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# WHAT BUSINESS CAN LEARN FROM THE POETRY OF THOMAS KINSELLA

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**A growing number of voices, including that of Stephen Brown, call for a greater embrace of literature and the arts in seeking to understand and master the world of marketing and business. The contention is that creative writers, such as novelists and poets, can articulate usefully the consumer condition. In this spirit, a close reading of the poetry of Thomas Kinsella, one of Ireland's most distinguished living poets and recent Freeman of the City of Dublin, can shed insight into a number of aspects of marketing and management practice. These aspects include the role of creative and innovative processes in business; the frequent misuse of scientific approaches; a tendency to settle for the second rate – 'the ease of the spurious'; the need for thoroughness in new product development – 'reading the ground'; and the consequences of corporate, and brand, amnesia.**

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## Introduction

During the past decade businesses have been harangued from all sides on the need to become more innovative and creative if they are to have any hope of surviving in an increasingly competitive world. From Michael Porter: 'innovation is the central issue in economic prosperity', to Gary Hamel: 'radical non-linear innovation is the only way to escape the ruthless hypercompetition that has been hammering down margins in industry after industry', all of the 'big beasts' of the business academic world have been singing the same tune. In the past business has never been shy of ransacking other disciplines for any insights they may have to offer, so it should come as no surprise that the humanities have now become a particular target.

'Creative writers can better articulate the essence of everyday experience, the consumer condition if you will, than any number of questionnaires, surveys, focus groups or ethnographic safaris into the pre-cast canyons of the concrete jungle – culture makes the invisible visible and brings into material form the unexpressed conditions of being.'<sup>1</sup> Even the prestigious *Harvard Business Review* has succumbed to the lure of literary criticism, prompting one business academic to declare that 'art for art's sake is the order of the day'.<sup>2</sup> 'Pragmatic and powerful insights can be found in the works of Sophocles,

Shakespeare, Conrad and others. But you've got to know where to look and how to understand what they're saying.'<sup>3</sup>

Six years earlier a leading Irish management consultant made the same point: 'At the heart of the enlightenment project was the notion that a scientifically enlightened elite could map all knowledge and make all social and economic reality predictable and controllable. All this was rooted in a morbid anxiety, fear and dread of the essentially uncertain and messy nature of human existence. A degree of scepticism with rational planning has now become commonplace; it is [therefore] not surprising to see leading edge management thinking and practice move away from natural and social scientism and increasingly seek to recapture insights from literature and the humanities.'<sup>4</sup>

More predictably, perhaps, the former 1960s *enfant terrible*, Richard Neville, now a respected business consultant in Australia, weighed in with: 'To transform information into knowledge and knowledge into something useful, original and marketable, you need the alchemy of creativity. To be fast and agile in a volatile world, you need an endless fount of this magic elixir. You need it to out-innovate your competitors, to respond to fluid markets, to read the footprints of the future in the sand. In the twenty-

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1 Brown, S. (2005), *Writing Marketing: Literary Lessons from Academic Authorities*, Sage Publications, London.

2 Ibid.

3 Badaracco, J. (2006), 'Leadership in literature', *Harvard Business Review*, March 2006.

4 Carroll, C. (2000), 'The end of modernity', *Management*, April/May.

first century creativity will become the interface between commerce and art.<sup>5</sup>

If as a result of this new consensus about the importance of art, literature and the humanities in general, businesses were tempted to examine what contemporary Irish literature had to offer, Thomas Kinsella would probably represent the most fruitful starting point. Kinsella's poetic career has now spanned over half a century and he has long been preoccupied with the nature and vagaries of the creative process. He has also been associated with the concept of 'quincunx' which, apart from reflecting a 'new self', has often been used in connection with the ancient division of Ireland into five provinces and 'can be observed on the cover of [Kinsella's] *Fifteen Dead*, where the roman numerals for fifteen (XV) can also be read as quincunx and vertical man.'<sup>6</sup> It seems appropriate, therefore, to try to distil his potential relevance for the business world, and particularly marketing communications, into five key insights.

