Winning Back the Self: 
The Implications of Jungian Imagery in Galway Kinnell’s
*The Book of Nightmares*

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Honors Thesis
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PASS WITH DISTINCTION
In 1971, Galway Kinnell published *The Book of Nightmares*, a lengthy visionary poem that is considered to be his masterpiece. In this poem, Kinnell addresses the harmful and destructive struggles brought on by modern man (the Vietnam Conflict and similar cases in the past), and also pulls back to address burning metaphysical questions. One of the most notable aspects of Kinnell's *The Book of Nightmares* is his strong use of archetypical imagery. The implications of the alchemical cover illustration are followed up by impressive and intriguing use of imagery throughout Kinnell's poem: he immerses the reader in layers of powerful images that build on each other, forming a cohesive final product.

Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung focused much of his research on archetypes, which are timeless recurring symbols and motifs that transcend culture and geography. Comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell drew much of his research from Jung’s archetypical theory, but focused largely on the hero and his quest in different mythologies. Today, when ideological clashes appear to be tearing our world apart, the works of Jung and Campbell show us the basic tenets that all mythologies have in common, even those that seem irreconcilably incompatible. *The Book of Nightmares* is concerned with modern man’s propensity towards destruction, and Jung and Campbell provide a unique and meaningful lens through which to address this problem.

In researching this paper, I drew heavily from the works of Jung and Campbell, and I also read articles written by well-known critics of Kinnell. Many of Kinnell’s themes—fire, water, stones—bring up Jungian archetypes. I applied Jungian theory to the most prevalent of Kinnell’s images, and observing these patterns, I hung the results on the framework of Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. I found that *The Book of Nightmares* is an example of the hero’s
journey, which is always, in a sense, a journey into the Self. In Jungian terms, this journey is known as the individuation process.

As Campbell says in *The Power of Myth*, every one of us is capable of being the hero. If we wish to grow more in tune with the Self, we must set off on the hero’s journey. *The Book of Nightmares* is a fresh example of the archetypical journey of the hero, and is especially applicable to our time. Kinnell’s message is ominous but hopeful: to survive much longer, man must learn to overcome his need for control and order. As we see in current politics, we are too often caught up in differences in ideologies and beliefs, which leads us to search (often destructively) for outward solutions. After performing several close readings of *The Book of Nightmares* in conjunction with researching Jung and Campbell, it is evident that the solution to man’s problems is not outward—it is within. The hero’s journey is the process of individuation, and if any of us hope to improve the state of the world, the journey must begin with the Self.

Although this project took a great deal of research, I have only explored the tip of the iceberg. Jung and Campbell published dozens of works, many of which are neglected or forgotten. I see much potential in this field of research. Using Jung’s archetypes as the building blocks of Campbell’s archetype of the hero, I would like to apply this further to literary criticism. Great literature, old and new, is heavily laden with significant archetypes of the hero’s journey. Unearthing and expanding upon these archetypes will not only add power and meaning to individual literary works, but it will help us see that great literature is more significant and interrelated than we previously thought. By finding similarities in seemingly incompatible mythologies and works of art, we will (one hopes) be led to a greater human understanding, a connection we sorely need.
I have said that the soul is not more than the body,
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is...

—From Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself”
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holds weight as an everlasting political message to a destructive and controlling mankind. *The Book of Nightmares* is especially applicable today, because rather than examining our inner Selves, we are caught up in destructive and meaningless fighting about outward results.

Throughout *The Book of Nightmares*, Galway Kinnell places importance on the immediate world and the immediate Self: “here, / here is the world. This mouth. This laughter. These temple bones” (Kinnell 52). The process of finding and developing the Self relies heavily on seeing one’s connections to the natural world. Kinnell urges the reader, through Jungian symbols, to become acquainted with one’s instincts and desires and not be ashamed of them.

This philosophy stands in direct conflict with much of modern religious philosophy, and Kinnell makes this especially apparent in section VI of *The Book of Nightmares*, “The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible.” The title is a direct quotation from 1 Corinthians 15:52: “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” Here, Paul refers to Christ’s second coming, freeing men from their corrupt bodies. Andrew Hudgins notes that this reference to the Bible “implies that people in their human, embodied form are corrupt—that mortality and moral failing are intrinsically linked” (Hudgins 63). Through his loathing of the body and stifling of the unconscious mind, Christian man has become “dangerously divorced from nature” (65).

Christian man is not the only one who, through his rejection of his body and of nature, has caused this perilous separation from the natural world. In section IV, “Dear Stranger Extant in Memory by the Blue Juniata,” Kinnell subtly pokes fun at a mystic he is acquainted with. In an interview, Kinnell acknowledges that Virginia, a real person that he “had a long correspondence with,” was “born without the protective filtering device that allows the rest of us to see this humanized, familiar world as if it were all there is. She sees past the world and lives in
the cosmos” (qtd. in Zimmerman 160). In *The Book of Nightmares*, Virginia describes herself as “faithless to this life” (Kinnell 28), and writes that she has a “demon lover” (28) from another world. Virginia sees into other worlds, yet she cannot bear to dwell in “this life.” Her admission, “I asked why should I love this body I fear” (30), is one of the questions Kinnell sets out to answer with *The Book of Nightmares*.

The Old Testament belief that man was created with the intention of dominating lesser peoples and animals has fueled numerous historical atrocities. “Christian man” has exterminated one billion heathens, heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, mystical seekers, black men, Asians, and Christian brothers, every one of them for his own good,

a whole continent of red men for living in unnatural community and at the same time having relations with the land, one billion species of animals for being sub-human... (42)

Many of these deaths stem from Christian man’s disgust with the closeness of a man or animal to the immediate world. Ever since The Fall in Judeo-Christian mythology, many religions have rejected their connections to the world, instead striving for treasures in the afterlife. Man is dissatisfied with his body, its “Sweat that has odor,” and its “Armpits sprouting hair” (42), to the extent that modern culture advertises ways in which man can (and should) change. Kinnell reemphasizes that this disgust with the body stems largely from Christianity, quoting 1 Corinthians 15:51: “We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed...” (Kinnell 42). In *The Book of Nightmares*, Kinnell sets out to find a path for the reunification of man with the world.

Kinnell’s journey to defeat Christian man’s body-loathing mentality is an inward journey. “The introduction of the mountain scene in I and the return to it in X suggests that this place may be taken as the literal location of the poem, with all the rest being the hiker’s mental journeying” (Hilberry 216). Kinnell begins and ends his journey in the same place, but mentally, he has
changed. His journey to come to terms with his place in the world is largely focused on the "healing of the rift between reflective thought and instinctive body" (Kleinbard 51), or more specifically, the union of the conscious (rational) and unconscious (irrational) mind. Resultantly, Kinnell’s poetry is heavily influenced by Jungian motifs. In a journey which is in itself archetypical—Kinnell undergoes the same trials, challenges, and transformations as do Campbell’s archetypical heroes—Kinnell draws from Jungian themes such as stones, fire, and water, establishing a concrete connection between man and the world he has shunned.

I.

The poem begins at a fire on a rainy night. The poet, on a path through the wet remains of old fires, lights “a small fire in the rain” (Kinnell 3). The poet experiences what Joseph Campbell labels “The Call to Adventure.” The call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration—a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth.... Typical of the circumstances of the call are the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling spring, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny. (Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* 51-52)

On his journey along this wet path, mentions “tramps ... gnawing on stream water” (Kinnell 3). While it is not directly noted in section I, when the poet returns to the scene in section X it is a wooded area. Present, then, in the beginning of *The Book of Nightmares*, are the “spring” and the “dark forest.” It is even possible that the “black bear ... nodding from side / to side” (4) is a perversion of the “carrier of the power of destiny.” The poet has received the call to depart on a spiritual journey.

