the unpublished collection, is "Westport." This poem emphasizes the "changes" across the prairies. In the third stanza, Kinnell writes, "The rain lashed down in a savage squall./All afternoon it drove us west." The poem is reminiscent of Bell's title poem "Song for a New America." The structure of Bell's poem follows a panorama across America's topography. Bell's poem is patriotic:

> We are men singled out by destiny  
> To a high calling. What an age is ours.  
> It is the coming of our father's dream.¹¹

The sentiment is the keynote of Kinnell's Western poems. The phrase "What an age is ours" is surely the source of the title of *What a Kingdom It Was*. In his acknowledgments, Bell thanks his friend Kinnell for helpful suggestions ("sometimes parts of lines"). The phrase is an obvious link between the two poets, but the tone is different. Bell's phrase was celebratory, whereas Kinnell's feelings about the kingdom become ironic. The kingdom, whether it was Christianity or the American dream, disillusiones Kinnell.

Kinnell tries to identify himself through his roots with the American landscape. In "The River That Is East," the first poem in *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, a man tries to identify himself as the spirit of seagulls which fly over the river which is called "River of Tomorrow." But the gulls fly over a "chaos of illusions" and they "scream"

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as they "swing home." Men cannot hope to "go home" because "We . . . have no roots but the shifts of our pain,/No flowering but our own strange lives." The failure of the American dream convinces Kinnell that America does not guarantee transcendence. In "The Homecoming of Emma Lazarus," the American dream is personified as Emma Lazarus who comes "home" to die. She floats past the Statue of Liberty which whispers "Eden." But there is no Eden. The American "childhood" is "oddly afflicted." Emma Lazarus is dying. Her father is already dead; her grandmother is a hideous crone. Thus, the roots of the American dream are either dead or hideous. As a child, Emma chased butterflies the wings of which become "cathedral windows in the sun."
The American spirit was beautiful in its earlier childhood but is now diseased and will die. The tone of the poem is desolate. Emma Lazarus, unlike her namesake, will not rise from the grave. The theme—the death of the American dream—demonstrates the limitations of defining oneself through one's culture.

Kinnell then turns to other people through which he hopes to find transcendence. His poem "One Generation" is an interesting variation of Bell's "Generation." Bell's poem concerns the attempts to discover oneself in the context of older ("Old people") and younger ("Children") generations. "In the forest where we lost our names," self-discovery is
a possibility. Bell's poem ends, "Look, I am here."\textsuperscript{12} Kinnell's treatment of this theme in "One Generation" ends with dissatisfaction: "And I/Alone on the grass."

Kinnell's poem ends not with a positive assertion but with the unresolved question of transcending the self: "what if I now should/Touch your face, child, mother, star first and faint in the sky." Nothing except solitariness is defined, despite the varieties of human relationships: girl, lover, old man, little girl, child, mother.

In a number of poems, Kinnell explores the possibilities of human relationships as the means of transcendence. One of the simplest statements of this search for transcendence is found in the poem "Doppelgänger." In the first part of this poem, two relationships demonstrate the inherent barriers. The persona bribes a policeman, and thieves rob a sailor who then begs for money from the persona. The next image of the poem demonstrates the dissolving identities:

\begin{quote}
The fan whips up the heat,
The ice turns to slush
Before you can throw it into your whiskey.
\end{quote}

The mass of humanity seems to dissolve like the ice. No one can distinguish himself from the "slush." The poem concludes with Kinnell's discovery of his \textit{doppelgänger}--his other self--in a beggar:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{12}Bell, p. 75.
\end{quote}
I could make out a beggar,
Down the long street he was calling Galway!
I started towards him and began calling Galway!

Kinnell's discovery is hardly distinguishing. He becomes simply another beggar on the street. There is no satisfying transcendence.

A more difficult poem concerned with this theme of transcendence through other people is "Freedom, New Hampshire," dedicated to Kinnell's dead brother. The poem is divided into four parts, each controlled by a different image: a dying cow, the birth of a calf, the changing moon, and the mingling of his brother's body with the earth. The central problem of the poem is the definition of death. In part 1 children and adults have different interpretations of the dead cow's grave. In part 2 a calf is born, "sopping with darkness when it came free." It is beautiful, but the birth of the calf, like the births of Maud and Fergus in The Book of Nightmares, is described imagistically as being tainted with death ("darkness"). The image in this section also emanates from a memory of a cowskull. This technique consists of the deep image method of association. Later, in section 4, Kinnell writes "In bed at night there was music if you listened,/Of an old surf breaking far away in the blood." The "old surf" is the "watery unconscious" from which the images emanate. The structure of "Freedom, New Hampshire" suggests the deceptively loose surface of deep imagist poetry. Underneath, the connections of the images are, in fact, very tight. Section 3 focuses on the changing
moon. Kinnell uses the image of the moon as a pregnant goddess who "wanes, in lost labor" in order to remain slender and therefore beautiful. She "cuts loose" the pregnant part in labor. The labor is "lost" because she actually loses part of herself. Similarly, Kinnell continues, "As we lost our labor/Too." Section 4 focuses on the part of Kinnell's brother that is lost: the flesh. Kinnell would like to believe that there is a spiritual realm in which his dead brother could exist. To those who knew him, his brother was identified in life by his name--"a name called out of the confusions of the earth." This phrase is related to the phrase "chaos of illusions" in "The River That Is East." The man in the latter poem desires to be like the gulls which fly over this "chaos" as Kinnell wants his brother's identity to transcend the "confusions of the earth." In both cases, Kinnell reveals his disillusioned hope for a lasting transcendence. In "Freedom, New Hampshire" all labor is lost; all identities dissolve in death. The poem concludes, "He [Kinnell's brother] remains dead,/And the few who loved him know this until they die." Because men "crumble" into dust, there are no lasting bonds. Mortality limits the strength of ordinary bonds.

Kinnell considers the possibility that poets have a special quality which makes their bonds with other men stronger. Thus, in poems to TuFu, William Carlos Williams, Denise Levertov, Guillaume de Lorris, and Robert Frost, Kinnell weighs the poet's function against the poet's relationship with people.
"A Toast to TuFu" is clearly the most hopeful statement of this theme. TuFu, the famous Chinese poet who wrote for the emperor, demonstrates the poet's necessary distance from the world. Although he was supported by the government, TuFu did not praise the establishment. "A poet isn't made to fix/Things up." TuFu rescues himself from drowning. He does not save the state. Kinnell takes obvious delight in the circumstances of TuFu's death. TuFu died, gorging himself at the celebration in honor of his rescue. He dies "full"—full of food and his own glory.

However, "For William Carlos Williams" and "For Denise Levertov" demonstrate the darker side of this theme. Kinnell describes a reading given by Williams at which the audience gives Williams "The tribute of their almost total/Inattention," although one listener squirms and another giggles. The distance between Williams and his audience is great, but Williams does not seem to care: "You seemed/Above remarking we were not your friends." Williams' alienation is reinforced by his smile as he "passes a lonely evening" giving a reading from his "tower." After the reading, as the chairman shakes the famous poet's hand, a professor sneaks out after uttering "faint praise." There are no relationships in the poem which are deep. In fact, there is an aura of death over the setting. The podium of "varicose marble" is faintly suggestive of a tombstone. If Williams is not dead, he is at least too private—"you read with your/Private zest"—to reach his audience. There are
no viable relationships in the poem.

"For Denise Levertov" is also set at a reading. Whereas Williams' limitation was his private zest, Levertov's seems to be an "intense unmusical voice." A bum looks through the window and observes her "utter, gently uttered,/ Solitude." Like Williams, Levertov is alienated from the world, the bum through the glass. Even more significant, however, are the limitations of communication between the poet and her recognized audience. Kinnell says that even if she had looked up she

would have seen
Him [the bum] eye to eye, and paused,
And then gone on, in a room
Of cigarette smoke and coffee smells
And faithful friends, the hapless
Witness crying again in your own breast.

Despite her poems "on the objects of faith," Levertov does not exhibit faith in other people. She becomes an unlucky witness who withdraws into her own world. Even the "faithful friends" do not offer her a comfortable bond because of the barriers of the world: cigarette smoke and coffee smells.

The poem to Guillaume de Lorris likewise demonstrates the failure of bonds to aid the poet's transcendence. The author of the Roman de la Rose, the thirteenth-century French romance, has a sudden intuition that he has failed to possess the Rose: "He looks for the Rose. He sees her in the arms/Of young men, and she is shedding tears for him."

At the end of his life, he is frustrated. He enters the Garden "on broken fee." Although the "intensity of the
dream nourished him," someone else had to finish the poem. The realization of this failure to complete the project confirms de Lorris' "days of solitude."

"For Robert Frost" is more positive in its praise of the poet's success. Kinnell says that Frost "dwelt in access to that which other men/Have burnt all their lives to get near." Other men may envy Frost's perception of the world. The poet Frost, like TuFu, lives closer to the center of life. As a result, he frequently acts in a way which is surprising to the rest of the world. Referring to Frost's difficulties in reading at John F. Kennedy's inauguration, Kinnell has a crewman say:

Boys this is it,
This sonofabitch poet
Is gonna croak,
Putting the paper aside
You drew forth
From your great faithful heart
The poem.

But even with such success in poetry, Frost fails to communicate on other levels. "For Robert Frost" describes Kinnell's visit to the old poet:

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.

Kinnell has difficulty establishing communication with Frost on the ordinary level of human relationships. They simply cannot have a balanced conversation. Kinnell does not suggest that the difficulty lies with himself. At the end
of the poem, Frost is "going away across/The Great Republic." Kinnell concludes with the image of the "bull-dozed land," a repetition of the theme of the ruined American wilderness. The fact that Frost is becoming a part of the past leads Kinnell into the position of being alone. Kinnell still feels the need for another kind of communication: a bond with something that will endure.

In "The Correspondence School Instructor Says Goodbye to His Poetry Students," Kinnell claims that poets "give away their loneliness in poems" but that they keep their solitude. Another man's poems, therefore, are evidence of alienation, for they do not establish bonds with other people. At the end of the correspondence course, the instructor is "relieved" because he "could only feel pity" for the "life" which struggled to free itself in poetry. Poets, then, are like other men in their relationships with other people. All men have barriers through which human bonds cannot penetrate. In "Freedom, New Hampshire," the darkness of the calf's birth, the dust of the man's body, and waning of the moon represent the limitations of a man's hope of transcending his own existence through someone else—in this poem, Kinnell's brother. In "Doppelgänger" Kinnell loses his identity in the beggar. The result is confusion, not transcendence. In the poems to Williams, Levertov, and de Lorris, the barriers include a marble podium, cigarette smoke and coffee smells, and a garden full of young men. When poets succeed, their transcendence is in the private
act of creating the poem. TuFu and Frost live close to the center of life, not bound to the limitations of other men.

Since men could not provide the kind of transcendence for which Kinnell was searching, it is not surprising that he turned to beasts. Donald Davie, Kinnell's harshest critic, describes Kinnell's development in this way:

Unable to leap above his humanity into the divine, [Kinnell] chooses to sink beneath it into the bestial. It is a sort of transcendence certainly. But what a fearsome responsibility for a poet, to lead his readers into bestiality.13

This criticism overstates the case. As Ralph J. Mills, Jr. pointed out in a letter to Davie, Davie's essay failed to consider—it does not even mention—The Book of Nightmares. "The Wolves," "The Porcupine," and "The Bear" are not mere descents into bestiality. They represent a significant step in Kinnell's development toward the Adamic mode. Through these poems about beasts, Kinnell comes one step closer to self-definition, but he does not define himself merely as a beast. He is beginning to define himself as a poet, a creator.

"The Wolves," an early poem from What a Kingdom It Was, begins in violence with the image of LeChien dying in bed. The narrator of the poem accompanies Vanni, who apparently stabbed LeChien in a fight the night before. In the woods the two men discover a brown flower, a "sensitive briar" which "shrinks at the touch." They have gone into

13 Davie, p. 22.
the woods to kill buffalo which the narrator says are "too stupid to live." The violence of the poem seems to retreat after the death of a bull, and a gentle tone is reinforced in the next to the last stanza with the reappearance of the image of the "brown-red flower." Kinnell's addition of a touch of red to the image suggests the violence of the hunt as well as the anticipation of LeChien's death which is announced in the last stanza in a way which is reminiscent of the narrator's judgment of the bull:

None of us cared. Nobody much
Had liked him. His tobacco pouch,
I observed, was already missing from beside his bed.

The narrator has apparently reached the conclusion that LeChien is likewise "too stupid to live." The final effect of the poem, however, undercuts this conclusion. LeChien's death, even though it has resulted from violence and stupidity (the fight), is nevertheless a violation of the basic right to live. Not only is the bull's right violated, but its body is even mutilated after the act: "We cut choice tongues for ourselves." The poem ends with a similar violation. LeChien's tobacco pouch has been stolen. The poem ends by attacking the theft as petty. In light of the greater violence of the poem, the final effect extends through both layers of the poem. The union of hunters and the wolves is revealed below the surface of the poem. Two apparently isolated incidents are carried simultaneously to the same conclusion.

The image of the flower in "The Wolves" balances the
violence of the theme. The two occurrences of this image suggest moments of illumination. In each case the flower "shrinks at the touch" as if it belongs to a realm other than that in which Vanni, LeChien, and the narrator exist. In this poem Kinnell is still struggling for transcendence through the natural order. It is clearly related to his early "nature" poetry, but it goes beyond that in its identification of the characters and image at a level beneath the surface of the poem. The image of the flower seems to emanate from an innocent part of the mind. The "sensitive briar," like the unexperienced parts of the psyche, retracts when it is threatened by the world of violence, the experienced realm of cruelty in which the characters move. The image of the flower is connected to the theme of violence (the addition of the color red); the unexperienced and the experienced exist within the psyche. The poem is, therefore, concerned with the juncture of these two realms.

In "The Porcupine," an even more violent poem, the porcupine is described as a great enemy of man:

\[ \ldots \text{and he would} \\
\text{gouge the world} \\
\text{empty of us, hack and crater} \\
\text{it} \\
\text{until it is nothing.} \]

The porcupine is bored with the stars; he is more interested in the sordidness of man's residue—"our sweat" and "our body rags." But Kinnell does not sail into the bestial. Instead, he uses the beast's struggle to survive as a sign
to man who also struggles to save himself.

The porcupine is shot and disemboweled in the process of falling from a tree. Unaware of the extent of injury, the porcupine runs through a field of goldenrod and "pays out gut.../before/the abrupt emptiness." In a parallel passage, the persona who has in the course of the poem come to be transformed into a porcupine himself falls from a high place and flees through a field of goldenrod. He says,

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.

The process of disemboweling is coupled with the idea of "seeking home." To define oneself, one has to "seek home," and seeking home means seeking one's sources. As the poet defines himself through his experience--his struggle to survive--he simultaneously discovers the emptiness of life. He "pays cut" the rope which connects him to life. Finally, there is no connection; there is only the emptiness. Nevertheless, there is a moment of glory. Through the creative act of writing, the poet transcends the emptiness and then creates meaning through the process of his struggle.

"The Bear" is one of Kinnell's favorite poems. In the interview "Deeper Than Personality," Kinnell claimed that this is the poem of his which he understands the least.14

The poem did not originate in the works of Gary Synder, William Faulkner, Henry David Thoreau, or Delmore Schwartz, all of whom have written about bears, but in a tale told to Kinnell by a friend who had hunted for bears with the Eskimos in the Arctic. The poem began as narrative, but Kinnell claims that it "sailed off on its own." Kinnell says:

The bear seems to be like the dark, non-mental side of a poem. And the hunter, who is stalking the bear, is like the mental side. In the central moment of the poem, the hunter opens up the bear, crawls inside, and perhaps he then becomes whole.15

Charles Molesworth calls this poem a "shamanistic immersion in the unknown."16 J. T. Ledbetter also sees the hunter in this poem as a shaman "whose job is to infuse himself with the sacred animal."17 Ledbetter also sees the hunter as a poet, but Kinnell has said, "I'm not sure if the poem is about poetry at all."18

The conclusion of "The Bear" suggests a definition of poetry:

the rest of my days I spend wandering: wondering what, anyway, was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of blood, that poetry, by which I lived.

The "sticky infusion," blood, is the source of life, "that . . . by which I lived." It is also the key by which the

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15Ibid., p. 127. 
16Molesworth, p. 234. 
17J. T. Ledbetter, "Kinnell's 'The Bear,'" Explicator, 33 (1975), Item 63. 
18Kinnell, "Deeper Than Personality," p. 127.
hunter tracks the bear because the bear hemorrhages after eating a twisted bone which the hunter had frozen inside the bait. The process by which the hunter finds the bear suggests that the hunter is searching for a sacred animal from which he will draw some power, magical or natural. Because the hunter is starving, he eats blood-sopped excrement which he finds on the third day of the hunt. Ledbetter explains this act as the desperation to which a poet is driven when he cannot write. This explanation seems to stretch the poem too far. The act signifies the growing identification which the poet feels for the bear. At the structural center of the poem, the hunter climbs into the body of his victim and dreams that he is the bear. No matter which way he "lurches" or "dances," he cannot escape "bear-transcendence"; that is, he continues to feel the pain which the bear had felt as it died. As in "The Porcupine," "The Bear" offers a transcendence in the flesh which opens a man's eyes to the beast's struggle against pain. When the hunter awakens, he sees signs of life: other bears (alive), geese, marshlights. The experience, however, leaves him with a profound awareness of the extent to which he lives within his own body. The shaman, or priest-magician, becomes the bear for a short while, but when the dream ends the hunter is overwhelmed by the "rank flavor of blood." In "The Porcupine" the poet had a moment in which he was "glorified in his blood." In "The Bear" the transcendence from man to beast illuminates the pain.
"The Bear" demonstrates Kinnell's preoccupation with the search for transcendence, and the conclusion of the poem is evidence of the necessity of continuing the search for identity. The search has taken Kinnell a long way. First he experimented unsuccessfully with the mythic mode in the early Christian poems. Then he tried transcendence through bonds with people or beasts. The final discovery of his poetic persona comes with the flowering of the Adamic mode in The Book of Nightmares, but this mode is clearly recognizable as early as Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock in the poems "Tillamook Journal," "Middle of the Way," "Sprindrift," and "Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock."

In each of these four poems, Kinnell reveals his desire for an absolute. In "Sprindrift" the persona says

   My footprints
   Slogging for the absolute
   Already begin vanishing.

The object of his walk across the sand is to find something that will last, but the vanishing footprints suggest that he perishes as he struggles to find the absolute. "Middle of the Way" repeats the difficulty which the other "avenues" possessed:

   I leave my eyes open . . .
   All I see is we float out
   Into the emptiness.

