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# **Entrepreneurship and Poetry: Analyzing an Aesthetic Dimension**

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## **Biography**

Dr Robert Smith is a Reader in Entrepreneurship and Leadership at the Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen, Scotland. His research interests are eclectic but his primary research focus is on study of entrepreneurship in different settings and applications including the socially constructed nature of entrepreneurship and thus entrepreneurial identity, semiotics, narrative and storytelling in organizations including small and family business. He has published over 70 journal articles and book chapters to date many of which have narrative themes. Other areas of research interest include gender and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial networks, small and family business, criminal entrepreneurship, regional development and rural entrepreneurship.

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to investigate the aesthetic dimension of entrepreneur poems. The notion of the entrepreneur as storyteller, and the entrepreneur story as cultural genres have become so firmly entrenched in the collective social consciousness that little consideration is given to the existence of other narrative genres, such as business poetry as expressions, or manifestations of enterprising behaviour and indeed identities. Poetry, like art, possesses aesthetic dimensions which make it difficult to theorise and analyse. Indeed, as a genre, poetry seldom features as a heuristic device for better understanding entrepreneurial behaviour or learning. This is surprising because poetry in particular is a wonderfully creative and expressive narrative medium and accordingly, many entrepreneurs engage in writing poetry as a form of creative expression.

**Design / Methodology / Approach:** In this study the author considers the entrepreneur as poet and from a reading of the literatures of entrepreneurship and aesthetics develops an aesthetic framework for analysing entrepreneur poetry which is used to analyse six poems written by entrepreneurs or about entrepreneurs.

**Findings:** That poetry has value in terms of entrepreneurial learning because of its atheoretical nature it permits listeners to experience the emotion and passion of lived entrepreneurial experiences and to relive these vicariously. In particular entrepreneur poems are a variant form of entrepreneur story devoid of the usual cliché.

**Research Limitations:** There are obvious limitations to the study in that the analysis of six poems can merely scratch the surface and that aesthetic analysis is by its very nature subjective and open to interpretation.

**Implication:** The study opens up possibilities for further research into entrepreneur poems, the aesthetics of other non standard entrepreneur narratives and consideration of

the aesthetic elements of entrepreneurship per se. Poetics and aesthetics are areas of narrative understanding ripe for further empirical research.

**Originality:** The article is original in terms of creating an aesthetic framework used to analyse entrepreneur poems. Indeed, little consideration had previously been given to the topic.

**Key Words:** Entrepreneurial Learning; Entrepreneur Stories; Entrepreneur Poems; Business Poetry; Aesthetics; Semiotics; Social Constructionism.

**Article classification:** Research paper.

## Introduction

Narrative approaches in entrepreneurship are impacting on how we as a research community view entrepreneurship theory and practice at a theoretical, conceptual, methodological and pedagogical level (as evidenced by the works of Johansson, 2004; Down and Revley, 2004; Rae, 2005; Fletcher, 2005; Smith, 2005; Buttriss and Wilkinson, 2006; Down, 2006; Hamilton, 2006; Gartner, 2007; O'Conner, 2007; Fletcher, 2007; Ahl, 2007; Baker, 2007; Hjorth, 2007; Steyaert, 2007; Martens, Jennings and Jennings, 2007; Down and Warren, 2008; Boje and Smith, 2010; and Larty and Hamilton, 2011). Studies relating to phenomenological inquiry (Cope, 2005) and social constructionism (Downing, 2005; Jones, Latham and Betta, 2008) have also added to and inform the debate as have the studies of Rae (2004: 2005) and Hamilton (2011) in relation to narrative and entrepreneurial learning. So much so, that an appreciation of narrative as a 'sense-making' device (Selvin and Shum, 2008), or heuristic, through which to better understand the nuances of entrepreneurial action and utterances is growing rapidly amongst entrepreneurship scholars. Building on this, this paper investigates the aesthetic dimension of entrepreneur poems adding to our understanding

of how sensory constructivist approaches aid us in theorizing everyday entrepreneurial processes (Tornikoski, 2005).

Similarly, there is an appreciation of the entrepreneur as storyteller (Roddick, 2000). The role of narrative genres, styles and storylines in shaping the socially constructed nature of entrepreneur stories is emerging (McKenzie, 2004; Smith, 2005). McKenzie (2004) researched issues of oral storytelling in the development of entrepreneur stories as picaresque tales and Smith (2005) found a discernable ‘storybook’ framework for telling entrepreneur stories constructed via the use of narrative building blocks and genres such as children’s stories, fairytales, myth, metaphor, heroics, epic, eulogy and tragedy. Nevertheless, scholarship has only touched upon possible sense-making narrative genres such as diaries, photographs, music, films, theatre, media images, jokes, cartoons, poetry and other semiotic entities and forms of expression. In entrepreneurship studies consideration of these mediums and in particular poetry and song (Nissley, Taylor and Butler, 2002) as a mode of enquiry is rare (Warren and Smith, 2012). Notable exceptions include Shockley and Frank (2010), Smith (2010), and Slaney (2012). This article addresses this gap in the literature

At the 2009 ISBE Conference in Liverpool, I heard serial entrepreneur Jonathan Hick, narrate his business story ending with a poem he had written for the occasion about being an entrepreneur<sup>1</sup>. I immediately appreciated the significance of the poem as an expression of entrepreneurial action at play. The poem struck an aesthetic chord in my academic consciousness relating to the aesthetics of narrative and the obligatory ‘google’ search revealed further examples of business poems - primarily located on internet blog pages. This stimulated the research questions:-

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<sup>1</sup> The self-deprecating raconteur, storyteller and as it proved stand up comedian, began with a joke / pun about being fed up with being considered a ‘Cereal Entrepreneur’ because he did not even like corn flakes (an obvious play on the term ‘Serial Entrepreneur’). This elicited the required ripple of laughter putting the audience at ease. Thereafter, in quick fire, entertainer mode, Hick breathtakingly narrated his roller-coaster story in a comic style (replete with prosaic language) and ended his oration with the poem. His masterful rendition earned him an ovation.

- Is poetry a legitimate linguistic medium for expressing entrepreneurial experiences?
- How can an appreciation of poetry help us better understand entrepreneurship *per-se*?

