CHAPTER TWO

Thomas Kinsella

The times were bad
And we were in bad hands,
There was nothing to be done,
Only record.

(Kinsella, *Collected Poems* 342)
Thomas Kinsella is an exceptional figure in Irish contemporary poetry. His place among British and Irish poetry is unique, as he is also a major Irish poet writing in English. His artistic versification is embodied in his literary and linguistic innovations. His poetry with its explicit detailing of “Dublin setting”, “Irish History”, ordinary life, private matters and public recognition associated with pessimistic, disappointment, ambiguity and diversity of Absentism, and symbolize the modern world’s complexity, dynamism and multiplicity.

Thomas Kinsella was born on 4 May, 1928 in Dublin. He began writing poetry in 1950s. The Starlit Eye and Three Legendary Sonnets are his first books published by Dolman Press in 1952. His first major collection Another September was published in 1958. Thomas Kinsella comes to maturity in the decade of 1960s in Moralities (1960), Downstream (1962), Wormwood (1966) and Nightwalker and Other Poems (1968). In 1967 he received the Denis Devlin Memorial Award. In 1962 and 1968 Oxford University Press anthologized a selection of his poems. “The Irish Writer”: Davis, Morgan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish writer was the printed form of his lecture on the “Irish Literary Tradition” in 1960s and simultaneously worked on the translation of the Irish oral epic Tain Bo Cuailgne. Butcher’s Dozen (1973) was his first book that appeared under his Press Peppercanister imprint and from this point onward, he published his books under Peppercanister imprint. He continued to publish, A Selected Life (1972), Vertical Man (1973), The Good Fight (1973), Notes from the Land of the Dead and Other Poems (1973).


According to Kinsella there are two voices in his poetry; the first one is clear and easy to understand. The second voice is the Absentist voice; it is ambiguous, incomprehensible and obscure. Absentist voice is what we cannot as a reader, hear easily, as it is hidden and obscured from our attention. In other words, Absentist poetry is exhausted poetry, the idea of wholeness and unity is destroyed, it is not complete any more. There are always inadequacies and lacunae in what appears to be complete and perfect. What Absentist poetry represents of our life is a life full of corrosive dissatisfaction. “All is absence. I, in the midst of my own city, more absent than any” (Kinsella *Starlit*).

With regard to Irish scattered history there are two groups of Irish poets and writers, one, those who accepted self-exile and left Ireland for ever and suffered from isolation and alienation in other countries, the best example being Samuel Beckett. The other group who stayed in Ireland dealt with the problems of ‘dual language’ and ‘dual tradition’. Both these groups suffered from the crises of identity in different ways. Kinsella belongs to the second group. He believes that in Ireland there is the manifestation of a dual tradition and the responsibility of a writer is to connect these two together. “In talking about a dual tradition in Ireland your (sic) were trying to
establish a continuity between the literatures in both languages. Nothing could be less likely. Ireland’s history discounts continuity of any kind. But there is a poetic response to the complex of experience and it exists in two languages” (O’Driscoll 64).

Anthony Cronin observes:

Dublin in the late nineteen-forties was an odd and, in many respects, unhappy place. The malaise that seems to have affected everywhere in the aftermath of war took strange forms there, perhaps for the reason that the war itself had been a sort of ghastly unreality. Neutrality had left a wound, set up complexes in many, including myself, which the post-war did little to cure. (qtd. in Fitzsimons 20)

In 1950s and 1960s the situation of poverty and suffering of the working class in Ireland emerges in the work of different writers such as Seamus Dean’s novel Reading in the Dark, where he writes about civil war in Belfast and his hometown London Derry. Likewise in the poetry of Thomas Kinsella, one becomes a witness to many changes in the stream of his versification, as a consequence of events in Ireland and at a deeper level the world changes during 1960s. In Nightwalker and Other Poems (1968), Kinsella endeavours to reveal the social-political atmosphere of Ireland’s predicament. He lambasts Ireland of 1960s for its economic and political crises. Campbell points out that the end of 1960s and 1970s was the “imaginative renaissance” in Ireland for poets. These transformations are important because it moved him from the social theme to pure concentration on a deeper level and wider range in his personal poems. His poetry stands for a critique of human society’s loss at the universal level. In 1970s, Kinsella began a new type of poetry with a new aesthetic vision and intense subject, a type of exploration of psyche with the same theme as his earlier poems, about love, art, family and history. It was a need for
Kinsella to explore the inner psyche by putting the “light to lighten the darkness” of the soul of man, as Derek Mahon puts it. He believes that the function of poetry in the Absentist era and international fragmentation is to be engaged with the dark and hidden dimension of man, which is yet to be explored.

The socio-historical atmosphere of Kinsella’s poetry is dominated by the influence of writers and poets such as James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams. Moreover, he was inspired by his own translation from the Irish epics and legend.

James Joyce the ‘Father of authors’ had a tremendous influence on Kinsella’s versification. From James Joyce he learns to use Homeric and ancient mythology. Fitzsimons in his article “Thomas Kinsella’s ‘The Pen Shop’: A Reading” uses the same quotation for Kinsella which Eliot says about Joyce: “a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (85). Alex Davis points out that “Nightwalker”, “has an intertextual relationship with the Wake” (Davis 84). Like Wake the beginning and the end of the “Nightwalker” comes together in full circle; “Nightwalker” likewise Wake is a ‘Dublin centric’ oeuvre, and both of them, narrate the story of Dublin’s night. Kinsella quotes from Dubliners in this poem: “None of the Grays was any Good” (CP156). Place and location in Kinsella’s poetry as a chain, connect them to Ireland and Dublin. Maurice Harmon observes that in the poetry of Kinsella, places like “Basin Lane, Baggot Street, King John’s Castle” in the poems like “‘Lead’, ‘A Country Walk’, ‘Downstream’, ‘Phoenix Park’, ‘Nightwalker’, and many others, have created a sense of location in his work that is as tangible as the use of place in the work of Austin Clarke or James Joyce” (“From Basin,” 78).
Although it has been noted that the influence of James Joyce on Kinsella was tremendous, Yeats’s influence on Kinsella was considerable. The significance of Celtic twilight and Gaelic tradition that Yeats worked on his entire life for survival was continued by Kinsella in his translations such as *The Tain*. The importance of Nationalism came to Irish literature with Yeats. In his article “Yeats, Folklore, and Irish Legend”, James Pethica announces that Yeats is the maker of “master-myths of Irish nationality”. Yeats believes that “‘there is no fine nationality without literature, and…no fine literature without nationality’” (Pethica 130). Like wise Kinsella’s dominant subject matter is “‘Irishness’ as a cultural identity” (129). In this regard Kinsella is celebrated for these two lines: “To show your love / By working for your language and your country”. Yeats’s works on folklore are “an essential source of Irish identity”, and Kinsella’s poems also give expression to Irish identity. Kinsella and Yeats both were “active observers” of events around them. Kinsella takes the title of “Nightwalker” from “Byzantium” and ‘the moon’s mark of Cain’ from “Blood and the Moon”. In his versification he alludes to Yeats several times. In Kinsella’s “A Country Walk” and Yeats’s “Easter 1916” have similar thematic preoccupations. Unlike Yeats, Kinsella’s historical poetry is poisoned with pessimism and Absentism. Maurice Harmon in his article “Thomas Kinsella: Poet of Many Voices” writes: Kinsella’s Difference from “Yeats is more sharply marked in the tone he uses to recall nationalistic figure. Yeats celebrated those who had brought about the terrible beauty of 1916 Rising” while “Kinsella’s voice is deflating” in the poem “A Country Walk”, while “Yeats raises his nationalists to heroic status, Kinsella lowers them to a mercenary reality. Yeats’s energy and passion is countered by Kinsella’s leveling speech in which there is no tolerance for violence and no trace of admiration” (4).