The small fire the poet builds represents Kinnell’s newly born child, Maud. She is born, small and weak, and the harsh world already attempts “to put the fire out” (4). Fire represents
life, and more specifically, spirit. “Spirit too has a fiery aspect, as we know from the language of the Old Testament and from the story of the Pentecostal miracle” (Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious 224). Though Kinnell celebrates the new fire of Maud’s life, he laments the Maud’s inevitable mental separation. She, who was recently “somersaulting alone in the oneness” (Kinnell 5) of her mother’s womb, will soon experience the division of mind between the conscious and unconscious. Maud’s “oneness” will be no longer. As Maud grows, her rational mind will overcome her irrational mind and she will suppress “a blacker / rasping flowering on that tongue,” instead following “the songs / of light said to wave / through the bright hair of angels” (7). This “blacker rasping flowering” resides in “the silent zones / of the brain” (7), to reveal itself only when the unconscious has full control—“in the nighttime” (7). Kinnell reverses the dichotomy of light and dark, implying that it is important to listen to “the dark song of the unconscious, which speaks through dream and nightmare, telling us the often frightening truths that we have forgotten” (Hudgins 59). Our rational mind, represented by fire and light, eliminates the darkness of the unconscious. Fire and light are often uplifted in the spiritual sense, but in Jungian studies, they can be potentially damaging. The paradox of light representing the rational mind and darkness representing the irrational mind is that light eliminates darkness (or at least temporarily suppresses it). Man cannot make sense of the irrational mind with the rational mind. Therefore, it is reasonable that man is afraid of his “book of nightmares” (8)—it is from the darkness, the portion of his mind that has been subdued by the conscious, rational mind. “As bringers of light, that is, enlargers of consciousness” fire and other promoters of culture overcome darkness, which is to say that they overcome the earlier unconscious state. Higher consciousness, or knowledge going beyond our present-day consciousness, is equivalent to being all alone in the world. This loneliness expresses the conflict between the bearer or symbol of higher consciousness and
his surroundings. The conquerors of darkness go far back into primeval times, and, together with many other legends, prove that there once existed a state of original psychic distress, namely unconsciousness. Hence in all probability the "irrational" fear which primitive man has of the dark even today. (Jung, *Archetypes* 169)

Mankind’s drive to advance his own culture and conquer the darkness of his unconsciousness sets him apart from the rest of the natural world. The farther away from his unconscious mind modern man gets, the less likely it is that he will ever be able to listen to its messages. Man’s “book of nightmares” is his irrational mind, and because man fears what he doesn’t understand, he will rely more heavily on his rational mind, thereby further suppressing his unconscious.

In *Mythos*, Joseph Campbell combines Plato’s diagram of the soul with Jung’s philosophy of the divided psyche:

One can see that the unconscious mind equates to a dominant part of man’s psyche, yet the rational mind keeps it suppressed whenever possible.
The box of the rational mind is much more tangible than the depths of the circular irrational mind, which stretch far below our threshold of consciousness. Because of this small "box" of light, the larger sphere of the unconscious is nullified.

The fire of man's rational mind further divorces him from the natural world when it is used collectively to suppress, conquer, or subdue other cultures. Whereas the initial fire Kinnell builds at the outset of The Book of Nightmares represents the joy of new life, as his fire imagery advances, it becomes laden with negative connotations. In "The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible," fire imagery emerges in the form of burning flesh, most likely because of napalm.

A victim of an attack describes his attempt to escape:

\begin{verbatim}
I ran
my neck broken I ran
holding my head up with both hands I ran
thinking the flames
the flames may burn the oboe
but listen buddy boy they can't touch the notes! (Kinnell 44)
\end{verbatim}

The victim is refusing to completely submit to the attack of Christian man, or more generally, to imposing and oppressing beliefs of any kind. (In an interview, Kinnell said that "Christian man" is a loose term for "technological man" [qtd. in Zimmerman 165]). This implies not only a physical attack, but also a clash of ideologies. "The religious spirit in the collective unconscious is like a fire; but fire in concrete reality spells destruction" (von Franz, C.G. Jung: His Myth in Our Time 156). The flames in the above scene are both literal and metaphorical. The fire of war destroys landscape and life, while the fire of "religious spirit" is overwhelming and consuming.

When uncontained, this fire often leads to acts of war. Von Franz notes that often, these revolutionaries "naively believe that the basic evils of human nature can be dealt with by force…. There is therefore a need to find a container which can contain the fire" (156). She does
not disapprove of religion, but voices her wariness of its capability to ignite, rage, and spread dangerously among revolutionaries.

Framing the section, “The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible” are two identical lines: “Lieutenant! / This corpse will not stop burning!” (45). In a perverse manner, these lines connect fire with life, as Kinnell does with the campfire and his newborn daughter. Just as Robert Langbaum states that a “flower’s dying is its life” (Langbaum 30), the act of death is the act of living. Man may kill and burn, but “an all-pervading vital force, a power of growth and magic healing that is generally called mana” (Jung, Archetypes 33) remains. This section of The Book of Nightmares is laced with irony, for although the Private has successfully exterminated a human life, life itself continues burning. Man can take individual lives, but he is not above this “all-pervading vital force,” which includes areas of consciousness he has suppressed. The Private is distressed that torching another human is all he can do; he can’t put out the fire. Man may kill, maim, and conquer to some extent, but in a grander scheme, he has little control over the power and intricacies of life. The problem is, man is so divorced from nature that he refuses to submit to its power. This places him in a dangerous situation: he cannot conquer nature, yet he will deny this fact and continue his cycle of blind destruction and suppression until he is stopped.

The idea of fire as consciousness is approached once more when, in section VIII, “The Path Among the Stones,” “An old man, a stone / lamp at his forehead, squats / by his hell flames” (67) and attempts to use his consciousness to transcend life on earth. Emblematic of man’s attempt to overcome the natural world with his fiery conscious mind, the old man’s attempt to transcend the immediate world is always doomed to failure. This failure to transcend is the turning point in the poet’s problematic division of Self. His struggle to transcend “has taken him to the essence of life” (Hudgins 69), and he comes “alive / in the whorled / archway of
the fingerprint of all things” (Kinnell 68). When man sees clearly the inevitable cessation of life that awaits him, he is more capable of a unification of psyche than would otherwise be possible.

Kinnell mentions a “flesh fire,” and a “flame” rising “off the bones” (68), symbolizing the aforementioned “all-pervading vital force” that drives the life cycle. When man is able to reconcile himself to his inevitable death by viewing himself within the framework of the cycle of death and rebirth, a more thorough “integration of the psyche” (Hudgins 69) can occur. Next, Kinnell makes reference to “the fatted calf,” who “takes the bonfire into his arms, and he / burns it” (Kinnell 68). Through man’s struggle and subsequent failure to transcend life, his suffering can be channeled into discovering his Self. “Through suffering the ego becomes conscious of the Self” (von Franz, C.G. Jung: His Myth In Our Time 230). A transformation has occurred to the journeying poet, and it is suggestive of what might make man more attentive to his psyche as a whole.

