

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“The Old Man Who Read Love Stories”

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CONTENTS

AUTHOR NOTES.....	4
HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....	5
GENRE.....	6
Audience	6
STRUCTURE.....	7
STYLE.....	8
Orientation	8
Symbol	8
SETTING.....	12
PLOT SUMMARY.....	13
CHARACTER PROFILES.....	24
THEMES AND ISSUES	28
Alienation as a form of self protection.....	28
Man v Nature	29
The Feminine Maternal.....	30
IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS	31
SAMPLE ESSAY TOPICS	34
FINAL EXAMINATION ADVICE.....	35
REFERENCES	37
References Used.....	37
References for Students	37

****Note:** Often in these notes, humanity is referred to as ‘man’. Whilst I recognise that this is not gender neutral language and therefore not politically correct in the modern context, I have deliberately used this as it is central to understanding the subtext of the film.

AUTHOR NOTES

***For the purposes of this guide, the 'author' is the director, Rolf de Heer.*

Rolf de Heer was born in Heemskerk, Holland in 1951 before migrating to Australia with his family when he was eight years old. At 18, he spent seven years working at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) until he decided to make his own programs rather than dealing with other peoples. In 1977, he gained entry to the prestigious Australian 'Film Television and Radio School' completing the three year course with Diplomas in Production and Directing.

Over almost two decades of writing, producing and directing feature films, he has become one of Australia's leading film-makers. His films consistently challenge moral conventions and push the boundaries of society. One of his more controversial films includes "Bad Boy Bubby" (1993) which chronicles the life of a child-man seeing the world for the first time, winning, among a plethora of other awards, four Australian Film Institute Awards and the International Film Critics Prize at the Venice Film Festival.

In 1999, de Heer spent three months in the jungles of French Guyana, filming "The Old Man Who Read Love Stories". The film won the Audience Award for Most Popular Film at the International Film Festival 2003, the President's Award for Artistic Vision and Execution at the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival in 2001 and the Special Jury Prize for Best Feature Film at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. Additionally, the film was selected for screening at both the Melbourne and Brisbane International Film Festivals in 2001. In 2003, de Heer received international recognition and acclaim for his film 'Ten Canoes', working with the Ramingining Community in Arnhem Land.

Other films by de Heer include:

- 'Tail of a Tiger' (1984)
- 'Incident at Raven's Gate' (1987)
- 'Epsilon' (1995)
- 'The Quiet Room' (1995/6)
- 'Dance To My Song' (1997)
- 'The Sound of One Hand Clapping' (1998)
- 'The Tracker' (2002)
- 'Alexandra's Project' (2003)
- 'Ten Canoes' (2006)
- 'Dr Plonk' (2007)

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Whilst as the audience, we are not given a specific period of time, there are several clues in the film to suggest that it is set in the early twentieth century. Antonio and Delores' wedding photograph, one of the few reminders of Antonio's former life, indicates this time period. The pair look staid, which is typical of wedding portraits of this time, when weddings were viewed as a formality rather than a grandiose celebration of love. We are also told that Antonio and Delores were sent to this remote part of the jungle in an effort to colonise it. Such an idea is consistent with late Victorian ideals of superiority as men, primarily, were sent to conquer new lands, sometimes, as in Antonio's case, with their new wife in tow. Further evidence for this time period is the significant lack of Anglo/European characters in the film. This accentuates the feeling of isolation in the film, but also suggests that colonisation of this area has not been successful, for a variety of reasons. One of the few 'outsiders' in the film is the itinerant dentist Rubicondo, portrayed as a man with questionable medical skills, but with a weakness for the attention of women. Additionally, the props used to tell the story are consistent with this time period: enamel kitchen implements, kerosene lamps and primitive firearms. This time period is characterised more by an Edwardian world view than at any other time in history, certainly one where environmental awareness and protection was not at the forefront of people's minds. It was a time when the world was seen to be available for exploitation and control, rather than to be managed and respected. The short story by Chilean writer Luis Sepulveda, "Un Viejo que leía novellas de amor", upon which this film is based, was written in 1989. The subtext of this story was derived from the need to nurture respect for the Amazonian jungle environment. In fact, the release of the novella coincided with the establishment of goals on ecological sustainability. "The Boston Review" notes that 'harmony with nature...is the novel's recurrent theme'. The story also demonstrates that deforestation is madness and the victims are not just the people, flora and fauna of the Amazon, but also man's humanity. Certainly, there is an air of dysphoria regarding the boorish, white man's egregious rape of the rainforest in both the book and the film. The historical context of the film is set in a time, almost a century after it occurs, when humanity, more than ever, is aware of the detrimental effect of their actions on the environment. In the early twenty-first century, we understand the devastating effects of humanity's desire to conquer the environment at any cost. This film uses metaphor and analogy to reflect upon 'man's' (sic) relationship with nature, through space and time.