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Absentism and the Historical Facts of Ireland

Irish history can be discerned in Kinsella’s poems such as Another September (1958), Nightwalker and Other Poems (1968) and Butcher’s Dozen (1972). In these collections Kinsella is committed to his nation’s history and literature. In the sequence of his historical poetry he tries to find out the sources of inauthenticity and absence in the broken past of Ireland. From the beginning of his career Kinsella was in quest for an answer to the question, “Why Ireland is a ‘poisoned Land?’” This idea leads him to a universal quest in history. From his first collection Another September (1958), till his works in the present time, he covers the long destructive history of Ireland in his poetry. The name of “Another September” is taken from the massacre of 25 September 1916. The Easter Rising 1916 was the result of the rebellion of Dublin and Volunteers under the command of James Connolly and later Patrick Pears. Pears with another thirteen leaders was defeated by the British Army and was executed. It was the beginning of conflicts of Irish crises and establishing of New Ireland. After Easter Rising, the revolutionaries mobilized a small party in the name of “Sinn Fein”. By the end of the First World War, “Sinn Fein” had a complete victory in the general elections. But it was not recognized as legal and the Anglo-Irish war began from 1919 to 1921. The Irish Volunteers in the name of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) were under the command of Michael Collins. Britain settled for the partition of two separate parliaments in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland. England was reluctant to grant independence to Northern Ireland, and started suppressing the South; Republicans forced Britain for negotiations and the result was the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The Treaty voted a system of self government known as “dominion status”, recognizing their country as “Irish Free State”. Michael Collins, Griffith and Eamonn
de Valera wanted Sinn Fein to accept the Treaty, consequently the Civil War started between the Republicans who were against the treaty and the Free State who accepted it. The horrible Civil war started between these two groups lasted till 1923. Kinsella concentrates on these events in different works. In *The Good Fight* (1973), he writes:

> If other nations falter  
> Their people still remain what they were.  
> But if our country in its call to greatness  
> falters, we are little but the scum  
> of other lands. That is our special danger,  
> our burden and our glory.  
> The accident that brought our people together  
> out of blind necessities  
> -embrace it! - explosive- to our bodies. ’(149)

Kinsella is not satisfied with what happened to his nation under the hegemony of Britain. Thus his poetry digs deep down in history. Derek Mahon points out:

> The poets themselves have taken no part in political events, but they have contributed to that possible life, or to the possibility of that possible life; for the act of writing is itself political in the fullest sense.  
> A good poem is a paradigm of good politics-of people talking to each other, with honest subtlety, at a profound level. It is a light to lighten the darkness; and we have had darkness enough, God knows, for a long time. (92)

“*Butcher Dozen*” from the collection *Butcher Dozen* (1972) is a history centered poem, related to post-independent Ireland. It is a response to Britain’s Lord Chief Justice Widgery’s Report on Derry. The speaker is a walker and a victim.
I went with Anger at my heel
Through Bogside of the bitter zeal
-Jesus pity! - On a day
Of cold and drizzle and decay.
A month had passed. Yet there remained
A murder smell that stung and stained. (CP 133)

Kinsella within a week of the Widgery’s Report wrote this poem. Although the poem is not a faithful narration of the event of 1972, it is a probe into the convulsion of history. History is a “ghostly pool of blood” (CP133). To the British’s justice the walker says:

We rap for order with a gun,
The issues simplify to one
-Then your Democracy insists
You mustn’t talk with terrorists.
White and yellow, black and blue,
Have learned their history from you:
Divide and ruin, muddle through. (135)

The victim, questions British democracy: who is the real terrorist? He points out that the dominant power, acts like evil. They subdue and suppress other cultures. History which is written by the dominant power is full of lies; “History, with its lessons, is only a haunting, as ‘Voices, far away, die in the cold’” (Bedient, “Absentist,” 19). In spite of the skeptical attitude towards history in this poem, Kinsella is quite optimistic about the impact of history. He agrees with Seamus Heaney when he says “hope and history might rhyme” (qtd. in Campbell 1). He doesn’t see history as an “unending sequence of follies’” but he says “‘I think if we were to see it as such, we would all
cease to do our best. There is a sort of calculus involved in which you pitch forward to a point in which you hope to break slightly more than even, otherwise the energy will dissipate” (qtd. in Fitzsimons, Sea 135). The happy ending of the poem is another reason for this claim.

We all are what we are, and that
Is mongrel pure. What nation’s not
Where any stranger hung his hat
And seized a lover where she sat? (CP 137)

He hopes that England will leave Northern Ireland, and that the divided North and South “mix themselves in the common blood”. But the problem cannot be solved so easily. Though Kinsella puts Ireland in the situation of a country under colonization and post-colonial experience; he finds that reality is beyond his expectation.

In the Collection The Good Fight, Kinsella investigates history at the international level. “The Good Fight”, is Kinsella’s elegy for John F. Kennedy. Oswald and Kennedy were two victims of politics. The materials of history are the elements for Kinsella’s poetry, but his oeuvres are more poetic than history. Kinsella searches for reality in history, and tries to find out the relation between ‘reality and his art’. Although ‘art’ and ‘reality’ are two separate issues, they work together. Art demonstrates reality and truth and reality feeds art. They exist in each other. The epigraph of the poem by John Clellon Holmes reveals that Kinsella found similarities between himself and Oswald: “Those who are imprisoned in the silence of reality always use a gun (or, if they are more fortunate, a pen) to speak for them” (qtd. CP 147). In his poems Kinsella, narrates the reality of history. Both the speaking persona and Oswald need to speak; they have to find out their understanding of reality.

I believed once that silence
encloses each one of us.

Now, if that silence does not
enclose each, as I am led
more and more to understand
- so that I truly am cut off,
a ‘thing’ in their eyes also-

I can, if my daydreams are right,
decide to end it.(CP 153)

Kinsella cannot be satisfied with those realities which historians tell us. He always observes the element of Absence in history. According to historians, Oswald is an assassin; they cannot see him as an individual or in any other way. But for a poet like Kinsella, who writes the unwritten pages of history to understand it better and understand human beings better; Oswald is a victim, he is an isolated shadow, he is a walker and a wanderer, a puppet in the hand of politicians. The similarity of Oswald and Kinsella is in their reaction to the events of society. Yet they are different.

In the fourth part of the poem, Kinsella brings a new narrator - Robert Frost. When a poet narrates part of history, he is “not in judgment, and not / in an acceptance either / uncertain.” Poets never judge, or take one part for another. They remain ‘uncertain’, their narration is open ended. The man of politics needs to be as certain as Kennedy and Oswald were. They are the “vessels of decision”. Frost says “it is we, letting things be, / Who might come at understanding (157). Thus through the world events of history Kinsella tries “to find an adequate response to actuality” or as he believes “the facts’, ‘the particulars’ of the time and place in which, as a result of the ‘accident’, the artist happens to find him or herself” (Fitzsimons Sea 166 ). It is a key
to understand Kinsella and his “ethical stance which functions as a structural device enabling the work to be achieved” (*Sea* 166).