In the literature review I explore links between entrepreneurship, aesthetics and position poetry within the literature. Thereafter, in the methodology section the concept of aesthetics as an analytical tool is developed as a framework to be used to analyze selected poems written by entrepreneurs. This active presentation of the poetry is essential in triggering an aesthetic analysis of the poems. The paper concludes with a discussion of what we as researchers can learn from an appreciation of poetry and aesthetics. Limitations and implications of the research are considered.

## **Reviewing the literature on aesthetics and poetry**

This section explores the literatures of aesthetics and poetry to position the study within extant literature and introduces the main concepts used in the study. Three sub-sections present the literature of aesthetics; develop a conceptual map; and contextualise entrepreneurship and poetry.

### **Appreciating the aesthetic dimension of narrative**

This section synthesises the literature of aesthetics and entrepreneurship to articulate exactly what aesthetics is and in what manner it contributes to our understanding of entrepreneurship. Although aesthetics is not a novel area of entrepreneurship scholarship (see - Steiner, 2003; Weiskopf and Steyaert, 2008), it is usually associated with the study of art, music, dance and poetry but not organizational contexts (Carr and Hancock, 2002).

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty and the fine arts; and the study of the psychological responses to beauty and artistic experiences. Aesthetics has a long history of philosophical inquiry ranging from early Greek philosophers to the writings of Immanuel Kant (Kant, 1964). For Seeley (2004) aesthetics is a socially constructed phenomenon, a system of constructed visual representations which impose order on the incoming flux of *sensory* information. Alexander Baumgarten (1734) introduced the term ‘Aesthetics’ in the eighteenth century to describe the study of sensuous cognition, or perception. According to Welsch (1998, p.38) “...aesthetics has pushed itself into the core of knowledge and truth”. It is no coincidence that Barry and Elmes (1997, p.4) situate aesthetics alongside the artistic domains of semiotics and poetics because aesthetics relates to a quality arising from combinations of words, lines, patterns, shapes and colours which stir our emotions and involves an appreciation of the observed, the dramatic and the passionate. Aesthetics is related to semiotics and is concerned with an appreciation of artifactual objects establishing a link between Art, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Art possesses representational, expressive qualities and has form and substance. Indeed, Langer (1953) suggests Art conveys various emotions, while verbal language conveys thoughts. This notion of entrepreneurship as an Art form is of interest because it has long been debated whether entrepreneurship is an art or a science. For Livesay (1982, p.13) “*entrepreneurship is an art form*” and for Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) it is both “Art” and “Science”, whilst Drucker (1985, p.10) considers it to be “*neither a science nor an art. It is a practice*”. Splitting the difference, Anderson and Jack (1997) consider it to be closer to an art form than a science. Although Livesay (1982, p.13) is perhaps correct in articulating that being an art form it is difficult to explain in terms of origin, method, or environment clearly not all entrepreneurs are artistic, nor all artists entrepreneurial. Also, the end point of entrepreneurial achievement is not directed towards creating Art although it possesses artistic qualities. McCarthy (2003) talks of the aesthetics of entrepreneurial identities, and Steiner (2003) suggests that cultural factors such as play, charisma and aesthetics affect identity creation. Thus, entrepreneurial narrative possesses an aesthetic quality which inspires others to emulate the success embedded in the story.

Early scholars of aesthetics (Langer, 1953; Arnheim, 1954; Beardsley, 1958; and Dickies, 1978) concentrated upon *taste* and *judgment* however the main thrust of research focus now rests upon consideration of aesthetic experience. Fenner (2003) argues the "raw data" of aesthetics combines to explain the aesthetic experience composed of aesthetic properties, objects, and attitudes. Consideration of *aesthetic character*, the primary basis for its 'emotional appeal', is seldom considered. The problem with aesthetics as a heuristic device is that it is a deeply subjective and interpretative concept<sup>2</sup>. For Slater (2005) pure beauty captures and holds our attention, inducing a state of *selflessness* in which appreciation is an end to itself. We attach an emotional value upon actions and objects which please us, and so it is with poetry.

Like entrepreneurship, aesthetics is difficult to define because it is a subjective quality, a perception and not a tangible entity. It is a cognitive sensory process involving acts of perception, recognition, and appreciation leading to a suspension of reality. As such it possesses a timeless quality as when one is in touch with one's senses. Aesthetics is granted a privileged place in the study which uses aesthetics to investigate an important facet of entrepreneurship from a fresh perspective – namely poetry and poetics. By discussing poetry as a heuristic device and the role of aesthetics and how these aid in our understanding of entrepreneurship *per-se* this study links the latter to the subjective concepts of emotions, intuitions, senses, spirits, creativities and passion - the very ephemeral qualities which make us artistic.

#### Developing a conceptual map of the aesthetic domain

From a reading of the literature of aesthetics, I developed a conceptual map of the aesthetic domain to help understand and deconstruct how different elements interact with each other. See figure 1:-

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<sup>2</sup> Because if we accept that aesthetics concerns the study of beauty we must inevitably return to the old adage that "*beauty is in the eye of the beholder*". Thus, what one person interprets as beautiful, may leave another unmoved.