Kinnell did not find enough meaning in Christianity, people, or beasts. For whatever reasons, he finds these modes unsatisfactory and so turns to himself:
In the heart of a man
There sleeps a green worm
That has spun the heart about itself,
And that shall dream itself black wings
One day to break free into the beautiful black sky.

"Middle of the Way" foreshadows the Adamic mode of *The Book of Nightmares* in this image. Transcendence, "breaking free," results from a man's ordering of reality about him "spinning the heart about itself." Deliverance will result when he frees himself "into the beautiful black sky," that is, when he goes as far as the trail can go. Earlier in the poem, he was "still hunting for the trail." "Middle of the Way" and "Tillamook Journal (2nd version)" are both set on the path. "Tillamook Journal" concludes as the persona takes the last "steps to the unburnable sea." Although the poem is basically a narrative account of a camping trip, it demonstrates Kinnell's search for the transcendent: the sea which will not burn, the absolute which will not perish.

"Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock" is also constructed on the journey motif. It reveals the Adamic mode and the deep imagist technique. Near the structural center of the poem, Kinnell writes, "I kneel at a pool,/I look through my face/At the bacteria . . ./My face sees me." He is looking at himself in the oceanic pool of images which Bly says exist in the unconscious. As the persona "ascends" into the forest, he sees the "old, shimmering nothingness, the sky." The last section of the poem demonstrates a moment of illumination:

In the forest I discover a flower.
The invisible life of the thing
Goes up in flames that are invisible
Like cellophane burning in the sunlight.

It burns up. Its drift is to be nothing.

This forest is like the wilderness through which the persona of The Book of Nightmares travels. The flower that he discovers is his own creative ability to define himself. His spiritual quest does not find a transcendent absolute. He discovers that the flower perishes; it becomes "nothing." Yet for Kinnell, the moment of glory exists as the flower burns. That is the moment in which man is most alive; that is, when he defines himself while at the same time acknowledging his transitoriness. Thus, Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock contains the seed of the Adamic mode which Kinnell will later use so brilliantly in The Book of Nightmares.
CHAPTER IV

The concept of the "deep image" is primarily associated with Robert Kelly and Robert Bly although Kelly traces the origin of the phrase to Jerome Rothenberg. Kelly's essay "Notes on the Poetry of the Deep Image" is the major document for an understanding of the deep imagists. In this essay Kelly defines poetry as "the juncture of the experienced with the never-experienced." The poet and his reader share both realms. They live in the same phenomenal world and so thus share experience. In addition, they possess what Jung calls the "collective unconscious," the racial memory of that which Kelly calls the "unexperienced." A poem must be made concrete enough to enable the poet to awaken the unconscious of his reader. The genesis and the response are located in this unconscious realm, and the poet orders his apprehension to reach this region of the mind. The process is not rational. It is intuitive.

Kelly's criterion for poetry is closely aligned with Bly's concept of "leaping," defined in the essay "Looking

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In this essay Bly explains his dissatisfaction with Eliot and Pound because he believes that they were not willing (or able) to "face the unconscious." Bly's criticism reveals the distance between the original Imagists of 1910 and the deep imagists since 1950. Bly says:

Even the Imagists were misnamed: they did not write in images from the unconscious, such as Lorca or Neruda, but in simple pictures, such as "petals on a wet black bough," and Pound, for instance, continues to write in pictures, writing as great a poetry as is possible, which in his case is very great, using nothing but pictures, but still, pictures are not images. And without these true images, this water from the unconscious, the language continues to dry up.3

In order to write good poetry, the poet must open the doors of the unconscious so that the "unmapped sections of the psyche" can reveal themselves and their connections with experience. Bly maintains that this kind of association—"leaping about the psyche"—existed in the poetry of ancient times, such as in the poems of Li Po and Pindar and in the epic Beowulf. European civilization closed the doors to the unconscious. Poetry became the "prisoner" (Bly's metaphor) of rationalism. According to Bly, one of the chief difficulties in American poetry is the failure of its poets to

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make use of the process of "leaping." American poets have struggled to free themselves from "old techniques" but have not understood how to "associate" the unconscious with the conscious. Whitman understood this necessity, claims Bly, and it is not surprising that the deep imagists should revere him rather than Eliot and Pound. Kinnell has repeatedly cited Whitman as his favorite poet (for example in Richard Howard's anthology Preferences, Viking Press, 1974).

Following Whitman's example, American poets are again struggling to uncover the connections between the conscious and the unconscious. These poets are following what Stephen Stepanchev calls the "movement toward subjectivism."4 By rejecting the objective image of Amy Lowell or Ezra Pound, they have been able to expand Olson's idea of projective verse into a new form in which "key silences" (Kelly's term) are replaced by "the centrality of image." Stepanchev, following Bly's lead, maintains that the deep imagists are not actually derivative of the projectivists but that they share an interest in freeing American poetry from traditional techniques.

Bly objects to the poetics of the projectivists chiefly because "what is blocking the further development of American poetry is the formalist obsession, which Olson embodies--the

middle-class worship of technique which he represents and feels."^5 Bly says that an American poet must open the "doors of association"; that is, he must place himself and his poems in a position that will enable him to "leap from one part of the psyche to another." Thus, Bly, prefers the term "free verse" to "open form" because the former term "implies not a technique, but a longing."^6 The longing is for freedom, a typical American longing, and the American experience should be an adequate stimulus needed for the poet to instill his poem with "urgency and tension," qualities which Kelly calls "the language of the image."

The deep imagists have not been interested in the "old techniques" because these poets are trying to reestablish an even older method of understanding. Underlying their theory is the basic assumption that reality is subjective and that it is the poet's task to lead his readers into the subjective realm of the mind. Yet, despite the non-rational basis of their theory, their poems, in practice, demonstrate at least a rudimentary "method." The method for the deep image depends upon associations that arise in a context which is not necessarily a logical step. Kelly says:

_Basically, the fullest force is possible only by means of the successful employment of one image's position in a context of other images; the image, after its first appearance as dark sound, still lingers as a resonance. This resonance must be controlled, and the effective means of control are the acoustics of the space intervening between one_  

[^5]: Bly, _Naked Poetry_, p. 163.  
[^6]: Ibid., p. 164.
image and the next. The subsequent image is conditioned, made to work, by the image that precedes it, and conditions, as it is finally conditioned by, the image that follows it: through the whole poem. 7

Kinnell's ordering of images frequently follows this scheme. The method is less frequent in the early poems because Kinnell was experimenting with a number of ways to give his poems shape. "Leaping Falls" is sometimes considered one of his most successful early poems, but the poem is not really representative of Kinnell's major poems.

The process of "Leaping Falls" (What a Kingdom It Was, 1960) is actually narrative. A young boy discovers that Leaping Falls, a waterfall, has frozen in winter. When the boy makes a sound, he inadvertently starts an avalanche of icicles. The poem ends as the icicles fall to the ground, lying in silence in a heap—a "pale blue twigfire." The poem is imagistic in the old sense of the word. Glauco Cambon praises this poem for its "pictorial vividness and syntactical resilience." 8 The stillness of the frozen waterfall is suggested by a short line "Noiseless. Nothing." The poem breaks open when the icicles begin to fall: "And the falls/Lept at their ledges, ringing/Down the rocks and on each other." Cambon's praise depends chiefly on Kinnell's use of syntactical variations to show the progress of the

7Kelly, p. 15.

image. The fusion of thought and form is a traditional technique based on a rational assumption about the nature of poetry. The lines stretch as the icicles begin to fall, and the poem closes on a frozen detail: the heap of icicles on the ground. The imagery of the poem is on the surface. Kinnell's use of fire to represent ice is a literal image. The blue icicles resemble twigs cast in a heap for a fire. In *Alone with America*, Richard Howard praises this image for its "wonderful play of contraries" but points out that the tension of the poem is "resolved in a place beyond contraries, a moment of vision."

Even if the poem suggests Kinnell's "moment of illumination," it goes no further than a realization that the literal image contains a paradoxical coupling of elements. The poem is a tour de force, but it does not indicate Kinnell's basic development toward the deep image.

Another poem from the same period is a more significant experiment. In "Lilacs" Kinnell works through a series of images which suggest a tension which takes the reader beyond the world of contraries into a new realm, the unexperienced. The first image of the poem suggests a physical entity which dissolves when it confronts another physical entity:

The wind climbed with a laggard pace
Up the green hill, and meeting the sun there
Disappeared like warmed wax into the ground.

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The succeeding images consist of a dog stretching and a woman walking. Suddenly the woman stops as she notices lilacs "climbing in the air." Her disorientation which results from the moment of vision is figuratively represented by the "lawn's slowly somersaulting under her." The climbing and dissolving of the wind in the first stanza conditions the reader's response to the sudden transformation in the surface of the lawn. The woman "stretches" mentally as the dog had stretched literally. After her moment of illumination, she returns home for supper where "a spoon would arrange/The leaves on the bottom of her china dream." The tension in the last image recalls the dissolving of the wind by the sun and suggests that her future--the tea leaves which she displaces at the bottom of her china cup with a spoon--is more settled than she would desire. Her "dry legs" and "hot scent" in stanza 2 yearn to leave the "closet of [her] well-governed flesh." She would like to transform her life--to change her future by climbing like the lilacs. The sensation of a possible escape triggers the surrealistic "somersaulting" of the lawn.

Another poem of this period, "Where the Track Vanishes," uses a natural setting to dislocate the character's field of vision. The track "curves into the Alps and vanishes," but it vanishes into stones, snow, and flowers. The character's mind wanders through a series of memories which are associatively derived; for example, he remembers trying on shoes as a child. The memory is suddenly transformed into
grass on which he once made love. He thinks about the lame beggar Pierre who limps through the wild grasses toward an unknown destination. Similarly, he thinks of the bones of strangers joined in the ground. Like Pierre, they had no idea that they would arrive at this point. The main character reveals that he cannot control the images when he says, "My hand on the sky/Cannot shut the sky out." The poem concludes with his realization that he has always been on this track ("walking through it all our lives"). The fact that the horizon is obliterated "where the track vanishes" suggests the dissolving of the character's field of vision. He sees beyond the stones or flowers or snow. Like Pierre the beggar, he travels lamely to an unknown destination, and the "way" he travels is actually a part of himself. Pierre is lame because the gypsies crippled him as a child so that he could beg. The "way" Pierre travels is also determined by a part of himself (the part which the gypsies crippled). The main character discovers that he himself has been walking through this "first land" all along. He discovers in the natural setting that the path to his future is embedded in his memories. He explores then what Bly calls the "unmapped areas of the psyche"—the places "where the track vanishes," in Kinnell's words.

"Lilacs," "Leaping Falls," and "Where the Track Vanishes" appeared in *What a Kingdom It Was*. Kinnell's next volume of poetry, *Flower Herding on Mount Monadnock*, appeared four years later in 1964. In this collection
Kinnell begins to be concerned with the spaces between his images. "Where the Track Vanishes" had foreshadowed the multi-part poems that would follow. "Poem of Night," "Nightfall of the Real," and "Ruins under the Stars" are three poems which are representative of Kinnell's changing attitude toward form. Though each of these poems is rigidly divided into numbered parts, Kinnell manages to achieve the impression of a series of distinct, if related, images. The method is somewhat different from the development in "Lilacs" in which there was one focal character.

"Poem of Night" demonstrates Kinnell's development. The poem appears to be concerned with the differences between life and death, or day and night. It is divided into five parts of irregular length. A first-person narrator, speaking in the present tense, describes his movements as he touches various parts of his lover's body. At the center of the poem, some of the parts—"A cheekbone,/A curved piece of brow,/A pale eyelid"—suddenly become metaphorically detached from his lover's being. They "Float in the dark," and the narrator discovers a dark eye "wormed with far-off, unaccountable lights." He cannot explain how life emanates from her body. The lights are unaccountable. The image shows that Kinnell is sometimes at odds with the transcendental tradition of Whitman out of which he has developed. In "The Prayer of Columbus," Whitman writes of the "light rare, untellable, lighting the very light." Because the underlying mystery illuminates itself, Whitman's "untellable
light" unites all things. On the other hand, Kinnell's lights are "unaccountable." They do not explain the mystery; they only show disunity by revealing the disintegration of the narrator's lover. The pieces "float in the dark" because they belong to the realm of darkness. They are floating in the "watery unconscious" that Bly says is the source of images. The eye is "wormed" because the narrator realizes that the taint of death is on his lover. Part 4 of the poem reinforces the Jungian concept of racial memory:

I hold
What I can only think of
As some deepest of memories in my arms,
Not mine, but as if the life in me
Were slowly remembering what is it.

Kinnell loses control of the poem at this point by referring to his lover's "physicalness." This word breaks the tone of the passage and he concludes part 4 awkwardly by praising her "beautiful degree of reality." The poem is saved, however, in part 5 by Kinnell's re-creation of the images of "floating" now set in the context of "a few bones . . . on a river at night." The tension of the poem is maintained by the images of starlight "blowing" on the river and the river "leaning like a wave towards the emptiness." The tension suggests the movement of the water toward emptiness in the way that the development of the poem suggests the tension of the change between night and day. Part 5 begins with a reference to the coming of day, as well as the death of love ("bones/Floating on a river"). The theme of the poem is not
simply night vs. day (or death vs. life) but rather the way by which the narrator comes to discover one in the other.

"Nightfall of the Real" poses another problem. Kinnell uses vivid pictorial images to suggest the "realness" of nightfall. "Poem of Night" suffered in part owing to Kinnell's abstraction ("physicalness" and "beautiful degree of reality"). The deep imagists have been opponents of abstract poetry. Like the early Imagists, Robert Bly and William Duffy maintain that a poem becomes alive in its imagery but will die in abstraction. "Nightfall of the Real" goes to the other extreme. It is so concrete that it appears to have no theme. Kinnell has focused so sharply on his images that the poem seems to have lost touch with any consciousness:

On a table set by heart
In the last sun of the day
Olives, three fishes,
Bread, a bottle of rosé.

A variation of this passage from part 2 occurs in part 3:

Olives, bread
Fishes, pink wine:
Sudden in the dusk a
Crackling across stones.

The first succeeded by the image of a rainbow crossing a fish on the table. The second passage digresses through two stanzas before revealing its variant successor:

A pause: out in the dark
The distant dull splash of a fish.
Yet again. Sick of weight
It leans up through its eerie life
Towards the night-flash of its emblemhood.

The differences in the two fish images suggest a tension in
the poem: dead fish on the plate vs. the almost conscious fish splashing in the water. The reference to "emblemhood" shrouds the entire poem; in fact, however, the poem does not progress, and the result demonstrates one of the central problems of the deep imagists. Because they place so much emphasis on the image, they are sometimes criticized for neglecting plot or narration. In the interview "The Weight That a Poem Can Carry," Kinnell expressed a desire to write poetry that contains no narrative. In place of a sequence of events, he would like to substitute a progression of the psyche: a movement of consciousness. This ideal is difficult to achieve, as "Nightfall of the Real" demonstrates. Stephen Stepanchev says that this technique "in unskilful hands . . . consists of coagulations of images that do not sort out."\(^{10}\) The chief difficulty with "Nightfall of the Real" is finally its lack of "realness." Kinnell focuses on vivid images but seems to be using the objective image. Thus, when he tries to bridge the connection between conscious and unconscious (as in Part II, "Paths floating on earth"), he fails because the spaces between his images are too great. He either repeats the image too closely (as in olives, fish, bread, rosé) or tries to infuse them with abstract meaning for which he does not prepare his reader (the "night-flash of its emblemhood").

The spaces between his images in "Ruins under the

\(^{10}\) Stepanchev, p. 180.
"Stars" make this poem a step in the right direction. Kinnell's use of the deep image becomes more dynamic, and his poems begin to contain more energy. He creates greater tension in this particular poem by moving randomly through a series of images that are tangentially related. The poem has a roughly temporal scheme. Part 1 refers to daytime; part 2, to night; part 3, to evening; part 4, to morning; part 5, to the timelessness of "now." This scheme is not rigid; the time fluctuates as the first-person narrator's mind passes from one image to another. During the day he sits beside the ruins of a house and thinks about the present (the newspaper report about a local farmboy who is now a Marine in battle). During the night he looks "up at night" and thinks about change and death ("An owl dies, or a snake sloughs his skin"). During the evening he goes out into the field and watches the conformations of the geese (the "dissolving V's") and listens to their "lonely yelping." During the morning, he observes a number of images moving through his field of vision: "Milton Norway's sky blue Ford/Dragging its ass down the dirt road," the sound of a chainsaw in the woods, and the white trail of a SAC bomber in the sky. The progress of the poem depends upon the shifts in the narrator's focus. From day to night, he moves from life to death. From evening to morning, he moves from an observation of the lonely geese to his own alienation (represented by his distance from the images of car, chainsaw, and bomber). Part 5 attempts to resolve the
tension between the images ("Just now I had a funny sensation"), but the narrator is left suspended between moments: "There was a twig just ceasing to tremble." Kinnell concludes the poem by repeating images that have been scattered throughout the poem (such as the sounds of porcupines and saws); thus, the final image reinforces the underlying theme: The "rustling and whispering stars" have something to tell him, just as each of the images has. The narrator remains in the "ruins," the fragments of experience, but he intuits the existing links with the unknown: whatever it was that caused the twig to tremble ("some angel, or winged star").

Even more successful is the later poem "Another Night in the Ruins (Body Rags, 1968). Whereas the theme of "Ruins under the Stars" is loneliness, the theme of "Another Night in the Ruins" shows that the poet can combat despair. The thematic link between these two poems is significant. Coming at the beginning of Body Rags, "Another Night in the Ruins" establishes Kinnell's theme for this collection: Man is transitory, but he may define himself in spite of the emptiness of life. Man must yield to the flames, and all that will remain will be the "rags" of his body. The process, however, is man's salvation.

Richard Howard defines Kinnell's poetry as an "Ordeal by Fire."\(^{11}\) Relating Kinnell to Heraclitus' idea of the

\[^{11}\text{Howard, p. 259.}\]
world as perpetually burning fire, Howard shows how the constant transformations of the elements define reality. The poet invokes fire when he begins his struggle; he uses fire to fight; finally, he discovers that his salvation consists of his being consumed by fire. The conclusion of "Another Night in the Ruins" denies that man can be immortal ("we aren't/. . . that bird [the phoenix] which flies out of its ashes"). But the poem ends by defining man's "work"—that is, his meaning—in the context of destruction:

as he goes up in flames, his one work is
to open himself, to be the flames.