Part one of the poem “Nightwalker” from the collection *Nightwalker and Other Poems* (1968) deals with the story of four former friends: “Soon, the story tells, / Enmity sprang up between them …” in the battlefield of Irish history. “There wedding Group…/ the groom, the Best Man, the Fox, and their three ladies. / A tragic tale (CP 78). Related to a photograph of O’Higgins’ wedding in 1921, Kinsella writes his poetic version of history. ‘The Groom is O’Higgins, ‘the Best Man’ is Rory O’Connor, and the Fox is Eamonn de Valera. Rory O’Connor was a leading officer of Republicans and a close friend of the leading Free State, Kevin O’Higgins. O’Connor was killed by his friend O’Higgins thus a few months later O’Higgins was assassinated by the Republicans. “The Groom was savaged / No one knows by whom” (CP 79). The event happens in O’Higgins life when he was the ‘groom’ but Kinsella wants to say another thing. ‘Groom’ is a showy word, and O’Higgins’ act of killing of his friend was only showy and a momentary act of victory. ‘Fox’ is a very ironic word for the cunning character of Eamonn de Valera; “the Fox / took to the wilds”. Kinsella shows that only the cunning can survive in politics because it is dirty business. “The Fox / Is a friend of Death, and rues nothing” (CP 79).

Soon, the story tells,

Enmity sprang up between them, and the Fox

Took to the wilds. Then, to the Groom’s sorrow,

His dear friend left him also, vowing hatred. (CP 78)

“A Country Walk” from the collection *Downstream* (1962) is another historical Absentist poem; it doesn’t deal with the events directly but takes up another subject. The image of ‘river’ is a resemblance of ‘river of history’; “under a darkening and
cleaning heaven / The hastening the river flowed in a slate sheen” (CP 47). Kinsella makes this poem universal by referring to the history of human being as “thousand currents” of history in different eras and places. From the ancient history of Ireland “the first Normans massacred my fathers” and the history of Christianity “the day Christ hung dying” all reveal the bloodiness of history. The walker moved in the town “Market square” and sees statues of historical Ireland;

Around the corner, in the Market Square,
I came upon the sombre monuments
That bears their names: MacDonagh and McBride
Merchants; Connolly’s Commercial Arms… (CP 46)

What Kinsella observes from history is only “sombre monuments” from a bloody past. These heroes are frozen in the cement of their statues. They are frozen in the icy heart of history. They are only “our watchful elders” that watched the Easter and keep watching us even now. In the historical absentist poetry of Kinsella, the idea of hero and heroism is absent. “Heroics have faded, crushed out by the crass materialism, raising in a deliberate parody of Yeats the question of the possibility of heroism in the modern age” (Garratt, “Fragilities,” 92). Kinsella observes the reality of Ireland and accepts that the uniting together of Ireland is a “troubled union”. But he is optimistic about the future of Ireland. He knows that the river of Ireland’s history will keep moving “over the stony bed / Glass-green and chill”. But under the “Venit Hesperus” will be the “green and golden light. / Bringing sweet trade” (CP 47). The historical facts of Ireland in Kinsella’s poetry shows how the past is full of inadequacies and Absence, but this is not the only aim of Kinsella, he needs to go down into the reality of history which is full of war and violence. Kinsella shows that the cruel function of human beings is in the negation of their existence.
Violence is the Negation of Being

It is really a difficult task to choose from among Kinsella’s collections, just a few poems about violence, as his entire collection deals with violence. Violence as the fundamental element of Absentist poetry is the theme of most modern poetry too. Violence and atrocity exist in the absence of peace, understanding, faith, and comprehending. Mankind has unsatisfactory will to power and violence as the tool of power. When man prefers violence he reduces himself to the state of the wild where there is no law or value that he can think of, there is nothing, no past no present and no future:

all is lost;
The Past becomes a fairy bog
Alive with fancies, double crossed
By pad of owl and hoot of dog (Cp12)

*Downstream* (1962) is divided into three important ‘violent’ themes: “Old Harry”, “A Country Walk” and “Downstream”. All of them are preoccupied with “the human capacity to willfully choose violence” (Fitzsimons 58). The fundamental bases for understanding of these poems are the historical events of Ireland and the world. The poem “Tyrant Dying” is a criticism of an “aged leader who, in his past life, by a stroke of the pen monstrously sanctioned the dispatch of human life: “Fat hands, no longer guided, rest their talons, / The bone- and sinew- shattering pen let fall” (CP 41). This poem is like an epigraph for “Old Harry” which deals with President Harry Truman’s decision about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Lost their flesh and blood-tiles, underwear, wild cries
Stripped away in gales of light. Lascivious streets
Heightened their rouge and welcomed baths of pure flame.

In board daylight delicate creatures of love
Opened their thighs, their breasts melted shyly
And bared the white bone. At that sight

Men blushed fiercely and became shades. (CP 43)

The chemical bomb melts the flesh of the bodies and the whiteness of the bones becomes clear. “Convulsive wreckage, physical distortion conveyed in ironic images of sexual response, fiery immolation and a devastation so extreme that mythic creatures, part animal, part human, abandon the world” (Harmon, “Kinsella: Poet,” 6). Kinsella in his pursuit of Absentism makes his own specific images of violence and cruelty. He depicts that the essence and basis of Man’s life and soul are on will and desires for power. He believes that life is inherently disappointed and destroyed by desires. Mankind is made of “a flesh of thirst and pain, a blood / Driven by onward self-tortment and by desire” (CP 42). Death as ‘Master love’ is the “grim instructor” of man that moves in the “criminal darkness”, the process continues till the catastrophe happens and then

‘What of the guilty spirit’ I inquired,

‘Inviting darkness to the human womb?’

‘The guilty must repay with flesh and blood’.

‘What of the innocent spirit, in pursuit
Of justice and the good? ‘The innocent

Repay with flesh and blood’
Then we proceeded. (CP 42)

Kinsella’s Absentist poetry is a testimony to the bases of human’s violence against each other, their “guilty spirit” which started from the womb.

The depression and chaos of the speaker started with “‘Master Love’, my grim instructor assured me, / ‘Moved already in the criminal darkness / Before our dust was chosen, or choice began “Old Harry”, (CP 42); continues in “A Country Walk”, which is an account of the layers of the historical violence. The speaker-poet is “Sick of the piercing company of women” in the first line. In the middle of the poem he refers to the Crucifixion of Christ and Anglo-Irish war and Norman massacre in 1798,

    I passed a marshy field: that shallow ford
    A place of bloodshed, as the tales agree.
    There, the day that Christ hung dying, twin
    Brothers armed in hate; the day darkened;
    They crossed swards under a full eclipse
    And mingled their bowels at the saga’s end (CP 45)

Kinsella directly goes to the heart of the issues. Violence is in religion, in history, in society and everywhere, in the “shallow ford” and “under a full eclipse”, where “brothers armed in hate” and “the day darkened”. Fitzsimons in The Sea of Disappointment: Thomas Kinsella’s Pursuit of the Real (2008) writes; “It is in ‘A Country Walk’ that it becomes apparent that Kinsella’s most intense regard is not to the creation of order, but with order as a subject, with what happens to all forms of ordering under pressure from the Real” (61). Absentism is the harsh reality of the chaotic order. It opens a new point of view in Kinsella’s pursuit of the real. To pursue the real one drowned in its absence, one achieves confusion and chaos. Absentism is the destructive image of order and violence fed upon this destruction. So the
establishment of order is under the pressure of absences. The violence is primordial and historical, internecine and genocidal, vengeful and systematic, and as endlessly recurring. It is implied, as the river in which it takes place:

Under a darkening and clearing heaven
The hastening river flowed in a slate sheen,
Its face a-swarm. A thousand currents broke,
Kissing, dismembering, in threads of foam
Or poured intact over the stony bed
Glass-green and chill. Their shallow, shifting waters
Slid on in troubled union, mixing together
Surfaces that gave and swallowed light.
And grimly the flood divided where it swept
An endless debris through the failing dusk
Under the trembling span beneath my feet. (CP 47)

