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## The Power Of Reminiscence In Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea*

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### **Abstract:**

Older people are more likely to stay sturdy by selectively concentrating on and remembering their past experiences. This can enhance their quality of life and emotional welfare. In *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, memory, reminiscence in particular, plays a crucial role. In the sea, Santiago, the protagonist of the novella, relies on memories to rise to the challenges he faces alone. This paper is a psychological reading of Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* in the light of Wong and Watt taxonomy of reminiscence. The taxonomy categorizes reminiscence into six types, some of them are associated with successful aging. Those types are: narrative, integrative, transmissive, escapist, instrumental, and obsessive, which the study attempts to identify throughout the narrative. The study also examines the function of each type along the novella according to Wong and Watt's classification, and how throughout the novella, Santiago's reminiscing about his past experiences, concentrating more on triumphs and successes, motivates him to resume his adventurous solitary journey.

**Keywords:** reminiscence; Santiago; Wong & Watt taxonomy; memory.

Aristotle aptly describes Reminiscing as what the aged live by; 'for what is left to them of life is but little as compared with the long past' (Book II - Chapter 13: Aristotle's Rhetoric, n.d.). According to the Greek philosopher Plato, knowledge originates in a hypothetical existence before birth, which is retrieved after birth through reminiscence (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). And Butler, a world-renowned psychiatrist, argues that positive review of the past 'may contribute to the development of wisdom, serenity and, to a great extent, maintenance of healthy psychological functioning' (Butler, 1981, p.349). Most psychological studies of reminiscence point to the heavy use of this activity by seniors, whose



tendency to use reminiscence excessively has encouraged scholars to try and identify different types of it. Many of these scholars have referred to two or three types of reminiscence, until Wong & Watt (1991) grouped these types together in their 'What types of reminiscence are associated with successful aging?'. Wong & Watt associated successful aging with certain types of the following six types of reminiscence: narrative, integrative, transmissive, escapist, instrumental, and obsessive. Each category is to be clarified as follows:

1. Narrative: involves the act of telling stories, which recount the past to people or to the audience for the purpose of gaining pleasure or amusement along with entertaining the listeners.
2. Integrative is what Butler (1981) refers to as life review that leads to successful aging only when the elderly reconcile with their past experiences, and accept them whether negative or positive they be.
3. Transmissive brings the past to life again through retellings in order to pass knowledge to younger generations.
4. Escapist is to daydream and fantasize about the past 'that may portray the past in an overly positive light while devaluing the present' (MED & Faan, 2002).
5. Instrumental utilizes the past experiences to resolve current problems.
6. Obsessive reminiscence is contemplating negative past experiences that the reminiscer regrets or feels ashamed of.

When viewed through psychological lens, reminiscence can be seen as a therapeutic aid for individuals to process their past experiences and emotions. By revisiting memories, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with their surroundings. Hence, the power of reminiscence lies in unraveling the complexities of human consciousness and the enduring impact of the past on the present. It also lies in bringing forth motivation, meaning, and solace in the face of hardship.

Ernest Hemingway's, "The Old Man and the Sea," is a literary masterpiece that delves into human nature and explores multiple themes. One such theme that emerges in the book is the concept of reminiscence. Throughout the novella, Hemingway expertly shows how reminiscence is crucial in shaping the thoughts, actions, and perceptions of the protagonist, the old fisherman Santiago. Battling against the obstacles of fate, Santiago relies on his memories to navigate his difficult journey in pursuit of a massive fish. While Hemingway vividly describes what is taking place in Santiago's



mind, he emphasizes the significance of memory in the face of misfortune and the power it possesses in shaping one's perspective on his risky adventure into the sea. Santiago's experience in "The Old Man and the Sea" encompasses more than just a physical journey, it's also a mental and emotional one. It is apparent throughout the novella that Santiago's memories act as a motivating and inspiring force for him. The memories he holds serve as a link to the past and a reminder of his previous triumphs and success.