**FIGURE 1 – DECONSTRUCTING THE ELEMENTS OF AESTHETICS**

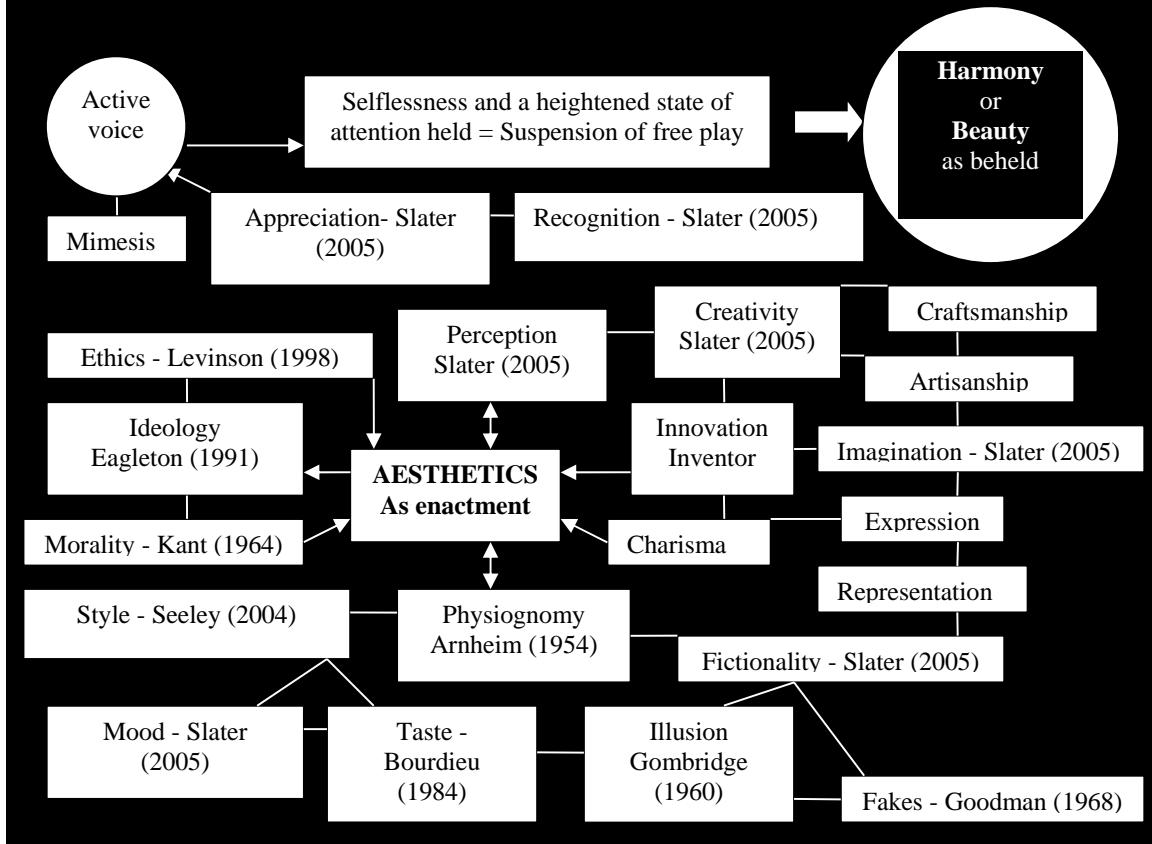


Figure 1 presents concepts and processes associated with the construction of *aesthetic appreciation*. Aesthetics (as an action) is influenced by physiognomy (Arnheim, 1954), ethics (Levinson, 1998), ideology (Eagleton, 1991) and morality (Kant, 1964). It can be expressed as a *style* (Seeley, 2004), a *mood* (Slater, 2005) or a *taste* (Bourdieu, 1984). It is further influenced by *fictionality* (Slater, 2005) and can be viewed as an *illusion* (Gombrige, 1960), or regarded as *fake* (Goodman, 1968). Aesthetics are created and produced (Slater, 2005) via *imagination* (Slater, 2005) *creativity*, and *innovation*. Thus aesthetics must be expressed, represented, and perceived as such which entails reliance upon the cognitive processes of *recognition* and *appreciation* (Slater, 2005). In relation to action, repetition or mimesis leads to perfectionism. These aspects are present in poetry. Moreover, we appreciate what is familiar to us and when we *recognise* and *appreciate* a

particular action or communication (as a creative expression) which *appeals* to our *senses* culminating in a heightened state of attention and a state of harmony.

Furthermore, Dickie (1974) considers aesthetics an *attitude* or *awareness*; and Slater (2005) discusses the aesthetic condition, values, attitudes and intentions. For Sibley (1959) the aesthetic condition requires heightened form of perception equating to taste, sensitivity, or judgment. Aesthetic appreciation is expressed via human qualities and conditions. Stories and objects are ascribed human conditions - humble, garish, gaudy, or flamboyant. Aesthetics make use of the metaphoric and these descriptors are all applied to the entrepreneurial persona. Also, aesthetics is linked to creativity and charisma, which are associated with entrepreneurship. Appreciation of aesthetics allows us to conduct such mental abstractions. For Guillet De Monthoux (2004) the aesthetics of action and thus the active entrepreneurial voice possess an affective quality in that it is linked to our emotions. Figure 1 provides a useful springboard to link the above concepts with an analysis of the poems presented below.

### Exploring the links between entrepreneurship and poetry

According to Gladding (1986) a “*poem is a concrete heuristic device that potentially operates on many levels*” and helps one reflect on crucial issues. For Gioia and Poole (1984) poetry is a scripted creative form of sense-making which acts as heuristic device to capture lived experience. However, this does not help us make sense of poetry in an academic context, albeit for Hengreaves (2008) poetry is an ideal inter-disciplinary teaching tool. The language of poetry differs from common linguistic usage – “*this the most unsophisticated reader senses instantly*” (Riffaterre, 1980, p.1). The characteristic of a poem lies in its unity and in its completeness as a storied entity (Riffaterre, 1980, p.2). Poetry can be auto-ethnographic and the purpose of poetry is to engage readers via an alternative way of presenting data (Leavy, 2008, p.71). Poetry encompasses concepts and things by *semantic indirection* created by displacing, dislodging or creating meaning and of making sense and non-sense - a poem says one thing and means another (Riffaterre, 1980, p.1). For Stewart (2004) poetry is a disruption of silence and works

because of space around it. Accordingly, poetry is both a style of representation as well as a vehicle through which academics can engage in larger questions about the nature of social research truth and knowledge (Leavy, 2008, p.84). Poetic representation allows one to metaphorically paint a feeling picture (Leavy, 2008, p.64).

Whilst the literature on poetry itself is extensive, the literature in relation to business, entrepreneurship and poetry, is sparse albeit such a link is established (see Gioia, 1983; Windle, 2006; and Fanning, 2007). Indeed, for Windle (2006) the domains of “poetry” and “business” intersect and Fanning (2007) argued that poetry emphasizes the creative and innovative processes in business providing a tonic for the frequent misuse of scientific approaches. Abercrombie (1968, p.277) suggests that poetry captures the tragic greatness of the hero! Thus entrepreneurship with its all its eulogizing and hero worship should be the perfect subject matter for the poet because poetry is ultimately about articulating power and passion in a memorable way.

Yet, a search of academic data bases using the search criteria “entrepreneur / poetry” raises few direct hits (Warren and Smith, 2012). Exceptions include studies by Shockley and Frank (2010) and Slaney (2012). Shockley and Frank innovatively used the Epic Poetry of Virgil to teach social enterprise to students; whilst the more prosaic study of Slaney mixing autoethnography with poetics showcases her self-authored business poems and what these mean to her as a practicing entrepreneur. Reading these works are aesthetic experiences in their own right.