### **Persistence, Patience and Prescience**

Achieving creative breakthroughs involves time, effort and failure. You can't order it on demand; you can't even specify what it is you want, you must gather as much experience and information as possible and keep trawling through it until some order can be established:

It is tedious, yes the process is elaborate  
and wasteful – a dangerous litter  
of lacerating pieces collects  
let my rubbish stand witness  
smile stirring it idly by with a shoe. (p. 124)\*

Kinsella himself describes how it works: 'the whole process of note-taking, drafting, exploration and the absorption or dismissal of material continues, mining away until the poem shows its proper direction and whether or not the data are going to

cohere'.<sup>7</sup> It has been pointed out that a fundamental element of his art is the 'dual technique-cum-ethic of eliciting order *from* experience rather than imposing order upon it'.<sup>8</sup> He doesn't set out with a grand plan, he assembles the material, allows it to intermingle and although ultimately exercising the artist's authority over it he also respects that it has a life of its own.

Kinsella feeds his ambition to come to a creative understanding of our lives today by absorbing information about our immediate and ancient past in an effort to come to terms with who we are now. He allows all of this information to be absorbed and digested in the hope that it will in its own good time yield results:

I feed upon it still, as you see  
there is no end to that which, not understood,  
may yet be hoarded in the imagination  
in the yolk of one's being, so to speak,  
there to undergo its (quite animal) growth. (p. 99)

It is interesting to note that Kinsella wrote this in the early 1970s and over twenty years later developments in neuroscience provided proof of the brain's capacity for absorbing infinitely more information than had hitherto been realised: 'Unconscious processing of external stimuli takes place and influences our actions without our conscious awareness – the vast bulk of the information that we need to function must be processed in the unconscious part of the brain – 95 per cent of our actions are unconsciously determined.'<sup>9</sup>

One of the most ambitious attempts to define the nature of creativity was Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation*: 'The creative act is not an act of creation in the sense of the Old Testament. It does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, reshuffles, combines, synthesises already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills.'<sup>10</sup> This led Koestler to his cre-

5 Neville, R. (2000), 'The art of work and the work of art in the 21st century', an address to international business leaders given at the art gallery of New South Wales to celebrate Korn/Ferry's 20 years in Australia, June.

6 McGuinness, A. (1980), 'Bright quincunx newly risen', *Éire-Ireland*, vol. 15, winter.

\* All quotations are referenced from the Carcanet Press, Manchester, edition of Kinsella's *Collected Poems*, published in 2001.

7 John, B. (1996) 'Reading the ground: the poetry of Thomas Kinsella', CUA Press, Washington, DC.

8 Clutterbuck, C. (2005), 'Thomas Kinsella', in A. Roche et al. (eds.), *The UCD Aesthetic: Celebrating 150 Years of UCD Writers*, New Island, Dublin.

9 Bargh, J. and T. Chartrand (1999), 'The unbearable automaticity of being', *American Psychologist*, issue 54.

10 Koestler, A. (1975), *The Act of Creation*, Pan Books, London.

ative theory of 'bisociation' in order to distinguish between routine thinking on a single plane and creative thinking that always occurs on more than one plane. 'The bisociative act connects previously unconnected matrices of experience – the essence of discovery is that unlikely marriage of cabbages and kings, of previously unrelated frames of reference or universes of discourse whose union will solve previously unsolvable problems'.<sup>11</sup> Koestler also believed that we are conscious of only a fraction of what may be 'hoarded in the imagination' and he addressed the problems of Cartesian thinking long before *Descartes' Error*<sup>12</sup> was more widely published. It should follow therefore that when trying to arrive at creative solutions the more we know about the background to the problem under review the more likely we are to make the necessary connections and, as Kinsella advises, we need to keep stirring the pot:

We have to dig down  
sieve, scour and roughen  
make it all fertile and vigorous  
get the fresh rain down. (p. 184)

