

# Fragrance of the Past: An Exploration of the Aesthetics of Olfaction and Olfactory Autobiographical Recall in Erica Bauermeister's *The Scent Keeper*

## عبير الماضي: استكشاف جماليات الشم وتذكر السيرة الذاتية في *The Scent Keeper* للمؤلفة إريكا بورميستر

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### Abstract:

The present article addresses the relationship between smell and emotive autobiographical recall in Erica Bauermeister's *The Scent Keeper*. Relying on an interdisciplinary backdrop that gathers perspectives from anthropology, neuroscience, psychology, and criticism, the article aims to negotiate the importance of the long-ignored sense of smell to place it front and centre as a pivotal sensory source that enriches events in the narrative. In addition, it strives to examine the resurrection of childhood memories through familiar aromas and how these fragrance-cued autobiographical instances influence the protagonists' emotional affect, mood, and behaviour. The findings of this research have shown that scents are able to conjure vivid childhood recollections which are emotive and immersive. Accordingly, olfaction can be interpreted as an alternative sensory modality to sight and hearing which can ultimately affect personal experiences in the narrative.

**Keywords:** olfaction; smell; memory; autobiographical recall.

### ملخص البحث:

تتناول هذه المقالة العلاقة بين الرائحة وذكريات الطفولة المليئة بالمشاعر للكاتبة إريكا بورميستر *The Scent Keeper*. بالاعتماد على خلفية متعددة التخصصات تجمع وجهات نظر من الأنثروبولوجيا وعلم الأعصاب وعلم النفس والنقد، تهدف المقالة إلى مناقشة أهمية حاسة الشم التي تم تجاهلها منذ فترة طويلة ووضعها في المقدمة والوسط كمصدر حسي محوري تؤثر الأحداث في العالم. رواية. فضلاً عن ذلك، تسعى المقالة جاهدة لفحص اليات استحضار ذكريات الطفولة من خلال الروائح المألوفة والطريقة التي تؤثر بها هاته الذكريات الناتجة عن استنشاق عطور مألوفة على مشاعر، مزاج، وسلوك البطلة. أظهرت نتائج هذا البحث أن الروائح قادرة على استحضار ذكريات عاطفية وغامرة من الطفولة. وفقاً لذلك، يمكن تفسير الشم على أنه طريقة حسية بديلة للبصر والسمع والتي يمكن أن تؤثر في النهاية على التجارب الشخصية في الرواية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الشم؛ حاسة الشم؛ الذاكرة؛ استدعاء السيرة الذاتية.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Empirical research indicates that there is a strong connection between olfaction and affect, and numerous studies have been conducted to comprehend the relationship between odours and autobiographical recall as well as their impact on individuals. The present research strives to address the aesthetics of olfaction and the nature of scent-cued memories in *The Scent Keeper* by Erica Bauermeister (2019). The narrative under study is a coming-of-age novel fused with magical realism elements. It depicts, skillfully, the evocative influence of scents and fragrances on its protagonist named Emmeline. The latter, in the first part of her life, lives in what she considers a fairy tale, surrounded by scents which are interwoven in each layer of the story. The narrative portrays Emmeline's fascination with the scent bottles that engulfed memories which "held entire worlds," (Bauermeister, 2019, p. 11) and recounts how she "wanted to dive into those worlds" (p. 11). The scent papers, preserved in the bottles, were created by her father's machine the *Nightingale* for his company Scentography. *Nightingale*, which was described in newspapers as "the Polaroid camera for smells," (p. 141) proposed to capture and recreate past scents that will later be remembered and cherished by customers. However, this revolutionary machine that bottled memories up, failed to preserve the smells which led to public outrage that drove the company to bankruptcy. Unable to face the outcome, John Hartfell, Emmeline's father, left his company and his wife and took away his only daughter to seek refuge in a remote island. It will later be divulged that John escaped to carry on his tests on the machine.