This poem is significant because it takes the motif of "ruins" one step up from "Ruins under the Stars." The transformations in the later poem indicate a way to combat the ambiguity of time which was a concern of the earlier poem.

In part 3 of "Another Night in the Ruins," Kinnell quotes his brother who tells him that despair can "light the sky" but to make it (the resulting fire which has been lit) burn, "you have to throw yourself in." The only way to transform despair is to admit one's mortality and to allow oneself to be consumed by experience. The movement of this poem is concerned with the transformation of one moment to the next. The resulting tension makes this poem a more dynamic poem that "Ruins under the Stars."

One of the most successful aspects of "Another Night in the Ruins" is Kinnell's use of the deep image. In part 1
a bird flies across the sky ("'flop flop',/adoring/only the instant"). Part 2 transforms this image into Kinnell's memory of an airplane flight during which he sees his brother's face in a thundercloud over the "lightning-flashed moments of the Atlantic." Whereas the bird seems unaware of the transition of time, Kinnell senses a distance from his brother ("Nine years ago"), just as the image of his brother's face observes the ocean "nostalgically." The wings of the bird and of the plane are transformed in part 4 into Kinnell's "wings" and "ink-splattered feathers" which the night "sweeps" up as the ruins of the wind. Kinnell's feathers are splattered with ink because his "work" is poetry. Thus in part 5 he defines his "work," poetry, as "to be/the flames"; that is, poetry requires transformations, the burning of one reality to produce another. The images in parts 5 and 6 confirm the poet's necessity to involve himself with experience. In part 5 in which he merely listens, he hears nothing:

Only
the cow, the cow
of nothingness, mooing
down the bones.

The detached observer discovers only the emptiness of life among the ruins ("the bones") of death. But in part 6 the image of the rooster suggests a transformation when it "thrashes in the snow/for a grain." Discovering the grain, the rooster suddenly burns or is transformed by "Flames/ bursting out of his brow." The poet must actively seek to understand. He cannot be content merely to observe.
On the whole, *Body Rags* represents Kinnell's continuing struggle to find his particular poetic voice. Although "Another Night in the Ruins" represents a major development in his use of the deep image, the collection from which it comes is uneven. There are still vestiges of the early influence of Yeats, and there are moments in which Kinnell experiments unsuccessfully with political satire. *Body Rags* at its worst is either too obscure or heavy-handed; at its best it is vivid and indicative of a growing poetic vision.

"Lost Loves" is reminiscent of Kinnell's earlier concern for the transitoriness of romantic love. The first section of the poem is set within the framework of a dream, the main character dreaming on the "ashes of old volcanoes," the remnants of love. He dreams that he hears a "door, far away,/banging softly in the wind." A part of his mind opens during the dream and he experiences fragments of memories ("Mole Street . . . Françoise, Greta"). The regret of the first section is balanced by his pleasure in the second section "that everything changes." His reconciliation is based on the reassurance that he is beginning to understand himself:

we . . . enter ourselves
quaking
like the tadpole, his time come, trembling
 toward the slime.

The passage echoes the last two lines of Yeats's "The Second Coming":

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And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Yeats's image arises from the "Spiritus Mundi," the collective unconscious, in the way Kinnell's image arises from that part of his psyche beyond the "door." Kinnell's poem does not present an especially interesting variation of the Yeats's passage, but "Lost Loves" is interesting in its concern for opening the doors of the unconscious to understand one's past.

Another poem with a similar concern is "Night in the Forest." In a way, it is a more successful poem because Kinnell derives the image in the second part from the same idea out of which the first grew: A mountain brook winds down "ancient labyrinths" as a strand of a woman's hair "flows/from her cocoon sleeping bag, touching/the ground hesitantly, as if thinking/to take root." The genesis of both images suggests a source. The hair and the brook are searching for their sources: a dark labyrinth within the ground. Kinnell concludes the poem by repeating one of his favorite images, flames. The scene of both movements into the earth includes the nearby campfire. The flames, however, are not a source of light or heat. Their random motion--"they absently leap"--suggests a change which might have illuminated the passage into darkness, but in neither case does the fire aid the struggle to the dark sources. The final image of the poem qualifies each of the preceding images and finally undercuts the relationship established between part 1 and part 2. The poem ends suspended in a
tension which each of the central images has suggested.

Kinnell tries to create this kind of tension in "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond." This poem is divided into three sections. Part 1 describes Kinnell's response to the reflection of a vapor trail left by a SAC bomber. The tadpoles in the pond and he observe the bomber with indifference. The tadpoles are concerned with their growth; Kinnell the poet is concerned with the bomber's "drone, drifting, high up/in immaculate ozone." The tone changes in part 2 when Kinnell parodies Whitman's "I Hear America Singing." America sings in "crack of deputies' rifles practicing on stray dogs . . . TV groaning . . . curses of soldiers . . . hysterical curses." The tone is bitter and the resulting distance between parts 1 and 2 is great. The poem progresses through one more image in part 3: a Vietnamese man looks at the sky before bombs fall. The tone of part 3 is bewilderment. The Vietnamese man does not know what to expect from the "drifting sun," but Kinnell suggests that death is imminent. The man is described by the metaphor "bones/wearing a few shadows," and he knows that his flesh may be scattered in the air by the bombs. His hands will become "rivered/by blue, erratic wanderings of the blood." The image suggests a literal picture of the man after the blast, but it also suggests the direction of Kinnell's mind as he moves erratically through blood—primal waters. The tadpoles in the frog pond correspond to the Asians in rice paddies. Thus, parts 1 and 3 are built on
similar principles. They are derivative of the same deep image. But part 2 is actually a wrong step. Kinnell's satirical intention in this section—to demonstrate America's violent nature—does not flow from part 1 nor does it lead imagistically into part 3. As a result, the poem contains thematic coherence but lacks the inner connections that make Kinnell's best poems work.

Another poem which deals more successfully with this problem is "The Burn." Although this poem is not divided into numbered sections, it does consist of five images which move in an apparently narrative scheme. The narrator remembers walking "across the burnt land" in a time during which he had not understood pain. Going "deep into the forest" which glows in its "prehistory," he discovers a waterfall—"the clear/swirls of creation." Suddenly the poem shifts closer in time and the narrator recalls seeing a woman at the airport. Her arms are scarred with needlemarks, signs that she is probably a drug addict. The next image consists of her walking through a poppy field. The poem concludes with Kinnell's most frequent image:

The mouth of the river.
On these beaches
the sea throws itself down, in flames.

The flames in the last image recall the burnt land at the beginning of the poem. The narrator's progress resembles the woman's wandering through the poppy field. Both characters move unseeingly ("blind as myself") out of their unexplored minds ("prehistory") to discover a site of flux—the "swirls of creation" or the sea transforming into
flames. The theme of "The Burn" concerns a journey back into the psyche. The residue of the process remains: the burnt land or the man's arms "dying like old snakeskins" around the woman. The transformations of the image suggest the changes of the elements. Thus, the apparent break in the narrative between the narrator's walk and his memory of the woman does not disturb the unity of the poem because, in fact, both images are manifestations of the same deep image which Kinnell has used to describe the transforming power of psychic journeys.

Two other poems in *Body Rags* make conspicuous use of deep imagist technique. "Getting the Mail" and "One Who Used to Beat His Way" are ostensibly scenic. In one, the narrator walks back toward the frog pond after picking up the mail. He observes the scenery as he walks. In the other, a "drunken bum" walks down a street lined with warehouses. He passes scenes of modern society (buildings, trucks, manholes). Both characters read the scenes from their own particular situation.

The character opening the letter understands the scenery in terms of what he is preoccupied with: words. The fly sounds as if it is declining the verb "to die." Kinnell probably means "conjugating" rather than "declining" although in a literal sense the fly declines—that is, is unwilling—to die. "Declining" may also mean "descending" or "turning"; thus, the fly is "going back" to die as the narrator is "going back" to the pond to read his letter.
The image of returning reappears when the narrator wonders what the phrase "getting warm" originally meant. The poem ends with a variation of the image of the fly's sound: "the Kyrie of a chainsaw drifting down off Wheelock Mountain." The chainsaw sounds like a responsorial part of the liturgy. The association is onomatopoetic, yet the narrator has made the mental connection because the word "Kyrie" denotes "Lord, have mercy." The final convolution of the image suggests that the narrator's journey back to the pond, indicative of the journey to death, gives him an intuition that the closer one gets to one's sources, the more one feels the need for those sources. The sound of perishing (the fly's drone) becomes a plea for mercy (the Kyrie).

"One Who Used to Beat His Way" is divided into three unnumbered sections. In the first, the bum is described as part of the scene:

Down the street of warehouses . . .
its bum crapped out on the stoop,
he staggers, among wraiths that steam up out of manhole covers and crimesheets skidding from the past.

The bum's identity shifts from being possessed by the streets ("its bum") to being an active traveler on the path that is filled with ghosts (steam) and other refuse of the past ("crimesheets," that is, newspapers in the street). The image of "going down" the street is transformed in section 2 in the bum's tasting a "backed-up/mouthful of vomit-cut liquor" and "regulping it." He mumbles bitterly about humanity, and in the third section he retreats "into
his wino-niche." His retreat in this section mirrors the 
retreat of vomit and the initial journey down the street. 
The poem is very tight imagistically. Even the image in the 
last line—"a streambed of piss groping down the dry stone"
—is part of the deep image which suggests the bum's descent 
into a part of his mind. In his altered state of conscious-
ness, the bum brings together a series of images which are a 
part of the scene (Redball trucks, Bible-ranters, hicks, 
manhole covers). Because the bum does not understand the 
connections between the images, he is lost. He "used to 
beat his way" throughout the world, but the end of the poem 
suggests that his retreat is like the "streambed of piss." 
His life slips away as waste.

"Getting the Mail" and "One Who Used to Beat His Way" 
succeed because Kinnell develops these poems with images 
which hold together the subjective reality of the poems. 
One image is not necessarily a logical extension of another. 
The connections exist in the "watery unconscious," as Bly 
calls it. The consciousness of these poems identifies the 
links between images (that is, that a Kyrie chainsaw sounds 
like an alderfly's drone), but the connection is not a 
step-by-step rational process. It evolves in intuitive 
flashes (such as the ghost-like steam rushing out of a 
manhole or the streambed of piss suddenly recalling the 
bum's staggering down the street).

All of the poems in Body Rags are not so successful, 
however. The longest poem in the collection, "The Last
River," is essentially narrative, even though its movement suggests a psychic journey. The poem depends heavily on Kinnell's concrete images, derived from his experiences in the civil rights movement in the South (particularly in Louisiana). The poem is sometimes symbolic. A youth named Henry David (obviously Thoreau) gives Kinnell a tour of the "underworld." The poem does not use the deep image to any significant extent, however. Kinnell is more concerned here with the "experienced" rather than the "unexperienced." The trip on the river suggests Kinnell's trip into the unjust world. In this poem Kinnell crosses into a new realm, but it is not the realm of the unconscious. It is only the "new world/of sugar cane and shanties and junked cars." His discovery of a "man of no color" in the last sections of the poem suggests Kinnell's hopes for a world in which black and white men can live in peace, but this image dissolves into "rags." Although the poem is long and vivid, it is essentially a narrative poem in which Kinnell airs his disillusionment with the social order. It is excessively long and imagistically uninteresting. When Kinnell tries to give the trip on the river a deeper significance, he violates his narrative scheme without the benefit of imagistic unity:

The birds have gone,
we wonder slowly homeward, lost
in the history of every step.

Moreover, when he does use an interesting image, it is usually unrelated to a deeper context: "We come to a crowd,
hornets/in their hair, worms at their feet." Perhaps the most interesting feature of this poem is the persona, Kinnell himself, who in only a very remote way prefigures the persona of The Book of Nightmares. "The Last River" is indicative of Kinnell's desire to write a very long, powerful poem, but the effort fails here because he does not make use of the techniques that he was successfully using in other poems of this period.

The poem in Body Rags entitled "The Poem" contains Kinnell's poetic theory. In the first of eight sections, he writes:

The poem too
is a palimpsest, streaked
with erasures, smelling
of departure and burnt stone.

A palimpsest is a parchment from which the text has been obliterated in order to write something new. Nevertheless, on Kinnell's palimpsest there are still signs of the obliterating process. The image preceding this passage suggests a hill on which soil covers up rocks. Critics such as Ralph J. Mills, Jr., have commented on the rarity of similes in Kinnell's poetry, but following this image is the simile "as/the face/drifts on a skull scratched with glaciers." The image suggests that the "face" of a poem is similarly scratched. Below the surface of a poem lie the rocks (as on the hill) or a skull (as under the face); that is, below the surface of the poem lies the enduring qualities of the poem. Section 3 of "The Poem" consists of
a series of questions concerning lost poems. The recurring motif of this poem is overwhelmingly the idea of loss. The poem then becomes the means by which to retrieve the hard, inner qualities (the rocks or the skull) of reality. Once the surface dissolves, the deep image opens a previously unconscious part of the mind and the reader experiences the moment of illumination which Kinnell refers to in his various interviews. Section 7 is a statement of this idea:

The moment
in the late night, when baby birds
closed in dark wings almost stir, and objects
on the page grow suddenly
heavy, hugged
by a rush of strange gravity.

The sudden growth refers to the moment of illumination which results when an unmapped region of the psyche is suddenly explored. Kelly's criterion—tension—is suggested by the "wings which almost stir."

"The Poem" established Kinnell's critical stand on the deep image. When he uses this technique successfully, as in "Another Night in the Ruins," the poem reveals itself by the spaces between the image. Ronald Moran (using the term "emotive imagination" for deep imagist technique) says that this technique involves timing, leaps, and muted shocks, all of which work together. The process involves what Bly calls "leaping within the psyche." Kinnell uses this

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technique least successfully when, as in "Poem of Night" or "Nightfall of the Real," he becomes too abstract, or when, as in "Vapor Trail Reflected in the Frog Pond" or "The Last River," he becomes preoccupied with social satire and fails to unify the poem through imagery. All in all, Kinnell's use of the deep image demonstrates his concern with the "unmapped regions of the psyche."
CHAPTER V

The Book of Nightmares places Kinnell within the Adamic mode. In this major poem there is a progression of consciousness through which the persona defines himself. The progression follows the traditional mystical scheme in some important ways, although finally Kinnell demonstrates his chief difference from that scheme. The moments of illumination do not reveal God; they reveal an awareness of oneself and of the transitoriness of the physical world.

The Book of Nightmares has the appearance of a fairy tale with Kinnell as its major character. The cast consists of his children (Maud and Fergus), his wife, a stranger (Virginia), a lover (the Waterloo woman), the Crone, the drunk, the deskman, two soldiers (Burnsie and the Captain), the sheriff, and the old man. The main character encounters people, animals, and things on his journey through the world of nightmares. The plot is simple, but the cinematic technique is vastly complex.

As the poem begins, when Kinnell's daughter Maud is born, he lights a fire. In the distance he sees a bear. In the next scene Kinnell tries to comfort his infant daughter who awakens during the night from a nightmare. The poem is more than halfway finished before he puts her back into her
crib. Kinnell understands his daughter's frightened state because he has traveled on the path which she must one day take.

The main character has trouble sleeping. Facedown on his pillow, he thinks about a hen. The feathers of the pillow come from a hen; there is also a henhouse behind the house in which he is trying to sleep. In his imagination he conjures up images of the hen laying eggs, being killed by an ax, and then being transformed into a flower. In the early hours of the morning, he gets out of bed to go to the henhouse to remove the carcass of a hen that has been killed by weasels. He throws the hen into the pine trees and returns to bed to try once again to sleep.

The next episode of the fairy tale involves his visit to a Salvation Army Store to buy some shoes for a trip. He finds a pair that fits perfectly. As he starts to leave, the Crone tells him that he will lose his way. He goes to a hotel, removes his shoes, and goes to sleep. He sleeps longer than he had planned because the deskman who was supposed to awaken him has passed out.

During his trip he exchanges letters with Virginia, a stranger who has been experiencing automatic writing. His insomnia returns, and he lies in bed thinking about the hen and death. Walking through the hotel one day, he discovers the body of a drunk. He writes a will for the dead man. The discovery disturbs him, and he has nightmares about death. The most vivid dream concerns two soldiers, Burnsie and the Captain.
The fairy tale is interspersed with a number of vignettes. Kinnell remembers a scene in a restaurant during which Maud climbs onto his lap and embarrasses everyone by shouting, "caca! caca! caca!" He imagines her one day in a cafe, years later, falling in love and making other embarrassing mistakes. Another vignette is concerned with his memory of a woman from Waterloo, Iowa. He loved her but could not leave his wife. Another vignette is set in a Southern jail where he had once been fingerprinted and detained for his involvement in the civil rights movement. In another vignette, he remembers lying next to his sleeping wife who is pregnant with Fergus.

The trip draws to a close. He passes through a field which is filled with stones. He passes an old man who is casting a spell. Kinnell discovers that the path returns to the original scene of the fairy tale. He recognizes the fire which he had lit and the bear which he had seen at the beginning of the trip. His son Fergus is born.

The Book of Nightmares is built on the framework of a journey motif. In one sense, it is the spiritual autobiography of a persona who ventures into the realm of mystical experience only to find that beyond the veil of the "things" of the phenomenal world lies no external meaning. Kinnell's persona explores the mystical experience in his search for transcendence but discovers that there is no greater reality than that which he was in possession of all along. The persona becomes then a mystic without a god.
In another sense, however, the persona discovers that there are transcendent levels of consciousness, and thus the journey into the world of nightmares becomes a meaningful way of defining the self. Published in 1971, The Book of Nightmares expresses the culmination of the struggle through which Kinnell had been working in his earlier poetry to discover a poetic persona. Whereas the earlier poetry strained to convince the reader of the heightened state that experience had stimulated, The Book of Nightmares moves dynamically into the mystical process to demonstrate how the persona reaches his "moments of illumination." The entire poem is concerned with the first stage of the mystical process, the awakening of the self although the poem deals with other stages: purification of the self, illumination of the self, and the dark night of the soul. Yet The Book of Nightmares does not offer a tightly structured path to mystical communion. At its consummate moments, the poem demonstrates that Kinnell's persona does not find the abyss in which mystics lose themselves and find their god. Instead, the persona discovers that he is his only witness, that he himself is the center of his universe. It is through his own experience and his "moments of illumination" that he defines himself. Thus, the persona, the mask of the poet Galway Kinnell, makes a journey in which he creates his own meaning. The Book of Nightmares demonstrates Kinnell's emergence as an Adamic poet.