The more we 'let our gaze blaze' the more likely we are to be successful. Concentrated thinking about the material is one method of making the necessary connections but both Koestler and Kinsella also emphasise the creative possibilities of the unconscious: 'The creative act, in so far as it depends on unconscious resources, presupposes a relaxing of the controls and a regression to modes of ideation which are indifferent to the rules of verbal logic, unperturbed by contradiction, untouched by the dogmas and taboos of so-called commonsense'.<sup>13</sup> Both writers are influenced by the thinking of Carl Jung, whose theory of the Active Imagination involved 'going down a steep descent akin to entering a trance during which unconscious personalities emerged with sufficient clarity to hold conversations with them – conversations with them brought him the critical insight that things happen in the psyche that are not produced by conscious intention'.<sup>14</sup> Henri Poincare, another writer who has considered the

nature of creativity, came to a similar conclusion: 'preparatory thinking activates potentially relevant ideas in the unconscious which are there unknowingly combined'.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from Kinsella's approach to creativity and the creative process is that real breakthroughs are unlikely to occur as a result of hastily convened 'brainstorming' sessions or even more carefully planned 'away-days'. A second lesson is that inexperienced executives with limited knowledge of the market are unlikely to be equipped to contribute much in the way of real innovation. Continuous absorption of all available product or service knowledge and of the behaviour and attitudes of the type of consumers under review is the best guarantee of making the unlikely connections that are invariably at the heart of new thinking. It should be a regular process which can be induced from time to time by complete immersion designed to dredge up all our unconscious as well as conscious knowledge. The implication that the process cannot be subject to the same degree of logistical control as other elements in the business supply chain will not be popular with senior management and in particular the accountability function, but it is better that they are aware of the reality of the creative and innovative process than that they imagine they can impose their own logic.

Discussions with creative people in advertising agencies will confirm that the best ideas often emerge from unconscious moments of reflection rather than during the time strictly allotted to solving the problem. But whether the such moments of reflection are conscious or unconscious, the entire process would be more productive if we ensured that anyone with responsibility for a brand is thoroughly familiar with: (i) the entire history of the brand – with every aspect of its origins, changes in its composition, its ups and downs and how it has arrived at its present position; (ii) the attitudes and behaviour, the lives and loves, the fears and hopes and the dreams and aspirations of the target group for the brand; and (iii) all relevant published case histories. Only when people's heads are immersed in this

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Damasio, A. (1994), *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, Putnam Berkley Group, New York, NY.

<sup>13</sup> Koestler, A. (1975), op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Stevens, A. (2001), *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<sup>15</sup> Boden, M. (2004), *The Creative Mind: Myths and Mechanisms*, Routledge, London.

knowledge will genuine creative breakthroughs emerge. The fact that we work in an area which is not conducive to what Stephen Brown refers to as the APIC (analysis, planning, implementation, control) paradigm<sup>16</sup> is no excuse for a sloppy, unprofessional attitude to the creative process. Thomas Kinsella's painstakingly dedicated approach should be our goal.

### **Beware All Totalising Systems**

The understandable desire for strict accountability in the business world can often lead to hugely ambitious but ultimately doomed attempts to exert a totalising level of control over one's consumers. Classic examples from the world of marketing are the regular announcements of techniques which claim to measure the precise effects of marketing communications campaigns, especially advertising. An industry perpetually smarting from the oft repeated jibe 'half of my advertising works but I don't know which half' is reluctantly forced to cooperate with these exercises while secretly regarding them as futile.

A recent book on this subject is enthusiastically gushing about what the author regards as the imminent arrival of technology which will enable advertisers to define precisely what and how different pieces of marketing communication work. 'In a few years time we should be able to measure brand communication exposure from all sorts of sources – from a logo on a T-shirt to an ad on the back of a bus, to a gondola end promotion in a supermarket, even to a branded lounge tent at a music festival. That's because all these things will be equipped with short range transponders that will register on receivers worn by volunteers on watches or spectacles or even embedded in their mobile phones or cars'.<sup>17</sup> The fact that this futuristic nightmare will never see the light of day won't stop the management consultancies, the market research companies and the media planning agencies from peddling 'comfort blankets for incontinent executives' to the masters of the universe in corporate head offices.