This dearth of studies can perhaps be explained by the fact that much of the literature relating to entrepreneurship and poetry is located on the internet on business and private websites, or in books, pamphlets and downloadable PDF formats thrusting one directly into the medium of poetry. For example Ehrenfield (2005) suggests that *“...entrepreneurs, like poets, invent new ways to connect people, ideas and organizations”*. Both entrepreneurs and poets take the same intuitive leap, creating meaning where none existed before communicating it to an audience, making ideas real. A further example of such material is an internet blog entitled *“Poetry and the entrepreneur”* by the Barbadian academic, entrepreneur and poet, Paterika Hengreaves (Hengreaves, 2008) who articulates commonalities between poets and entrepreneurs, in that both are creators; both invent new ways to connect people, ideas and organizations;

both make great strides on intuitive behaviour; both create meaning where it didn't seem to exist, with their head, heart and hands to the plough, as it were; They communicate this to their audience making vision real. She likens poetry and entrepreneurship to an emotional avalanche and argues that entrepreneurs and poets claim to write from the heart and operate in a poetic frame; and both deal in selling abstract conceptualizations. Hengreaves advocates "*poetry driven business*". Ehrenfield and Hengreaves stress that poetry is used in business advertisements to inspire us and are pinned to notice boards to motivate those who read them. Poetry appears as mottoes, slogans and poetic vision statements promulgated by many business corporations. Poetry has practical applications for entrepreneurs.

Business poetry has spawned several (un-theorized) books including Dennis (2004: 2006); Omokara (2009); and Sivewright (2009). The works of Dennis are not so much about poetry in business but poems applicable in a business setting. In "*Beyond Dreams*", Omokara (2009) uses poetry to capture her experiences and emotions as an entrepreneur, such as hindrances: fears, rejection, blunders, isolation, exhaustion and feelings of aloneness and to embody specific wisdom, metaphors, and deep insights that can be applied to the business of life. Sivewright (2009) provides practical words of wisdom on how to use poetry to teach business. However, poetry is basically atheoretical. For Abercrombie (1968, p.13) poetry is particularly resistant to theory and theorizing *per-se*, because theories of poetry are open to interpretation and because a theory is nothing but a generalized observation it exists at the level of a conviction. Poetry, like Art has a deeply aesthetic dimension and may *resonate* with some but not all. Poetry is an art and theorizing and philosophizing about it misses the point. Thus, Abercrombie's views mirror those of some entrepreneurship theorists because entrepreneurship as an art is also resistant to attempts at theorizing. Art can be appreciated hence the power of aesthetics. These insights are significant because poetry is but another discourse, albeit one with a different aesthetic plane (Easthope, 1983).

## In search of method and aesthetic meaning

This section selects an appropriate methodology for analyzing the aesthetic dimension of the poetry selected for analysis. Poetry as a research strategy challenges the fact-fiction dichotomy and offers a form for the evocative presentation of data (Leavy, 2008, p.63). According to Leavy (2008, p.64) poetry is best used in research as a representational form and the basic method of analyzing poetry mirrors other forms of linguistic analysis. One looks for themes and recurring language to find hidden meaning via a *reading*. Nevertheless, Faulkner (2005a) argues that poetry must be judged by artistic and poetic criteria<sup>3</sup>. Using poetry as a heuristic device works because in conducting an analysis or a critique one is introducing a third voice. Indeed, poetic expression is often regarded as a third voice in qualitative expression. Building on the conceptual map above, a framework for conducting aesthetic analysis emerged.

### Formulating a framework for conducting aesthetic analysis

Academic literature detailing how to conduct aesthetic analysis is scarce because aesthetic analysis is normally associated with, and practiced upon works of Art revolving around identifying sensory properties. To analyse the poetry it was necessary to formulate an analytic framework. In the sense in which it is used aesthetic analysis is a complimentary research tool to semiotic analysis (Chandler, 2002). The latter deals with what is seen and what it looks like, whereas the former is concerned with how and why the images, sounds or texts appeal to us or repel us. They are logical extensions of the same analytic process. As applied in this study, aesthetic analysis is a commonsensical tool of sense-making and sense-giving, revolving around identifying aesthetic triggers within sensory data. Semiotic analysis involves comparing two different objects, or concepts, and therefore identifies the component parts of the construct under review, whereas aesthetic analysis identifies the affectual outcome of sensory stimuli which engage our *emotions* (Chandler, 2002).

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<sup>3</sup> Artistic criteria = compression of data; understanding of craft; social justice; moral voice; emotional verisimilitude; empathy. Poetic criteria = artistic concentration; embodied experience; discovery/surprise; conditional; narrative truth; transformation.

When conducting aesthetic analysis on a piece of Art, one examines the surface to determine the specific character of its lines, shapes, textures, values, colours, scale, space and volume, and the images these elements are associated with. Yet, in conducting an aesthetic analysis of creative writings of entrepreneurial experience one is faced with a different problematic and must adapt existing techniques to achieve the task in hand<sup>4</sup>. A common question asked is - how do we make sense of aesthetic experience? It is customary to consider what is expressed, followed by the degree to which we like or dislike it. Aesthetic analysis is judgmental, relating to a personal judgment of content and aesthetic character. Aesthetic elements express themselves, but one must have a degree of knowledge about a subject to interpret its significance. Thus, aesthetic analysis must be based upon what we can actually *see*, and actual *properties*. We therefore must ask ourselves - *What do we actually see? How is it organized? What emotions and ideas are evoked as a result of what we observe? What makes aesthetic experiences special? And why do we revere these experiences?* In conducting aesthetic analysis we must break down images and texts into basic units of sensory data and describe how these affect us and our understanding of entrepreneurship.