Equally, and after several trials on the island, the machine did not succeed in reviving the scents and the recognition of this failure led Emmeline's father to despair and depression. An instance of paramount significance occurs when John burns a red-sealed scent paper. This instance calls for a reflection on the original meaning of the word perfume. The latter is derived from the Latin word *per fumus* which means *through smoke* and the practice to burn incense dates back to ancient civilizations mainly Mesopotamia, Egypt and China. Burning incense and aromatic herbs was a religious practice that relied on the volatile fragrances released by the columns of incense to rise to the gods. This premise is acknowledged by the author, who through John expresses that: "Some of the first fragrances men ever created were made to burn... 'Per Fumare-through the smoke. It was a way to the gods. I wanted to send them home'" (p. 36). This tribute highlights the emotional link between scents and Emmeline's father. Unfortunately, this ritualistic experience begot a negative moment of realisation about the scent's fleeting effects that lingered only for brief instances. Emmeline notes that her father changed after that incident: "He'd always been fascinated by the bottles, but the loss of that scent-paper shifted something in him" (p. 321). Shortly after this scene, the story unfolds a series of discoveries that led Emmeline to discover that her life on the

island was imbued with lies. All the gifts delivered by the mermaids and all the stories told by her father were tailored to distance her from the world and allowed him to undergo his tests on the machine peacefully. At last, she decides to destroy the scent papers, and as she proceeds to throw the scent bottles from the bluff, she is interrupted by her father who dove after his bottle to meet his doom.

The next chapter depicts Emmeline departure from the island to join the Cove. This new adventure exhibited her struggles with social interactions which were alleviated by her encounter with Henry, Colette and Fisher. Each character contributed to her growth and development. Chapter three moves Emmeline to the city to look for Fisher and her mother. This latter is described as a renowned olfactory expert who passed her superb genes to her daughter. Victoria Wingate, a profit driven scent master, who provides Emmeline with the opportunity “to train to be a nose,” (p. 241) and the necessary atmosphere to re-discover her skills as a source of success and pride. On this note, Emmeline confesses: “Victoria’s offer sparkled in front of me like light on water. I could do something, be somebody” (p. 240). The story proceeds by depicting multiple developments shaped by Emmeline’s olfactory abilities. The story end is entrenched in scents and fragrances of childhood flashbacks and unfolded secrets of a protective father and a pragmatic mother. The closure celebrates the potency of odours to evoke rich memories, create significant moments of nostalgia and reminiscence and shape personal bonds.

Notably, the present article is an endeavour to negotiate the relevance of the long-neglected sense of smell in the literary canon and a validation of what has been considered as a ‘lesser sense’ by many Western intellectuals. The research proposes an interdisciplinary approach that gathers perceptions from anthropology, neuroscience, psychology and criticism to argue that odours and fragrances are emotive and a powerful stimulus for the memory which are able to conjure rich and vivid childhood recollections. The findings of this paper support the claim that scents are a more potent sensory incentive when compared with other sensory cues. Equally, the paper projects findings from neuroscience and psychology onto the narrative to expound on the interrelationship between olfaction, memory and emotions. It relies on close reading to highlight scenes of significance within the story in order to address the power of scents. The adopted approach is challenging due to the segregation between science and literature embedded in modern scholarship. However, the research moves beyond the conflict between fact and fiction, sense and sensibility and endeavours to cultivate the assumption that science and literature are entrenched in the general culture of our world since, as Brigitt Flohr puts in her article “The Relationship between Literature and Science,” both are “human activities and human construction” (2004, pp. 1-2). Following this line of thought, Bauermeister weaves the threads of her story by blurring two distinct realms thus celebrating the tradition of scientific writers who were inspired by literature and science

respectively, and demonstrating her support of the view that knowledge about the human brain in literature can complement facts about the brain found in cognitive and psychological studies.

It is paramount to admit that the empirical nature of the topic was challenging considering the fact that meaningful input has always emanated from visual or auditory stimuli which has deepened olfactory anosmia in the field of science and literature. More importantly, it is significant for the study to acknowledge the paucity of research on the link between olfaction, emotion, and memories which prompted the researcher to tread carefully when addressing scenes of relevance. On a similar note, the selected case study has not received any attention from academia and the present work is the first attempt to address it critically. Since sparse critical research has been carried out on the topic, the present paper offers a valuable contribution to researchers interested in olfaction, olfactory memory and their dimensions.