The final section of The Book of Nightmares, “Lastness,” returns to the original image of fire, though it now contains more weight than it originally did. “[A] small fire goes on flaring in the rain, in the desolate ashes” (Kinnell 71). The fire continues burning despite the harsh climate it exists in, just as the psyche grows stronger in the face of suffering and death. “[I]n the dying world it was set burning” (71). Kinnell’s approach to fire is cyclical: he begins with fire representing new life, progresses fire’s destructive potential, and once again examines fire as a metaphor for the simplicity and strength of the ever-persevering life force. Kinnell explores the dual nature of fire: he appreciates the joys of consciousness, but provides an implicit warning to contain the fire of the conscious mind, which has the power to spread violently and unexpectedly when left uncontrolled.
II.

The heart of Kinnell's journey is the clash between man's desire to transcend and the cold fact of death and nonexistence that awaits everyone and everything. Kinnell uses wing imagery as a metaphor for man's desire to break free of his metaphysical anguish. In the first section of the poem that Kinnell completed, "The Hen Flower," Kinnell examines the irony of the hen's wings. With wings, birds are able to transcend earth through flight. The "wing" is "made only to fly," yet the hen is unable
to fly,
and waiting, therefore,
for the sweet, eventual blaze in the genes,
that one day, according to gospel, shall carry it back
into pink skies, where geese
cross at twilight,
honking in tongues. (12-13)

The irony of the hen's plight—possessing implements which are designed "according to the gospel" to transcend earth to some extent, but cannot do so—is similar to the plight of humans who, "though they long to transcend their own earthbound nature, are held to earth by the weight of their bodies" (Hudgins 59). The mind of man is powerful enough to seek a way to transcend earth, but ironically, it cannot escape the limitations of the human body. All of earth's creatures that are created with seemingly transcendent abilities are ultimately limited to earth. Even if the hen could fly, it could not transcend. As Kinnell himself points out, the "bird which can fly above or transcend the earth nevertheless keeps its wings bent according to the curvature of the earth" (Gardner 427). Although Kinnell closely compares the similarities between man and earth's winged creatures, the striking difference is the existence of a rational mind within man. Kinnell bemoans,

if only
we could let go
like her, throw ourselves
on the mercy of darkness, like the hen...

head
thrown back
on the chopping block, longing only
to die. (Kinnell 11)

The hen may be unable to transcend, but at least she is able to submit to death with the readiness
that does not come with the rational mind.

In section V, “In the Hotel Of Lost Light,” Kinnell observes “a fly”

Losing his way worse
down the downward-winding stairs, his wings
whining for life as he shrivels
in the gaze
from the spider’s clasped forebrains... (35)

Hudgins likens the fly to the conscious mind and the spider to the unconscious (Hudgins 63).
The fly, stuck in the spider’s web, whines its wings to no avail and eventually “ceases to
struggle, his wings / flutter out the music blooming with failure” (Kinnell 35). The conscious
mind is stuck in the framework (or more appropriately, web) of the human body and the
unconscious, but it beats against it relentlessly. Just as man attempts to transcend earth, he
attempts to break free from the restraints of his body, namely the basic instincts and desires of
his unconscious mind.

The results of this rejection of the man as animal are harmful. When man fails to see that
his mind is limited to the constraints of the body that houses it, he divorces himself from the
natural world. Kinnell worries that when his daughter Maud is his age, she will be cut off from
nature and the unconscious: when raindrops fall on her, she will “be unable to let them in” (51).
Because Christian man believes he has the power to transcend his body, he comes to hate his
body and the natural world. Christian man’s destruction stems from this, and his body-loathing
philosophy can be seen in the extermination of “a whole continent of red men for living in unnatural community / and at the same time having relations with the land, / [and] one billion species of animals for being sub-human” (42). This attempted journey outside the parameters of the natural world results in the elimination of man’s willingness to admit his ties to the land and other creatures, and also results in the rejection of the unconscious mind.

When Maud is delivered, cut from the unity of the conscious and unconscious mind, her “slow, / beating, featherless arms / already [clutch] at the emptiness” (7). Even at the initial emergence of the conscious mind, Maud is already fighting to transcend, a task that she will never achieve. To the rational mind, flight poses as an escape from the restraints of the immediate world. Even the poet strives, in “The Path Among the Stones,” to soothe his mental suffering by following a “path winding / upward, toward the high valley” (65). However, as the Crone said earlier, “the first step.../ shall be / to lose the way” (19), and the journeying poet finds his enlightenment in a journey that is not outward or upward, but downward and within.

A way opens
at my feet. I go down
the night-lighted mule-steps into the earth,
the footprints behind me
filling already with pre-sacrificial trills of canaries, go down
into the unbreathable goaf
of everything I ever craved and lost. (67)

The poet descends into the depths of his suppressed desires, “everything I ever craved and lost,” and it is here that he is able to be reconciled with his Self and the natural world. Although the old man uses his intellect, represented by the “stone / lamp at his forehead” (67) and parts of creatures designed to fly and transcend—“crow,” “peacock,” “canary,” “robin” (67)—the result is “Nothing” (67). Once the poet realizes this, he completes a major part of his journey. He no longer sees being restrained to earth as “nothing.” Rather, through this failure, he sees life. “I
crawl up: I find myself alive / in the whorled / archway of the fingerprint of all things” (68). The poet has identified with his unconscious mind and reconciled himself to “all things.” He finally feels a sense of belonging, and “the hunger / to be new lifts off” (68). The poet has unearthed a significant aspect of his archetypical journey. As Kinnell puts it, “when you do get deep enough within yourself, deeper than the level of ‘personality,’ you are suddenly outside yourself, everywhere” (qtd. in Zimmerman 177). Once the poet ceases journeying outward in an attempt to transcend and instead travels inward, he feels attached to everything, and hears the “blood-strings wailing the wail of all things” (68). He feels so connected to all of earth’s creatures, that in “Lastness,” he cannot be discerned from a bear. Kinnell’s confusing pronoun use results in a reference to both the bear and the poet—they are now one and the same, two of earth’s creatures connected by the “wail of all things.”

This journey into the underworld, or diving into “The Belly of the Whale” (Campbell, The Hero ix) is one of the best known archetypes of the hero’s journey.

The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died. (90)

This death and rebirth is evident in many mythologies as an archetype, namely the legend of Jonah and the Whale, and it continues in “The Path Among the Stones.” Upon the poet’s emergence from his journey within, he has been reborn—he has crossed the “magical threshold.” Even the idea of death and rebirth as sacrifice is emphasized in “The Path,” as Kinnell mentions “pre-sacrificial trills / of canaries,” birds which traditionally were carried into mines to detect poisonous gases. Kinnell’s idea of transcendence via wings dies here with the metaphor of the canary, and he can now be reborn. Later, he recalls the “fatted calf” that “takes the bonfire into his arms, and he / burns it.” (Kinnell 68). Here is another sacrificial image in which the calf
accepts, even welcomes, his inability to transcend. In “Lastness,” Kinnell is “one / divided among himself” (75), one who desires transcendence yet embraces his earthbound nature.

Kinnell is a “sky-diver … / opening his arms into the attitude / of flight, as he obeys the necessity and falls…” (75). Finally reconciled to his natural ties to the earth, Kinnell can let go of his unattainable hope for transcendence and open his arms to his downward plunge.