“Downstream” meditates on the significance of a journey to the underworld which resembles Pound’s Cantos. But here it is the violence that the poet concentrates on. Kinsella alludes to Cantos as “the Dantesque journey”. The narrator opens the Cantos:

I opened the Cantos; and chose the silken kings,
Luminous with crisis, waging war
Among the primal clarities. Their names dying
Behind us in the dusk. (CP 47)

But opposite to this world is the world of the dead and corpses. Fitzsimons believes that this journey reveals the “darker dimensions of experience” (64). They travel in the ancient place of “Durrow Wood” in the night, “Night voices: soft / Lips of liquid, while the river swept / Its spectral surface by” (CP 48). All they find in their ways are
“furred night-brutes”, and men “half eaten, like a rotted thrush’s / To frighten stumbling children” or “An X of wavering flesh” (CP 50). The speaker starts his journey in the world of shadows, “ghost of whiteness” begun by wakening of a shapeless swan “in the muffled stress”. The swan here is an allusion to Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan”. In “Downstream” the swan is the symbol of destruction. “…betrayed with feathery kiss / A soul of white with darkness for a nest. / The creature bore the night so tranquilly…” (50). The “shapeless swan” is not a swan anymore but it is any brutal force that destroys not as an outside enemy but it comes from the inside of the human mind, from the darkness of men’s soul.

Likewise as in the Cantos and The Divine Comedy, in “Downstream”, the narrator visits Hell “Among nude herds of the damned”, but this “Hell” is on earth,

    We saw the barren world obscurely lit
    By tall chimneys flickering in their pall,
    The haunt of swinish man. Each day a spit

That, turning, sweated war. Each night a fall

Back to the evil dream where rodents ply,

Man-rumped, sow-headed, busy with whip and maul (49).

In this poem, the dark and evil side of mankind is highlighted through the death camps of the Second World War. In this harsh reality death is a predominant theme that frames the poem with aggression and disarray. The narrator, travels on the waste and destroyed land and all he visits are corpses. “It seemed that I, / Coming to conscience on that edge of dread / Still dreamed, impervious to calamity.” Here what this poem signifies is “an actual mess” as the foundation of Absentism.
Nightwalker and Other Poems (1968) is a major collection of Absentism, and violence. Here, “Nightwalker”, is selected with a view to analyze the theme of violence. “Nightwalker” is an important long poem; Calvin Bedient claims that, in “Nightwalker”:

[...] Irish poetry comes abreast of ‘The Waste Land’ and ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’... [Kinsella’s] poem has the extreme bitterness of a man who finds that the last refuge of his virtue is his despair. If more continuous, less allusive and difficult than ‘The Waste Land’, its structure similarly expresses, through slips and shifts, both uncontrollable cultural disintegration and personal misery, the spirit writhing to find a tenable position. (Eight 127)

Thus “Nightwalker” stands for one of the pessimistic Absentist poems of Kinsella. This long poem starts with the following lines:

Mindful of the shambles of the day,

But mindful, under the blood’s drowsy humming,

Of will that gropes for structure; nonetheless

Not unmindful of the madness without,

The madness within- the book of reason

Slammed open, slammed shut (CP 76)

In this short epigraph Kinsella presents his distrustful idea about all knowledge that men have achieved till now. “The book of reason” that is full of ‘madness’ is sometimes “slammed open” and sometimes “slammed shut” because it is not useful any more. Subsequently he moves to another sentence that drowns the reader in the ‘uncertainty’ and ‘bluer’, “I only know things seem and are not good” (CP 76). This is not only the narrator’s idea but it is the cry of all human races. In “Nightwalker”,
Kinsella finds out that people are “shadowy flesh”; they are walking at night not knowing where their destination is, their “brain[s] in the dark and bones out exercising”. “Night” here stands for ‘phantasmagoric discontent condition of men. It is interesting to know that all the characters in this poem are dead, or are statues or embalmment; only the walker remains who is a vagabond, like the moon and other constellations that are wanderers in the sky. The walker and the moon together become “The Wakeful Twins” (CP 78). One of the historical events that Kinsella refers to in “Nightwalker” is the Civil War of 1921. Rory O’Connor a leading officer was killed by his friend Kevin O’Higgins as Free Staters who was responsible for the death of 77 men. In “Nightwalker”, ‘The Groom is O’Higgins’, ‘The Best Man’ is O’Connor ‘and ‘the fox’ is Eamonn de Valera, the leader of the Fianna Fail Party and the Prime Minister from 1932 until 1948. What is important here, is the history of Irish Civil War, and the point of brutality and sadism between the people of the same city. From a regional event, Kinsella leads the reader to the Biblical story of brotherhood conflict present in the story of Cain and Abel as a universal issue and lack of affection among human beings. In the second section of “Nightwalker”, the walker reaches the statue of James Joyce, the “father of Authors”. Joyce here is a symbol for art and order. The walker in search of structure and order is eager to find guidance from Joyce. Standing at his tower he says, “Watcher in the tower, / Be with me now. Turn your milky spectacles / On the sea, unblinking” (CP 80). This poem has a political allegory with reference to Charles Haughey a minister “The Sonhusband /.../ On his big white harse! (CP 80) In the third part of the poem, the narrator leads the reader down through the past and glorious Joyce and brings him to 1940s, when “the Dublin Castle” was used as the “National Schools”

To try to conquer the Irish national spirit
And the same time exterminating our ‘jargon’

- The Irish language, in which Saint Patrick, Saint Bridget

And Saint Colmcille taught and prayed! (CP 82)

In his interview with John Haffenden, Kinsella refers to this period as ‘brainless innocence’ and ‘reality like oxygen’. Fitzsimons believes that ‘‘Nightwalker’’ can be seen as a bitter commentary on the failure of the Irish state at the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising” (“Sea,” 344). The violence here is related to the failure of nationalism and “the messy, violent birth of the Irish state” (“Sea,” 345). In part four of the poem, Kinsella laments for a supreme power to hold control of everything. He laments for the “Hatcher of peoples” (CP 83). He alludes to Dante’s The Divine Comedy: “Virgin most pure”. Virgin Mary fuses in the moon and its “Reflected enormous in her shaggy pool”. Virgin Mary the source of “wisdom and renewal” and a “vessel of devotion”, guided Dante to the “Eternal Light” and Heaven. Similarly here the moon is the source of light and life that his “brain swims in her light”. The moon and Queen Victoria here play the role of Virgin Mary to save Ireland from disaster. Queen Victoria was the source of “wisdom and renewal”. Kinsella believes that she stands for some kind of order in a deadly world”. Fitzsimons quotes from Dante’s Paradiso that: “all things bound in a single book by love / of which creation is the scattered leaves” (“Sea,”346). Kinsella searches for such love or power to bring all nations (Irish people) together like a single book of love. But in the absence of values neither power nor love can bring about this unity. He says: “From time to time it seems that everything / Is breaking down” (CP 83). In this regard Fitzsimons believes that Kinsella “reacts against Victoria” when he refers to Victoria “as proximate parent of new Ireland”. Quoting from Kinsella he says:
Today the positiveness of the Victorian mind survives in Ireland (in me…) after the catastrophes of W.W.II and Hiroshima. And who will say this is not an enrichment, rather than an improvement? To be able to face the contemporary world, with the positiveness (marginal, yet there) of commitment to structure, meaning, purpose, giving, maybe, a means of dealing with a monster of formlessness and malignity. (“Sea,” 347)

Part five deals with violence and disappointment

A true desert,

…………………………………………

If I stoop down and touch the dust

It has a human taste: massed human wills.