It is common practice to first identify the sensory properties i.e. what we experience through our senses to identify formal properties; capture dominant elements, unifying themes and movements in written description. Moreover, having identified sensory and formal properties, one can begin to speculate about how they contribute, or what the image tells us, literally, symbolically and metaphorically. These are known as expressive properties. Researchers are looking for mood, dynamic state, ideas or ideals invoked. However, formal aesthetic analyses, has limitations because it can only highlight the expressive nature of what can be seen. To fully appreciate a subject it is necessary to conduct a *critical appraisal* taking account of the historical-socio cultural milieu in which it is embedded, and the associated *iconography* to identify additional symbolic and metaphorical elements within a cultural context. Our senses do not work in isolation and corroborate or affirm messages we decipher. Thus, when we encounter a phenomenon visually we simultaneously *hear, smell, and touch* it. The very sight of the phenomenon

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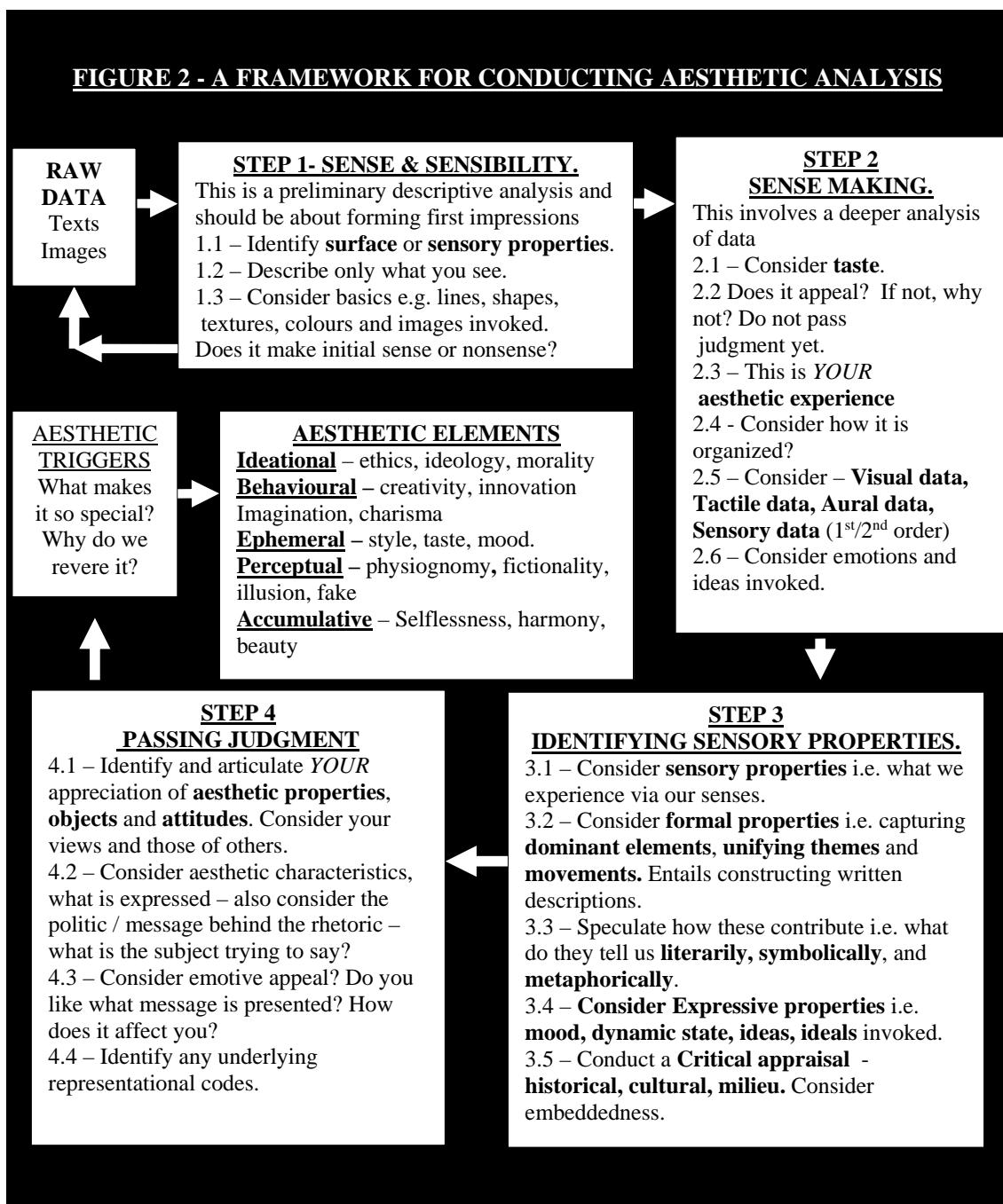
<sup>4</sup> The following website on how to conduct aesthetic analysis was extremely useful - [http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/laa/analysis\\_3.html](http://instructional1.calstatela.edu/laa/analysis_3.html)

and the words associated with it trigger aesthetic responses. Table 1 discusses forms of sensory data one should consider when conducting an aesthetic analysis.

<b>TABLE 1 - SENSORY DATA OF RELEVANCE TO AESTHETIC ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>Visual Data</b>	Relating to sight i.e. what one can see, the semiotic, the textual, and the written word. Orton <i>et al</i> (2000, p208) note " <i>observation is a good technique for looking at behaviour because it is objective and only records what actually happened</i> " (Eager and Oppenheim, 1996). In conducting an esthetic analysis of poetry the lay out of the words on the page, the use of capitals, bolding or italics and the choice of presentational background make a difference.
<b>Tactile Data</b>	Relates to what one can touch and to texture. In relation to poetry, the utility of this type of data is limited.
<b>Aural Data</b>	Relates to sound i.e. what one can hear, spoken words, cadence, accent etc. This is relevant because poetry has to read and / or spoken to be fully appreciated.
<b>Olfactory Data</b>	Relates to what one can smell and taste. In respect of the entrepreneurial construct this is limited unless poetry is read at a reading event.
<b>Sensory Data</b>	There are first order and second order senses. The former trigger immediate responses upon exposure and the latter relate to remembered senses, invoked by triggered memories of the first hand experience, inducing a heightening of the senses, euphoria, melancholy, and aesthetic pleasure. Senses are connected with states of being such as emotionality (Goleman, 1995). These <i>aesthetic triggers</i> can induce positive or negative emotional responses.