“The Path” appropriately ends with two stanzas with the first words, “As above,” and “So below” (68), hinting that the striving to escape earth and exist among the stars above is unnecessary, and the true cessation of the struggle to transcend lies within submerging oneself within one’s unconscious. It is when we submerge ourselves within our unconscious that “lamps start lighting up, one for each of us” (68). The previously discussed idea of light as the rational mind has changed, and the “lamps” now signify lights in the dark graveyard: a unification of consciousness and unconsciousness, resulting in a contentedness with one’s earthly grave.

III.

The aforementioned submergence in one’s unconscious mind has further and more complicated implications in The Book of Nightmares. Kinnell’s repeated use of water and sea imagery is significant; within the Jungian framework, water and the sea are symbols of the depths of the unconscious mind. “The water is no figure of speech, but a living symbol of the dark psyche” (Jung, Archetypes 17). The rational mind focuses on what is above the surface of the water, while shady aspects of the unconscious lurk in the depths below.

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1 See Campbell’s diagram of the psyche, in which the surface of the water is, in effect, the threshold of consciousness.
In civilized society, individuals begin stifling their unconscious almost as soon as they are born. Just before Maud is born, Kinnell observes that the wholeness of her consciousness is about to be shattered.

It is all over,
Little one, the flipping
And overleaping, the watery
Somersaulting alone in the oneness...(Kinnell 5)

Upon birth, Maud’s inevitable separation of psyche will begin and she will lose the harmony of simply “being.” She will no longer exist in “a life lived entirely by the sure wisdom of instinct in unreflective, unselfconscious bliss” (Kleinbard 50). As Maud ages, she will grow more in tune with her rational mind and her association with the unconscious mind will fade. In “The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible,” it becomes evident that the reason for Maud’s separation of consciousness is owed greatly to Christian man, who perpetuates the body-changing mentality, especially via the media.

On the television screen:
Do you have a body that sweats?
Sweat that has odor?
False teeth clanging into your breakfast?
Case of the dread?
Headache so perpetual it may outlive you?
Armpits sprouting hair?
Piles so huge you don’t need a chair to sit at a table?

We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed... (Kinnell 42)

The prevalence of body-loathing undertones in civilized society has driven modern man to suppress his natural and instinctual behaviors. As mentioned earlier, the title of this section, “The Dead Shall Be Raised Incorruptible,” implies that man cannot hope for goodness or holiness until he has passed on to the spiritual realm. This leads to displeasure with our instinctual side and increases the desire to control it. The attempt to control the unconscious aspect of our psyche
has suppressed and partially hidden the voice of the unconscious. The unconscious mind remains, but its needs and desires have become more difficult to detect.

What we call civilized consciousness has steadily separated itself from the basic instincts. But these instincts have not disappeared. They have merely lost their contact with our consciousness and are thus forced to assert themselves in an indirect fashion.... Modern man protects himself against seeing his own split state by a system of compartments. Certain areas of outer life and of his own behavior are kept, as it were, in separate drawers and are never confronted with one another. (Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious” 73)

The shadow of man’s unconscious mind is laced with various aspects of the psyche that he fails to identify with. Although man likes to think he is “the master of his soul” (72), the side of his mind that he has attempted to shut off makes its appearance in dangerous ways. A good example of modern man’s split state is Christian man’s defense of his slaughter of fellow humans. He has exterminated more than a billion people, “every one of them for his own good” (Kinnell 42).

Christian man’s justifications for violence and hate are hidden within his shadow, which “represents unknown or little-known attributes and qualities of the ego—aspects that mostly belong to the personal sphere and that could just as well be conscious” (von Franz, “The Process of Individuation” 174). Because man has attempted to keep his problems tucked away, these problems have taken on different form in the unconscious mind and emerged in the guise of hate and violence. Writing at the time of the Cold War, Jung noted that Western societies’ attempts to address moral problems by amassing nuclear weapons and competing economically are ineffective, and will continue to be so

as long as we try to convince ourselves and the world that it is only they (i.e., our opponents) who are wrong. It would be much more to the point for us to make a serious attempt to recognize our own shadow and its nefarious doings. If we could see our shadow (the dark side of our nature), we should be immune to any moral and mental infection and insinuation. (“Approaching” 73)
The more we are driven to “fix” aspects of another culture, the more likely it is that we ought to be looking inward in an attempt to recognize our own faults.²

Often, Christian man’s psyche becomes so polarized that his natural side (including his unconscious and his body) is dead to him. Kinnell recalls the “animal gentleness” of an angry sheriff’s “hand on my hand” (Kinnell 59). The natural goodness that exists in the sheriff’s body has been choked out by the sheriff’s hate and misery, brought on largely by his rational mind’s dominance.

Better than the rest of us, he knows
the harshness of that cubicle
in hell where they put you
with all your desires undiminished, and with no body to appease them. (59-60)

In Kinnell’s naturalistic view of man’s existence—“here is the world”—the sheriff experiences hell on earth. The sheriff is so divorced from his natural side, so dominated by his tainted mind, that he has “no body.” This, not the supposed fiery nature of the afterlife, is hell. When Christian man rejects his own body to such an extent that his mind completely takes over, he loses the ability to share the human connection which sustains and nurtures our psyche. Kinnell then juxtaposes the bodiless sheriff’s rampant mind with the sea of the unconscious. When the sheriff

floats out on a sea he almost begins to remember,
floats out into a darkness he has known already;
when the moan of wind and the gasp of lungs call to each other among the waves
and the wish to float
comes to matter not at all as he sinks under... (60)

Humans are lost, drowning in the sea of the unconscious, but they are able to “gasp” and “call to each other” and experience the human connection. The suspension on the surface of the sea of the unconscious, repeatedly dipping under and then being brought back to the surface, is a

² It should be clarified that the shadow is not synonymous with the unconscious; the shadow exists within the unconscious, but it is largely a creation of the ego. However, the shadow “is not just the simple converse of the conscious ego. Just as the ego contains unfavorable and destructive attitudes, so the shadow has good qualities—normal instincts and creative impulses” (Henderson, “Ancient Myths and Modern Man” 110). Our shadow is not always unfavorable, and it is not the whole of our unconscious (Jung, “Individuation” 174).
daunting image, but it is ultimately the existence humans were meant to share—it is all they have. In his hell-like state, the sheriff is driven by his “wish to float”; he has no desire to sink in or even touch the sea.

This section of The Book of Nightmares has close ties to the segment of Campbell’s “Hero’s Journey” in which mankind is in dire need of redemption.

The world of human life is now the problem. Guided by the practical judgment of the kings and the instruction of the priests of the dice of divine revelation, the field of consciousness so contracts that the grand lines of the human comedy are lost in a welter of cross-purposes. Men’s perspectives become flat, comprehending only the light-reflecting, tangible surfaces of existence. The vista into depth closes over. The significant form of the human agony is lost to view. Society lapses into mistake and disaster. The Little Ego has usurped the judgment seat of the Self. (The Hero 308)

Man is focused almost entirely on the comprehensible, the “light-reflecting, tangible surfaces of existence,” which creates the unhealthy stifling of the Self. Within the motif of the hero’s journey, this fallen world calls out for one who will wrest man’s perspective from the “Little Ego” to the Self. When man’s perspective is jarred and shifts inward, he can see past the “tangible surface” of his existence and come to terms with his unconscious Self.