I believe

I have heard of this place.

I think this is the Sea of Disappointment. (CP 84)

According to Absentism, in “Nightwalker” men suffer from some inadequacies of interpersonal relations with the world outside and with his inner conflicts. In the chaotic nature and environment of modern life man is not able to enjoy the world: “Lungs that take no pleasure any longer” (76) and from within, an Absentist man is only “patrolling the hive of his brain” (77). Man scrutinizes his mind, and cannot find passion among men thus retiring more and more into himself, rejecting the harsh world. Fitzsimons writes:

If a standard is to be found, he [Kinsella] believes the nutritive source will be located in the same place as the destructive: ‘the imposed order of the Church will not do in this post-atomic chaos. We must do it out
of our own bowels: it is we, who have, from our inner wills, brought chaos and we who must, from our inner wills, bring new order’’.

(“Sea,” 335)

This perfect representation of Absentism shows the whole world’s catastrophe and anarchy. Kinsella “wanted the poem to be seen... ‘not as a political satire or as an exile’s criticism but as a sad poem about violence’” (335). Kinsella in his pursuit of Absentism finds the lack of order and structure in modern life. Like Joyce he refers to mythical figures from Celtic and Gaelic mythology like Cuchulainn, in order to give shape and form to his poetry. Violence is the focal point in Absentism. Kinsella in “Nightwalker” portrays human society as a jungle which is ruled by the law of the “survival of the fittest” rather than men’s rationality. Senses of morality and religious beliefs are invalidated and absent. Kinsella’s major effort is to make clear that human beings are poisoned by “an actual mess” from the past. This “actual mess” creeps into his future too. It cannot be evaded by any body and has become a dilemma for men.

As a central problem of modern life it comes in the form of disarray and vagaries. In the article “Thomas Kinsella: Jousting with Evil”, Harmon explains that: “At the heart of his entire work, as he explores the presence of evil in increasingly more complex and more balanced poems, is the belief that art itself is the true answer to the power of evil” (18). Having dealt with the problems of his nation and the wars and violence, Kinsella has pessimistic views which lead him to disappointment. The following argument pinpoints this scepticism which has root in the Existentialist philosophy of Heidegger.

Absentism and Kinsella’s Scepticism

Kinsella finds himself face to face with the basic notion of Existentialism which as the anguish of ‘being’ and the anguish of the human condition in its
particularities. Man’s existence is an inexplicable and irrational surge which reduces the human condition to a permanent state of ‘Absence’. The limitations of the human condition render human aspirations unfulfilled. In the light of this concept of ‘Absence’ one can understand most of Kinsella’s motives such as the meaninglessness of man’s existence, the despair, the failure of human understanding to know the ultimate truths, the failure of love, the failure of discourse, the flux of time, one’s own identity both present and past, the failure to solve the problems of death and destruction. The search for man’s own identity, the discovery of the truth of nature of the self and rising of the problem of identity, and finally the confrontation of the readers with the existence of their own intriguingly problematic condition are the themes of Kinsella’s poetry. The real pinnacle of pessimistic ideas is in the second half of the nineteenth century, when doubt, anxiety, uncertainty and skepticism reaches its climax as the consequence of the Second World War. Wars have altered the attitude of man’s mind and shattered his faith. It shakes the bases of his belief of himself and God, it brought the hesitation of “the possibility of art after Auschwitz” (Davis 84).

Disappointment directly leads to the notion of Absentism. In modern life and in the absence of God and faith a man has freedom in view of his situation, in decisions which he makes and sets himself to solve his problems and live in the world. “Thrown into the world”, is a human being who is condemned to be unbearably free, a liberty which is free from responsibility. ‘Inauthentic existence’ is a name Heidegger has given to the human being. To be an ‘inauthentic existence’ means to be a being of anxiety and anguish. Alienation from self and society reveals the attempt of man to run away from his own anxiety. Thomas Kinsella and other fellow Absentist poets try to respond to this enigmatic hopelessness. Kinsella’s skepticism and “shreds of
disappointment” which are the foundation of his Absentism have roots in the existentialism of Heidegger and Sartre. Fitzsimons declares that: “The particular conditions of his social background, and pertaining in post-Independence Ireland, however, confirmed an imaginative and temperamental inclination to see Real in terms of hope continually fading away into disappointment” (Fitzsimons, Sea 4).

The circumstances of the world in general and post-colonial Ireland in particular along with his personal issues are also the reasons for his pessimism. In The Messenger (1978), Kinsella portrays the influence of disappointment in his family matters and general issues. He writes about the death of his father; “It is more than mere Loss”. The death is a symbol for the “frustrated ideals produced a debilitating foreknowledge of failure” (Fitzsimons 154). So disappointment is in the core of life. His notion of disappointment is expressed in the following lines:

   It was of course no news that the human mind was an abyss, and that the will, just as much as the imagination, was capable of every evil. But it was something new that creatures out of Hieronymus Bosch should have materialized in the world, […]. The coming to reality of these apparently fantastic images is an inner catastrophe: we have opened up another area of ourselves and found something new that horrifies, but that even more intensely disappoints. (qtd. in Fitzsimons, Sea 74)

The significance of Kinsella’s poems as an example of “post-atomic crisis of value[s]” is that they investigate the source of disappointment in the psyche and confronts it with outside violence. They represent the disappointment that had originated partly in historical fact of the past, such as failure of nationalism and partly in the sinful essence of Man and “a sense of precariousness and disorder in the spirit”. 
Violence and anarchy from outside of being will come in the form of social disorder. In his interview to John Haffeden, Kinsella says: “we’re surrounded and penetrated by squalor, disorder and the insignificant, and I believe the artistic impulse has a great deal to do with our trying to make sense out of that” (101).

The poem “Breakdown” from *Littlebody* (2000) is a perfect image of Kinsella impatient mind:

- Onset of restlessness and confusion
- and mental absences settling in disorder.

- With a coarsening of the personality
- -the exaggeration of established traits-

- and an infantile stubbornness:
- -interests narrowed to the self,
- -irritation the dominant mood,
- -and ceaseless indiscriminate demands on others. (CP 351)

The title of this Existentialist poem is the embodiment of Absentism. The poem defines life bereft of meaningful purpose and direction. Human beings in such a situation lose the sense of being; since “irritation” is “the dominant mood”. The World becomes a strange place for human beings and they feel isolated and alienated in their own land. Scepticism toward life is one of the elements of Absentism. Kinsella is possessed by the pessimistic idea which engulfs human beings in itself. Self and identity of human beings is the target of this scepticism. Therefore in the next part of the argument of this work the relation between Absentist poetry of Kinsella and the issue of the alienation of human being is discussed.
Absentism and Alienation of Man

Feeling like an outsider in life, is the modern man who is haunted by a feeling of an absence of identity and a sense of alienation in the world. Kinsella was always in search of liberating man from his isolation and the crisis of identity. Kinsella’s “work has become increasingly preoccupied with establishing “who he is and where he comes from’ his large issues of identity, origins, language and tradition, blood and family” repeated in different poems (John 250). The idea of the individual’s crisis of identity and the scattered identity of the Irish nation constantly occupied his poetry. Gradually the idea of identity cross the border of nationalism and becomes a universal quest in his poetry. Fragmentation of self and alienation of being connected to mankind to a life “which is always a referred existence, disemboweled by analytical self consciousness, by knowing too much”, then the “mere life”, valueless and colorless is present and rest is absent (Bedient, “Absentist,” 18). Quest for the liberation of Irish nation is the first level and the freedom of human beings in the international level had been the preoccupation of modern Irish writers and poets such as James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and W. B. Yeats. Kinsella’s poetry discusses the calamity of human society especially in the context of Irish culture and history. Like many of the post-world war poets, Thomas Kinsella experienced the chaotic situation of Ireland during 1950s-1960s. Daniel Corkery writes: “Everywhere in the mentality of the Irish people are flux and uncertainty. Our national consciousness may be described, in a native phrase, as a quaking sod. It gives no footing. It is not English, nor Irish, no Anglo-Irish (qtd. in Kinsella, Dual 87).