In examining a single sense in isolation we have limited opportunities to understand a concept. If we consider only the textual, or spoken word, there is a danger that we may miss (or misconstrue) the aesthetic element. Fuller appreciation entails a more holistic stance. However, even when reading a text, our imagination fills in the gaps thus we can reconstruct the original experience in our minds. Thus aesthetic analysis comes into its own by enabling us to review an entire scenario live making it a useful heuristic which can be overlaid, or used alongside more common types of analysis e.g. textual analysis, content analysis and semiotic analysis. Far from being an emotive construct, aesthetics is an intellectual *emotion* which involves making judgment based upon perceptions drawn from our visual and aural senses. From consideration of the above, an analytic template evolved. See Figure 2:-

**FIGURE 2 - A FRAMEWORK FOR CONDUCTING AESTHETIC ANALYSIS**



Using the framework to analyse the aesthetics of poetry

Windle (2006) stresses the need to pursue critical analysis of “*business poetry*” by the exacting criteria of poetry and not by less subjective criteria. But how then should we

analyze poetry? Timpane (2001) suggests the best way is to search for the literal versus and implied meaning. Similarly, Curtis (1990) constructed a framework for analyzing poetry by asking the following questions:-

- What sort of writing is shaped in front of me?
- Speak the poem to yourself.
- What patterns can I see in the poem?
- Discuss any ambiguities or paradoxes in the poem.
- Summarize responses to the poem.

Amalgamating the advice of Timpane and Curtis provides a reliable framework for analyzing the poems articulated above in this research note. Alternatively, Semino (1995) approaches the analysis of poetry from a practical theory of background knowledge and comprehension known as schema theory. Semino introduces liminal space or ‘poetic text worlds’ which offers a viable alternative to traditional analysis such as the possible-world models which have traditionally been applied to the description of fictional worlds. A poetic text world results from the application of certain portions of a reader's background knowledge (schemata) to the interpretation of texts. The reader's perception of a particular world depends on the extent to which their existing schemata are confirmed, or challenged during the process of interpretation. In the case of the poetry presented below, readers use their experience and/or knowledge of entrepreneurship as a frame of reference through which to decode and consume the poetry. This questions the need, to analyze and theorize if the words of the poems and the images and emotions they trigger help us better understand a lived experience, such as entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial failure, tragedy or the euphoria of success! Furthermore, Semino argues that poetics and poetry act as modes of ‘refreshment’ and ‘reinforcement’ of already formulated life schemas. Thus poetry is a powerful medium of expression offering alternatives to traditional entrenched entrepreneur stories. Poetry and expressive writing complement, or challenge, theories but are no substitute for theories themselves.

## **Unleashing the power of poetry**

Poetry as a presentational mechanism is powerful because to appreciate the power of poetry one has to read it aloud and listen to it, to the diction and the sequence of words used. Poetry requires space of its own and one has to experience the power of the emotions it unleashes, stanza by stanza. We now unleash the power of poetry by presenting selected poems written by entrepreneurs to express their feelings, or poems which exude entrepreneurial passion. Poetryboard one presents the ISBE poem.

**POETRYBOARD ONE**

***The ISBE Entrepreneur Poem***

By Jonathan Hick

Am I an entrepreneur  
How can you tell?  
There are some basic instincts  
Which I know rather well

You have lots of ideas  
You regularly spot a gap  
You see a product or market  
And think I can do better than that!

You have no fear of risk  
Down to your very last pound  
You'll pile everything you can borrow  
Into getting the idea off the ground

When it starts to go wrong  
(cos you'll never start fully right)  
You'll adapt and change direction  
Never with a thought of flight

When you run out of money  
You'll find a way to borrow more  
You won't pay Customs & Excise  
And whilst you shouldn't break the law

You'll stretch your creditor payments  
And collect cash as fast as you can  
Re the security of your family

Alas you're unlikely to give a damn

Because you know you cannot fail  
You think you can walk on water  
Even at 20 odd stone  
(You can ask my son and daughter)

And if (god forbid) you fail  
You never see it as such  
For failure is not an option  
You put it down to learning much

And when (god willing) you succeed  
You see it merely as a stepping stone  
As straight into the next idea  
Your energy and cash are thrown

Entrepreneurialism is not for the faint hearted  
It's a roller coaster ride  
But building something from scratch  
Is a source of massive pride

If you think it's inside you  
Then please give it a go  
For ultimately that's the only way  
That you will actually know

Whether you are Sir Alan Sugar  
Or a member of the Dragon's Den  
Or equally valiant on the T-shirt  
One of the "Had a Go" women or men

We all need to look  
For that first stepping stone  
It might start via work  
Or from something at home

If and when you find it  
Or know someone that does  
Please be truly positive  
For entrepreneurs need a buzz

Confidence can be brittle  
In the very early days  
And well-meaning doubting Thomas's  
Can stop Golden Eggs being laid

So there is a 10 o'clock challenge  
To all you members of ISBE  
To use your intellectual powers  
To create the next generation Frisbee...

Or Facebook....or GHD's....  
However you earn your spurs  
For one thing Britain needs  
Is more Entrepreneur Professeurs.

One can discern common themes which engage academic scholars of entrepreneurship such as instincts, ideas, adaptation, change, spotting gaps, hard-work, risk-taking, and success. On the negative side there is talk of excessive pride and hubris, failure, cunning, chicanery and sharp practice. The poem triggered a long buried memory of being inspired by the poem – “*Rationalists with Square Hats*” by Wallace Stephens, I had once heard in an entrepreneurship lecture. It was memorable because it signified the entrepreneurial spirit of creativity and also exemplifies aesthetics in action. The words appeal to my senses. Decoded it is a plea not to be stifled by rationalist convention but to express yourself creatively. In modern management parlance, it relates to thinking outside the box. To me it speaks volumes as a poetic metaphor for the entrepreneurial spirit with its ethos of playfulness<sup>5</sup>. See Poetryboard two for details:-

#### POETRYBOARD TWO

##### *Rationalists, wearing square hats*

[The last of the Six Significant Landscapes by Wallace Stevens]

*Rationalists, wearing square hats,  
Think, in square rooms,  
Looking at the floor,  
Looking at the ceiling.  
They confine themselves  
To right-angled triangles.  
If they tried rhomboids,  
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—  
As for example, the ellipse of the half-moon-Rationalists would wear sombreros.*

<sup>5</sup> The poem was also used by Price Waterhouse Management Consultants in an advertisement to recruit free thinking (entrepreneurial) individuals with an ability “to challenge orthodoxy” and “wear many different hats”. In the advert the poem is presented in juxtaposition with an academic ‘Mortar board’, a ‘Jesters cap’ and with the ‘Conical headgear’ commonly associated with wizards and magicians. As metaphors for creativity they are powerful images because wizards and clowns are ancient archetypal figures embedded in the human psyche and are common metaphors for entrepreneurs.

