

CARCANET

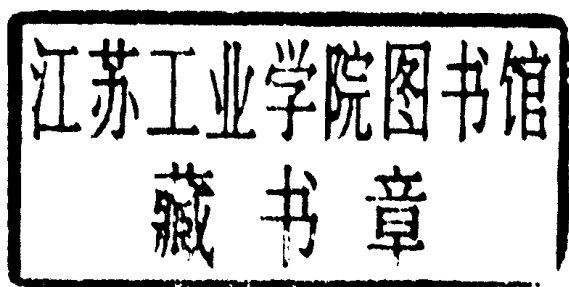
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THOMAS KINSELLA *Selected Poems*



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Selected Poems



CARCANET

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Selected Poems

THOMAS KINSELLA was born in Dublin in 1928. He attended University College Dublin and entered the Irish Civil Service, before becoming a full-time writer and teacher in the United States. He is the author of over thirty collections of poetry, and has translated extensively from Irish, notably the great epic *The Tain*. He was a director of the Dolmen Press and Cuala Press, Dublin, and in 1972 founded Peppercanister Press for the publication of sequences and long and occasional poems. The editor of *The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse* and Austin Clarke's *Selected Poems* and *Collected Poems*, Thomas Kinsella is also the author of *The Dual Tradition*, a critical essay on poetry and politics in Ireland. His awards and honours include Guggenheim Fellowships, the Denis Devlin Memorial Award, the Irish Arts Council Triennial Book Award and honorary doctorates from the University of Turin and the National University of Ireland. In 2007 Thomas Kinsella was awarded the Freedom of the City of Dublin.

Also by **Thomas Kinsella** from Carcanet

Collected Poems

The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland

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from
Poems
(1956)

Night Songs

1

Now, as I sink in sleep,
My heart is cut down,
Nothing – poetry nor love –
Achieving.

*

Turns again in my room,
The crippled leopard.
Paw-pad, configured
Yellow light of his eyes,
Pass, repass, repass.

Quiet, my hand; he is tame.

Soon, while I dream, will step
And stir the sunken dawn.

Before I woke there entered in
 A woman with a golden skin
 That tangled with the light.
 A tang of orchards climbed the stair
 And dwindled in the waxen air,
 Crisping the midnight,
 And the white pillows of my bed
 On apple-tasted darkness fed.
 Weakened with appetite
 Sleep broke like a dish wherein
 A woman lay with golden skin.

Midsummer

Hereabouts the signs are good.
 Propitious creatures of the wood
 After their fashion
 Have pitied and blessed before our eyes.
 All unpremeditated lies
 Our scattered passion.

Flowers whose name I do not know
 Make happy signals to us. O
 Did ever bees
 Stumble on such a quiet before!
 The evening is a huge closed door
 And no one sees

How we, absorbed in our own art,
 Have locked ourselves inside one heart,
 Grown silent and,
 Under beech and sacred larch,
 Watched as though it were an arch
 That heart expand.

Something that for this long year
Had hid and halted like a deer
 Turned marvellous,
Parted the tragic grasses, tame,
Lifted its perfect head and came
 To welcome us.

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

Soft, to your Places

Soft, to your places, animals.
Your legendary duty calls.
 It is, to be
Lucky for my love and me
 And yet we have seen that all's
A fiction that is heard of love's difficulty.

And what if the simple primrose show
That mighty work went on below
 Before it grew
A moral miracle for us two?
 Since of ourselves we know
Beauty to be an easy thing, this will do.

But O when beauty's brought to pass
Will Time set down his hour-glass
 And rest content,
His hand upon that monument?
 Unless it is so, alas
That the heart's calling is but to go naked and diffident.

Soft, to your places, love; I kiss
Because it is, because it is.

A Lady of Quality

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

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

For obvious reasons we ignore
The leaping season out-of-door,
 Light lively as a ferret,
Woodland walks, a crocused shore,
The transcendental birds that soar
 And tumble in high spirit

While under this hygienic ceiling
Where my love lies down for healing
 Tiny terrors grow,
Reflected in a look, revealing
That her care is spent concealing
 What, perhaps, I know.

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

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

And you go down with womankind
Who in her beauty has combined
 And focused human hungers,
With country ladies who could wind
A nation's love-affair with mind
 Around their little fingers,

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

Now the window's turning dark
And ragged rooks across the Park
 Mix with branches; all
The clocks about the building mark
The hour. The random is at work
 Between us: two petals fall.

A train lifts up a lonely cry ...
Our fingertips together lie
 Upon the counterpane.
It will be hard, it seems, and I
Would wish my heart to justify
 What qualities remain.

from
Another September
(1958)

In the Ringwood

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

The yellow Spring on Vinegar Hill,
The smile of Slaney water,
The wind that swept the Ringwood,
Grew dark with ancient slaughter.
My love cried out and I beheld her
Change to Sorrow's daughter.

'Ravenhair, what rending
Set those red lips a-shriek,
And dealt those locks in black lament
Like blows on your white cheek,
That in your looks outlandishly
Both woe and fury speak?'

As sharp a lance as the fatal heron
There on the sunken tree
Will strike in the stones of the river
Was the gaze she bent on me.
Oh her robe into her right hand
She gathered grievously.

'Many times the civil lover
Climbed that pleasant place,
Many times despairing
Died in his love's face,
His spittle turned to vinegar,
Blood in his embrace.

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

Though every stem on Vinegar Hill
And stone on the Slaney's bed
And every leaf in the living Ringwood
Builds till it is dead
Yet heart and hand, accomplished,
Destroy until they dread.

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

I kissed three times her shivering lips.
I drank their naked chill.
I watched the river shining
Where the heron wiped his bill.
I took my love in my icy arms
In the Spring on Ringwood Hill.