It was obvious that Irish identity is threatened to be buried under the pressure of the British culture and language. This is a harsh reality in the form of disarray,
violence, lack of identity that becomes Kinsella’s central thematic concern. Garratt in his article “Fragilities and Structures: Poetic Strategy in Thomas Kinsella’s ‘Nightwalker’ and ‘Phoenix Park’” points out that his poetry “presents the central anxiety which runs throughout the poetry- artistic isolation and cultural alienation - and it offers the characteristic response to that anxiety, a quest or a search for markings to aid in the struggle for establishing identity and order” (94). A typical Kinsellain poem is a demonstration of a search for order, for truth and search for certainty of self, but he achieves nothingness, as these elements are absent conspicuously. The themes introduced in Kinsella’s poetry of 1950s are intense isolation and lack of many things. The poet consoles himself by writing poetry, but writing intensifies his isolation.

For Kinsella writing itself is the matter of exile; in “Baggot Street Deserta” he says:

> Versing, like an exile, makes
> A virtuoso of the heart,
> Interpreting the old mistakes
> And discords in a work of Art
> For the One, a private masterpiece
> Of doctored recollections. (CP 12)

This poem is a small journey that takes place in the mind of the speaker-dreamer of the poem. This poem like other walk-poems shows the speaker, searching. The search is for self, and for identity. In the “quiet of [his] attic” he sings with “a curlew’s lingering threadbare cry / of common loss”. He remembers his loneliness;

> Compassionate,
> I add my call of exile, half-
> Buried longing, half-serious
Anger and the rueful laugh. (CP 12)

This type of despair is repeated in his poetry in the form of an anguished and disturbed ego. Parts of these identity crises in Kinsella’s poetry deal with the different progress of development in Ireland from colonialism to nationalism and from nationalism to independence and democracy. Actually the Irish identity is lost between Catholicism, colonialism and Irish nationalism. Irish identity that formed under the ‘force of European urbanization’, cut to heterogeneity and ambivalence between Irishness and Englishness. Again in “Nightwalker” he pronounces:

…And Dublin Castle used the National Schools

To try to conquer the Irish national spirit

At the same time exterminating our ‘jargon’

-The Irish language… (CP 82)

In 1940 in Southern Ireland, Irish language and history was taught in the Christian schools such as Christian Brothers Schools, O’Connell Schools, and Brother Burk Schools. But the point is that after abandoning the language for a long time, the students find it rather difficult to understand the language. It was only a ‘jargon’ for them: “a dying language echoes / across a century’s silence” (82). Language is the most important element of identity for any culture and tradition and in such condition “the Irish tradition is seen as broken, through language-loss” (Fitzsimons, Sea 35).

Language constructs identity so the forgotten Irish language made a forgotten identity. This is a problem happening in many colonized countries. The language of the colonizer becomes the language of the colonized. Language itself becomes the source of love and hatred, and Ireland was plagued by this problem. Irish culture and tradition was imparted through English language. It became the language of new the
generation, the language of education. Kinsella in his *the Dual Tradition* opens up the education system as a ‘powerful device’ to give life to a nation or destroy it.

In this regard he writes about Pearse that: “he had studied the mechanisms of British Colonial exploitation in Ireland and identified the system of education as a powerful device, a ‘murder machine’ doing what Swift had recommended: teach the English tradition in the English language in Irish schools” (Kinsella, Dual 72). Absentism is not against globalization, although globalization does not solve the problems of identity. Kinsella in his later poetry tries to show the dilemma of identity through innovative strategies in his poetry. In *Notes from the Land of Dead* (1973), he ‘descends into self’, thus the poems are highly complex and ambiguous. Kinsella endeavours to explore and describe the inner world of the character. He is concerned with the process of growth of an individual. Carol Tattersall points out that ‘purely literary heritage’ is not enough for “self-understanding”. So in *Notes from the Land of Dead*, Kinsella uses ancient Irish myths such as the Deluge in “Survivor”, Eden in “Nuchal”, “Selen”, the moon goddess in “Endymion” and “Hecate” in “At the Crossroads”, “to discover the direct effects of early immersion in this culture upon the individual” (80). He continues this search for self among the “distant memory and accumulated knowledge” of ancient Gaelic and Celtic traditions and culture to find answers to the catastrophe of the “present state”. Kinsella makes use of fragmented structure to portray the scattered and fragmented self in incomplete sentences. Thus his poems look like broken statues and fragmented figures. The structure of these poems do not follow any rule and order although there are a few rhyming couplets between broken stanzas; In “Nuchal” (a fragment), this disarray is clear:

She has dreamed so long already...

Four great rivers creep across the plain
toward the four corners of that vast domain.

Four rivers reaching toward th’encircling sea,

that bitter basin

Where every…” (CP 110)

In Notes from the Land of Dead, Kinsella divides parts and sections by ‘black dots’ and ellipses that enforce a rupture and incompleteness into the poem. Especially in “Survivor”, there are single word sentences like “Hair. Claws. Grey. / Naked. Wretch. Wither” (CP 112) According to Fitzsimons, these broken sentences and phrases stand for fragmentation of the individual’s mind and lack of certainty. “I must remember / and be able some time to explain” (CP112) but “… there is so little I can do any more’” (CP117). “The Clearing” is deceptively simple. The speaker as a “troubled figure” continues:

It is night. A troubled figure

is moving about its business

muttering between the fire and the gloom.

Impenetrable growth surrounds him.

Owlful. Batful.

Great moths of prey. (CP 117)

The images he portrays for characters resemble Beckett’s and Kafka’s characters, very strange and scary. But they are all men without the quality of man and without identity. They are modern men, they are Absentist men.

“Mirror in February” from Downstream (1962) is another poem that deals with lack of identity. Kinsella depicts a ‘world-weary speaker’ lost in the routine of his life,
every day having a bath and morning shave. Suddenly he sees in the mirror his “dark exhausted eye’:

Under the fading lamp, half dressed-my brain
Idling on some compulsive fantasy-
I towel my shaven jaw and stop, and stare,
Riveted by a dark exhausted eye,
A dry downturned mouth. (CP 53)

The poem is a manifestation of an isolated individual and death of the youth; “in slow distaste / I fold my towel with what grace I can” there in no ecstasy in life, “not young and not renewable but man” (53). Every thing around men including himself “stand defaced / Suffering their brute necessities”. The speaker sees himself in the frame of the mirror, and even “little more” beyond that because the mirror reflects his image and his eyes reflect his soul, and in the mirror he can see his soul. From this image in the mirror he goes to his exhausted soul: “Now plainly in the mirror of my soul / I read that I have looked my last on youth / And little more.” (CP 53).

Likewise in real life man is in isolation and loneliness. In “hesitate, cease to exist, glitter again,” from the Collection New Poems (1973), he says:

I fell foul at the last
and broke in a distress of gilt and silver,
scattered in a million droplets of
fright and loneliness… (CP 96)

The second part of “The Good Fight” gives expression to a burst of isolation and loneliness of an individual;

A lonely room.