Kinsella has commented on the ultimate futility of this type of imperialism and although he was thinking more of attempts by British administrators in

the seventeenth century to subdue Ireland by accurate mapping and categorising, the fact that the business world would merely substitute the words 'market surveying' and 'segmentation' shows that they are engaged in precisely the same activity in relation to twenty-first-century consumers. His most famous target is William Petty, the seventeenth-century cartographer whose Down Survey of Ireland is taken by the poet as 'an example of the difficulty encountered if a system or structure is imposed upon the details of experience rather than being elicited from them'.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Kinsella changes the name of the unfortunate map-maker to Skullbullet should be enough to alert readers to his attitude:

Blessed William Skullbullet  
glaring from the furnace of your hair  
thou whose definitions – whose insane nets  
plunge and convulse to hold your furious catch  
let our gaze blaze, we pray  
let us see how the whole thing works. (p. 177)

Flanagan argues that Kinsella's intentions are twofold; 'to explore and reveal how the original classifying gaze quickly follows cultural generalisations to acquire the armour of scientific statement', and how inexorably the textual and contemplative awareness gradually becomes 'administrative, economic and even military'.<sup>19</sup> In a business context it is the 'armour of scientific statement' that tends to create the most serious problems. The fact that the measuring devices are faulty is ignored once the ever-seductive figures are available. But some management theorists are now sounding a warning. 'We should abandon the search for the Single Criterion – the feeling that quantification is the ultimate source of unerring certainty and oracular wisdom and that the evaluation process is "nothing but" the one or two figures that result'.<sup>20</sup>

Later in the same poem Kinsella goes further by pointing out that the very act of measurement causes the subject to change, thus immediately rendering the whole exercise invalid ('Except that at the first violation/the body would rip into pieces and fly

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16 Brown, S. (2001), *Marketing – The Retro Revolution*, Sage Publications, London.

17 Taylor, J. (2005), *The Space Race*, Wiley, Chichester.

18 Tubridy, D. (2001), *Thomas Kinsella: The Peppercanister Poems*, University College Dublin Press, Dublin.

19 Flanagan, I. (2001), 'Issues of order: Kinsella and the Enlightenment ethos', in C. Clutterbuck (ed.), *Irish University Review* special issue on Thomas Kinsella, spring/summer.

20 Tasgal, A. (2003), 'The Science of Brand', Market Research Society Annual Conference, London.

apart/with terrible spasms'). Here he is alluding to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle from quantum mechanics which casts doubt on the assumption that if we can calculate the present exactly we can calculate the future. In a quantum world it is our ability to 'calculate the present exactly' that is in doubt. Unfortunately, these earth-shattering developments were conveniently ignored by the business world, where managers are continually being told that 'you can't manage what you can't measure.'<sup>21</sup>

The world of marketing communications has always had reservations and is more instinctively in tune with the 'uncertainty principle' but rarely has the self-confidence to raise its head above the parapet, although there have been exceptions: 'You could say if you felt like being cynical that peddling statistics of dubious value to the profoundly unimaginative and unselfconfident would provide a pretty good living for a lot of clever people even though it may not help very much to create successful new brands or revive sad old declining ones. But numbers are the talisman of our age, they justify everything, it must be true because the numbers say so. I've always been amused and sometimes amazed by the way in which numbers, sometimes tendentious, sometimes torn out of context, occasionally quite meaningless and arbitrary are used to give a false, but nevertheless a comfortable air of verisimilitude to even the most evident rubbish.'<sup>22</sup> But there are now signs of a wider revolt against the obsessive application of dubious mathematical models and two leading US business academics have recently argued that 'business schools have lost their way because of the scientific model that dominates business research and teaching.'<sup>23</sup> They go on to argue that business students should all take a course in literature, which would teach them more about human nature and the real world than any business case study.