The poem has the appearance of a tightly structured
work. There are ten books, each divided into seven parts. Book I sounds very much like a prologue with its statement:

And then 
you shall open 
this book, even if it is the book of nightmares.¹

The final book is entitled "Lastness" and sounds like an epilogue:

This is the tenth poem 
and it is the last. It is right 
at the last, that one 
and zero 
walk off the end of these pages together. (p. 73)

Yet Book I and Book X are actually no more firmly fixed than the other books. By the repetition of certain key images, Book X demonstrates that it is the point at which Book I began. The Book of Nightmares achieves a kind of freedom in form by which the persona can move through various levels in much the same way that the mystic soars and plummets. The form of the poem follows the persona's journey, and Book X suggests that the persona's movement is actually a "free floating" (p. 73).

"Under the Maud Moon" establishes three major motifs for The Book of Nightmares: the journey, residue, and time. The narrator starts his journey on "the path" where tramps have made their fires. He makes a fire on the site of the ashes, the residue of those earlier wanderers. The fire is for "her"—his daughter who is not identified until part 3

of this book. He holds her in the first moments of her life, and he senses her mortality as soon as he hands her to someone else, his hands "still trying to hold the space where she was" (p. 73). His sense of loss is immediately physical, and he extends his line of vision into the abstract:

the deathwatches inside
begin running out of time, I can see
the dead, crossed limbs
longing again for the universe. (p. 3)

The longing suggests the emptiness of the path and the persona's paradoxical desire to stop time as he moves through it. There is a clean separation of opposing forces. He makes his fire from wet wood, the wood changing into dead limbs longing to be alive again. Part 1 of "Under the Maud Moon" ends by establishing that the persona is about to make a journey through a universe in which the covenant of "things" has been disturbed:

the oath broken,
the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit broken,
to be sworn again . . . to be broken again,
over and over, on earth. (p. 4)

The tension of the poem has been established; the journey has begun.

The fire is still burning in the ashes in Book X, "Lastness." The paradox has continued: The fire burns in the rain. Yet in Book X it no longer "matter[s] . . . whom it was built for" (p. 71) because it warms everything that comes within the range of its heat. The covenant of "things" is not permanently fixed since there is still flux.
The world is "dying," its death being echoed in the processes "over and over again." The footpaths of Book X "wander out of heaven"; that is, they come back into the real world. The movement between Book I and Book X is actually a circular one. The narrator finds himself at the origin of his journey, but there is a significant discovery.

If the persona sets out on his journey to find the residue, that which will remain after "everything . . . dies" (p. 8), he discovers that there is no greater reality than himself. In Book X Kinnell plays with the number "ten"--the one and zero that "walk off together . . . one creature/walking away side by side with the emptiness" (p. 73). The persona is the solitary creature, walking with the zero: the emptiness. The persona discovers that he is the only meaning in the universe. There is nothing beyond one's life since "Living brings you to death" and "there is no other road" (p. 73). If the motivation for the journey is the desire to discover the covenant of "things," it is more truly the motivation of the poet to discover the disparate parts of himself. The journey defines the way in which the parts do or do not fit. In part 6 of "Lastness," Kinnell calls The Book of Nightmares

This poem
if we shall call it that,
or concert of one
divided among himself. (p. 75)

The persona does not find spiritual peace at the end of his journey. There are still dividing forces within him. Yet the poem constitutes the harmony, the "concert," of those
forces. It provides Kinnell with an awareness of the self which has made the journey.

The manner by which the persona of The Book of Nightmares comes to awareness is the mystical process. The non-rational illumination that Kinnell's images strive to achieve indicates his interest in this mode of knowing. The deep image calls up from within the poem a moment of illumination, a change of consciousness. This change of consciousness seems to be what Evelyn Underhill in her book Mysticism defines as the "illumination of self"; that is, as the self's ascent from its purification.² The mystical experience follows this pattern: awakening, purification, and illumination. But the process cannot be so rigidly dissected, for the illumination, though it may appear as a sudden flash, is a natural development of the initial step, the awakening. Underhill defines the mystic's awakening as a disturbance of the equilibrium of the self which results in the shifting of the field of consciousness from lower to higher levels, with a consequent removal of the centre of interest from the subject to an object now brought into view: the necessary beginning or any process of transcendence. (p. 176)

says that the nature of the mystical process emanates from "the effort to establish a new equilibrium" of the self (p. 381). Kinnell's persona tries to establish a new context in which "things" make sense; that is, he tries to find links among the levels of transcendent order, to make new again the broken oath "between earth and water, flesh and spirit" (p. 4).

The journey, however, convinces the persona that there is no universal correspondence. There is only that meaning which he himself makes. The only universal constant is death, "lastness," and "Lastness/is brightness" (p. 73) which must "when it does end" leave "nothing" (p. 74).

Death is the primary theme of The Book of Nightmares, and it is appropriate that Kinnell begins and ends this poem with images of birth. "Under the Maud Mood" is concerned with the birth of Kinnell's daughter, Maud; "Lastness," with the birth of his son, Fergus. The poem is dedicated to these two children, and it would seem that they might have become the context by which Kinnell might have defined himself. But even in birth there is the overriding sense of loss since "the dead lie, empty, filled at the beginning" (p. 74). To be born is to enter into the world of perishing. Maud "dies" as her umbilical cord is cut. Part 6 of "Lastness" reiterates the "necessity" of "falling" --that is, of perishing--and part 7 paradoxically comforts and admonishes Fergus to examine the "blued flesh" of a dead body.
Book I parallels Book X in a number of ways. Kinnell retraces the same images: the path, the fire, a description of a bear, the passage of birth, the Archer, and advice from the father. The persona is traveling on the same path; the same fire is burning. The persona's perspective is different, however. In Book I he speculates that earlier wanderers did not get warm by their fires and that they were not sanctified ("unhouseling themselves on cursed bread"; that is, not having received spiritual nourishment). In Book X everything ("a tree, a lost animal, the stones") that comes near the fire's heat gets warm, although now it no longer matters for whom the fire was built since the world is dying. The persona like earlier wanderers has traveled the path and has been left without the sacrament ("unhouseled").

The parallel passages about the bear almost exactly repeat the image:

- a black bear sits alone
  . . . nodding from side
to side. He sniffs . . . gets up,
eats a few flowers, trudges away,
his fur glistening
  in the rain (p. 4, pp. 71-72)

But in Book X the bear sniffs sweat in the wind and senses the "death-creature," the persona nearby. The bear "understands" that the persona is "no longer there" and the image shifts, the bear watching himself get up, eating a few flowers, trudging away in the rain. Whereas the bear sniffs "blossom-smells" in Book I, it senses the death smell that is on the persona in Book X. The bear becomes removed one
step away from itself. In Book X it turns

slowly around and around
on himself, scuffing the four-footed
circle into the earth. (p. 71)

It moves in the same path, making its impression or leaving
its trace as it turns, just as the persona's path circles
back on itself. The bear sees the difference and is not
disturbed. The persona, on the other hand, is disturbed by
the look of himself that his journey gives him.

The passage about his children offers a comparison of
the death-like qualities of the act of birth. Maud's birth
is described as a "passage" (p. 5), like the path which the
persona takes. She is "alone in the oneness," foreshadowing
the solitary figure walking with the emptiness in Book X.
As she prepares to enter the world, she pushes against the
slippery walls of her mother's womb and her pushing has the
effect of "sculpting the world with each thrash." She is
emerging and simultaneously making her impression, her
"sculpting," on the world. Her birth signals the Adamic
mode of the poem. She comes forth with a remembrance of the
dark, the memories rushing out of her, leaving a residue in
her brain of the darkness out of which she has come.

The transition from one world to another is magical.
She is born with a chakra on top of her brain. The chakra
is a whirling disk of the light which suddenly throbs as she
awakens to a new level of existence. Her "black eye opens,
the pupil/droozed with black hairs/stops" (p. 6). She is
not deformed; she has two eyes. Kinnell is suggesting the
singularity of the older vision; that is, then she saw one way and now she sees another way. The word "droozed" is apparently a portmanteau of "drooped" and "oozed." The pupil droops or sags because it is at the end of one kind of life, but it oozes with black hairs because it is at the beginning of a new kind of life. The transition between worlds is accompanied by changes in color from the "astral violet/of the underlife," to the "blue as a coal" during the moment that she dies in birth, to the "rose" color of her first breath.

The transition is also ugly. She comes forth like a "peck/of stunned flesh/clothed with celestial cheesiness" and her arms "clutch at emptiness." The passage is painful. As her head passes through the birth canal, she is caught in the "shuddering/grip of departure, the slow,/agonized clenches." Her first "song" is a scream, and her first gesture is to clutch the emptiness. The adverb "already" modifies "clutching," the suggestion being that even this early in life she is making her first mistake by trying to grab hold of that which does not exist. In an earlier section of Book I, Maud, as a child in her crib, tries to "take hold" of her father's song by putting her hand into his mouth and grabbing the sound. The implied metaphor is that she mistakes his tongue for his song. She misapprehends the phenomenal world. In part 7 the persona tells her that she will remember "in the silent zones" of her brain his nighttime song to her, not a song "of light . . . /but a
black" (p. 7). The song becomes part of her preconscious memory, together with the residue from the memories that rushed out at birth.

The image of the flower is repeated throughout Book I. The bear eats "a few flowers." The father's song "flowers" on his tongue. Most importantly, Maud appears as a blue filament or blue flower tearing open her green swaddling clothes when she "sprouts." Even her gums become flower-like in their "budding for her first spring on earth." Such repetition of images is a typical device of Kinnell's in The Book of Nightmares. The images appear to float, unattached to one another. For example, "astral violet of the under-life" (p. 6) is echoed in "the underglimmer of the beginning" where in the marshes the persona learned his only song as the "earth oozed up," an echo of the "pupil droozed with black hairs." In part 2 one musical note, the residue of his words, "curves off" of his tongue into a howl. In part 7 Maud cries out during the night while she rocks in the crib, the wood of which is "knifed down to the curve of a smile, a sadness." The rocking arch of wood seems to be whittling itself down. The images are not isolated. The connections are subtle. The underlife and the underglimmer suggest a correspondence between birth and the beginning of the song. "Ooze" and "drooze" both suggest the moment that prompts the awakening. The image of the curve suggests the residue motif. In both cases the theme of perishing is directed toward despair (the persona's howl and Maud's cries).
Fergus' birth parallels Maud's. In the process of birth, his head "came out/the rest of him stuck" (p. 72). His head is "all alone." Like his sister, he comes into the world with a pre-existence. He "almost smiled . . . almost forgave it [the world because of the difficulties that it puts in the path] all in advance." Fergus, like Maud, is born in pain, "blood splashing beneath him on the floor" like the "omphalos [umbilical] blood humming all about" Maud. But there is also magic. The persona takes Fergus into his hands and senses the "grasslands and ferns" of the infant earth, just as he had taken Maud into his hands and sensed "the mist still clinging about/her face" (p. 5).

Suddenly the persona associates the newborn Fergus with the bear by the image "the black glistening fur/of his head." The free association once again shows how the persona's consciousness has floated into a space where his own private mental associations give meaning to his experience. The son Fergus is one step removed from the persona, just as the bear's image became dissociated from the bear as it observed itself. But Fergus is not a transformation of the persona's energies. The child is not a transcendent value. In the next section the persona calls out to the "stone,/and the stone/calls back, its voice hunting among the rubble/for my ears." The rubble repeats the residue motif and the persona discovers that there is a point at which there is no echo; that is, "nothing comes back." The persona stands alone, dressed in old shoes and
hen-oil, residue from Books II and III.

The image of the Archer found in Books I and X reiterates the birth-death theme. In the "first nights" of the person's journey, the Archer—the constellation Sagittarius, the ninth sign of the zodiac—lies, like an infant, sucking the cold "biestings" (mammary secretions) of the cosmos. Under the "glimmer of the moon, the persona creeps down to the riverbanks, "their long rustle/of being and perishing," life and death, here represented by the flux of the river. Here he discovers his "song" when the "earth oozes through to the underglimmer"; that is, he creates his first poem when his consciousness moves from one level of reality (the earth) to another (whatever is illuminated beneath the surface of the water). In Book X the Archer lies dead, the cycle apparently complete; however, "the first/voice comes craving again out of their [the dead's] mouths. The voice is reminiscent of the persona's first song, as well as of Maud's first gesture, "clutching at the emptiness." Kinnell is not suggesting rebirth, for he writes in part 4 of "Lastness":

And when it does end
there is nothing, nothing
left.

There is only the wail of life at its end:

the wail,
the sexual wail
of the back-alleys and blood strings we have lived
still crying,
still singing. (p. 74)

The anaphora in the last two lines recalls another
association from Book I. The persona sings to Maud because she has been crying. The coupling of singing and crying endures until death.

Book X ends with the persona's advice to Fergus; Book I ended with his advice to Maud. Both sections are concerned with a reaction to death. Book I ends with words directed toward the "orphaned" Maud; that is, to Maud when one day the persona is dead. His voice will call out to her, "sister!" The old father-daughter relationship will have been obliterated, and she will be on the path that he had once traveled. They will be like brother and sister in the same experience, and the prompting for her to read her father's book will come from the grave, "from everything that dies." Book X, on the other hand, echoes the anaphora "still crying" (p. 74) by offering paradoxical advice:

Sancho Fergus! Don't cry!

Or else, cry.

On the body, on the blued flesh, where it is laid out, see if you can find the one flea which is laughing. (p. 75)

The persona wants to comfort his son but realizes that there is no comfort. His journey has convinced him of the emptiness of the heavens ("Has the top sphere/emptied itself?" p. 73). The grotesque image of the blued flesh suggests the theme of death, and if there is any relief from what the persona perceives about death, it lies in the "one flea which is laughing." But the relief is not a relief at all. The flea is parasitic and will consume the dead body, and it
Books I and X demonstrate Kinnell's modification of the mystical process. In the first stage or awakening, the persona experiences a change in the equilibrium of the self. He begins a journey in an effort to restore that equilibrium, but although the journey moves through different levels of consciousness the persona discovers that he has only traveled through his own psyche. The illumination is that there is no transcendent value but that which he has made by his journey. Underhill describes the intermediate stage as "purification." In order to reach illumination, one must detach and modify oneself. In *The Book of Nightmares*, detachment and mortification are almost involuntary. Pain comes upon the persona sometimes by chance. A more essential difference between the persona's progress and traditional mysticism lies in the concept of sin. Mystics detach themselves from the world by renouncing sin; that is, they strip away that which stands between them and their god. Kinnell's persona also detaches himself from that which prevents a new vision, but his progress incorporates a new entity by which to identify the self. Underhill says that with the shifting of consciousness comes a "consequent removal of the old center of interest from the subject to an object." In *The Book of Nightmares*, the old center is the old self-image, and the persona shifts his attention to a new object. Book II and Book III demonstrate this intermediate step.
Both Book II and Book III are extensions of the disrupted state of the self's equilibrium. Book II, "The Hen Flower," removes the persona's attention from himself to a hen; Book III, "The Shoes of Wandering," from himself to a pair of old shoes. In both books the persona continues to feel pain but becomes detached from his agony by thinking about the possibility of existing in another state. These books establish the persona's desire to identify himself with the objects. Of the hen, he says, "--if only/we could let go/like the hen" (p. 11). Of those who have worn the shoes of wandering, he desires their mantle because they have already traveled on the path.

The persona had entered an altered state of consciousness. The original version of "The Hen Flower" began with the words "We insomniacs" and then concludes with the later first words of the final version:

Sprawled
on our faces in the spring nights, teeth
biting down on her feathers. (p. 11)

The direction of "The Hen Flower" follows a gradual transformation of the persona into the hen or "hen flower" as the image finally emerges. Part 6 repeats the words "Sprawled face down, waiting." The altered state, insomnia, leads the persona into a bizarre hallucination derivative of the hen feathers in the pillow on which he tries to sleep. In the hallucination he traces the residual eggs in the dead chicken's body, and as they grow smaller and smaller near their source the persona sees that they "reach back toward/
the icy pulp/of what is" (p. 13). His finger discovers that
the "what is" or the source is a zero which freezes the
finger which is examining it. The source is a cold void.

The eggs in the cadaver suggest the residue motif. The
residue is a key to understanding the levels of existence.
In part 5 the persona places the bone of a ram near his eye
and suddenly intuits, as if by a magical transformation, the
cosmos itself:

I thought suddenly
I could read the cosmos spelling itself,
the huge broken letters
shuddering across the black sky and vanishing. (p. 13)

But it is the persona who reads the broken letters. The act
of witnessing that which is perishing establishes the Adamic
mode once again. The cosmos does not define itself; it
merely offers letters without spelling itself out.

The Adamic mode also appears in "The Shoes of
Wandering." Even though in part 6 the persona says that the
"path invents itself," what he means is that the passage
through jungle and ground is delineated by the process of
walking. Speaking of the wanderers who preceded him, he
says, "and whichever way they lurched was the way" (p. 22).
The original version of the poem ended in this way:

light up
the way
by being more intensely upon it.

The final version de-emphasizes the persona's confidence that
he will enter more fully into the journey. The revisions
tend to emphasize the purification theme. The character
of the Crone is added, and the last lines of the final version are:

you will feel all your bones
break
over the holy water you will never drink. (p. 23)

Just as Book I had suggested that earlier wanderers had been "unhouseled" or without the sacrament, the Crone curses the persona by predicting that he will never be purified. But the overriding sense of "The Shoes of Wandering" suggests that the persona will become a purified traveler. He believes that the wanderers lit "their steps by the lamp/of pure hunger and pure thirst" (p. 22). They had detached and mortified themselves in a step corresponding to the mystic's purification prior to illumination. The Crone represents an obstacle in the path. In part 1 she warned that the "first step . . . shall be/to lose the way." Yet the persona does not seem to be losing his way. He walks in "someone else's wandering," the shoes of the dead, and the shoes fit so perfectly that they are like the "eldershoes of my feet." The shoes become his feet, and when he puts them off in part 2, he "lapses back/into darkness." It is through the residue in the shoes that he comes to feel another consciousness. The "footsmells in the shoes" are the residue, and it is through the transference of his attention from himself to the smells that he comes to the grotesque images of other men's nightmares—the war veteran in the hospital or smells of an Oklahoma men's room. He moves from one image to another in stream-of-consciousness associations. The acts
of purification are not made in response to sin but are necessary because of man's false apprehension of the world. The journey through the images serves to purify the mental traveler.