An electric fire
glowing in one corner. He is lying on his side.

It is late. He is at the center of a city,
awake.

Above and below him

there are other rooms with others in them.

He knows nobody as yet, and has

no wish to. (CP 151)

This poem is not only a moral, psychological study of Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of John F. Kennedy, but it is a philosophical probe into human race. This part starts with a subjective portrait of Oswald. Then the view changes to objective and Kinsella removes the barrier between the narrator and the reader. Oswald himself is the narrator and the protagonist:

I cannot reach or touch anything.

I cannot lay my hand with normal weight

on anything. It is either nothing

or too much. (CP 152)

Maurice Harmon draws attention to it: “Oswald sees and understands himself as lonely outcast, a lost person, victim of his own energy” (“Poetry,” 65). Oswald stands for any individual in this modern Absentist world where man is a victim of political or social ties and the victim of his greed. Man is a victim of his “assigned tasks” and his “routine”. Man becomes a tool and everything is fixed for him from the beginning.

“There is something he must do”, there is no wonder whether he is Oswald or Kennedy both of them are isolated individuals. Implicitly Oswald as the assassin stuck in his hiding place and Kennedy as the President is in a pitiful situation enabling “to move except within the theatre of public acclaim” (“Poetry,” 65). Here Kinsella
develops his character as one of the “social and philosophical estrangement” (Campbell 12). Both of them are isolated individuals and victims. Oswald scrutinizes himself as a psychologist;

I have watched my own
theatrical eyes narrow
and noted under what stress
and ceaseless changes of mind.
I have seen very few
cut so dull and driven a figure,
masked in scorn or abrupt
impulse, knowing content
nowhere. (CP 153)

After probing the mind of Oswald, Kinsella moves to the image of people (crowd) running in the streets of Washington after the assassination of the President. This scene resembles the end of the world where people are “saying ‘Catastrophe’ and weeping” (155). It is very much like the prophecy of the Apocalypse about the end of the world. He changes Plato’s phrase: “All reasonable things are possible” to “all unreasonable things / are possible. Everything / that can happen, will happen” (CP 157). It is the uncontrollable force outside individual ability that rides the chariot of life. Man is reduced to a mere puppet in the hand of the cruel destiny.

In the Collection such as The Pen Shop (1997), Kinsella deals with the lack of self-knowledge and crisis of self. In the poem “To the Coffee Shop” he portrays the heroes of history like the shads and shadows, they are in the prisons of their statues. “solidity of particular person in particular places”, the statue of Jim Larkin the hero of 1913, Sir John Gray, William Smith O’Brien. Daniel O’Connell, Honest Toil, statue
of Grattan Thomas Davis, all of them are from the past, they are not alive and present any more, they are statues, lifeless, motionless and stone:

By Sir John Gray, of The Freeman’s Journal,
unremembered on his pedestal.

-None of the Grays was any Good.

By Smith O’Brien. Dead thirty years, to the day,
when Mr Bloom unclasped his hands in soft acknowledgement. And clasped them. About here.

By Daniel O’Connell

    high in the salt wind,
with hand on heart and dealer’s eye;

    Church and Education in debate
around the hem of his garment; Honest Toil at his heel,
    shirt thrown open and ready for nearly anything. (CP 324)

Cuchulain is the mythic hero but here is only “bronze hero” and

    Our souls passing among each other
    Under the cathedral ceiling. Around the bronze hero
    Sagging half covered off his upright,
    Looking gown over one shoulder at his feet.
    the harpy perched on his neck. (CP 323)

Fitzsimons points out that Harpy the bird of dead that “perched” on the dead hero stand for “Sterility and for chaos which has yielded to Kinsella’s many of the most
powerful moments in his poetry, and which features on the cover of Collected Poems (1996)” (Fitzsimons 87)

Since the beginning of Modernism till date and especially in the poetry of Absentism of 1960s, crisis of identity, lack of confidence, mystery of self and loneliness, presented bereavement of man from himself. The crisis of identity in the form of ambivalent and heterogeneous self, isolation, loneliness, wandering and sense of exile, in the Absentist poetry are wide-reaching issues in Thomas Kinsella. In his Absentist love poems, He depicts modern love which is empty of love and affection since the lover and the beloved suffer from the absence of identity. A human being with the lack of self knowledge can not understand another human being. Kinsella argues that family and married life is under the direct influence of other crisis in the society especially the problem of identity and self-knowledge. The following argument analyzes the Absence of love.

Love I Consider as a Difficult, Scrupulous Art.

Love like other aspects of modern life is a victim of Absentism. Thomas Kinsella in his significant love poems figures out a pessimistic idea of love. Love as an “empty word” and “graven language” portrays a new dimension of love as ‘Absentist Love’. Absentist love is the most real image of love. The lover and the beloved suffer from the isolation of their individual, as well as the isolation of their married life. They suffer from the fragility of feelings and other events which are beyond their control such as illness, death and separation. “Faithfulness to one another … but for subsequent Absentists married love is seldom a source of security or joy” (Bedient, “Absentist,” 18).
In this regard Kinsella is in agreement with the French poet Baudelaire in his “Fusees” depicts love as a way of torture, he says “the supreme and unique joy of love lies in the certainty of doing injury. All joy is based on evil” (Wells 25).

Kinsella in his love poems shows love not as sweet and romantic but as a “symbol of love”. Love as a sweet story with a happy ending is not possible since human beings suffers from violence, war and consequently the crisis of identity. Love and marriage are the values which in our modern life are in the danger of destroying. Love is surrounded by sadness, sourness and disappointments of modern life. When one is able to see love from this angle then he/she will be able to see what is lacking in love and the Absences of love. Love is “remote” that when one gets close to it, one can see the “mask[s] of love”. The alienation of a couple from each other, and the deep layer of love “inaccessible softness of breast or voice in the dove / Or high gull grace are what we are thinking of” (CP 1). Kinsella’s interest is to save love and immortalize it through his art, through writing poetry. He wants to save love from its shortcomings and absences and brings it out from an ordinary issue to take it to a permanent stage. In love and art the poet creates wholeness, beyond the inadequacies of Absentism in the form of ‘disparity, alienation and potential chaos’. But his unconditional scepticism attacks his notion of love and art. “the inevitable of destruction and decay that dooms love or art, the historical fact of oppression, the sense of exile inherent in being an outsider, an upstart, a poet in a country whose recent record was not likely to beef up a young poet’s hope” (Skloot180).

At the same time, he says:

Now, as I sink sleep,
My heart is cut down,
Nothing- poetry nor love-
Achieving. (CP 4)

This is the ‘sea of disappointment’, that human beings, individuals or couples have drowned in. What the poet portrays about love is insufficient love that can not save the human being. In Kinsella’s poetry, art as a mirror reflects the sick love, which suffers from inadequacy. Love as well as poetry is marginalized in the Absentist world. The role of a poet is to protect them through his art. In modern times, art and love are exposed to dissolution and death as Harry Clifton considers: “‘love as process, as the grind of proximity and attrition over years’” (79). Kinsella’s entire career is a search for order to save art and love from fragments of Absentism, as they act like a frame which gives order to disorder; love and art give structure to the fragmentary. “Non coincidence is both the psychological and structural principle of Absentism. Just as the Absentist does not coincide with the moment in which he lives, so his poem is made of fragments that do not match up, let alone link up” (Bedient, “Absentist,” 20). In “Phoenix Park” he opens up his will for search of order;

Laws of order I find I have discovered
Mainly at your hands.

............................