### **Beware the Ease of the Spurious**

Creativity and innovation involve risk. In the business world market research can reduce but never eliminate risk, as evidenced by the alarmingly high fail-

ure rate for new product development launches. The main reason for this failure is that the products or services were not sufficiently different from what was already in the market. Not enough risks were taken because managers settled for products or services which could be safely evaluated within consumers' existing conceptual framework and therefore weren't really all that new. Kinsella has obviously studied not only the nature of the creative process, but the working methods of the fellow artists he admires:

we find everywhere  
in his strange work  
the readiness to take risks  
tedium, the ignoble,  
to try anything ten times  
if so the excessive matter can be settled. (p. 240)

Here he is referring to Mahler, who was a particular inspiration ('if only we could wring our talent out/wring it and wring it out to dry like that'). His triple use of the work 'wring' in two lines shows how much effort Kinsella believes must go into creative work. He makes frequent reference to the sheer 'ordeal' involved and to the constant failure before some kind of result is achieved. By definition, therefore, success is rare and most of the time:

it grows dark and we stumble  
in gathering ignorance  
in a land of loss  
and unfulfillable desire. (p. 259)

But a willingness to face the ordeal, to accept the inevitable failure will eventually be rewarded:

a few times in a lifetime, with luck,  
the actual substance alters: fills with  
expectation, beats with a molten glow  
a change occurs; grows cool; resumes. (p. 187)

But it may be that Kinsella's most important lesson under this heading is to avoid the easy, often crowd-pleasing solution. Writing about Thomas Moore, he damns the eponymous melodies with faint praise ('some of these songs established the imagery of harp, heartbreak and vague patriotism that passes for Irish still in England and the United States')<sup>24</sup> and dismisses his poetry as 'commonplace ideas with

<sup>21</sup> Karplan, R. and D. Norton (1996), *The Balanced Scorecard*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

<sup>22</sup> Olins, W. (2003), *On Brand*, Thames and Hudson, London.

<sup>23</sup> Bennis, W. and J. O'Toole (2005), 'How business schools lost their way', *Harvard Business Review*, May.

<sup>24</sup> Kinsella, T. (1995), *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland*, Carcanet Press, Manchester.

verbal ingenuity and charm, always a marketable combination'.<sup>25</sup> He himself was determined to avoid what he often referred to as 'the ease of the spurious':

I have known the hissing assemblies.  
The preference for the ease of the spurious  
the measured poses and stupidities. (p. 352)

The number of 'me-too' product and service offerings that are still being launched into the market and doomed to early failure, not to mention the number of mind-numbingly boring advertisements unleashed on the public, is testament to the fact that we are all too inclined to settle for the 'ease of the spurious'.

### **Walk, Don't Run**

The runner reaches the destination first but the walker observes more and therefore understands more along the way. Creative breakthroughs are more likely to occur to the walker because of the ability to focus on the concrete or specific in order to understand the wider world:

emotion expelled, to free the structure of a thing  
or indulged to free the structure of an idea.  
The entirety of one's being  
crowded for everlasting shelter  
into the memory of one crust of bread.  
Granting it everlasting life.  
Eating it absolutely. (p. 171)

Kinsella has always been a great walker, from *A Country Walk* in the early 1960s, where each step represents 'a drop of peace returning', to *The Pen Shop* in the late 1990s, where he indulges in a Leopold Bloom-like perambulation around the streets of central Dublin, and to his prescient observations on the embryonic Celtic Tiger prompted by a walk around the newly emerging Dublin suburbs in *Nightwalker*. Tubridy has argued that 'the degree of precision afforded to the walker acts as a stimulus to creative insights' and has drawn our attention to the connection that Michel de Certeau makes 'between the act of walking and the process of understanding as it relates to systems of totalisation and power'.<sup>26</sup> She goes on to comment on Kinsella's creative use of

walking to substitute a synchronic view of a particular place, people or society with a more diachronic perspective: 'Kinsella's trajectory through the city disrupts the stable, isolatable and interconnected properties through which the urban space is conceived introducing an irreducible diachronicity that troubles personal as well as public history.'<sup>27</sup>