An anonymous entrepreneur poem is presented in Poetryboard three, below:-

### **POETRYBOARD THREE**

#### *Entrepreneur Poem*

Entrepreneur!

Dream!

To the change the world  
A positive vision for all  
Live your dreams every day  
Change will start heading your way

Dream

Share with your team of believers  
A single voice becomes a choir  
Empower individuals to live  
A decentralization of power will transpire

Dream

Take a chance on the world  
It may just take a chance on you  
Small every day changes make the day  
An economy and environment in harmony

Dream

Doors close, but others open  
Others just need constant knocking  
Cold call, introductions are the key  
Achievement is action and delivery

Succeed

Success, cash and social goals  
A world where you added soul  
The next visionaries are on their way  
Time to move over anyway.

Anon

(Dedicated to entrepreneurs and those dedicated to the pursuit of  
the American Dream).

This poem highlights action orientated themes associated with entrepreneurialism, such as change, vision, dreams, empowerment and success. It is akin to an inspirational behavioural script. The poem also illustrates how poetry can be a private passion which entrepreneurs engage in but wish to remain anonymous.

In an internet blog “*Zen Entrepreneur*” by Rizvan Virk, I encountered an entry entitled “*Poetry for Entrepreneurs: Love my start up More than You*”. Virk, an active entrepreneur and writer, wrote the poem in homage to Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. As a first time poet he opined that poetry is an ideal medium through which to express entrepreneurial ideas. For Virk, it “*is about love and hope and the life of an entrepreneur. It's about relationships and how they're put on hold sometimes in the early days of a startup*”. He wrote it because the sentiment came from watching married friends and entrepreneurs working too hard and leaving little time in their relationships for life and love. Virk based the poem on a WW1 army marching tune “*Cindy Cindy Cindy Lou, Love My Rifle More Than You*”. Using creative adaptation Virk changed Cindy Lou to be Cindy Lu, to honor the large Asian population in Silicon Valley. New uses for old material - is an entrepreneurial theme in itself. The poem shows the dark side of entrepreneurial success, the single-mindedness, the family tensions caused by absence and the obsessive compulsion of being an entrepreneur. See Poetryboard four:-

#### POETRYBOARD FOUR

*Love My Startup More Than You*  
By Rizwan Virk

Cindy Lu, Cindy Lu  
You know that my heart is true

But my Idea is very new  
And we'll make a million dollars  
If only I can prove  
That the market is true!

Cindy Lu Cindy Lu  
Soon I'll be home  
And put my arms around you  
....

But first  
I'm being shown  
Design specs I must review!

The beta downloads are a jumping  
But so are the bugs that need a thumping!

Please let me know  
When the baby is asleep  
Then I can show  
You how we'll avoid feature creep!

Towards you my sweetheart I'll always feel  
A never ending attraction  
But right now what I really need to show  
Is more customer traction!

Cindy Lu, Cindy Lu  
Don't look at me that way,  
You'll worry yourself blue!

Once we raise our series A  
Our mortgage will be easy to pay!

And if the company gets in a bind,  
My investors will help me find  
Some folks that are keen  
To assemble a management team  
And we'll be on our way  
To making lots of green!

So please don't think that I'm mean  
When I say:

Cindy Lu, Cindy Lu  
You know my heart is true,  
But just right now,  
I love my startup  
More than you!

Dennis (2006) in the poem "*How to get Rich*" distils entrepreneurial wisdom on how to be rich. See Poetryboard five below:-

## POETRYBOARD FIVE

### *How to Get Rich*

Felix Dennis

Good fortune? The fact is  
The more that you practise,  
The harder you sweat,  
The luckier you get.

Ideas? We've had 'em  
Since Eve deceived Adam,  
But take it from me  
Execution's the key.

The money? Just pester  
A likely investor.  
To get what you need  
You toady to greed.

The talent? Go sign it!  
But first, wine and dine it.  
It's tedious work  
With a talented jerk.

Good timing? To win it  
You gotta be in it.  
Just never be late  
To quit or cut bait.

Expansion? It's vanity!  
Profit is sanity.  
Overhead begs  
To walk on two legs.

The first step? Just do it  
And bluff your way thru' it.  
Remember to duck!  
God speed...  
and good luck!

Interest in entrepreneurial poetry is increasing as evidenced by the work of Slaney (2010) whose work “*sME: The poetry diary of an entrepreneur*”, presents her entrepreneurial

experience as a series of poems including “*Success*” which provides a warning to the ambitious and hubristic. The poem speaks volumes about leader-entrepreneur staff relations and should be pinned on to every notice office board to serve as a warning for the blindly ambitious. Slaney (2010) describes her poetry as “*a collection about my working life as an entrepreneur*”. The poems are a frank and critical appraisal of entrepreneurial life covering emotions seldom considered in academic writing. Slaney argues that the poems capture different changing moods and needs as well as brutal truths reflecting the reality of working life. For Slaney bearing one’s soul in writing is a risky business reflecting entrepreneurial risk taking. Her poetry helps her inject the two key entrepreneurial qualities of humour and irreverence into her reflections of business life.

See Poetryboard six:-

### **POETRYBOARD SIX**

#### *Success*

The unfurled tongue of his ambition  
    tripped him up at every turn  
It didn’t match his shirt or socks  
    just like a tie would,  
and he couldn’t ever seem to learn  
    to keep it tucked away  
Inside his pinstripes of performance,  
safe from colleagues’ naked and sharpened eyes.  
The luring ladder of advancement always  
    blew caution off in favour of the prize.  
So the steaming heap of peer resentment  
    Grew warmer daily, fuelled the fire.  
    Oblivious to all around him,  
he sailed on past his self-made pyre  
    (Next to the copier, fax and cooler,  
    around the corner from Accounts).  
    Cubicle innuendo stoked it hourly,  
in neatly measured, flammable amounts.  
Blinkered, he failed to spot the obvious:  
    no one liked him, no one cared,  
    no one offered him a coffee,  
    holiday toffees never shared.  
    Promotion all that mattered to him,  
the praise of corridors above his head  
made him stone to those around him –  
    all his staff who wished him dead.