Three additional revisions in "The Shoes of Wandering" indicate the reinforcement of major motifs of The Book of Nightmares. First, in part 4 Kinnell adds the image of the "witness trees" which are consumed as the persona moves through them. Even the road trembles. These trees reappear in Book IX, but their presence in Book III demonstrates that they contribute to the "shock" that "each step" in the path gives the persona. In response to the shocks, his memory overextends itself, trying to grab the future. The image is reminiscent of Maud's preconscious memory and her gesture of clutching at the emptiness. The motif of time is reinforced as the memory--the past--tries to harness the future. In the original version, the memory gropes and makes a mistake by trying to overextend itself, but in the revision the mistake is more violent ("the bloody hands" of memory), the effect being to heighten the horror of the passage. In part 5 there are two additional images not found in the original version. These support the motifs of residue and time. In the path there is the "trace" of "our history of errors" left behind in the dust. This image becomes another image:

And is it the hen's nightmare, or her secret dream, to scratch the ground forever eating the minutes out of the grains of sand? (p. 22)
The "grains of sand" recall the hourglass image from Book I, and the hen (a reference to Book II) scratches the ground forever, foreshadowing the bear of Book X that scuffs his circle into the earth by turning on his four legs in one spot.

The tone of Books II and III is a combination of fearfulness and audacity. The persona is afraid of his position—insomnia in "The Hen Flower" and losing his way in "The Shoes of Wandering." Yet in both books he seems to defy the threatening hallucinatory obstacles—the dead hen and the Crone. In Book II he throws the dead hen into the sky in a moment of liberating himself from the vision of himself as hen; in Book III he sleeps with his door unlocked and continues on his way despite the Crone's warnings. But the persona wonders as he throws the dead hen across the constellation Ursa Major (the Bear) whether or not her "wings creaked open"; that is, whether or not his victory over her is complete. Book III also reveals the persona's doubt. The Crone places his bones near the Aquarian stars, a gesture corresponding to his use of the ram's bone in Book II. She tells him that he will not be sanctified.

Because the tone of fearfulness and audacity mollifies the persona's receptivity to the purification, these two books do not end with the death of selfhood which Underhill says is the primary object of mortification (p. 221). The persona still feels the vestiges of his old self. Book II ends thus:
Listen, Kinnell,
dumped alive
and dying into the old sway bed,
a layer of crushed feathers all that there is
between you
and the long shaft of darkness shaped as you,
let go. (pp. 14-15)

The self is not dead, and he is trying to tell it that it
must let go if it is to be delivered into another level of
consciousness (in this book, from insomnia to sleep). The
long shaft of darkness is the realm to which he might have
passed. Part 7 concludes by repeating the image of part 1:
"The crucifix drifting face down," an echo of "Sprawled on
our faces in the spring/night." Even the feathers which
have been "freed" from the hen are afraid. There is no
deliverance yet. The reference to Christ in part 6
demonstrates the lack of salvation: "it is an empty morning"
(that is, no resurrection). In Book III the persona gets
his shoes from the Store of the Salvation Army. The persona
does not find salvation; instead, he finds the shoes of the
dead. These discoveries of death images within or on the
persona are part of the purification process.

The mystical process reaches its peak in Book V, "In
the Hotel of Lost Light." In this book the persona achieves
the illumination of self by transcending the purification
process and moving into what Underhill calls "another order
of reality" (p. 233). It becomes conscious "of a world that
was always there and wherein its substantial being . . . has
always stood." Underhill calls this consciousness "Trans-
cendent Feeling' in excelsis." This is the highest state
of perception and the mystic intuits a profound awareness of whatever it is that is "Absolute." The persona identifies with the drunken man who died in the "left-hand sag" (p. 35). In this way, the persona achieves a kind of death of the self which enables him to experience the "moment of illumination."

The identification begins in part 1 when the persona says, "my body slumped out/into the shape of his." The identification becomes elaborated when in part 3 the persona begins to write for posterity the dead man's last words. Part 4 is the "final postcard" that the dead man might have written if he had lived longer. Part 7 becomes a kind of footnote ("The foregoing scribed down in March, of the year Seventy," p. 38) written by the persona in witness of all that he has experienced earlier in Book V.

The major image by which the persona becomes entranced within the night vision is light, although Kinnell also uses the images of a fly, spiders, worms, bruises, and blood. Light is the most natural image for a moment of illumination, yet this vision is a moment devoid of light. The hotel is named for the light that it no longer possesses. The spiders leave behind their light after they have eaten their "memoirs" (another image of residue) into the dead body. The vision is finally documented in part 7 "in the absolute spell/of departure, and by the light/from the joined hemispheres of the spider's eyes" (p. 38). The "spell" indicates the exalted state of the illumination, but the
departure reinforces the idea of loss. The light is lost; that is, the persona discovers in his moment of awareness that except for his own experience the universe is essentially empty. This theme is found in the persona's composition of the dead man's letter:

I saw the ferris wheel writing its huge, desolate zeroes in the 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 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 nightmares. (pp. 36-37)

The circles of light are zeroes, foreshadowing the bear's circle in Book X; the painted footsoles suggest the Adamic theme (the persona's coloring of the world); "it shall be so" reiterates the absolute power of death; the persona's cries represent the response to the emptiness. The intrusion of the dead man's consciousness in the last line (the pun "ghostwriting his own prayers") suggests the residue of consciousness which the persona has picked up on and transformed into the letter. Thus, the moment of illumination is a confirmation of the persona's isolation even though he may find himself amid residue that he may use in the creative process.

If the light is "lost," the persona must find his source of illumination somewhere other than in a divine source. The image at the conclusion of Book V suggests that the footnote was written in the light from the spider's eyes.
Similarly, part 3 suggests that the death-note was written from the "languished alphabet/of worms." Neither the spider nor the worms offer a source for the persona's identification.

The fly, however, does share a problem with the persona. They both struggle against death. The fly descends "down the downward-winding stair" (p. 35)—the persona's levels of consciousness—until it sticks in the spider's web—the persona's awareness of death. It only ceases to struggle when its doom is sealed, and Kinnell uses the simile of Roland's horn for the sound of the fly's wings as the fly yields. In the eleventh-century French epic, Roland does not call for help in battle from his lord until his own death is imminent. Thus, like the fly and like Roland, the persona will continue to struggle until he dies.

Death is personified in the letter of the dead man as a poor female cousin. At this point the persona tries to soften the image of death by having the dead man offer a retort to the deskman of the hotel who complains about the odor of the cadaver. This retort, coming from the cadaver itself, seems like an ironical defense of its own foulness which it no longer is capable of perceiving. The retort suggests that Death visits cadavers to change the "flesh-rags on her bones" (p. 37). The transformation motif suggests that she takes flesh from dead bodies to clothe her own bones. The title of Body Rags (1968) had suggested a similar image. In "In the Hotel of Lost Light," the
transformation motif reinforces the theme of death. Death is personified as a female cousin who has transformed the dead man's family name—"To Live"—into "To Leave." The transformation is a blatant wordplay suggesting how in life one always is close to death.

The transition from death to life is also a narrow bridge. In part 5, Kinnell describes the body of the dead man:

Violet bruises come out
all over his flesh, as invisible
fists start beating him a last time; the whine
of omphalos blood starts up again. (p. 37)

The body appears to be coming back to life. Blood circulates in the omphalos (the umbilicus), and soon the "bellybutton explodes/the carnal nightmare soars back to the beginning" (p. 37). Also the more learned Greek word juxtaposed with a colloquialism ironically undercuts the mystery established in these lines by the use of the Greek word for umbilicus. The image seems to break open at the same moment that the cadaver explodes in putrefaction. The carnal nightmare—that is, the life of the flesh—comes back to its beginning—that is, to nothingness, annihilation.

If there is any life remaining in the bones of the dead man by this point, it finds its way back into the earth where the bones are thrown away into the aceldama—the field of bloodshed. The bones will "re-raise/in the pear tree" which will one day "shine down on"—not shade—the lovers "clasping what they dream is one another." The image of the lovers is reminiscent of the theme of illusion in First Poems,
and Kinnell uses the techniques of reversing the traditional use of the image of light. The light shines in illusion; moments of illumination come in the darkness.

Book V establishes the essential aloneness of death. Books IV, VII, and VIII, on the other hand, show how the persona tries to establish bonds that will allow him to transcend the position of the isolated self. Book IV, "Dear Stranger Extant in the Memory by the Blue Juniata," deals with the persona's relationship with a "stranger," Virginia. Book VII, "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight," looks forward to the maturation of the father-daughter relationship. Book VIII, "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing" spans a spectrum of bonds: husband-wife, man-woman, father-son, man-man. In each case, the persona hopes that the bond will offer a refuge from the wilderness that surrounds the journey.

Kinnell's tone toward the theme of bonds is established at the beginning of Book IV. Listening to the chimes in the bell tower, the persona resigns himself to the fact that the hotel deskman did not awaken him as promised. Instead, the deskman has "passed out/under his clock" (p. 27). Kinnell's tone suggests that the persona distrusts human relationships. The persona cannot count on the deskman's work; nevertheless, he still looks forward to another day ("grain after grain," suggesting the hourglass image) and hopes to hear the maggots as they bite through the cover of the brain and sever the nerves "which keep the
book of solitude." In other words, even though he has just witnessed the unreliability of human nature (demonstrated by the irresponsibility of the deskman who has passed out on the job), he looks forward to human relationships.

The theme of Book IV is solipsism. In a series of letters between the persona and Virginia, Kinnell establishes the impossibility of transcending the gap between people. Virginia is addressed as "Dear stranger." Yet there is the overriding urgency to bridge the gap:

So little of what one is threads itself through the eye of empty space.

Never mind.
The self is the least of it.
Let our scars fall in love. (p. 31)

If "little of what one is" makes itself known to another person, the bond seems to offer little hope against the void. He says, "I guess/[these letters] will be all we know of one another." Yet he brushes aside these limitations and concludes Book IV with the imperative to ignore the value of the individual's selfish desires to love or to be loved ("The self is the least of it"). The persona concludes this book on the hope that his "scars" will understand Virginia's and that these will fall in love.

The scars recall the residue motif. This book seems to emphasize an Edenic setting. The blue river, the Juniata (a river in southern Pennsylvania), flows through the ruins of "a rural America . . . now vanished, but extant in memory,/a primal garden lost forever." The setting reinforces the Adamic mode. As Emerson wrote, "Man is a God
in ruins," so too Kinnell is saying that man is his own god. He must create his own solace because he has lost touch with the original harmony that he was once a part of. Thus, he tries to retrieve that harmony in part 4 with a recipe to cure insomnia ("Take kettle/of blue water. Boil of twigfire/ of ash wood. Grind root . . ."). The recipe is the persona's own remedy to retrieve the "sothic year" (which appears every 1460 years in the Egyptian calendar). The stranger's existence also depends for its definition upon nature since she is "extant in memory by the Blue Juniata."

The Adamic mode is further confirmed by the image of the automatic writing that Virginia experiences. The persona tells her that the "poem writes itself out" (p. 29) and that her "hand will move on its own." The poem that results is entitled "Tenderness toward Existence," an ironic title considering Virginia's claim that God is her enemy. She cannot rationally be expected to be tender toward "Existence" no matter whether it is malignant or "vacuum." Yet the source of Virginia's letter is apparently the persona's psyche. He is her "demon lover" whose eyes reflect themselves on her and then back into his "own world" (p. 28). Parenthetically in part 3 the persona addresses his mother with the words, "You see, we just think we're here . . ." (p. 28). The ellipsis suggests that the words "but we're not" will follow. But because the statement is directed toward his mother, the persona seems to be recalling a childhood memory from a time before he
realized that he could, in fact, "be here." The references to virginity ("virginal glades," p. 28, "virginal woods," p. 29, in addition to Virginia's name) suggest the primal garden out of which the blue Juniata flows.

Virginia's vision of God as her enemy stresses the virgin's distance from creation by her innocence. She and the persona are actually strangers although they share a kind of magical communion across space in their minds. The persona, on the other hand, has memory (of the hen, for example, remembered in part 5), and he can try to sort out the differences—or more properly, the unity—among people's darknesses; that is, all people share the same darkness—their common bond.

Book VII, "Little Sleep's-Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight," modifies the theme of bonds by setting it within the context of death. This book focuses on the persona's relationship with his daughter Maud who thinks that her father "will never die" and that he "exudes . . . the permanence of smoke or stars." The image expresses, however, his realization of his transitoriness since neither stars nor smoke is infinite. In part 2 Maud senses the impermanence when she tells the sun not to set and the flowers not to wither. The persona offers his daughter solace by listing in a Whitmanesque catalogue all of the things which he would do to preserve every particle of her being (including the "rot from her fingernail," p. 49).

The framework of Book VII is built on the scene of
Maud's crying out in the night, and the persona interprets her crying as an anticipation of her own mortality. Once again, he postulates that she possesses a preconscious memory when he calls her state of mind "the pre-trembling of a house that falls" (p. 50). Later, in part 5, he tells her not to be misled as he had once been by thinking that existence translates itself in memory:

the error of thinking, one day all this will only be memory. (p. 51)

He tells her to look "deeper into the sorrows to come" so that she can realize that the bones lying under her face indicate her death to come: "The still undanced cadence of vanishing." Thus, existence does not even last in memory, as he had hoped in Book IV that it might (the stranger extant in memory). The image of the persona's father appearing in Maud's eye demonstrates the illusiveness of memories. Her father appears as a tiny kite (obviously a personal memory of his father) moving "far up in the twilight" until "the angel/of all mortal things lets go the string" (p. 52); that is, the memory of his father becomes smaller and smaller until it disappears as a kite will if the string is released. The role that "mortal things" take is interesting in view of the fact that Kinnell has frequently tried to define his persona in terms of "things."

The conclusion of Book VII reiterates this attempt:

we will walk out together among the ten thousand things

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each scratched too late with such knowledge,  
the wages  
of dying is love.

Kinnell's expressed intention in writing The Book of Nightmares was to write a book about "real things." The original title for the work was "The Things." The quoted passage restates the Adamic theme by positing the persona on the path as a kind of director of his daughter's path although she too will one day have to define herself on "the path of vanished alphabets" (p. 50). Her father merely casts the residue of his life into the path, signs that someone has previously traveled the way. He foresees the day in the year 2009 when she will walk along the path, when the stones will call out only pieces of words, and she will want the world to make better sense; however, the sense—the image of raindrops—will not enter her consciousness because of her psyche's fontanel (a membraned opening) which prevents a total identification with "things." Even if she does come to perceive the nature of "things," the perception will consist only of an awareness of perishing. As a result of this perception, Maud clings to her father. Her arms are like the words of old men's speech. Kinnell uses the simile that old men's speech consists of abrupt ("halting") strings of adjectives because the old men cannot remember "things" ("lost nouns," p. 51). Loss is the consequence of living. Similarly, Book VII concludes that the consequences of living are also the stimuli for love because they lead to a realization of "the wages/of dying."
Thus, the parody of the Biblical text "The wages of sin is death" reverses the direction of the proverb while at the same time it substitutes the idea of perishing for the concept of sin. This substitution follows Kinnell's modification of the mystical process. The love bond therefore results because man realizes his mortality and tries to hold on to something which will give him meaning, if only temporarily.

In Book VIII the persona tries to assert that love bonds are a viable means of dealing with the emptiness of the heavens; more importantly, he expresses his belief that the perfect love bond is in its own way "the middle of heaven" (p. 60). Yet he qualifies the moments of illumination—manifested in the love bond as ecstasy—by calling the moment "that purest/most tragic concumbence, strangers/clasped into" (p. 58). The concumbence or lying together is "purest" because the most exalted moment results when one person becomes part of another. The concumbence is "most tragic" because even in the most exalted moment the two lovers remain "strangers." The title of Book VII "The Call Across the Valley of Not-Knowing" indicates that the effort to establish a bond is inevitably doomed because one person can "not know" another fully; nevertheless, people still call out across the empty space which surrounds them. They hope to regain a state of tranquility which they possess in their preconscious memory of fetal existence.

The context of the persona's bond with his wife is
established by the image of the male fetus in the mother's body. Fergus "rouses himself . . . and re-settles in the darkness." The wife, however, is not disturbed by the movements because she "sleeps on,/happy,/far away, in some other,/ newly opened room of the world" (p. 57). The persona and his wife are existing on different levels of consciousness. When they had lain together under the tree in an earlier time, they had shared a "knowledge of tree . . . of graves of flowers." This knowledge enabled the persona's brain to "blossom." In this heightened state, anything is possible ("the unicorn's phallus could have risen) if it emanated "out of thought itself" (p. 59). The Adamic mode is repeated. The expanding consciousness of the mind makes the persona "god-like'' (p. 59), and his thought can create a new reality (such as "a unicorn's phallus").

In contrast to the wife is the woman whom the persona once met in Waterloo, Iowa. This woman could have become his perfect bond, but he gave her up because of "necessity" which he explains as cowardice and loyalties to his family. This necessity might more properly be identified as the things of the world which prevent the persona from achieving and maintaining the illumination of self. The woman is "a torn half/whose lost other we keep seeking across time" (p. 58). If he had stayed with her, he might have been able to live in the exalted state.

The bond between men is represented in a Southern jail following a civil rights demonstration. The sheriff curses
and spits but surprises the persona by the "almost loving/animal gentleness of his hand on my hand" during fingerprinting (p. 59). The bond in this relationship allows the persona to understand the "harshness" of another man's hell, the jail cubicle which the sheriff "better than the rest of us" knows. The persona tries to imagine the sheriff's transcending this cubicle and returning to the fetal waters --"the sea he almost begins to remember" (p. 60). The obstacles which prevent the sheriff from achieving full illumination of self consist of the "black and white" that he treated unjustly. The violation of other men's civil rights represents the sheriff's failure to be fully "touched by creation" (p. 60). The bond between the persona and the sheriff is therefore limited by their differences in consciousness.

Book VIII concludes by underscoring the uncertainty of bonds. Kinnell uses the image of the bear "calling out across the valley of not-knowing" to the female bear. The call, "like ours, needs to be answered" (p. 61). The persona's assertion that the bonds can bridge the darkness seem to be weakened in part 7 by the bear's call: "yes . . . yes . . . ?" The persona wants affirmation from across the valley, but his call is finally a question. It is not an "intercession" (p. 61) or petition because it finally must acknowledge that there is no divine source of answers. The persona is his own divine source.

If Books IV, VII, and VIII demonstrate the persona's
attempts to maintain the equilibrium that he finds in bonds with other people, Books VI and IX demonstrate the extent of such a need by presenting two diverse aspects of the nightmare motif. Book VI, "The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible," is the persona's nightmare in a bizarre world of war images. It is indicative of the mystic's Dark Night of the Soul. Book IX, "The Path Among the Stones," in its own way also presents this stage of the mystical process but in a less violent and more hopeful way.

