Irrespective of which themes he explores, Kinsella always seems to present a challenging and thought-provoking view of the world. Discuss.

In Kinsella’s poetry, a number of themes are explored.

The theme of old age and suffering seems to be one which is very close to his heart. *Thinking of Mr D* deals with ageing, particularly the negative effects of ageing. It has a rather bleak or sombre outlook on life, which is apparent in many of Kinsella’s poems, and this is reflected in the imagery of pain and suffering. Mr D, the character of the poem, could be described as a shadow of the man he once was, and this is illustrated by his reduced ability to drink. The poem describes the man in his old age, and then his death. The poet’s second “encounter” with the dear Mr D highlights the pain, loneliness and suffering involved in the ageing process. The man is shown as a lonely figure by a river, with lamps plunging him in and out of darkness as he walks. The idea that he was “plunged” in and out of light suggests a rough and unsavoury force. The man is described as “wolfish-slim”, suggesting not only that he is slim to the point of emaciation, but also that in his suffering, he has developed some harsh, animalistic qualities.

The poem *Dick King* also explores the theme of old age and suffering, as it deals with the death of yet another elderly man. The years in which the elderly man, Dick King, is to become even older are described by Kinsella as his “dread years”, further driving in the point that to the poet, old age is something to be feared and dreaded.

**“***Dick King was an upright man.  
Sixty years he trod  
The dull stations underfoot.  
Fifteen he lies with God.***”**

In this stanza, “stations” could refer to a railway station he may have worked at, or to the Stations of the Cross. The Stations of the Cross describe the suffering of Christ in his brief time before his death. Likewise, they may be used in this poem to illustrate the suffering Dick King underwent in his own old age.

The theme is also explored in *Mirror in February*. In this poem, Kinsella is discussing his own impending old age. Kinsella’s description, although he was still fairly young when the poem was written, paints a picture of a rough old man who has already lived as much of his life as he had intended to enjoy, and is now simply waiting for the end of his life to come as it must.

Old age is something portrayed in many poems as a relaxing time filled with family and friends, and remembering the greatest days of your life. Instead, Kinsella’s poetry paints an image of a time filled with pain and suffering, illness and loneliness. He discusses it as though it is something to dread, and it seems to be something he is already anticipating himself. It is an interesting and troubling view of the future, and it makes you wonder if you are making the most of your younger years, so that you at least have something nice to remember when you finally reach the broken state described in Kinsella’s poetry.

Death is another theme which is discussed in worryingly similar terms. The poem *Thinking of Mr D* is a personal poem describing and mourning the death of Mr D, and we still get a hint of the poet’s feelings towards him. To a certain degree this is an elegy, a poem mourning or lamenting this man’s death. However, it is an uncompromising poem at the same time. Mr D is never idealised. He is presented in an honest manner, even though to many people a person’s death may be a reason to describe them only in positive terms. This is an interesting feature in Kinsella’s poems regarding death, including *Thinking of Mr D* and *Dick King*.

*Dick King* is another elegy. Although this time the poet shows a little more affection than he does in *Thinking of Mr D*, he still does not compromise his honesty or accuracy which is shown in most of his poetry. Even though his memories of Dick Kingare happier and more affectionate, unsettling imagery still illustrates his morose, morbid, sombre outlook on life.

Kinsella seems to regard death in a relatively normal manner, understanding the fact that in life, death is the one inevitability. We do not know what will happen in the future, what we’ll do, who we’ll meet or who we’ll be. The one thing we do know is that sooner or later, every one of us must die. Of course, in fitting with his unusual view of the world, Kinsella seems to be slightly more fixated by the concept than the rest of us, but it is difficult not to be intrigued by the one definite in a world of unknowns.

The poem *Chrysalides* deals with the theme of childhood, a rare occurrence in the work of Thomas Kinsella. For the first four stanzas of the poem, it seems like any other poem about childhood – descriptions of lazy summer days, farms, food and animals. In the final three stanzas, however, it once again takes the form of a Kinsella poem. The poem moves away slightly from their experiences to how they changed as people. One might say the poem becomes more interiorised, looking inwards rather than outwards, recording how they felt about these changes. The words of the poem begin to be as much about mood as they are about meaning. Stanza six describes the wonderful things that happened at that time, like midnight feasts in the moonlight. Stanza seven then changes the tone to echo once again his morose, sombre view of life. It describes one of the first tastes of death and horror in their world, which was when they came across a swarm of ants spawning, and dying as they did so. Life and death came together in a sort of cruel beauty, shown to us through Kinsella’s own brand of grotesque imagery. Kinsella assigns human characteristics to the ants, presuming that this was an agonizing experience for them. He chooses to end on this point, leaving us with an image of the world as a place of death and pain.

It is interesting to note that even when Kinsella is exploring even the most innocent of themes, childhood, he is still able to present us with this challenging and though-provoking view of the world. We like to think of childhood as this innocent, honest, genuine time of our lives, and think that nothing bad happened at that time because it is a time of freedom which we are never getting back, but Kinsella challenges this odd little comforted idea by somehow managing to link childhood with death: an achievement indeed!

**“***Or to lasting horror, a wedding flight of ants  
Spawning to its death, a mute perspiration  
Glistening like drops of copper, agonised, in our path.***”**