In the above contexts, poetry acts as a scripted, sense-making heuristic device in the manner described by Gioia and Poole (1984). Thus poetry as an expressive medium; and as creative writing helps entrepreneurs such as Hick, Virk, Hengreaves, Omokara and Slaney express themselves and nurture the “*soul*” within their enterprise. These entrepreneurs are not alone as evidenced by this collection celebrating the poetry of entrepreneurs. According to Hengreaves (2008) poetry (like entrepreneurship) is a work of passion which encourages writing in different forms and styles and because poetry is so invigorating, it is not unusual to find a significant portion of business persons delving into poetry either as readers, writers or reviewers because poetry helps them maintain equilibrium in a challenging business environment. It makes perfect sense because it helps them articulate their feelings in their own words, not tired and borrowed “off-the-shelf” clichéd entrepreneur stories.

### **Making sense of entrepreneurship through poetry**

Entrepreneur and business poems are narrative forms close to storytelling (Richardson, 1997). Having presented and discussed the poems, it is time to address the first research question - *is poetry a legitimate linguistic medium for expressing entrepreneurial experiences?* Aesthetic analysis as a heuristic device aids our understanding of entrepreneurship and taking cognizance of the sensory, visual and aural elements it appears that poetry is a legitimate linguistic medium for expressing entrepreneurial experiences. In reading the poems one experiences a sense of selflessness and suspended reality. The poems provide a window into elements of creativity (with poetry as creative writing), and imagination. Both of these are used to create a mood in which an entrepreneurial identity is expressed and represented. Ultimately, the poems make sense (not nonsense) in that they express the realities of entrepreneurial experience making them an ideal medium for expressing entrepreneurial attitude.

This study makes a contribution to extant literature by considering the aesthetic dimension of poetry as a novel form of entrepreneur story. An understanding of aesthetics allows us to develop a taste for the material presented making it of importance, because aesthetics is knowledge gained through our senses in contrast to knowledge obtained through the mind. When talking of the senses we are primarily talking of sight, sound,

taste, smell and touch. Of the five senses, our knowledge of entrepreneurship is constructed primarily from sight and sound (what is spoken of entrepreneurs and what is written) thus we observe entrepreneurs and talk about them. The sense of sound (orality) plays a significant part in our appreciation of the entrepreneurial phenomenon. This study develops links with auditory and visual aspects of the entrepreneurship phenomenon. Also, because aesthetics relates to human appetites, the stimuli must be renewed and repetition impacts upon our perception of what we find aesthetically pleasing.

### **Conclusions, reflections, implications and limitations**

This study contributes to the literature of entrepreneurship because it inquires into the aesthetics of a creative, entrepreneurial genre capturing the fleeting, ephemeral qualities of drama and passion associated with poetry and creative writing; and also because it creates a bridge between the (a)theoretical and the practical. It is a scholarly exploration concerned with an examination of a relatively unexplored linguistic and semiotic domain of aesthetics and what it can contribute to the collective body of entrepreneurship theory. Poetry perhaps offers readers a “*practical atheoretical*” method of entrepreneurial learning to develop Rae’s (Rae, 2004) concept of the “*practical theory*” because poetry offers implicit, intuitive, tacit and situated insights into entrepreneurial practices and processes. One does not prove the veracity of a poem - it either resonates with one, or does not. Poetry offers a novel form of contextual learning in a social setting using social and constructivist processes (Rae, 2005). Poetry as an avenue for learning is socially situated (Hamilton, 2011) embedded in everyday practice in the context of the social life of the entrepreneur allowing unique access to practice based knowledge. The findings are not intended to be generalised, but to offer empirical insights that extend atheoretical frameworks in order to better understand the entrepreneurial phenomenon. Furthermore, it explores the aesthetic base through which entrepreneurial processes become established and intervene in society. Entrepreneurship as a practice is characterized by two main components, namely action and communication, characterized by the sprits of competitiveness and creativity (Smith, 2006). By immersing ourselves in the poems we come closer to entrepreneurial spirit by reading about entrepreneurial actions and experiences in the words of entrepreneurs themselves. Granted they are crafted and

carefully worded expressions of reality but the poems convey the power and passion of entrepreneurship. This discussion addresses the research question - *how can an appreciation of poetry help us better understand entrepreneurship per-se?*

On reflection entrepreneurship, like poetry, touches us in many ways because it is constructed from a plethora of subjective and aesthetic elements. It can be expressed as an art form, a style, an attitude, awareness, and an emotion. These aesthetic elements are not presented to us in black in white as represented in figures 1 and 2. Instead, we must experience them, feel them, live them and interpret and pass aesthetic judgment on whether they please us, or not. Because entrepreneurs as portrayed in Western societies are constructed via a heroic masculine aesthetic this may be determined by our gender - yet such poetry appears to appeal to both feminine and masculine senses. Traditional entrepreneur storylines (humble-beginnings and poor-boy-made-good-stories) are prime examples of such aesthetically pleasing stories. These inspirational elements are constructed to convey this authenticity and appeal to us collectively. Through aesthetics we experience the raw power within such stories. Some entrepreneur stories are more aesthetically pleasing than others e.g. overcoming hardship, poor-boy-made-good, and rags-to-riches stories instinctively appeal to men invoking an emotive response within them but may not appeal to women. Such (aes)themes seduce our senses because they appeal to a sense of what being a man and thus an entrepreneur is all about - similarly the aesthetic of "*doing-good*" triggers feelings of warmth. In the storied moment it is as if the reader becomes the entrepreneur. This heightened sensory perception is amplified in poetry and poetics. Thus through narrative forms one can engage in and enact with story. However, it is a socially conditioned response which may not trigger an identical response in others who may simply not 'buy into' the rhetoric, dogma and ideology of manhood implicit in such tales.

This exploration of aesthetics, and of aesthetic analysis, in relation to poetry is helpful because aesthetic analysis is even more obscure than semiotic analysis in published studies. Furthermore, the framework constructed provides a useful heuristic for understanding emotionality (Goleman, 1995) and the aesthetic power of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial narratives. Aesthetics provides an additional layer of meaning to the concept of entrepreneurship, beginning with the semantic and being carried forward into

the semiotic. This is so because - we first name it (semantics); recognize it (semiotics) and then experience it (aesthetics). The aesthetic element is deeply embedded within narrative processes such as stories and poems as lifelike representations of a reality that we can recognize, and which therefore appeals to us in an aesthetic way. In entrepreneur poems, we can engage in the emotive and this research demonstrates that entrepreneurship and poetry are under researched genres worthy of further exploration.

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