In his novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway has perhaps intentionally chosen an old man to be the hero of his book, because an old man may have a vast number of memories to evoke during a solo expedition. Memories have become the oars he used to row towards his goal; catching a massive fish, and the invaluable tool that enabled him to persevere and find success in his solitary journey. Santiago's reminiscing about his past experiences along the novella proves the great role of this activity in shaping Santiago's identity, actions, and relationship with the natural world, and its power in providing solace, motivation, and meaning in the face of misfortune.

It is evident that the aged Santiago and young boy Manolin have a great bond despite the age difference. Through sharing experiences on the sea, the two form a bond as they navigate the treacherous waters of the Gulf together. The old man began teaching the boy fishing at the age of five, and the boy believes that it is Santiago who teaches him valuable lessons about fishing, patience, and the value of perseverance when facing defeat 'there is much that I can learn and you can teach me everything' (62). Manolin always asks for more, always demands more knowledge from the old man; 'tell me about the baseball.' (10), 'Tell me about the great John J. McGraw' (11). And the old man is more than happy to share his experience and memories with Manolin, and he is glad knowing that the boy cares about them; '"Can you really remember that or did I just tell it to you?" "I remember everything from when we first went together." The old man looked at him with his sun-burned, confident loving eyes' (5). The boy sees in Santiago the true father figure, and he prefers to accompany him and spend time with him more than his own father. Santiago on the other hand does not see the boy as his son, rather he sees his younger self in Manolin (Tanner, 1964).

Known for his brevity, emotional depth, and simplicity, Hemingway, is often hailed for his distinctive writing style. There are many fascinating writing techniques used by Hemingway in his works, one of which is the



"iceberg technique", also known as the theory of omission. The term "Iceberg" is derived from the idea that Hemingway's writing is analogous to an iceberg, with the larger part of its substance lying below the surface. The technique aims at conveying deeper meanings by deliberately omitting essential details. Instead, he provides seemingly simple narratives that carry subtle emotional and thematic depth beneath the surface, relying more on the reader's ability to understand the underlying meanings and emotions:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway as cited in Goodheart, 2010, 58)

As part of Hemingway's iceberg technique in *The Old Man and the Sea*, the act of telling stories told by Santiago to Manolin is implied. Readers may deduce that Santiago has imparted a lot of stories from his past to Manolin, which has helped him reflect on his life journey and find meaning in his past experiences: "When I was your age I was before the mast on a square-rigged ship that ran to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evening." "I know. You told me." (10), and it appears that Manolin has been enjoying listening to those stories. The relationship between the boy and the old man has stood the test of time, as the boy refuses to leave Santiago even when everybody thinks he is 'salao'; the worst kind of unlucky. The stories of Santiago told to Manolin might be classified as narrative as well as transmissive reminiscence, which shows that Santiago is proud of his past that he doesn't want his 'many tricks and ... resolution' (11) to die with him, therefore he wishes Manolin to be the heir of his legacy.

To Santiago, sea is life. In Santiago's eyes, the sea is not simply a backdrop, he sees it as being more than just a backdrop; it is a living entity that he cherishes and reveres. It is the sea, which supplies him with fish to catch and sell, and enables him to earn a living and support himself. They are both the central characters of the novella, whom Hemingway unites in the title. Santiago has spent his entire life as a fisherman, who relies on the sea for survival and sustenance. However, unlike other fishermen, Santiago doesn't build his relationship with the sea on material advantage. The sea is the childhood, boyhood, and youth of old Santiago which is reflected in his eyes. Most of his past experiences are embraced by the sea. Santiago's integrative reminiscences throughout his journey uncover the strong bond between him,



the sea and its creatures. Furthermore, Santiago's past experiences with the sea and its creatures have successfully turned a profession into affection and respect. The flying fish are his brothers, the marlin itself is his brother, which he loves and respects. He talks to birds and feels sorry for them being delicate, which makes their life hard in the sea. Even the stars are also his brothers. He loves green turtles and has 'a friendly contempt for the huge, stupid loggerheads' (18). He knew all of them very well, and has a strong attachment to them. Even though Santiago is a fisherman, he shows concern for the sea and its creatures of an individual towards his family rather than an unsympathetic predator towards prey like his fellow fishermen.