The sheriff in The Book of Nightmares, like much of civilized society, has lost the “judgment seat of the self”—his Little Ego dominates his mind. The sheriff and others suffering from a limited perspective are in need of a hero who, like the poet, can see past the comfortable, lighted surface of the conscious. Kinnell remains hopeful that the sheriff might reconnect with his unconscious, natural side. As the sheriff gives up his comfortable hold on the surface of the waters of consciousness and begins to sink, he comes to realize that “the wish to float / comes to matter not at all” (Kinnell 60). Once the sheriff allows himself to slip into the nightmarish, unknown aspect of his psyche, his fears diminish and he attains a greater perspective, one not solely governed by light glinting off the surface of his consciousness.
Like the hero, the most difficult task for the sheriff is the crossing of this threshold. In the hero’s archetypical journey, he must enter what Campbell calls “the zone of magnified power,” which stands for the “limits of the hero’s present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger…” (The Hero 77). The desire to remain within the bounds of the rational mind is the major limiting power that keeps man from crossing the first threshold of his journey deeper into himself. “The usual person is more than content, he is even proud, to remain within the indicated bounds, and popular belief gives him every reason to fear so much as the first step into the unexplored” (78). The sheriff is trapped firmly within the “indicated bounds” of his consciousness, and the likelihood of him breaking free is lessened by his reliance on popular belief, which fears the unknown. In the hero’s journey, “The regions of the unknown (desert, jungle, deep sea, alien land, etc.) are free fields for the projection of unconscious content” (79). The mysterious landscape of the unconscious mind is fear-inspiring at times, but it has much to offer to the willing and receptive mind.

In addition to the idea of floating on the surface of consciousness, Kinnell’s suspension imagery appears elsewhere in The Book of Nightmares. Hudgins’ proposed analogy of the fly (rational mind) suspended in the web of the spider (irrational mind) is similar to the above imagery of man floating on the surface of the sea of his unconscious. The fly is analogous to the human who is dominated by his rational mind. It is “concentrated wholly on / time, time” (Kinnell 35), and continues the fervor of its struggle for life “in the gaze / from the spider’s clasped forebrains” (35). Eventually, however, the fly “ceases to struggle,” and “his wings / flutter out the music blooming with failure” (35). When the conscious mind gives itself freely to the “abstracted stare” (35) of the unconscious, the entire psyche can come close to experiencing “the watery / somersaulting alone in the oneness” (5) that exists before birth.
Kinnell, in his striving to achieve this “oneness,” longs

for the mantle
of the great wanderers, who lighted
their steps by the lamp
of pure hunger and pure thirst,

and whichever way they lurched was the way. (22)

Kinnell desires to be driven by pure instinct, but he knows this complete reconciliation to the unconscious is impossible. Even primitive man, whose consciousness has “just emerged from the primal waters,” is “afraid of uncontrolled emotions, because consciousness breaks down under them and gives way to possession. All man’s strivings have therefore been directed towards the consolidation of consciousness” (Jung, Archetypes 22). Once man develops a hold on the rational mind, he strives to maintain his grasp. “A wave of the unconscious may easily roll over it [his conscious mind], and then he forgets who he was and does things that are strange to him” (22). Existing in a state where the rational mind may suddenly disappear and become completely eclipsed by the unconscious mind is indeed nightmarish. M.L. Rosenthal describes The Book of Nightmares’ preoccupation as “the world of terror raging beneath the sill of daylight consciousness” (Rosenthal 84). This terror is the fear of the unknown, which lurks like a spider in a dark corner or unseen shadows in a deep sea. Man’s quest to remain almost entirely within the rational realm are like the fly’s striving to escape the web and the sheriff’s efforts to remain afloat; the conscious mind is afraid of giving itself up to the power of the unconscious mind, and once it is given a hold on the psyche, it attempts to keep it at all costs.

The darkness of the unconscious is a lurking threat, and to combat this, man attempts to construct barriers to keep the unconscious from affecting his consciousness.

This was the purpose of rite and dogma; they were dams and walls to keep back the dangers of the unconscious, the ‘perils of the soul.’ Primitive rites consist accordingly in the exorcizing of spirits, the lifting of spells, the averting
of the evil omen, propitiation, purification, and the production by sympathetic magic of helpful occurrences.

It is these barriers, erected in primitive times, that later became the foundations of the Church. (Jung, *Archetypes* 22)

Christian man has come to fear and reject the world he lives in. Like Kinnell, he has “eaten / the meals of the dark shore” (Kinnell 29), but unlike Kinnell, Christian man has shied away from the shore. He has constructed rituals and religion to soothe his fear of the irrational mind. This brings to mind the fearsome but healthy suspension between the conscious and unconscious mind: to stand on the “dark shore” is the same as floating on the sea of the unconscious or being trapped in the web of the spider. Kinnell presents us a difficult and fearsome task: we must submit to the dark waters, give in to the spider, and loosen our grip on our rational mind.

IV.

Through the acknowledgement of appetites and desires of the unconscious, the Self becomes more unified. This wholeness can be achieved through Plato’s idea of finding our missing half, or in the act of lovemaking that Kinnell thoroughly describes, in which we are almost completely driven by the instinctual side of our nature. Brief glimpses of the whole Self can also be glimpsed in the throes of pain and suffering. Jung often quoted Thomas á Kempis as saying “suffering is the horse which carries us fastest to wholeness” (von Franz, *C.G. Jung* 115).

Through pain, the body’s instincts take over and the rational mind loses its hold on the psyche. The Self can be unified either by satiating the appetites of the unconscious and allowing it to take control, or by enduring loss and pain, in which the rational mind also loses its control and structure.

Freud believed that religion, art, and philosophy all stemmed from repressed sexuality. His theory may seem drastic, but one must keep in mind that he wrote in the post-Victorian era,
and that he and other pessimistic rationalists like Nietzsche were bound to spring up in the face of repressive Victorian authority. “The Victorian era was an age of repression, of a convulsive attempt to keep anaemic ideals artificially alive in a framework of bourgeois respectability by constant moralizings” (Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* 34). Eventually, Jung notes, “enlightenment slowly broke through” (34), but the repressive effect largely remained. In an effort to maintain power and assure structure in a society that was dangerously close to enlightenment, the Victorian regime effectively stifled impulse and unconscious desires. Historically, Christianity and other forms of organized religion have been used to develop stability and structure. Unfortunately, what followed was man’s divorce from nature: namely, from a major aspect of his own Self—his unconscious.

Through centuries of educational training, Christianity subdued the animal instincts of antiquity and of the ensuing ages of barbarism to the point where a large amount of instinctual energy could be set free for the building of civilization. The effect of this training showed itself, to begin with, in a fundamental change of attitude, namely in the alienation from reality, the otherworldliness of early Christian centuries. It was an age that strove after inwardness and spiritual abstraction. Nature was abhorrent to man.... The world and its beauty had to be shunned, not only because of their vanity and transitoriness, but because love of created nature soon makes man its slave. (Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* 73-74)

St. Augustine, among other philosophers of the Church, knew that man had the capacity to worship rivers, seas, the sun, mountains, and the stars as godly creations to the point of obsession. If the medieval Christian aversion from the world were successful, man could then defeat the impressions of his senses through the construction of an inner, spiritual world (76). The oppressive effects of Christianity and other religions still linger under the title of “self-improvement.” Today, man’s instincts are not only still stifled by religious belief, but also by the belief that technological man should be free from his body’s basic instincts.
Freud may have been extreme in his statement that all of man’s creative outlets were driven by repressed sexuality, but he was not far from the truth. Jung, in his description of the libido, does not limit the libido to sexual drive. He observes that “many complex functions, which today must be denied all trace of sexuality, were originally derived from the reproductive instinct” (136). The libido consists of instincts that stemmed from the original sexual drive and exist with the same power within us that sexuality does. The libido, Jung says, “denotes a desire or impulse which is unchecked by any kind of authority, moral or otherwise. Libido is appetite in its natural state” (135). In returning to our more healthy, natural state, we must address, not repress, our appetites.