That life is hunger, hunger is for order,

And hunger satisfied brings on new hunger (CP 90)

Although he achieves order it is the beginning of another search of order. In “Echoes” (1958), Kinsella laments being unable to immortalize his love through “graven language”:

Across the deepest speech,

When what is said is less than what is heard,

Gift to the shaken giver melts into each,
Receipt on the lips alights and returns to teach
What further words can be spared
Till graven language centres love with quiet
More full than spoken gesture can supply it. (CP 1)

Inability to immortalize love in his poetry is related to the elements of absence in art and in love such as disorder, destruction, mortality and drawbacks. For example in “Echoes”, love is not a ‘dove’, sweet and soft and a symbol for peace and tranquility but it is a “swan” a symbol of destruction and decay. Swan stands for sinister inference of “Leda”. So with this cynical agent of love in mind, Kinsella in other poems tries to mark out: “What is utter love?” (CP 2) and says love is to lock “ourselves inside one heart” (CP 5). Love is ‘degradation’ and “what justice would rather die than commit” (CP 2). It is here that ‘tiny terrors grow’ in mind about love. In “A Lady of Quality”, he suggests that the end of love is separation: “Our trophied love must now divide / Into its separate parts” (CP 7).

In the sea of Absentism everything, except disappointment and chaos, is absent. What the poet achieves through his art is neither ‘poetry nor love’. Kinsella is concerned with how art and love work (‘achieve’) in the struggle with inevitable dissolution. The most urgent difficulties of life and love and art are those connected with the precariousness of all when confronted by Time, whose destructive workings make necessary a scrupulousness of response (Fitzsimons, Sea 14).

In the poem “An Outdoor Gallery” the gallery of love he endeavors to recover ‘order to [his] pen’ and tries to create “New love” by “Love, so regarded, nervous of rapture, placed / Item after item of beauty behind her” (CP 15). In the 1958 Collection Another September, Kinsella found out the destructive Absentist elements of love. In
Wormwood (1966), he discovers that love is still dying in its loveless world. In “Mask of love”, ‘love’ is introduced as ‘the narrow abyss’, and “the silent abyss” and “the fuming abyss” (65). The speaker wonders whether Love “turn[s] to us for peace?” or destroys us. The Absentist love poems “with relics of love’s loss, constitute the (sic) many disconsolate, impassable love” images not less in Kinsella’s poetry (Ling 153).

In “Wormwood” he points out that:

A black tree with a double trunk-two trees
Grown into one-throws up its blurred branches.

The two trunks in their infinitesimal dance of growth
Have turned completely about one another … (CP 63)

In this poem “the intertwined trees” stand for love, as Harmon points out: “In Kinsella’s mind creativity and love are inextricably linked” (“Thomas Kinsella,” 19), but he is also able to see that “their join / A slowly twisted scar” (CP 63). This is the “tragic nature” and the evil side of love.

In the other poem “Remembering Old Wars”, the absence of love and affection between couples make life as an old war. The struggle of a couple in their marriage is indicative that modern love has the “smell of decay”, they knew about that but they are doomed to continue; thus love is not a source of fertility and happiness but an instrument of torture and pain.

What clamped us together? When each night fell we lay down
In the smell of decay and slept, our bodies leaking,
Limp as the dead, breathing that smell all night.

Then light prodded us awake, and adversity
Flooded up from inside us as we laboured upright
Once more to face the hells of circumstance.

And so on, without hope of change or peace.
Each dawn, like lovers recollecting their purpose,
We would renew each other with a savage smile. (CP 66)

He wants to praise love as a provider of structure and order, because it is the only way that one can get away from Absentism. Kinsella in his personal life was blessed with a true love for his wife Eleanor. Unfortunately Eleanor did not enjoy this true love since she suffered from illness and weakness. But still this love was a source of inspiration for Kinsella, to write poetry and in getting more energy and power out of the issue of the sickness of Eleanor. In “Nightwalker” he says that:

…your body’s fever leaped out at my mind.
There’s a fever now that eats everything
-Everything but the one positive dream.
                          .....
Your body would know that it is positive       (CP 87)

Art and love both control each other, feed upon each other and improve each other. The word “Dream” in his poems connotes writing as an artistic act and as a relief from disappointment and Absentism. He points out that Eleanor’s illness destroys everything but “one positive dream. / That dream: it is something I might offer you” (CP 87) but “while the dream lasts, there’s a total hunger” (CP 90). Hunger is total chaos in art and in love that can destroy everything. To achieve love, there are other problems:
Giving without tearing

Is not possible; to give totality

Is to be torn totally, a nothingness

Reaching out in stasis a pure nothingness. (CP 90)

In the story of love one must give more than what one gets. In the “Beloved” from *Wormwood*, Kinsella introduces love as a “bitter cup”. He continues:

This bitter cup is offered, heaped with curses, and we must drink or die. And even though we drink we may also die, if every drop of bitterness-that rots the flesh-is not transmuted. … Death, either way, is guilt and failure. But if we drink the bitterness and can transmute it and continue, we resume in candour and doubt the only individual joy-the restored necessity to learn. Sensing a wider scope, a more penetrating harmony, we begin again in a higher innocence to grow toward the next ordeal. (CP 62)

“The ordeal-cup, set at each other turn, so far / We have welcomed, sour or sweet. What matter where / It waits for us next, if we will take and drink?” (CP 89) Love for him is “to clasp simply, question fiercely; / That getting life we eat pain in each other” (Cp 91). Absentist love is a gamble, but without a winner. In love “The road divides and we can take either way”, because in both cases “the ways are one” by selecting each way the result will be the same. If we stay in love and continue we will drown in its lacunae and if we separate, we will die in our isolation and loneliness. In the dark business of love in any case both sides are failures. In his article “Homeward, Abandoned: The Aesthetics of Home and Family in Thomas Kinsella”, Jefferson Holdridge points out that “In ‘Phoenix Park’, Kinsella combines the themes of ‘Mask of Love’ and ‘Nightwalker’ in order to examine the difficulties and possible phoenix-
like rebirth of love as well as the implicitly similar patterns of culture growth and
decay” (128).
Weakness, illness, fading and death in love, make it to a cyclic, to die and rise from
itself like the phoenix. According to Holdridge, Kinsella ‘meditates on his wife’s
illness’ and it is one of his preoccupations. Actually weakness and illness are the
characteristics of true love; they are the reasons to immortalize love. Although the
beloved may die soon yet spiritually she or he stands strong in the mind and in the art
of the lover for ever. In “Phoenix Park” he points out that:

A twig with two damp leaves drops on the bonnet
From the upper world, trembling; shows us its clean
Fracture and vanishes, snatched off by the wind:
Droplets of moisture shudder on the windscreen.

-You start at the suddenness, as though it were
Your own delicate distinct flesh that had snapped.

………………………………………………………………………………

Fragility echoing fragilities… (CP 87)
The similarities of Absence of love and illness of Eleanor are in these lines in “The
Rout of Tain”:

…dissatisfaction
spreading slowly like an ache;
something reduced shivering suddenly
into meaning along new boundaries; (121)
Thus love is the only form of love which is able to be secure from the Absentist; otherwise in the absence of values in modern life, love can not be safe from the lack and the inadequacies of human beings.

This chapter concludes with the point that Absentism has penetrated in everything and human life is scattered in the elements of absence. Violence and wars destroy the past and the present of human beings and consequently wound the modern man. Yet the broken self of being suffers from the absence of love, permanently scarring the soul.

Kinsella’s sequence of Absentist poetry begins from the regional and reaches the universal level. His achievement is in analyzing the human’s catastrophe in the Absentist themes at the national and international stage.
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