

## **ENGLISH: *THE OLD MAN WHO READ LOVE STORIES***

**The Old Man Who Read Love Stories emphasizes the importance of memory in shaping one's identity. Discuss.**

---

Rolf de Heer's *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* explores the identity of a man caught between two worlds. Collectively, it is the memories that Antonio Bolivar holds onto and reminisces about that help to shape the psyche of the man he is today. Drawing from the past, Antonio's values are shaped, his traits are fashioned and the loves and hates in his life are strengthened. Flashbacks help Antonio to see the error of his ways and help him to form decisions about the future. He is perhaps reliant on these memories in order to decide the paths in his life. Merely, de Heer shows that this unique character is transformed through the power of his memories.

Through recollection of the past, Antonio's values and morals are formed. Saved and invited to stay "as one of us" in the tribal community Antonio gains significant values and lessons from their leader Nushino. The significant values he acquires here help to shape his identity and love for the jungle. As Antonio looks back to these moments in his life, we see that these past experiences have changed Antonio to value the sacred jungle that lies before him. The memory of his failure to avenge Nushino's death by "capturing the courage" of the killer evidently shapes Antonio's decision to surrender his gun when on the hunt for the jaguar. Metaphorically, through this memory, Antonio perhaps lets go of western values to embrace those of the tribal world, those closer to his heart. His identity and love for the jungle is also shaped by significant memories that degrade white settlement. As he dwells on memories of the vulgar, violent settlers, Antonio comes to the conclusion that he "cannot tell the difference between a coward, a fool and a brave man". Thus Antonio begins to lose respect for the ignorant white men around him, and his values begin to fashion around his love of nature and harmony. These memories, whilst not always pleasant, help Antonio to form his values and sense of self between conflicting worlds.

Memories allow Antonio to see the error of his ways, helping him to make decisions that shape who he is. Scented and marked, ready to be killed by the jaguar, Antonio reminisces about his failure to avenge the death of his friend Nushino. "Violating death with the poison of pain" by using the gun, Antonio feels a sense of inner remorse for doing so. It is only through these memories that Antonio gains clarity on how he, in his own mind, can atone for his past and live harmoniously in the jungle, as he desires to. The mistake of using the gun to kill is not replicated as Antonio learns from the past. Thus Antonio shows that through this memory his identity has been formed into someone who shares a respect for the jungle. It is this memory that helps Antonio make decisions that impact who he is.

The intimate memories of Josefina that Antonio holds, help to strengthen their love, a love key to his identity. De Heer's use of a short flashback to Josefina stating how "a man who reads love stories is less of a fool than a man who beats his wife thinking she loves it" strengthens Antonio's sense of masculinity and demonstrates Josefina's impact on Antonio's character. Memories of their time together, help to strengthen their romantic connection and give Antonio hope of a new love beyond life in the tribe. Resting under the canoe in wait of the jaguar, Antonio reminisces on their more intimate moments. Memories of Josefina, a "thunderbolt", powerful and impossible to capture as Antonio describes, helps to relay the sense that these two people are deeply and romantically connected. Drifting frequently into such day dreams, de Heer perhaps intends to show that this intimacy is a new and future part of Antonio's life, central to the man he is in the present. Thus Antonio, holding onto memories of Josefina, is reminded of the new prospect of love in his life; love that shapes his identity.

Rolf de Heer consciously seeks to display the effects of memory on his protagonist Antonio Bolivar, and how it has shaped his sense of self. From the values and morals that Antonio holds close to his heart, to the great loves in his life, to the errors of his past; all are shaped by his past experiences and his tendency to dwell on them. Antonio, a man sincerely regretting the actions of his past, is

able to atone by gaining lessons from his memories. Thus, Antonio finds his identity shaped by the events of the past; his memories.