Kinnell brings sexuality to mythic proportions as he describes the wholeness possible with finding the missing part of one’s “halved” (Kinnell 58) self. Plato speculated that the two sexes were originally one, and the reuniting of these split selves would make humans “powerful enough to challenge the gods” (Hudgins 66). The idea of the split Self brings to mind the divide between the conscious and unconscious minds. Once these two sides of the psyche are “clasped into one” (58), they possess godlike abilities. The longings of humans for their lost halves which, when found, will make them whole, “arise out of the desire to be reunited with one’s lost other half and the craving for psychic wholeness which the primordial hermaphrodites must have enjoyed” (Kleinbard 49).

Man cannot hope for a permanent fusion of the conscious and unconscious mind; he can only try and fail. This failure is all man has. In “The Path Among the Stones,” the old man’s striving to transcend appears to amount to “Nothing” (Kinnell 67), but in actuality, brings him “alive / in the whorled / archway of the fingerprint of all things” (68). Failure allows man a greater realization of Self, and resultantly, a more whole Self. When Kinnell speaks of his
missing “torn half” that he met on “an Ozark / Airlines DC-6” (58), and left because of “necessity” (58), he conjectures that glimpses of a whole Self are still possible through “the wound, the wound itself, / which lets us know and love” (58). One can then “accomplish, / for a moment, the wholeness” (58) that should belong only to perfectly fitted halves.

When Kinnell and his wife lay out under a pear-tree, in addition to their immediate physical connection, they experience a unification of psyche. “And the brain kept blossoming / all through the body, until the bones themselves could think, / and the genitals sent out wave after wave of holy desire” (59). Contrary to the body-loathing mentalities of Virginia and Christian man, Kinnell sees sexuality as “holy.” One of the holiest acts man can commit is that of surrendering his body to his instincts and thus allowing his unconscious temporarily to take hold of man’s waking Self. “The only word the body forms without the intercession of the brain is one of affirmation and the instinctive but tentative response of one human being to one another” (Hudgins 68). Hence, the call across the valley of not knowing is “yes . . . yes . . . ?” (Kinnell 61). The language of the Self is that of physical response. Man may not be able to perfectly complete his halved Self, but he can at least achieve proportions of holiness in the act of sexuality. When instincts, which are “specifically formed motive forces which . . . pursue their inherent goals” (Jung, Archetypes 43), are allowed the freedom of emergence in Kinnell’s sexual connection with his wife, Kinnell becomes so connected with his physical Self that “the bones themselves could think”; every part of his body is equally important and holy.

The union between Kinnell and his wife may be less than perfect, but through their striving for perfection, a greater realization of Self is possible. Their union is, in turn, reflected on the temporary union of their divided mind. “The healing of the rift between reflective thought and instinctive body and the curing of the sense of alienation from all other human beings and
from nature frees sexual desire from the infection of sin, guilt, and shame” (Kleinbard 51). When man is free from self-condemnation, he is free to proceed as a more complete Self. The wholeness described in Maud’s “somersaulting alone in the oneness” (Kinnell 5) is revisited by Kinnell and his lover, but “here the wholeness is not recalled from the womb but experienced in adult life—the coming together for a moment of body and thought, of man and unviolated nature, of love and the knowledge of death, of lover and lover” (Hilberry 223). The act of sex, among other instinctual behaviors, partially seals the rift in one’s psyche, but sometimes pain, suffering, and sacrifice are necessary to bring one face to face with one’s complete Self.

Although Kinnell realizes that he and his wife are still “two mismatched halfnesses lying side by side in the darkness” (Kinnell 57), they can achieve momentary bliss by embracing their failure, just as the man with the stone lamp does. Through this aforementioned “wound” which develops because of being paired with our “misfit” (58), man can come to a greater realization of Self. Sacrificial imagery emerges with the description of the calf who “takes the bonfire into his arms, and he / burns it” (68). The calf knowingly accepts this sacrifice, signifying the rational mind giving itself over with the knowledge that this sacrifice will ultimately be beneficial.

The central significance of the sacrifice for the ego now becomes clear: it is the possibility for the ego to experience the superior presence and reality of the Self…. For the Self it is the moment in time when it can enter into us, and so pass from a condition of unconsciousness into consciousness, from potentiality into actuality. It is, so to speak, the moment when the “unknown god” in us becomes conscious, thereby becoming at the same time human. (von Franz, C.G. Jung 229)

Through suffering, the ego, or rational mind, can realize to what extent the depths of the unconscious stretch. When the “unknown god” within gains consciousness, man achieves temporary perception of his entire Self.
This point in Campbell’s motif of the hero’s journey is accomplished after a series of grueling trials, in which the hero, through constant challenges, is forced to look deep within himself to find a way to move on. After the problem of the first threshold has changed the hero’s mindset, he faces a road of trials that continue to stress the question, “Can the ego put itself to death?” (Campbell, *The Hero* 108). By guessing that “it must be the wound, the wound itself, / which lets us know and love...” (Kinnell 58), Kinnell acknowledges Campbell’s requirement for the successful completion of the road of trials. The “wound” represents the death of the ego, brought about by suffering. After the ego is sufficiently overcome, “by a kind / of poetry of the soul” (58), the hero can achieve “wholeness” (58) of Self. The hero, like the old man attempting to use his “stone lamp” (intellect) to transcend, must descend “into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth” (Campbell, *The Hero* 101) and face his unconscious in order to reconcile himself to his whole psyche. The “crooked lanes” of the man’s spirit represent the dark language of the unconscious that will swallow and dissemble the rational language of the ego.

The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh. (Campbell 108)

The above-mentioned “resistances” are constructs of the rational mind that prevent the hero from understanding his irrational side. Once, through a series of difficult trials (failures to transcend in Kinnell’s case), the hero’s ego has given up its grip on his psyche, the hero can truly progress as a complete being.

When man realizes his failure, he is made whole in the unification of mind and body. Kinnell has achieved this when “one / and zero / walk off together, ... / one creature / walking sway side by side with the emptiness” (73). The one is the whole Self, and the emptiness is the
realization of failure. Without the realization of failure, the whole Self would not exist; without the “1” of the whole Self, “0” would signify nothing. However, paired together, “1” and “0” make “10.” “But the zero added to the one raises it to a higher power, forming a new and much higher number than they do separately” (Hudgins 71).

V.

The Book of Nightmares' occult aura is immediately apparent; Kinnell augments the alchemical undertones of the text with reproductions of old alchemical woodcuts. The cover illustration depicts Mercury exhaling two angels: the spirit and the soul (Zimmerman 145). A black bird rests on Mercury’s clasped hands, appropriate to The Book of Nightmares’ repeated bird imagery. Parallels between the significance of this alchemical illustration and The Book of Nightmares are surprisingly strong.

Mercury, like the Self, possesses a dual nature. He is “a water ‘that does not wet the hands,’ a ‘dry water’ or a ‘divine water’…. Mercurius was at the same time fire and light…. Thus he is always a paradox containing within himself the most incompatible possible opposites” (von Franz, C.G. Jung 208). Von Franz continues: “As pneumatic stone he unites spirit and matter and is at the same time that mysterious, secret something which animates and brings to life everything in the world…” (208). A byproduct in the process of alchemy, mercury is an essential part of the process of the purification of stones.