Santiago's most significant connection is with the giant marlin he captures during the course of his journey. After going eighty-four days without catching a fish, Santiago endures a lengthy and exhausting battle with the giant Marlin. Santiago's obsessive reminiscences carry feelings of guilt and regret, which are evident as he reflects on past and present killings as sin, 'You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman' (51). The sea to Santiago is a mother, a life-giver, therefore, he refers to it with the feminine name 'La mar', different from other fishermen, who use the masculine name 'El mar'. To them the sea is a contestant and fish is prey, to Santiago fish is a rival with an equal chance to prevail in a fight, thereupon he often acknowledges his difference from other fishermen, when calling himself 'a strange old man', and shows respect for the marlin and calls it 'brother'. The Marlin for Santiago is seen as a majestic and powerful entity, a formidable challenger for him in his ultimate display of strength and resilience. He never hesitates in expressing his deep admiration for it. He also acknowledges the Marlin's majestic qualities and recognizes its right to exist as a magnificent sea creature. The memory of killing a female marlin in the past is associated with feelings of guilt, shame, and sadness. His admiration for the creature has taught him to focus on its behavior that has helped him acquire skill at discerning between males and females. Encountering a pair of Marlin in the past has shown Santiago how the male fish shows love and protection for the female, how it 'always let the female fish feed first' (24), and how it stays near the female till the end, which has deepened Santiago's admiration for this creature. Nevertheless, those obsessive reminiscences develop into integrative ones as Santiago reconcile to his actions and accept his pursuit



that ends his recurrent self-debate over the killing of such magnificent being; 'He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it' (29).

Consciously or subconsciously, dreaming of lions on the beaches of Africa boost Santiago's valor. Whenever he faces a highly critical situation, his thoughts often drift towards this childhood memory. Whether awake or asleep, he saw them and felt the pleasure of their frequent presence in his mind. Those fantasies function as a mechanism for Santiago to detach himself from the harshness of his current situation, granting him a sense of relief and solace. The scene of the lions playing on the beach is made a motif in the novella, as Santiago's mental and emotional well-being is heavily influenced by the presence of those escapist reminiscences. Amidst his struggle with physical weakness and exhaustion, Santiago leans on those recollections to provide himself with temporary relief from high emotional stress to the point that he sensed they were the 'the main thing that is left?' (p.32). Through the power of those reminiscences, Santiago is able to transcend his physical limitations and find positivity, Therefore, they occur to him both on land and in the sea, in bed and on boat. Bloom (2008) interprets Santiago's dreams as his retreat into a more ideal world, where he leaves all his troubles behind:

Santiago has wondered, and we may wonder too. Perhaps his dream of innocent predators, allied with the boy and the continuity of life, carries him to a Peaceable Kingdom, an Eden unspoiled by sin where men no longer need to "live on the sea and kill our true brothers" (75), to a place where viewing nature as a contestant or an enemy is no longer possible, and love alone remains. (174)

The question that arises is why Santiago finds solace in such reminisces. In literature, lions are recognized as complex symbols that represent a range of meanings, for they not only symbolize courage and wisdom, but they exhibit a dual nature of both guardian and predator, something that Santiago possesses subconsciously; without awareness. They represent peace, which he seeks in order to take a break from the violence and brutality of his fights. Those dreams provide Santiago with the escape from the violence which he can no longer tolerate. This is proven through the fact that he used to dream of storms, women, great occurrences, great fish, fights, contests of strength, and his wife, but he quit dreaming of these, and only dreamed of the lions on the beach, that led him to find pleasure and relief.



Furthermore, lions are employed as a representation of Santiago's deep affection for nature and the natural world. Like a lion guarding its territory with reverence, Santiago displays a deep respect for the sea and its inhabitants throughout the novella.