Kinsella's message for us under this heading is that we are more likely to achieve real insights through direct observation than relying on outsourced market research. Research is essential for an overview and accurate structure of a market, but if we accept the fact that genuine innovation occurs at some point between expert knowledge of a particular market and acute understanding of consumers in that market then there's no alternative to combining both sets of expertise in the one person. This could account for the fact that smaller businesses that can't afford to divide these functions have a better track record in developing and launching new initiatives than the large corporations. But the one large corporation that is recognised as genuinely innovative, Procter & Gamble, is acutely aware of the need for the 'walker approach' to new product development. Its chief executive was recently quoted as advising: 'if you want to understand the lions go to the jungle not the zoo'. The same advice was proffered by Thomas Kinsella twenty years ago in *St Catherine's Clock*, where he takes the reader on a walk through time around the historic lanes and alleyways that stretch out from Thomas Street:

I inhaled the granite lamplight  
divining the energies of the prowler. (p. 261)

Thus the walker/prowler sets out to 'divine', which can be defined as 'discovering by intuition', and in another memorable line from the same poem 'reading the ground' provides an inspirational metaphor for market research. The poet points business in the direction of minute observation of the particular as the most likely and rewarding path to innovation. This is an area where we have made rapid progress in recent years as semiotic and ethnographic techniques are introduced into mainstream market research. 'Semiotic analysis (of communications) concerns reading the hidden meanings of market-

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Tubridy, D. (2001), 'Difficult migrations: the Dinnseanchas of Thomas Kinsella's later poetry', *Irish University Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, spring/summer.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

ing messages, exploring the discourse, decoding the conscious signals the brand is sending out, revealing and retuning the brand's conscious beliefs about its consumers. Observational interviewing is literally living with people in the real time of their use of products and brands, sharing the minutiae of behaviour and relationships that constitute usage and attitudes, widening the perception to the reality of the consumer's whole world.<sup>28</sup>

### **An Understanding of the Present Is Dependent on an Understanding of the Past**

Kinsella was always conscious of history. He was born and raised in Inchicore in Dublin, close to Kilmainham Gaol. Both his grandmothers ran small shops from their homes in the Liberties, an area rich in historical associations and at a time, only a few decades after the War of Independence and the Civil War, when these recent events weighed heavily on all sections of the population. The reference in an early poem ('ourselves though seven hundred years accurst') is testament to an early endorsement of the official Irish historical line, though young Thomas was the recipient of extra-curricular tuition in the home:

Your family, Thomas, met with and helped many of the Croppies in hiding from the Yeos on their way home after the defeat in South Wexford. They sheltered the Laceys who were later hanged on the Bridge in Ballinglen between Tinahely and Anacorra. (p. 172).

However, it was his later exposure to the works of Carl Jung that provided a more intellectual basis for the poet's subsequent immersion in his country's immediate and ancient past. Jung believed that for man to attain complete fulfilment, which he referred to as a state of individuation, akin to Maslow's better known 'self-actualisation', it was first necessary to come to an understanding of our 'collective unconscious'. Jung believed that the collective unconscious was 'composed of functional units, archetypes, identical psychic structures common to all which together constitute the archaic heritage of humanity'.<sup>29</sup> He believed we have all allowed ourselves to

become too far removed from our psychic roots and this hinders our ability to operate at full capacity in today's world.

Kinsella's reaction was twofold: first, to delve deep into his own family background, being prepared to confront any dark secrets that may have been repressed; and second, to reconstruct the original foundations of his society. In successive poems from *New Poems* in 1972 to *St Catherine's Clock* in 1987 Kinsella explores, examines and exhumes his immediate family, especially his father and grandmother, and creates an imaginative reconstruction of the origins of life on the island of Ireland. With these descriptions of childhood and the forces which shaped the society in which he lived, Kinsella comes to a better understanding of himself and the world that surrounds him. Like most intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century he may still be alienated from the modern world, but by reconnecting with his psychic heritage he is in much better shape to confront it.

Many business organisations are unable to confront the challenges of today's marketplace because of their inbuilt historical provincialism. Since the late 1970s when the Irish Marketing Society ran a conference for its members under the title 'The Challenge of Change', no sector of the business world has remained free from a conference, a seminar or a 'think-in' devoted to the same topic. A rain forest of books, a slew of MBA modules and a swarm of management consultants and celebrity business gurus have dedicated themselves to the subject of change management; all to very little avail. The general consensus is that change management programmes change very little. The generally accepted reason is that senior management are not fully committed to the process and therefore those under them see no reason to make the effort to change.