Kinnell initially links The Book of Nightmares to alchemy with his use of the alchemical illustrations, and he strengthens this link with heavy text references to stones, which represent the natural world and are also a symbol of Self. Kinnell describes stones as “great, granite nuclei, / glimmering, even they, with ancient inklings of madness and war” (Kinnell 67). Stones have
been since the beginning of time, and although they may be shaped and broken, they do not disappear. Stones are appropriately likened to the “experience of the Self,” because this experience “means a glimpse through the ‘window on eternity’ but is at the same time a concentration of one’s own being in the ‘stone,’ at one and the same time a boundless enlargement and the narrowest of limitations” (von Franz, C.G. Jung 251). We can see eternity in “slain fighting conches, / dog-eared immortality shells,” but at the same time we are faced with our imminent death:

I come to a field
  glittering with the thousand sloughed skins
  of arrowheads, stones
  which shuddered and leapt forth
  to give themselves into the broken hearts
  of the living,
  who gave themselves back, broken, to the stone. (Kinnell 65)

The mysterious history of the stone combined with its commonness and matter-of-fact appearance adds more to the duality of alchemy and of the Self: thought and mystery meets matter. “The symbol of the stone … emphasizes the principle of matter, because it is to be found everywhere, it is ‘cheap’ and its fabrication lies within the reach of every man” (von Franz, C.G. Jung 231). Anyone has access to stones, just as anyone has access to his or her own Self. In the course of Kinnell’s journey, stones become a part of his mythical landscape, and are ultimately necessary to help him heal his split. Until the turning point in “The Path Among the Stones,” Kinnell’s every mention of stones leads the reader to an intensified feeling of desolation: “And a wind … / moves among the stones, hunting / for two twined skeletons to blow its last cry across” (Kinnell 45). The stones say “over their one word, ci-gît, ci-gît, ci-gît, …” (51), which means, “here rests…” in French. Stones litter the landscape and serve as constant reminders of the end that awaits all. This is indeed depressing, but one must not dismiss stones as simple reminders of
death. Jung quotes an old verse: "This is the stone, poor and of little price, / Spurned by the fool, but honoured by the wise" (Jung, *Archetypes* 141n), emphasizing that although they are often overlooked, stones may reveal more about ourselves than we acknowledge.

Some alchemists "dimly perceived that their much-sought-after stone was a symbol of something that can be found only within the psyche of man" (von Franz, “Individuation” 226), indicating that there may be more of a connection between man and inanimate matter than we know. The stone “symbolizes mere existence at the farthest remove from the emotions, feelings, fantasies, and discursive thinking of ego-consciousness” (224). The science of alchemy seeks to unify a psychological purification process with the process of purifying a stone—the act of burning away the chaff of a stone in order to obtain pure gold parallels the chipping away at the barriers of the rational mind so the Self may be thoroughly realized.

To get to the heart of the stone, alchemy requires stripping the stone of its form, then regenerating it in a different form. This is like the realization of the Self. Intense moments of self-realization, as mentioned earlier, often come about in the context of suffering. In the process of alchemy, “It usually takes prolonged suffering to burn away all the superfluous psychic elements concealing the stone” (226). The Self is fully realized only after all of its “superfluous psychic elements,” set in place by the rational mind, are stripped away.

Somewhere
in the legends of blood sacrifice
the fatted calf
takes the bonfire into his arms, and *he*
burns it. (Kinnell 68)

Kinnell says this after descending into the earth and witnessing the old man’s unsuccessful attempt to transcend. The man suffers as he continues his arduous task with inevitable failure, yet
he continues. His sacrifice, like the calf’s, will amount to “nothing” (67) visible, but it will lead
to the realization of the Self.

In the act of sacrifice, therefore, the ego, with its natural egotistical claims,
decides against itself, to the extent that it subordinates itself to an authority which
is higher than itself. This authority is the principle of individuation, or the Self,
which emerges in the act of sacrifice because it forces the ego from within to a
subordinate position. (von Franz, C.G. Jung 229)

By giving up something important, one subjects oneself to a greater authority, and healing can
finally take place.

Some religions—especially Christianity—that rely on the basic idea of suffering and
humbling oneself to experience redemption may actually hinder the individuation process by
separating spirit from matter. Jung notes that “alchemy endeavors to fill the gaps left open by the
Christian of opposites” (qtd. in Zimmerman 144). Religion has the dangerous potential to
divorce the mind from matter, further contributing to the problem of man’s split psyche. The
philosophy of alchemy, however, unifies “material and non-material…. Where the religion
[Christianity], that is, separates spirit and matter, the medieval science insists on their shared
identity” (144).

Kinnell bemoans that one day, as Maud stands among the stones, listening to the
raindrops fall—cī-gīt, cī-gīt, cī-gīt—she will be “unable to let them in” (Kinnell 51). He worries
that she will be so cut off from nature, she will be unable to perceive her relation to the rain and
the stones. The strong relation of the unconscious to matter is (although inadequately explored)
is an interesting subject.

The fact that this highest and most frequent symbol of the Self [the stone] is an
object of inorganic matter points to yet another field of inquiry and speculation:
that is, the still unknown relationship between what we call the unconscious
psyche and what we call “matter”—a mystery with which psychosomatic
medicine endeavors to grapple. In studying this still undefined and unexplained
connection (it may prove to be that “psyche” and “matter” are actually the same
phenomenon, one observed from “within” and the other from “without”), Dr. Jung put forward a new concept that he called *synchronicity*. This term means a “meaningful coincidence” of outer and inner events that are not themselves casually connected. (von Franz, “Individuation” 226)

If the unconscious mind is the same as the proposed “matter”, then its language is manifested in meaningful archetypical images. Thus, when one is exposed to an archetype that is significant to his or her life, it may be that this archetype is an example of how mind and matter are intrinsically linked. If this is true, one can see the danger in polarizing one’s psyche to the extent that one is completely separated from the natural world.

Kinnell unifies life and inanimate matter in “Lastness”:

Somewhere behind me
a small fire goes on flaring in the rain, in the desolate ashes.
no matter, now, whom it was built for,
it keeps its flames,
it warms
everyone who might wander into its radiance,
a tree, a lost animal, the stones…. (Kinnell 71)

The flame of existence warms *everything*—it does not discriminate between living and inanimate matter. Trees, lost animals, and stones are beautifully drawn together by Kinnell’s usage of the fire. They are all capable of receiving the fire’s warmth and light; they are one in the same. Life and inanimate matter are melded together; life is matter, and matter is life.

Kinnell’s individuation process reaches its climax when he emerges from the depths of the earth, into “the whorled / archway of the fingerprint of all things” (Kinnell 68), and he can hear “the wail of all things” (68)—not just living things, but all things. “That everything proceeds from the One is a fundamental tenet of alchemy” (qtd. in Zimmerman 147). By hearing the wail of all things, Kinnell has received an answer to his question, “Can it ever be true—/ all bodies, one body, one light / made of everyone’s darkness together?” (Kinnell 30). Matter, animate and inanimate, is all related. “At some level all things *are* each other, but before that
point they are separate entities” (qtd. in Zimmerman 147), says Kinnell. We focus so much on ourselves as these separate entities, but “The self is the least of it” (Kinnell 31).