In the midst of his battle to capture the enormous fish, Santiago recalls his youth, where he witnesses lions playing along the shores of Africa. It is evident that he instrumentalizes those memories not only to break free the severity of the situation but also to feed his determination and give him strength. Moreover, he relies on them to help him keep going in his fight against the Marlin for as long as he could. Hence, those dreams can be viewed as both escapism as well as instrumental reminiscences. Another incident where Santiago utilizes his past memories to withstand his troubled present is his hand game with the negro of Cienfuegos. His left-hand cramp, which happened while he was struggling to manage the marlin's resistance, has brought this incident back to his memory. Santiago cherishes this memory, because it reminds him that once he was referred to as 'El Campeón' or the champion instead of 'Salao', the worst kind of unlucky. Santiago arm-wrestled this man who is known as the strongest man on the docks. The game has involved grabbing each other's hands and trying to force them onto the table. Due to the intensity of the game, it lasted a full day and night that the opponents had to change referees every four hours. The battle was so intense that blood seeped from beneath their fingernails. Bettors fed the negro rum and lit cigarettes for him. With each pour of rum, the negro would make a great effort, but Santiago would remain steady. The match ends with Santiago defeating the negro when everyone is expecting a draw. Eventually, Santiago earns the title of The Champion, and a rematch was organized for the spring. Due to his early victory over the negro, Santiago wins easily despite the small amount of money involved. Many matches follow, and Santiago triumphs in all of them, later he decides 'that he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough' (34) Those memories serve as the calls of motivation during Santiago's fierce battle with the mighty fish. As he once struggled against a formidable opponent, Santiago now fights with a mighty fish, exhibiting absolute determination in both contests. Thus, the memory of the hand game victory undermines the hand cramp which Santiago battles with internally, and fuels his determination to conquer the mighty creature and emerge triumphant once again.



## Conclusion:

When old, Man relies on the stick for physical support while his memories provide him with emotional support. Reminiscing about past triumphs and successes offers support in times of solitude and hopelessness. It has been determined by a number of psychologists that reminiscing has numerous forms. Some of these forms have been collected by the experts Wong and Watt who on their part divide them into six distinct categories, some of which they have associated with successful aging. However, In Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, all of these types of reminiscing can be deduced throughout the narrative. They are essential in molding the protagonist's, Santiago, resilience and resolve along his journey. They represent his power, which shines through when he is faced with vulnerability. Santiago resorts to memories and dreams as a motivation to keep fighting or as a haven to escape to during physical or emotional weakness. Furthermore, he turned them into narratives he passed on to his apprentice to make sure his skills as a fisherman would live after him. He derives strength from his memories, using them as a guiding light to reinforce his belief in conquering obstacles.

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## قوة الذكرى في رواية ارنست همنغواي (الشيخ والبحر)

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### مستخلص البحث:

من الأرجح ان يحافظ كبار السن على قوتهم من خلال التركيز على ذكريات الماضي بصورة انتقائية مما يعزز جودة حياتهم وسعادتهم عاطفياً. تلعب الذكرى في رواية الكاتب ارنست همنغواي (الشيخ والبحر) دوراً مهماً. يعتمد بطل الرواية سننجاغو على الذكريات للتصدي للتحديات التي يواجهها وهو وحيد في البحر. تعتبر هذه الورقة البحثية قراءة سيكولوجية لرواية ارنست همنغواي (الشيخ والبحر) في ضوء تصنيف وونغ ووات للذكريات. يقسم التصنيف الذكريات الى ست أنواع وهي: قصصي واندماجي وانتقالي والتهرابي والوسيلي والاستحوادي. ويتناول البحث مهمة كل من هذه الأنواع على طول الرواية طبقاً لتصنيف وونغ ووات وكيف ان استعادة سننجاغو لذكرياته الماضية على طول الرواية مركزاً بقدر أكبر على انتصاراته ونجاحاته، يحفز على استئناف رحلته الانفرادية المليئة بالمغامرات.

الكلمات المفتاحية : الذكريات؛ سننجاغو؛ تصنيف وونغ ووات؛ الذكرى.