Underhill has defined the nature of the mystical process as

the effort to establish a new equilibrium, to get, as it were, a firm foothold upon transcendent levels of reality; . . . an orderly movement of the whole consciousness toward higher centres, in which each intense and progressive affirmation fatigues the immature transcendental powers, as if paid for by a negation; a swing-back of the whole consciousness. (p. 381)

Books VI and IX are certainly moments of fatigue for the persona. The heightened state is suddenly forced from its moment of ecstasy, and the persona—like the mystic—sinks into a state of despair. According to the mystical scheme, the Dark Night of the Soul passes when the consciousness recovers from its fatigue and makes the transition back to the path which leads to ecstasy.

The theme of Book VI is despair. The persona has a vision of a death from which he can see no deliverance. Parts 1 and 7 establish this despair: "Lieutenant!/This corpse will not stop burning!" (p. 41). Book VI is perhaps the most ironical book of the entire poem. One of Denise
Levertov's students (quoted on the blurb of the book's jacket) claims that *The Book of Nightmares* "encompasses both political rage and satire, and the most lyrical tenderness and holds them together: coheres." The quotation stretches its point. Book VI contains perhaps the only truly satirical material in the poem.

The tone of Book VI is sarcastic. Part 3 satirizes materialism by cataloging questions which television commercials raise:

> Do you have a body that sweats? . . .
> Armpits sprouting hair?
> Piles so huge you don't need a chair to sit at a table? (p. 42)

The questions are interrupted by a text which asserts that man "shall not sleep, but . . . shall be changed." The biblical nature of the text suggests that man shall not be spiritually asleep but shall be transformed by the spirit. Yet Kinnell's persona has no hope in the immortality of his spirit. Part 4 consists of his last will in which he bequeathes various parts of his body in mercenary fashion as he makes ironical excuses for the unjust state of the world. For example, he gives his blood to a bomber pilot who has already shed enough blood; he gives his stomach to the Indians who have already "digested" or "stomached" enough treaties as they "sucked in good faith on peace pipes."

Book VI does not reaffirm the faith in human relationships that Kinnell tried to establish with the theme of bonds. In fact, part 2 provides an example of a soldier's delight in destroying one of his victims.
remember that pilot
who'd bailed out over the North,
how I shredded him down to catgut on his strings?
... I loved the *sound*
of them, I guess I just loved
the feel of them. (p. 42)

The soldier's sadism, as a dehumanizing force, undercuts the theme of brotherhood implicit in the bond theme. The image of the catgut (the parachute strings of the victim) reappears in Book X as the catgut of the violin which wails its music as the persona reestablishes himself as the interpreter of the wail ("still crying/still singing").

Part 6 is another hallucinatory vignette, another fragment of the persona's nightmare, in which because his neck is broken he must hold his "head up with both hands" as he runs. He must carry the weight of his own consciousness; he is the sole interpreter of his perceptions. This vignette suggests a correspondence with the innocent state of Maud in Book I when she mistook her father's tongue for his song. But in Book VI the idea is presented in a more violent context: "the flames may burn the oboe/but listen buddy boy they can't touch the notes" (p. 44). The metaphor seems very heavy-handed. The destructive forces may consume his body (the oboe), but they cannot destroy the "notes" he has produced. The term "buddy boy" is representative of the sarcastic tone of this book. The sarcastic tone becomes even more vicious when Kinnell applies it to his theme of despair. He begins Book VI by repeating images of residue (such as the small particles: orts, pelf, fenks, sordes, p. 41) but concludes this book with the image of the corpse.
which refuses to give up its particles. It refuses to stop burning or to be consumed. The nightmare will not end. The Dark Night of the Soul persists.

Book IX, "The Path Among the Stones," is similar to Book VI in theme but very different in tone. Book IX presents another state of fatigue. The persona is near the end of his journey, and he remembers the images accumulated along the path (such as the wishbone of the hen). He believes that he will remain in the "field"; that is, he despairs of deliverance from this state of exhaustion. A significant difference between the traditional mystical scheme and the persona's progress lies in the way in which deliverance from the Dark Night of the Soul occurs. Underhill says that the mystic must finally surrender. "The self . . . has got to learn to cease to be its 'own centre and circumference'" (p. 397). Kinnell's persona works in the opposite direction. He finally asserts that he is the center of the universe. This assertion is proof of the Adamic mode. In part 4 the field becomes the path once again:

\begin{quote}
A way opens at my feet. I go down . . . into the unbreathable goal of everything I ever craved and lost. (p. 67)
\end{quote}

Book IX seeks to resolve the original motive for the journey proposed in Book I. In this next to the last book, the persona is still "seeking to be one/with the unearthly fire" (p. 66). He is still seeking the covenant of "things." Thus, he descends into the grainery barn ("goaf")
which contains the residue (grains) of everything that he has ever desired and lost. The themes of residue and perishing are brought together just prior to the moment in Book X in which he will discover that he has returned to the original site of departure. As the Adamic persona steps into the path which opens under his feet, he sees an old man casting a spell with "sand/stolen from the upper bells of hourglasses" (p. 67). But time, like residue and death, seems to offer nothing substantial. The old man's spell produces "Nothing/Always nothing."

Part 5, however, offers the key to the release from the Dark Night of the Soul. The persona suddenly discovers something:

\begin{quote}
And yet, no,
I crawl up: I find myself alive
. . . wailing the wail of all things. (p. 68)
\end{quote}

Unlike the traditional mystic who suffers in the Dark Night of the Soul because of a sense of low self-esteem due to sin and because of his subsequent isolation from God, Kinnell's persona suffers because he has not realized that he can "crawl up." He can save himself. Thus, Book IX ends with a sacramental refreshment of the soul. "The witness trees heal/their scars" (p. 68) as the persona is now able to heal himself and the "stars/kneel down . . ./a splash/on the top of the head,/ . . . splashes of the/sacred water" (p. 68).

Book IX leads the persona into "Lastness," Book X, which is revealed to be a return to the origin of the journey which had begun in Book I. The overall structure of
The Book of Nightmares is basically cyclical. Yet the process through which the persona travels is determined by the ways in which his consciousness is directed. Books I and X are the chief evidence of the cyclic structure because they so heavily repeat the similar images (the path, the fire, the bear, the birth of a child, the Archer, the concerned parent). Books II and III represent the first step after the awakening: the purification. The persona shifts his attention from subject, himself, to object, the hen or the shoes. Books IV, VII, and VIII reveal his attempts to establish a bond and thereby transcend the solitary position of the self. His first attempt at a bond, Book IV, convinces him of the distance between people. He and Virginia are actually strangers. Thus, when he moves into his moment of illumination in Book V, his worst fear is confirmed: The only thing that he can count on is the fact of perishing. His vision of the dead man in the Hotel of Lost Light tells him that there are no final transcendent values. The only universal constant is death. As a result of this "tragic illumination," one of Kinnell's most basic critical terms, the persona is cast into the world of nightmares, the Dark Night of the Soul which follows mystical illumination as a kind of psychic fatigue. In an effort to save himself from the nightmares, he tries again to form bonds with other people. Books VII and VIII demonstrate his various attempts (with Maud in Book VII and with his wife, a sheriff, the Waterloo woman, and even the fetus of his son.
in Book VII). These attempts serve only to convince him once again of the limitations of the bonds. As a result of this further disappointment, he finds himself back in the world of nightmares, the solitary field in Book IX. The persona's salvation consists of the way in which he releases himself from the Dark Night of the Soul. In part 4 of Book IX, he says, "A way opens/at my feet." The persona discovers that, as he takes each step, the path opens before him. The path might have gone anywhere, depending on the direction that he might have taken. As he emerges in Book X, he discovers his ability to define himself. He has tried human relationships, but they were not strong enough to deliver him. Ultimately, he is his own authority.

The structure of The Book of Nightmares, thus, follows the mystical scheme. The persona's progress confirms the Adamic mode by showing how definition of self results from a non-rational apprehension of reality. The structure of the poem does not depend on the rigid symmetry of its appearances (each book consisting of seven parts). Kinnell, himself, has admitted that there is no particular reason for seven, that he might have arbitrarily chosen six or eight (even though he admits that "seven" has a magical suggestion).\(^3\)

He had written "The Porcupine" (Body Rags, 1968) in seven parts and had decided to continue his experiment with the

form. The division into ten books reflects Kinnell's admiration of Rilke's *The Duino Elegies* which he calls the "supreme modern poem partly because it doesn't have a shred of narrative in it." The less narrative a poem is, Kinnell argues, the more it becomes a poem about a "consciousness that is left on its own . . . nothing is telling it which way to go--it has to probe without maps, so to speak." The persona in *The Book of Nightmares* probes without maps.

Critics such as M. L. Rosenthal, who argue that *The Book of Nightmares* does not possess a "structural thoroughness," fail to understand that the structure of the poem depends upon the journey of the persona's consciousness. The structure of the poem grows organically as the persona defines himself. The poem ends where it began--in the awakened self and its structural center is in Book V in the moment of illumination: Kinnell's vision of death.

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\[4\text{Ibid., p. 26.} \quad 5\text{Ibid., p. 27.}\]
Black Light, published in 1966, is Kinnell's only novel. Preceding Body Rags (1968) and The Book of Nightmares (1971), it demonstrates a turning point in Kinnell's development. Although Kinnell had by this time given up the mythic mode, he had not yet settled upon the poetic persona that flowers in the Adamic mode of The Book of Nightmares. In his novel he experimented with a technique which he later felt to be unsatisfactory. In an interview he once said that Black Light was actually a novel "straining to be a poem."

Kinnell's dissatisfaction is not completely justifiable. Black Light is in fact a good novel. It is carefully plotted, well developed with characters, and thematically interesting. Kinnell's dissatisfaction most probably derives from the fact that he would rather have written it as a poem. In fact, Black Light is a precursor of The Book of Nightmares, and as such it offers an interesting comparison that delineates Kinnell's primary concerns. Of chief concern in this comparison are Kinnell's uses of the journey motif and his imagery. On the other

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hand, the differences between his only novel and his major poem indicate a decreasing interest in narrative and irony.

Kinnell's concern with poetic technique places Black Light in the tradition of Lawrence's Women in Love. The transformations of Jamshid, the protagonist of Black Light, resemble the kind of character development about which Lawrence wrote to Edward Garnett:

You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego--of the character. There is another ego, according to whose action the individual is unrecognisable, and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise, to discover are states of the same single radically unchanged element. (Like as diamond and coal are the same pure single element of carbon. The ordinary novel would trace the history of the diamond. . . .) Again I say, don't look for the development of the novel to follow the lines of certain characters: the characters fall into the form of some other rhythmic form, as when one draws a fiddle-bow across a fine tray delicately sanded, the sand takes lines unknown.²

Black Light, like Women in Love, is not an ordinary novel. It does not merely trace the changes in Jamshid's life. As the precursor of The Book of Nightmares, it is concerned with the progression of consciousness. This is a primary concern in Women in Love as demonstrated by Lawrence's statement in his "Forward" to that novel: "It is the passionate struggle into conscious being."³


The allotropic states in *Black Light* can be seen in Jamshid's spiritual struggle. The central image of the flame transforming itself into smoke suggests the direction of Jamshid's character development. In "Moony" of *Women in Love*, "flakes of light" reunite on the surface of the water as the moon tries "to recover from its convulsion, to get over the disfigurement and the agitation, to be whole and composed at peace." Jamshid's attempt to achieve spiritual peace is more important than the events of *Black Light*. This spiritual journey or progression of consciousness fails because tragically Jamshid fails to understand himself.

Jamshid, the central character of the novel, is a carpet-repairer in Meshed, Iran. Jamshid is forty years old, a widower, and father of a girl. He is losing his faith although he considers himself a virtuous man. Even though he is a relatively poor man, he hopes to procure a fine husband for his daughter, Leyla. For this purpose he hired a matchmaker, the mullah Torbati. While he is meditating one day in a mosque, he overhears a conversation which reveals that Torbati has been dealing in "temporary marriages." Shocked and angered, Jamshid leaves the mosque before Torbati arrives to lead the evening prayer. As he leaves, he says to himself, "Am I to trust the marriage of my only daughter to a mullah who is everybody's procurer? ... Furthermore, why should I let myself be led in prayer

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Ibid., p. 251.
Thus, within the first of twenty-five chapters, Kinnell establishes Jamshid's arrogant self-image. The remainder of the novel consists of Jamshid's discovery of his own vile nature; moreover, as he discovers his own corruption, so too does he begin to yearn to free himself from his own body. The theme of the novel concerns his desire for freedom. The plot destroys Jamshid's hopes, first for his daughter, then for himself.

The plot is relatively simple. Jamshid kills Torbati when Leyla's reputation is called into question. In fact, Leyla appears to be knowledgeable in the ways of the flesh, but Jamshid cannot bear to admit that his daughter is developing into a sensual woman or that he is sometimes sexually interested in her. The remainder of the novel consists of Jamshid's flight from the police to Tehran where he becomes a pimp. At the conclusion of the novel, he is trying to find his daughter whom he now believes to be a whore in the city. He fears that she may have been the girl with whom he slept in the dark whorehouse one night. As the novel ends, Jamshid's lack of self-awareness demonstrates that he is spiritually lost.

The novel is written in the tragic mode. The significant action upon which the plot rests consists of Jamshid's murder of Torbati. The murder occurs in Chapter 3

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5Galway Kinnell, Black Light (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), p. 5. Subsequent references to this work are made within this chapter.
after Torbati tells Jamshid of the difficulties of procuring a husband for a girl whose reputation is questionable. Jamshid, driven into a rage by such a thought, kills Torbati by stabbing him with a pair of shears. Dispassionately, he goes to the police since "there was nothing to think about. It was clear, he must turn himself in" (p. 16). At the police station he tries to confess, but the police misunderstand, thinking that Jamshid is only asking for protection against thieves. The police turn to the complaints of some other men, and Jamshid leaves. Subsequently, he becomes a fugitive, and the remainder of the novel traces his journey to Tehran where he hopes to lose himself in the anonymity of the city. Ironically, he does not escape from his worst enemy: himself.

He travels for a while with Ali, a murderer who dies trying to save Jamshid from a band of thieves. Feeling a combination of guilt and devotion and determined to bring Ali's body to the widow's home, Jamshid travels with the body strapped across the back of a camel. Attacked by vultures, Ali's body and the camel have to be left behind. In a "vast field of stone ruins," Jamshid discovers a woman who is wailing in grief for her lost son, and immediately he makes love to her. Continuing his journey the next day, he goes to Ali's widow to tell her the news of her husband's death. For a brief while, he is her lover but eventually flees to Tehran to avoid the police who are now looking for him. Foolishly leaving clues as he travels, he finally
reaches the New City, a district of Tehran known as a haven for prostitutes and criminals. Staying for a while in a whorehouse, he discovers that he has contracted syphilis. In a moment of horror, he also discovers that he may have made love to his own daughter in a dark room of the whorehouse. At the conclusion he finds that he can flee from the city undetected, but ironically he is now obsessed with the idea of staying so that he can find his daughter whom he now believes to be a whore.

As a tragic figure, Jamshid is confronted by the consequences of the significant action, the murder of Torbati, and flees to avoid causing his daughter additional pain. Ironically, however, his flight leaves Leyla vulnerable to the world, and he suspects at the conclusion of the novel that by abandoning her he may have turned her into a whore. Furthermore, as a result of his lust, demonstrated by his encounter with the wailing woman, he has contracted syphilis and has spread the disease to his dead friend's widow and others, possibly even to his daughter. His flight, therefore, is like the spreading of this disease. Instead of saving himself, he is actually harming others and damning himself.

Jamshid's occupation demonstrates the direction of his character development in the plot. In the first chapter he is repairing a carpet on which the design of a bird of paradise has been damaged by a burning lump of charcoal. He works "with nervous speed . . . as he always did when it was
a question of a gap through which darkness was visible" (p. 1). He constantly adjusts his position so that a patch of sunlight lies before him in the room. The patch of sunlight is essential for him to see his work, but it also is in contrast to the darkness which peeks through the hole in the carpet. Jamshid's nervousness, demonstrating a deep-rooted anxiety to fill up the space, is indicative of his eagerness to arrange a marriage for Leyla. Furthermore, his conscientiousness at work demonstrates the care with which he tries to weave the threads of his life. Jamshid is reconstructing the pattern in the carpet, and the empty place remains a threat. Similarly, when Jamshid tries to sleep, he unsuccessfully attempts to hold off insomnia by emptying his mind, but "it was like looking into an empty sky and gradually seeing it was crawling with vultures. With relief he welcomed mundane worries back into his consciousness" (p. 4). Emptiness is not a repository of peace. It is a threat. Thus, he struggles to fill the gap in the carpet because it represents a reality that is torn.

Jamshid had been observing a strange visual effect, almost hallucinatory: "In the past few weeks there had been other moments when a thing, when he glanced at it, would blur and become a dark tear in reality" (p. 2). The bird of paradise represents the first tear; Leyla will become another. He will actually try to fill up her "open gash" (p. 126), even though unconsciously, when in Chapter 24 he makes love to her (or so he later thinks). When he views himself in the
pool of the mosque, he closes his eyes when his image is "torn to pieces" in the rippling water. Jamshid cannot bear to look at a broken reality. His occupation is to make carpets whole again, and his struggle in the novel is to make himself whole again. At the end of the novel, he strikes an entire package of matches before the very last match lights up. He tries to fill up the darkness. Even the last match does not succeed because the yellow light is transformed almost immediately into a "dancing, upwardly blackening flame" (p. 132).

The epigraph to the novel is taken from the Persian writer Sohrawardi:

Down low, the flame is white. Halfway up, it already begins changing itself into black smoke.

The transformation of flame into smoke suggests the major motif of the novel. Jamshid yearns to be transformed into a free man. He is enslaved by the past, present, and future. The process of living—or burning, in Kinnell's favorite metaphor—involves destruction. Jamshid adjusts his position in his workshop so that the patch of light will continue to shine. Yet the patch is elusive. At first it is a trapezoid of sunlight. The next day it "was on the verge of becoming a square" (p. 14). Just before Jamshid kills Torbati, the sunpatch "was absolutely perfect," that is, perfectly square. As Torbati's body falls, the patch is suddenly "stretched grotesquely out of shape" (p. 16), and after the murder "the patch of sunlight had slipped almost
entirely off the body and was taking on its old geometrical form again” (p. 17). Jamshid finds the transformations "pleasing," probably because the final shape represents the "old form."