In his divorced state, man is separate from God and the natural world. He cannot relate to his unconscious, and he feels cut off from God. The rational mind “has been exalted to such an extent that it has broken and become an irreligious scientific rationalism, attempting to repress everything dark and irrational” (von Franz, C. G. Jung 232). The symbol of the stone, though, unifies man with nature and allows him (like Plato’s halved hermaphrodites) to rival the gods once he becomes whole. The alchemical stone symbolizes something “eternal that some alchemists compared to the mystical experience of God within one’s own soul” (von Franz, “Individuation” 226). Man is “the disciple / of stone” (Kinnell 14), a servant and part of this interconnected world. When man reconciles his psyche, he finds the God within—he is divine, as is everything else.

Kinnell does not explicitly state his apotheosis, but after close comparison to the archetypical hero’s journey, it is quite possible that, for a moment at least, Kinnell has found the God within. After Campbell’s hero overcomes the last of his obstacles, he undergoes a mental change that is beyond the grips of ignorance and doubt. Here, Campbell makes reference to the Prajna-Paramita-Hridaya Sutra:

Like the Buddha himself, this godlike being is a pattern of the divine state to which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance. “When the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he becomes free of all fear, beyond the reach of change.” This is the release potential within us all, and which anyone can attain.... (Campbell, The Hero 150-151)

Kinnell has submitted to the “abstracted stare” (Kinnell 35) of the nightmarish spider, he has considered the “blacker / rasping flowering” (7) on Maud’s tongue, and now he concentrates on
the “earthward gesture / of the sky-diver” (75), because it is “necessity” (75). These events are
nightmarish, but,

Having surpassed the delusions of his formerly self-assertive, self-defensive, self-concerned ego, [the hero] knows without and within the same repose. What he beholds without is the visual aspect of the magnitudinous, thought-transcending emptiness on which his own experiences of ego, form, perceptions, speech, conceptions, and knowledge ride. And he is filled with compassion for the self-terrorized beings who live in fright of their own nightmare. He rises, returns to them, and dwells with them as an egoless center, through whom the principle of emptiness is made manifest in its own simplicity. (Campbell, The Hero 165-166)

Like the archetypical hero, Kinnell has faced his nightmares, and in the defeat of his own ignorance and the successful individuation process, he has found the God within.

CONCLUSION

In an interview, Kinnell warns,

The “nature poem” as opposed to, say, the poem of society or the urban poem, doesn’t have much future—and not much past, for that matter—we have to get over the notion we carry from the Old Testament on down that we are super beings created in God’s image to have dominion over everything else—over “nature.” We have to feel our own evolutionary roots, and know that we belong to life in the same way as do the other animals and the plants and stones.... 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 re-feel in ourselves our own animal and plant and stone life, our own deep connection with all other beings, a connection deeper than personality. (qtd. in Zimmerman 191)

The Book of Nightmares achieves its status as a nature poem, when Kinnell finally realizes his connection to animals, plants, and stones. He mentions the indiscriminate fire, which warms “a tree, a lost animal, the stones” (Kinnell 71), and “everyone who might wander into its radiance” (71). Ultimately, Kinnell becomes so in tune with nature that he cannot distinguish himself from the black bear: “finally he understands / I am no longer here, he himself / from the fringe of the trees watches” (71). Kinnell has reconciled himself to life, death, and matter. He welcomes
emptiness as a necessity, and “obeys the necessity and falls” (75) to the earth. Like the hen, Kinnell waits, “not long, I grant, but all my life—/ for the small, soft / thud of her return among the stones” (30). Kinnell has reached the end of the hero’s journey.

Kinnell has begun his archetypical journey in a dark wood at a fire. At first, like Christian man, he attempts transcendence the only way he knows how: by trying to rise above the earth, to break free. This, he finds, is impossible and with the emergence of water imagery, Kinnell begins to peer inward. Eventually, after the crossing of multiple thresholds, Kinnell completely submerges himself in the depths of the earth—a journey that is directly contrary to his initial desire to transcend through flight. After his drastic change in thinking—“And yet, no, / perhaps not nothing. Perhaps / not ever nothing” (67), Kinnell eschews the need to transcend, and he emerges “in the whorled / archway of the fingerprint of all things” (68). He comes to the realization that his trials and suffering are a purification process (like alchemy) that brings the journeyer closer to himself. When the conscious and unconscious minds are fused together in moments of intense pleasure or suffering, the Self emerges. In Kinnell’s reconciliation of his divided psyche, he also reconciles himself to the earth. He no longer feels separate from the rest of nature, as in the Old Testament idea of man’s domination over the earth. Rather, he feels a “deep connection with all other beings, a connection deeper than personality.” At the end of Kinnell’s archetypical journey, he has dispelled the need for such life ignorance by effecting a reconciliation of the individual consciousness with the universal will. And this is effected through a realization of the true relationship of the passing phenomena of time to the imperishable life that lives and dies in all. (Campbell, The Hero 238)

Kinnell has undergone the deification process. In subjecting himself to “the universal will,” he finds God within him and all other things. He has reached “the moment when the ‘unknown god”
in us becomes conscious, thereby becoming at the same time human” (von Franz C.G. Jung 228), and he now has the freedom to live.

Kinnell’s journey appears successful, but is it something everyone can achieve? “This problem cannot be solved collectively, because the masses are not changed unless the individual changes” (Jung, Archetypes 349). Change takes place within the individual. Each of us must undertake our own personal journey, undergo our own suffering, and discover the god within. Change does not take place collectively, which makes Christian man’s “trespass on earth” (Kinnell 42) and massive exterminations of those who believe differently appear even more ominous. Christian man attempts to spark a collective change without allowing for the “natural process of development” (Jung, Archetypes 349). He attempts to collectively eliminate “unnatural community” and “relations with the land” (Kinnell 42), and ideally achieving a concrete separation of man and nature. “We shall not sleep, but we shall be changed…” (42).

Von Franz raises a question contradictory to the damaging Old Testament mantra: “Are we today, after two thousand years, mature enough to understand and realize man’s divinity without forgetting our smallness and darkness?” (von Franz, C.G. Jung 233). Collectively speaking, we are not. Luckily, though, as Kinnell and Jung have written, individuation is a process that must be undertaken individually. Every person must undertake his own journey in order to find his Self and see the connection between it and “all things” (Kinnell 68).

Jung noted that

The tempo of the development of consciousness through science and technology was too rapid and left the unconscious, which could no longer keep up with it, far behind, thereby forcing it into a defensive position which expresses itself in a universal will to destruction. (Jung, Archetypes 349).

Without the healing power of the individuation process, man’s unconscious appears in destructive ways, like Christian man’s destruction cloaked with good intentions. Man’s psyche
has become dangerously divided, just as man has become dangerously separated from the earth on which he lives. As hate, war, and separation of man and nature continue their destruction, the situation is bleak. We cannot hope for collective change; we must undergo our individuation processes alone. Von Franz wonders, “How many heroes will meet at this stone, now, to set out upon the great adventure of individuation, the journey to the interior? The fate of our Western culture depends, if I am right, on the answer to this question” (C.G. Jung 287). Today’s world is a jumble of angry countries bickering because of hate, fear of the unknown, and the desire for control. We often look for outward solutions—military force, dividing walls, political alliances—to problems that stem from within.

It is dark and rainy. Every one of us huddles in front of a small fire, raindrops sizzling and twigs snapping. A path winds its way into the darkness. We must follow this path: it is the path of the hero’s journey; it is the path towards individuation.
Works Cited


