

Graphology Mutations 54: Memories of Spiral Staircases

Terror of the newel you can't
grip properly though winding
up or down was never my fear
and I felt sense was manifest
on the outer edge where steps
were widest, screwing up in
helical obligation, no spiral in
the spire, no moving out up
the tower which as with La Seu
Vella watching over Lleida
narrows to its spiritual lookout.
In this low house tucked
square into the hillside, I can only
imagine all the spiral staircases
I have negotiated — those climbing
when I descend counter my
clockwise defence of self-aware-
ness the slipping on buffed stone,
or the wrought iron Babels ascend-
ing to books of pastoral disquiet
and long in an old colonial build-
ing — a gallery, a library, its
foundations cold with mostly
vanquished wetlands. Old
architecture. But those trendy
narrow spaces of new urban
compaction, or a lush demon-
stration of style that's also New
Designs stamp of approval or
stigmata. I once knew a young man
(when I was a young man) who

came bounding up to me in St
George's Terrace, and said, I am
so glad to see you again — I want
to send you a recording of sax-
ophones being played by musos
moving up and down — fast
and slow — spiral staircases. It's
called 'Frog Music'. I gave an
address, he sent the tape, I listened.
It marked me though I can't re-
call anything specific, anything
further — not even his name or
face, having moved so far away
from my central point of lift-off.
The cold walls clammy even in
summers of old buildings we
search out, astonished by their
precision, ability to hold them-
selves up, the points of view we
take from heights, from nature.

John Kinsella