Kinsella's quest for 'wholeness' suggests a different reason – that if you are not fully aware of what you are then by definition you can't change, and you can't fully comprehend what you are unless you know where you came from. Professor Tim Ambler of the London Business School describes the problem well: 'Institutional memory loss is exacerbated

28 Gordon, W. and V. Valentine (2000), 'The 21st century consumer: an endlessly moving target', *Market Leader*, issue 11, winter.

29 Stevens, A. (2001), *Jung: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

by rotating marketing directors who regard an eighteen month tenure as the norm. They demand new insights from new research ignorant of the similar research piled up by predecessors. The modern marketers life is a whirl of meetings. These leave little time for field visits, consulting back files, or sitting with long-serving managers still less company pensioners to absorb the history of trials, what worked and what didn't in the past.<sup>30</sup> The importance of understanding business organisations by studying their history is now becoming more acceptable and a recent influential book on brand innovation included the following recommendation. 'Who are we? The underlying premise here is that the identity of the company already exists – that is there's a lot of potentially valuable components of the brand's past stored away in a metaphorical vault – we just need to find the most relevant dimensions of these facts, equities or ideas.'<sup>31</sup>

## Conclusions

Businesses are constantly being urged to adapt to a rapidly changing world by becoming more creative and innovative. A feature of all this pressure is the belated recognition that this change, if it is to have any chance of success, must involve everyone in the organisation and not just senior management. But too often there is a complete disconnection between this aspiration and the reality of how the business world is managed. This is particularly marked in terms of the language used in business, or more accurately the impoverishment of that language whose empirical nature is simply not commensurate with the complexity of the real world it seeks to understand and influence.

The precision of poetry, and the need for those who engage with it to concentrate in order to 'ease the particular of its litter' makes it a potentially invaluable resource for business. Long-term labourers in the Lit Crit vineyards may feel aggrieved, but shouldn't be all that surprised. Terry Eagleton explains: 'Capitalism is impeccably inclusive – in its

hunt for profit it will travel any distance, endure any hardship, shack up with the most obnoxious of companions, suffer the most abominable humiliations, tolerate the most tasteless wallpaper and cheerfully betray its next of kin.'<sup>32</sup>

In their quest for innovation and creativity businesses spend very large sums of money every year organising away-days, think-ins, brainstorming sessions and sometimes even more bizarre practices like walking over hot coals in an effort to squeeze insights from hard-pressed executives. If a close reading of the poetry of Thomas Kinsella could be positioned as a more civilised way to release these insights, then there would appear to be no harm in the poet benefiting from the increased sales and his interpreters and critics from the resulting consultancy fees.

## Acknowledgement

The genesis of this paper was a request from Diageo's head of advertising to address a conference of its marketing personnel and agency teams on the subject of creativity in November 2006. Thomas Kinsella's connections with Guinness – he was brought up in the area, has written extensively about it and both his father and grandfather worked for the brewery – seemed an obvious starting point; the fact that the head of marketing in Diageo is a certain Tommy Kinsella clinched it.

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30 Ambler, T. (2004), 'Innocents and experience', *Financial Times*, 30 November.

31 Morgan, A. (1999), *Eating the Big Fish*, Wiley, Chichester.

32 Eagleton, T. (2004), *After Theory*, Penguin, London.

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32 Eagleton, T. (2004), *After Theory*, Penguin, London.

Thomas Kinsella, who turns 90 this month, was my first poetic mentor. I remember the excitement in the early 1970s, as a university student, of discovering the work of someone who seemed to come out of the same blank space that most of us inhabited on the Irish poetry map — the space of suburban, commuter and inner city life, at a time when Irish poetry meant Rural Irish poetry and was about to mean Northern Irish poetry. Two Kinsella poems of those years, *Butchers Dozen* and *The Good Fight* still might stand for the mental crux of Irish poetry, not to say Ireland itself, at a time, the end of the 1960s, between opening up to the wider world or reversion to the dark, introverted past.