Despite the murder Jamshid would like to believe that he has not damaged the "pattern" of light. But the body soon changes color and Jamshid does not realize that he is about to become a prisoner of his own design. Walking to the police station, he experiences "a strange, almost giddy sympathy with these creatures [children in the schoolyard for whom he has never before felt any kindness] that ran so freely in the sunlight" (p. 19). Although he feels that he is "walking through time" (p. 14), he is actually entrapping himself. The children represent a freedom which he would like to feel. Even though he is not arrested by the police, he becomes a fugitive and hence no longer "free" to act as he wishes. The pattern of his life is restricted to flight.

A similar irony exists in Chapter 11 when he leaves the "field of stone ruins." Having made love to the wailing woman, he gets a ride on a truck "across plains that were, suddenly, green and fertile" (p. 64). He eats watermelon on the back of the truck and thinks that he is riding to freedom; however, he does not know that he has contracted syphilis from this woman, nor does he realize that he is heading toward the scene of his final damnation.

Jamshid's flight to Tehran represents the defeat of his spiritual yearning. From the beginning of the novel,
his spiritual inadequacy is hinted at. Although he felt shame for never having made a pilgrimage to Mecca, he "was one of the most pious men in the region, and he knew it" (p. 8). He found "human sin" repulsive. He thus found himself in the dilemma of being driven to atheism because of "his very devotion to God." Ironically, his religious beliefs lead him away from God. He feels regret that he does not pray enough and prefers to pray alone even though praying alone is "twenty-seven degrees inferior to a prayer said in congregation" (p. 9). Even the process of washing for prayer disturbs him, and he seems preoccupied with the uncleanness of the water in the purification pools. His denunciation in Chapter 17 of the "flimsiness of religion" comes as no surprise, although even here he takes pride in his imagined spirituality: "It seemed, for the first time, that he could forgive her [Leyla]--for anything, whatever it might be" (p. 89). He can only forgive her bad reputation now that he is a fugitive murderer. When he arrives at Tehran, he believes that he has arrived at a new "paradise." Although he finds the city exciting--"He found it alive"--he realizes that it is a "crude paradise." He drifts into the New City, an emblem of the hope for salvation; however, he soon realizes "in a flash" that this is the worst possible place for him. Surrounded by prostitutes and criminals, he fears that his chances of being arrested are greater due to the increased surveillance of the police. The New City does not offer salvation; instead, it offers
disease, perversion (incest), and captivity.

Because Black Light is concerned with a spiritual journey, it is a precursor of The Book of Nightmares. In both works Kinnell is concerned with a journey of the self. In the novel Jamshid struggles to extricate himself from the corruption of the world. He succumbs, however, and sinks into oblivion. Just before he enters the field of stones, he observes on the tip of a flame "that shifting instant where the flame was turning into pure spirit" (p. 58). Jamshid blows out the flame. This act signals the annihilation of his spirit. As he moved through the desert with Ali's body strapped onto the back of Hassan, the camel, Jamshid realized that it was a "hopeless journey" ostensibly because Ali's body is giving off the odor of decomposition and makes Jamshid's flight no longer inconspicuous. The decomposition of Ali's body parallels the transformation of Jamshid's spirit. Jamshid's journey takes him closer and closer to annihilation. In The Book of Nightmares, the persona's journey takes him to the brink of annihilation but saves him at the last moment and allows him to pass through the field of stones and find his way back to the path.

Kinnell's basic assumptions about the universe have not changed. In both works, nature is essentially empty. Effat, the madame in the whorehouse, tells Jamshid that the one thing she has learned in life is "that nothing matters" (p. 122). When Jamshid suddenly fears that the girl to whom
he has just made love in the dark is his daughter, Effat's words echo in his mind. "'Nothing?' he gasped, 'nothing'" (p. 127). At this point Jamshid suddenly realizes that "he did know how to die." Ironically, at this point he discovers that the gates to the New City are no longer guarded. He is free, yet now he is bound to this new knowledge. The desire to die results from his fear that he has committed incest. The fear had been foreshadowed in Chapter 8 in Jamshid's memory of once having kissed Leyla only to discover a "buried sexual urging" (p. 46). This memory precedes by two paragraphs a reference to the title. Jamshid discovers Ali's body in the "black light . . . cast [by a rock] . . . straight down on the earth, illuminating a broken form." Thieves have just killed Ali and left the body beside the rock. In the blackness Jamshid discovers death.

This discovery parallels the persona's discovery of himself in the world of nightmares in The Book of Nightmares. Both works confirm Kinnell's view of the universe as emptiness. Life, therefore, is a journey through this emptiness. In Book IX of The Book of Nightmares, the persona passes through the field which is filled with fragments that are "glittering with the thousand sloughed skins/of arrowheads, stones." Jamshid buries Ali in a field of stone ruins on the site of Takhte Jamshid, which had once been the capital of Iran. Jamshid bears the name of the extinct city, and thus the ruins are linked to the character's origins. "For a moment he felt he was back
where he had started, in his shop in Meshed, bending over the dead mullah" (p. 61). The almost unconscious, perhaps Jungian preconscious, recognition of his primordial relationship with the ruins leads him to a moment of illumination. When he reaches the top of a stairway in the palace ruins, he discovers "nothing but ruins and emptiness" (p. 62).

Unlike the poetic persona, Jamshid does not fully recognize himself within the ruins. He seduces the wailing woman and later finds pleasure in an opium den. Under the influence of opium, he thinks of the eyes of his dead wife—"black with little lights in them" (p. 71). The memory "was like remembering what he had never perceived—a look containing some shuddering, animal mystery" (p. 71). The image of black light is again associated with death because his wife had been dead for many years. Yet there is also the suggestion of a vitality in his wife which he had never perceived. Her early death seems to have resulted from Jamshid's failure to appreciate that vitality, and now years later he suddenly realizes that within that darkness there had been a mystery that he had never understood. When he meets Ali's widow, he discovers the same black lights in her eyes. Ironically, he unknowingly passes syphilis to her in the way that he had given death to his wife. Within the dark mystery of these women Jamshid might have known salvation, but he fails to see the point at which the flame turns into smoke; that is, he fails to understand the transformations through which life takes on meaning. Jamshid's final
understanding comes too late. Once he has recognized his sexual desires for his daughter, he is able to see the "dancing, upwardly blackening flame" because he has discovered the point at which the flame of his life is going out. For Jamshid the discovery comes after he is spiritually lost. Thus, although Black Light and The Book of Nightmares share a nihilistic view of the world, Kinnell's view in the poem is more hopeful than in the novel. The poetic version utilizes the Adamic mode and hence reinforces the persona's struggle. Moreover, because Kinnell had discovered his own poetic voice by the time of The Book of Nightmares, he is more capable of envisioning a way of saving oneself through a definition in poetry. His novel demonstrates his lack of confidence in narrative and irony to point the way to spiritual redemption. As spiritual journeys, both the poem and the novel attempt to accomplish the same goal.

The most obvious similarity lies in the journey motif. In addition to the field of stones, there are numerous examples of parallel passages. Ali makes a fire "where there had been fires before" (p. 31). This image of fire, appearing at the beginning and end of The Book of Nightmares, signals the remnants of other journeys, and Jamshid tries to get "as close to the fire as he dared get." The fire becomes a sign of comfort to him because he cannot sleep on the ground in the darkness. "He felt he was too much at its the earth's mercy" (p. 31). Jamshid is troubled with
insomnia because he believes the earth will swallow him. He envies Ali the carpet upon which the old man sleeps because the carpet separates Ali from the earth. Later, however, the carpet covering Ali's dead body is a sign that there is no protection from death. After Ali's death Jamshid discovers that he actually comes to feel close to the old murderer. "He was discovering there were possibilities of friendship in the world" (p. 71); however, the discovery of the human bond comes after Ali is dead. The bond is made firm only in death. The fire around which these two men sat is the point at which their humanity almost meshes, like the fire in *The Book of Nightmares* which is the site on which other men have camped on their spiritual journeys. Yet the bond is limited during life. Jamshid's relationship with his wife is described as a "gulf" which during his eighteen months of marriage he had hope to "cross" (p. 56). But the gulf was immense, and his wife died before they could establish a deep bond. Even in his brief encounter with the wailing woman, "his mouth tasted of ashes" (p. 66), and despite the passion and ecstasy the result of the act is not love but venereal disease. When he tries to claim to the opium smoker that he has experienced love—"Why just last night, by the dark of the moon" (p. 66)—he is forced to admit that his encounter with the wailing woman is not an example of love. The taste of ashes signals the residue of fire, not fire itself. Jamshid comes to the conclusion that he will be the same at death as he was at birth: without
love. Jamshid reviews his life and decides that his only possible escape would have been the adventure which he once started with his friend Varoosh.

Jamshid's childhood adventure with Varoosh establishes the spiritual nature of Jamshid's adult flight. The two children ran away to become darveeshes in imitation of an old man they knew. The adventure lasts less than two days, but it demonstrates Jamshid's stunted spirituality. He laughs at Varoosh's parodies of Christ's last supper and crucifixion, but at the same time he is terrified of sacrilege. When Varoosh's mother dies several days after the adventure is over, Jamshid flagellates himself during a penitential ceremony. He beats himself until he "made himself bloodier than anyone" (p. 22). The adventure demonstrates Jamshid's spiritual yearning, but it also reveals that his old conceptions of himself as a holy person keep him from making spiritual progress. The persona in The Book of Nightmares finds a new awareness of self and as a result is spiritually saved. Jamshid, on the other hand, flees with the hope of salvation but fails to be saved because he does not see the world in a new light— that is, in black light.

The world of nightmares and the world of black light are intimately related. The reality of the persona's nightmares matches the reality which emanates from shadows. In the epigraph from Sohrawardi, the dark shadow of the "half moon" consists of "its own light" unlike the white
half which is "dressed in borrowed light." Sohrawardi was a twelfth-century Persian philosopher, who is considered the master of the Illuminationists. According to this philosopher, reality consists of nothing but light. Consciousness, therefore, emanates from a divine source—light—and yearns to free itself from the world in order to return to its origin. The persona of *The Book of Nightmares* returns to the starting point of his journey. In addition, the persona struggles with the world of darkness—his nightmares which keep him from sleep or peace.

The persona's nightmare in Book II of *The Book of Nightmares* can be traced to Jamshid's nightmare about the bird-of-paradise design on the carpet which he is repairing. The persona imagines the hen's violent death and its transformation into a flower. When he awakes, he flings an actual hen, killed by weasels, into the woods. Jamshid dreams that the bird of paradise changes into a vulture which devours Leyla's corpse. In another nightmare the bird's red beak is transformed into the mullah Torbati's henna-stained hand (because of the red-fingernail polish which Torbati wears). The transformed bird-hand attacks Jamshid in the dream. The nightmare foreshadows the violence of Torbati's visit on the next day. When Torbati greets Jamshid, he extends a "red-beaked hand" (p. 51). Later, when fleeing, Ali and Jamshid stop at a coffee house and witness the proprietor's killing of a hen for dinner:

The proprietor . . . haggled at the head until it had nearly come off. It still dangled by a
bit of skin when the proprietor flung the bird into the yard for bleeding. She set off at a fast run with blood pumping from her neck. Unbalanced by the dangling head, she ran in crazy directions, and the cock appeared to think she was experiencing an unusual sexual frenzy for he went charging after her. When at last he caught up with her and leapt upon her she fell dead (p. 40).

As in The Book of Nightmares, the same image reappears in a slightly altered form, Jamshid's first associations are obvious. The design on the carpet disturbed him because it was a tear in reality. Since his daughter is becoming another tear in his reality, she also threatened his peace of mind. The association of Torbati with the bird clearly foreshadows Torbati's attack on Leyla's reputation, and Jamshid's nightmare upsets him terribly because the corpse of Leyla suggests the death of her soul because of her loss of a good reputation. Beyond Jamshid's understanding, however, the nightmare foreshadows the murder of Torbati. Later at the coffee house, the dying hen reawakens Jamshid's fears although there is no explicit statement relating the two images. Nevertheless, in Black Light the hen is a hideous transformation of the bird of paradise. In The Book of Nightmares Kinnell uses some of the same language to describe the hen. The hen flower "dangles from a hand" and is "flung" into the woods. The hen in Black Light is "unbalanced by the dangling head" and is "flung . . . into the yard." An interesting difference between the images lies in the sexual references in Black Light in contrast to the fertility references—especially eggs—in The Book of
Nightmares. Kinnell has stripped the latter image of overt sexuality while at the same time he has added a more horrible emphasis on the death motif—the "hen's carcass sucked by weasels," the "rubbery egg slipping out," and the "icy pulp . . . of the opened cadaver" (The Book of Nightmares, pp. 13-14).

"The Shoes of Wandering," Book III of The Book of Nightmares, can also be traced to an image in Black Light. For his journey the persona wears shoes from a Salvation Army Store. Jamshid's shoes are also leftovers. They are "body rags," one of Kinnell's frequent motifs:

He concentrated on his step, and on the feel of gravel and pebbles through the cotton soles of geevays. He thought of the old shirts and dresses these shoes were made of, worn by unknown men and women, thrown away, collected, torn into strips, the strips folded and hammered and sewn flat to flat, and worn again as these slightly spongey soles through which one could just feel the road's wrinkled surface (p. 28).

The persona also walks in "someone else's wandering." Jamshid feels that he is "walking through time" (p. 19), and the persona walks "down the brainwaves of the temporal road."

An interesting obstacle in the path of both of these characters is the crone, although she is called "hag" in the novel. The crone tells the persona that he will lose his way, but she is actually less of a threat than she appears because the persona makes his own way rather than loses a known path. Mehre, the hag in Black Light, is a syphilitic whore who frightens Jamshid. She foreshadows the deformity that may eventually come to him through the disease, but she
is in fact harmless. She screams and frightens people, but she is no longer contagious. In fact, Kinnell downplays her sinister nature when Jamshid, contemplating suicide, tries to steal some poison from her only to discover that the bottle contains face powder. Even though the hag drags herself toward him, Jamshid fails and finds his possible act of incest more frightening than the threat of syphilis. He had had symptoms for days without any deep anxiety, complaining only of the slight pain. The differences between the crone and the hag suggest that Kinnell was trying to make the persona's obstacles even more ominous than Jamshid's so that the persona's final self-redemption would command more respect than Jamshid's might have if he had managed to save himself. The persona and Jamshid travel a similar path and met roughly similar obstacles. The results of the spiritual journeys are significantly different.

One of the most striking differences lies in the basic reason for the spiritual journey. The opium smoker tells Jamshid, "When I saw you . . . I knew you were a dead man. . . . I don't know what you died of. Whatever it was, that is what will bring you alive again" (p. 70). After some discussion, the opium smoker comes to the conclusion that Jamshid died because of love. In a deep, unconscious way, Jamshid is obsessed with sexuality, particularly his sexual relationship with his wife. For Jamshid there is no distinction between love and sexuality. In contrast The Book of Nightmares contains almost no overt sexual references.
The spiritual journey of the persona varies in an important way from that of Jamshid. Whereas the persona's vision focuses on birth to understand death, Jamshid's view focuses on a sexual obsession to understand life. The idea of birth in *The Book of Nightmares* leads the persona to an affirmation; a confused sexual orientation in *Black Light* leads Jamshid ironically to a negation.

Jamshid's flight is literally a flight to save his life, but on his journey "it seemed to Jamshid he was on his way to die" (p. 54). Shortly before the camel's death, Jamshid begins to think of his wife. "It had always been painful for him to think of her." The marriage had not been successful. They were very young when they married, and she died eighteen months later. The main difficulty lay in Jamshid's expectations. Although he had originally thought "that a wife was a minor adjunct in one's life" (p. 55), he becomes obsessed with her dark, mysterious sensuality, especially her "huge black eyes and a straight, rich, sensual mouth." Jamshid tries to "win her complete submission" (p. 56) but discovers that "his efforts turned out to be self-defeating. The more he demanded, the less he got." Although he claimed to love Cobra, his wife, he was merely obsessed with the idea of possessing her.

When he meets Ali's widow, he is immediately attracted to her black eyes in which "lights seemed to float" (p. 75). On another occasion he is "filled with a strange hunger" as he notices that her eyes are "full of reflections" (p. 77).
Later, in the New City, he can only feel sexual desire by imagining the widow. The widow is obviously a substitute for his wife since her eyes possess the same black light. Jamshid's chief difficulty rests in his dangerous conviction that to be alive or to be in love one must feel the excitation which he feels when he experiences "black light" or its equivalent. Kinnell is carefully laying a trap. When Jamshid entered the New City, he "found it alive. It excited him to be wandering here" (pp. 93-94). He does not have to live here long before he realizes that he is like the prostitutes for whom he becomes a pimp. Like the dreams of the madame Effat who hopes to travel to Russia, Jamshid's dreams to escape are exposed. Furthermore, his pretensions to being a holy man are also demolished by the acts of murder and pimping. Jamshid's failure to distinguish between mere sexual excitement and a love which includes sexual feelings causes him to confuse being in the midst of a sexually alive area—the New City—with "feeling alive."

To see if the camel is still alive, Jamshid repeatedly checked the camel's eye: "Jamshid lifted the eyelid. It came up with difficulty. The black pupil remained wide open, looking into the absolute darkness. When Jamshid let go the eyelid it dropped halfway down, giving the camel a comical, drowsy air" (p. 57). In The Book of Nightmares, this image is transformed into Maud's eyes as they open at birth: "the pupil/droozed with black hairs." The transformation of this image is significant. Even though
Maud's birth is described as a process of dying, she is nevertheless coming into the world of light—"the chakra/on top of the brain throbs a long moment in world light." The persona's relationship to Maud is based on love, and the persona can feel joy that his daughter is coming to life.

Jamshid, on the other hand, is frightened when his daughter begins to show signs of coming to life. Leyla's coming to life is described in sexual terms: "He kissed her on the lips. With a shock he drew back. Was it only that he suddenly realized that she had become a woman, rich in passion like the woman he had lost" (p. 46). Jamshid's reaction—"fright"—causes him to fear that he desires her sexually. Because he cannot understand how sexual excitation and love can be separate, this fear becomes an obsession with him. As a result, when he sleeps with a girl who turns out to resemble Leyla, Jamshid finds himself in despair that he may have not only turned his daughter into a whore by abandoning her but also committed incest, an act which he feared for a long time.

The ending of the novel is somewhat ambiguous. Jamshid is determined to stay in the New City to find Leyla. He must find out whether or not the girl with whom he slept was his daughter. Kinnell has carefully prepared the reader for this final ambiguity through the character of Varoosh. In Chapter 23 Jamshid as a pimp tries to solicit business from a "rich-looking man with a furled umbrella" (p. 120). The man angrily denounces Jamshid as a "dirty pimp" and
strikes him with the umbrella. Jamshid's response is to suspect that the man is Varoosh, his childhood companion. He wonders, "If it had been Varoosh, then what kind of a man had his childhood friend turned into? What kind of a man would break open someone's face just for being a pimp?" (p. 121). Jamshid fails to see his own degenerated state. He killed Torbati under the suspicion of pimping. Jamshid had once planned to run away with Varoosh to become a darveesh. Jamshid most likely imagines that the man is Varoosh, as he most probably imagines that the young prostitute is Leyla. Because of his own feelings of inadequacy, he projects his fears onto other people. Jamshid could just have easily identified himself in the man on the street. The image of the umbrella has appeared twice before. When Jamshid climbs to the top of the stone ruins on the site of Takhte Jamshid, the Throne of Jamshid, he saw a stone bearing a relief on which was represented a man carrying an umbrella. As the name indicates, the site suggests a place of origin—thus, a place of self-identification—but Jamshid fails to understand any connection. Furthermore, he himself is the man with the umbrella. When he fled from the scene of Torbati's murder, he carried away the weapon—his carpet shears—hidden in a folded umbrella. Thus, the man on the street is probably not Varoosh. Similarly, the prostitute is probably not Leyla. Jamshid never considers the fact that he has traveled across the desert to Tehran, leaving his daughter in Meshed. His lack
of understanding is a further example of the irony of his spiritual journey. That he fails to come to knowledge does not negate the tragic mode of the novel, for it is the reader who fills in the blanks left by Kinnell.

The novel demonstrates a characteristic feature of Kinnell's work in general. The reader's understanding results from associations which he himself must make. Kinnell's interest in the deep image has clearly been demonstrated by this technique in his major poems. The interesting difference between Black Light and The Book of Nightmares lies in the direction that the spiritual journey takes and in the conditions which affect the direction. In The Book of Nightmares, the images become more violent and the narrative less prominent. Irony is finally not a major device in The Book of Nightmares because Kinnell is affirming the creative mode, whereas in Black Light Jamshid's failure to adjust his spirituality and his sexuality leads to a statement of negation. The evidence is conclusive that Black Light is a precursor of The Book of Nightmares. In The Book of Nightmares, Kinnell removed the theme of sexuality so that he could reinforce the affirmation of the process of birth, an affirmation which demonstrates the creative process of the Adamic mode. Narration is obviously a prominent element in Black Light, but then that is a predictable feature of a novel. Nevertheless, as Kinnell says, Black Light "strains to be a poem." Kinnell's use of imagery foreshadows the associative method of his major
poem. *Black Light* was obviously an experiment for what was later to become Kinnell's masterpiece, *The Book of Nightmares*. 
CONCLUSION

Kinnell writes about the physical world, but his themes constantly reveal a desire for a transcendent order. In his essay "The Poetics of the Physical World," he says, "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." Because there are external guides, the poet must be his own witness. His is his only authority. His experience, the "pure wandering," takes place in the physical world. In this sense, Kinnell is a nature poet because the physical world includes everything other than the man who perceives it; as Emerson defined it, nature is the "Not Me." Kinnell's interest in the self has led him to a fascination with the relationship between the "Me" and the "Not Me." In the deep imagist's terms, Kinnell is interested in the juncture between that which the poet consciously perceives himself to be and that with which he is actually—although unconsciously—bound.

Kinnell has qualified an interviewer's judgment of him

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as a nature poet. Kinnell has said, "The real nature poem will not exclude man and deal only with animals and plants and stones; it will be a poem in which we men refeel in ourselves our own animal and plant and stone life, our own deep connection with all other things, a connection deeper than personality, a connection which resembles the attachment an animal has for an animal. We're going toward that sense of ourselves and we're going away from it simultaneously." Book I of The Book of Nightmares is constructed around the search for the connections among all things—"the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit." The persona's final awareness in that poem consists of a moment of illumination in which he sees the common denominator: the impermanence of all things. Thus, the poem celebrates man's creative power to deal with death.

As poet, Kinnell tells his children—and therefore all who come after him—that the only constant in life is the fact of death, and man's transcendence over the physical world can be accomplished only by moments of heightened awareness.

For Kinnell, a poem may represent the poet's awareness, and it may also awaken the reader's unconscious self. The poem is not merely an "ego-system." In The Iowa Review interview, Kinnell said:

The enterprise of a poem is, perhaps, to start writing about yourself and your problems, and your particular personality, a kind of autobiography—and then to go deeper than personality, to write in the voice with which prayers are spoken, which is both universal and extremely personal, a voice to which you can give all your feelings, all your devotion. Anyone who might whisper that prayer—or say that poem—would feel it spoke exactly for him, the separate egos would vanish and the poem would become simply the voice of a creature on earth speaking . . . in the sense that when you do go deep enough within yourself, deeper than the level of "personality," you are suddenly outside yourself, everywhere.3

In two separate interviews, Kinnell's use of the phrase "deeper than personality" suggests that he has been trying to go beyond poetry that is merely personal. The mystery for which he has been searching is finally "deeper than personality," yet Kinnell has never been able to find a manifestation of the mystery except through one's own private experience. His use of the Adamic mode, especially in The Book of Nightmares, confirms his belief in his own power to define himself. When "separate egos vanish," they do not die. They merely acknowledge their connections with other things—with men, women, beasts, or inanimate nature. They acknowledge that they are merely another part of the physical world. For Kinnell, the mystery consists of a man's ability to discover this connection among the ruins in which he exists.

Kinnell's use of words is consistent with this idea of

mystery. The deep image technique assumes a mysterious connection which does not manifest itself at the surface of the poem. Kinnell's use of space between his images as well as his use of unusual words are devices by which he hopes to lead his reader into the mysterious realm of the unconscious. On his use of odd words he has said, "When I run across an archaic word that seems to me terribly expressive, I entertain the possibility of its resurrection." Kinnell is intensely interested in giving a new life to words so that they can lead the way to a new truth. The Adamic poet becomes a creator of meaning. When Kinnell uses words such as "goaf," "orts," "concumbence," or "fenks," he is attempting to resurrect the essence for which these words once stood. Following Emerson's idea of words as fossilized metaphors, Kinnell seeks to resurrect the original correspondence. Sometimes, his odd word does not have an original meaning; for example, his portmanteau words suggest the poet's creation of a new meaning by the combination of two fossils. Hence, "drooze" is the recreation of "drool" and "ooze," and the new meaning relates the resurrected essences of two fossilized metaphors. The new word suggests an image which is understandable through the level of meaning which goes deeper than the physical apprehension of its surface qualities.

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4Galway Kinnell, "The Weight That a Poem Can Carry: An Interview with Galway Kinnell," The Ohio Review, 14 (1972), 34.
Here is the essential reason why Kinnell favors Whitman over Thoreau. Kinnell trusts the "authenticity of Whitman's declaration" because "spoken in poetry" Whitman's words are "raised to the level of truth by [their] alive-ness."\(^5\) Kinnell has said, "I don't fully believe Thoreau, for example, when he says with just a touch of elegant cleverness, 'we need pray for no higher heaven than the pure senses can furnish, a purely sensuous life.'"\(^6\) Kinnell quotes Thoreau's response to *Leaves of Grass*: "There are two or three pieces in the book which are disagreeable to say the least, simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke."\(^7\) Kinnell's charges against Thoreau are oddly enough similar to Davie's charges against Kinnell. Davie says, "What a fearsome responsibility for a poet, to lead his readers into bestiality." Kinnell does not lead his readers into the bestial, however. At the conclusion of "The Bear," the hunter wonders about the mystery of life, "the sticky infusion by which he lived." The poet's vision saves the hunter from "bear-transcendence" and places him within the context of poetry--the infusion. The truth of "The Bear" consists of the layers of meaning through which Kinnell and his reader see the connections between the "sticky infusion" and "experience." The infusion represents the mystery of life--that is, blood--as

\(^6\)Kinnell, p. 10.  
\(^7\)Ibid.
well as poetry. The moment of illumination comes to the
hunter as he experiences "bear-transcendence" within the
body of his victim. Yet his awareness has been rationally
achieved. It has resulted from an ordeal by blood. The
hunter goes deeper than the surface of the physical world.
He goes "into" the bear to discover the primordial connec-
tions which he and the bear share. But he does not become
the beast. When the vision passes, he knows that he has
touched an unmapped region. Bly's idea of exploring the
unmapped regions suggests the intuitive, nonrational means
by which the hunter comes to self-knowledge at the end of
"The Bear." The hunter's questioning of himself--"wondering/
what, anyway, was that sticky infusion, that rank flavor of
blood, that/poetry, by which I loved?"--suggests a truth
which cannot be denied within the framework of the poem.
The poem claims the existence of a moment of illumination.

This truth is what Kinnell says distinguishes poetry
from prose. He has said, "The truth of prose is usually
imponderable, for in prose to be persuaded one has to follow
all the steps of its argument. Poetry verifies itself,
telling us by the authenticity of its voice how true it
is."8 Thus, Kinnell favoring Whitman over Thoreau, demon-
strates in one sense no more than his basic prejudice for
poetry over prose. Kinnell's only novel demonstrates that
he is more comfortable with poetry than with fiction.

8Ibid.
Although he had tried to write several novels before Black Light, he has completed only one and told The Ohio Review interviewer that he seriously doubts that he will ever attempt to write in that genre again. An essential feature of his poetic stance is revealed in this statement: "I think that what happened was that I gradually came to understand that poetry could say everything that I had wanted to say through a novel—that I [his italics] had wanted to say. True novels can't be said in poems, but Black Light...is straining to be a poem at all joints. I would rather write a poem than a novel—a large poem—and try to open, or increase the weight a poem can carry."9 The creation of a persona in The Book of Nightmares demonstrates one way to increase the weight a poem can carry. The Adamic mode of this poem places a god-like persona within the context of a physical world through which he travels, tossing the fragments of his life into the path for signs to his children who will follow him. The course of the persona's journey becomes, in Kinnell's terms, a progression of consciousness, and the poem bears the additional weight of the meaning which is created by the persona's discovery of his ability to generate the only transcendence which is possible. Through the power of his own consciousness, the persona moves into the realm in which "separate egos vanish."

The Book of Nightmares is the statement of an exalted ego, but the exaltation is the elevation of the poet's identity. It is not merely a probing of one's conscious mind. It is also a probing of one's unconscious mind. At the juncture between the realms, the ego ceases to restrain the persona to the physical world, and as a result he is suddenly liberated in a moment of illumination. As Kinnell said in The Iowa Review interview, "You are suddenly outside yourself, everywhere." Because of the deep imagist's concern for the juncture between these realms and because of the Adamic poet's ability to establish his own limits of the physical world, the surface dissolves when Kinnell probes the inner self. The moment of illumination is the moment of transcendence. For Kinnell there is no other absolute except the creation of the moment.

Kinnell finds the poet more capable than the novelist of reaching this moment because a poem "moves into the inner world of the self," whereas "writing a novel means conceiving of a whole world outside of yourself." Kinnell's attempts to write novels demonstrate his attraction for the Adamic mode in this sense. The impetus for Adamic poetry is the desire to conceive of a world outside oneself. Thus, Kinnell was tempted to seek a new meaning through a world of fictitious characters in a novel.

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10 Kinnell, "Deeper Than Personality," p. 133.
The keynote of Kinnell's statements on poetry are based on his insistence on avoiding old paths. He once said, "It's stultifying to keep writing from the same point of view the whole of one's life." The development of Kinnell's poetic persona has followed the course of making the poem carry more weight; that is, he has tried to create poetry which contains more dynamic tension or energy. Between his early and middle periods, Kinnell was working toward the long poem "The Avenue Bearing the Initial of Christ into the New World." Even in that poem he was experimenting with a technique—the journey motif—which would not find full expression until The Book of Nightmares. Kinnell obviously prefers a long poem to a short one. He describes the advantage of the long poem's aesthetic in this way:

In a very short poem time slows down, as it does in a music box that needs winding. If it's a very good poem it can come to rest on one moment, on the last note of the music box, and open that moment, seem to exist outside of time. . . . But in the long poem it's possible to turn this limitation to good use. A person, or at least a personage, can begin to appear in the long poem, as in "Song of Myself"; and also one can develop a series of events, of inner events, which can culminate, come to a fullness and climax. . . . This culmination, though it's made of time, can also, in its way, transcend time.

One way to compensate for "slowing down" in the short poem is the deep image which, like the objective image, carries

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12 Ibid.
energy through the poem as a kind of force vector. But
Kinnell's fondness for long poems is based on their ability
"to begin and then wander around, search around for some way
out, and to come to a climax and resolution." Kinnell's
basic criterion for a poem is that it be "an organic thing,
to have an inner drama, an inner rising line."

To achieve this "inner rising line," Kinnell actually
explores the depths of the psyche. Through the use of the
deep image, he wants his readers to delve into the mysteries
of the unconscious in order to emerge with a heightened
awareness— a transcendence. Thus, as his poems become more
ponderous, the greater become the possibilities of the extent
through which the consciousness can rise; hence, the result
may be a more intense moment of illumination.

A recent poem demonstrates Kinnell's continuing search
for ways by which to lead his reader to such an illumination.
In 1975 Kinnell published the poem "Wait" in The New
Yorker. Although its twenty-seven lines hardly qualify it
as a long poem, it nevertheless demonstrates the "psychic
progression" which Kinnell refers to in The Ohio Review
interview. The poem aims at a "progression of consciousness"
rather than at an "outward narrative." The theme is one of
Kinnell's favorites:

Wait, for now.
Distrust everything, if you have to.
But trust the hours. Haven't they
carried you everywhere, up to now?

The only constant is transitoriness. It is the only trust-
worthy guide into the future. Kinnell's tone of patience is
reiterated in the first line of each of the four sections:
"Wait, for now . . ./Wait . . ./Only wait a little, and
listen . . ./Be there to hear it, it will be only time."
The patience implied in each imperative statement is an
interesting variation of Kinnell's view of the fact of
perishing. Unlike the man in "The Porcupine" who empties
himself as he ascends into the consciousness of the
porcupine, the voice in "Wait" reassures the reader of a
renewal through patience:

    Personal events will be interesting again.
    Hair will become interesting again.
    Pain will become interesting again.

Buds, secondhand gloves, and even the desolation of lovers
will also become interesting again. This use of parallelism
reinforces his belief in the revitalization that will come
in time. In the next to the last section of the poem, he
reiterates the theme with anaphora:

    music of hair,
    music of pain,
    music of looms weaving all our loves again.

Anaphora is another means of giving the poem weight. The
progression in the poem suggests the importance of waiting
because repetition of love will revitalize the fading
realities of life. The "secondhand gloves will become
lovely again" because "their memories are what give them the
need for other hands." Everything is included among the fading realities, even "whole existence." The concluding section tells the reader "to hear the flute of your whole existence... play itself into total exhaustion."

Although "Wait" is not a long poem by Kinnell's standards, it attempts to achieve that "inner rising line" which he told The Ohio Review interviewer was easier to achieve in long poems than in short ones. The inner rising line consists of the development of the final image of the flute's playing itself out. Patience is a reward because time offers the consolation of repeating old joys, but the consciousness of the poem constitutes the rising line. Even as the voice of the poem commands the reader to be patient, so too does it warn the reader of "total exhaustion." By making the reader aware of the value of savoring each passing moment and hence of the need for waiting and not worrying about the future, the warning conditions the advice.

Kinnell's poetry is concerned with the mysteries of the moment, especially with how a person might transcend time despite the movement of one moment in the present to one moment in the future. Kinnell tries to achieve a timelessness in his poems that does not depend on a sequence of events. The moment of illumination is not a consequence of a rational series of events. Transcendence in "The Bear" does not result from an intellectual process. The hunter climbs into the bear's body and suddenly understands his
connections with the bear. Moments of illumination result from intuitive apprehension of such mysterious connections.

The kind of pure poem for which Kinnell is striving is one which forces the reader's old conceptions about such connections, whether with men, animals, or inanimate nature. The resulting new awareness confirms the sense of mystery but gives the perceiver a new foothold in reality. Kinnell has said, "I don't have an ideal [concerning the "pure poem"] which I try to fulfill." Yet in the introduction to his translation of the poems of François Villon, Kinnell said, "It [Villon's The Testament] has no secrets left, and for this reason, as one gets to know the poem, it grows so truly mysterious." This paradox contains the seed of Kinnell's poetics. Kinnell attempts to uncover the secret connections within the physical world. Moments of transcendence result when he illuminates an unmapped region of the psyche. The poet's sense of wonder—as in the hunter's wonder at the conclusion of "The Bear"—confirms the mysteries of consciousness; that is, the mind can apprehend itself and create an order which transcends the unilluminated state of consciousness. The mystery lies within the poet's creative faculties.

It is clear that Kinnell will continue to be concerned with the mysteries of the psyche, but it is also clear that

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16 Ibid.
he continues to move farther and farther from the Transcendental tradition out of which he has grown. Like Thoreau's desire to seize and devour a woodchuck in "Higher Laws" in Walden, Kinnell's desire to seize and devour the physical world suggests a primitive instinct. But Thoreau distinguished this instinct from one "toward a higher, or, as it is named spiritual life." Thoreau had reverence and love for both instincts. Kinnell, on the other hand, does not see this division of man's nature. Thoreau says, "We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion as our higher nature slumbers."\(^{18}\) Kinnell, on the other hand, sees the awakening of man's animal consciousness as a step in spiritual awakening. Kinnell's moment of illumination does not acknowledge a spiritual transcendent order. Kinnell yearns for such an order but comes to the conclusion that there is no transcendent order other than the progression of one's own consciousness.

With The Book of Nightmares, Kinnell discovered his poetic voice. The direction of his work will clearly follow the Adamic mode. He has said, "I think that whatever I do will be different from The Book of Nightmares."\(^{19}\) Whatever Kinnell tries will obviously be related to ways of giving poems additional weight. The poem "Wait" suggests his


\(^{19}\)Kinnell, "The Weight That a Poem Can Carry," p. 32.
experimentation of anaphora to give a poem of moderate length more weight. It is clear that Kinnell will continue to search for ways of reaching the unmapped regions of the psyche. In light of his past success, especially in The Book of Nightmares, Kinnell's search will undoubtedly continue to make use of the Adamic mode and the deep image in his continuing exploration of these unmapped regions.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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