### **1. Olfaction, Memory, and Emotions**

In discussing the relationship between scents and emotional recall, three main concepts need to be addressed: olfaction, emotions, and memory. In simpler terms olfaction refers to the physiological sense of smell which results from the detection and perception of chemicals aerosolized in the air. It is the “function whereby odors are perceived” (Soudry et al., 2011, p. 18). Olfaction is a vitally important sensory ability for the recognition of chemical signals in the environment for both humans and animals. It influences behaviour, mood, well-being, risk assessment, interpersonal relationships, food perception, and memory (Sorokowski et al., 2019; Nielsen et al., 2015; Ehrlichman & Bastone, 1992) and “these effects are often said to reflect the dependence of olfaction on parts of the brain involved in emotional experience” (Ehrlichman & Bastone, 1992, p. 410). Emotions are hard to pin down, however, they can be described as psychological and physiological responses to an experience which influence one’s behaviour. Memory refers to one’s ability to preserve and retrieve past events in the present. It can be divided into explicit and implicit memory. The interest is in the former which refers to the conscious retrieval of knowledge and experiences. According to the renowned psychologist Endel Tulving, explicit memory is further divided into two categories: semantic and episodic. The former refers to the remembering of general knowledge and facts and is considered as a “mental thesaurus” (Tulving, 1972, p. 386) that provides “the memory necessary for the use of language” (p. 386), whereas the latter engulfs the memories for “temporally dated episodes or events, and the temporal-spatial relations” among them (Tulving, 1972, p. 385; Greenberg & Verfaellie, 2010, p. 1). Olfaction, emotions, and memory intersect at the epithelium; which is the nucleus of the olfactory system that contains the olfactory receptor neuron. When an odorant molecule is released in the air and reaches the olfactory receptors, it is conducted to the olfactory bulb which

is connected to the amygdala related to the processing of memory, and the hippocampus which is linked to emotions. This physiological connection illustrates odour's remarkable ability to evoke highly emotional memories (Chu & Downes, 2000, p. 111; Herz, 2016, p. 2).

#### 4. Olfactory Experiences in *The Scent Keeper*: Instances and Relevance

A primary textual interpretation of *The Scent Keeper* divulges a strong defiance of Western social and cultural thoughts that depreciate smell at the expense of sight and hearing. The author, throughout the narrative used the term smell and its variations 291 times to create olfactory instances that enrich experiences and contribute to perception. Scents in the story, whether fleeting in the air or preserved in the scent papers, are valuable assets that Emmeline believes to be magical and which are able to tell stories. In this regard, she notes: "they told you their own stories, letting you know when the tide was low or the oatmeal was done cooking of the apple trees were getting ready to bloom" (p. 13). Hence, smells in the story generated truths and were trustworthy because, as Emmeline's father's stresses: "*People lie, Emmeline, but smells never do*" (p. 69). What is paramount to consider in Emmeline's statement is the premise that smells are means to recognize and predict changes. Interestingly, Emmeline's nose and sense of smell modulate her life and help her make sense of the world around her. She confesses about how she relies on her olfactory ability more than her vision as she contends in this quote: "I used my nose instead of my eyes" (p. 109). This statement, although seems provocative especially for humans who tend to appraise sight and hearing as sole mediums for meaningful input, sheds light on a focal aspect in human perception: in the lack of sight the nose is primal.

Emmeline's olfactory abilities allow her to locate people or objects. On this topic, it has been believed that there exists a strong link between smell and navigation and many reports detailed how the human nose aided navigation throughout history (Jacobs, 2019, p. 4). In the narrative, Bauermeister explores this claim and goes beyond theories to illustrate how Emmeline's nose serves as a medium for wayfinding. In this regard, Emmeline recounts how she reached Fisher's home by following an olfactory marker: "*Keep going, Emmeline, I told myself. Go find Fisher... follow your nose... I inhaled... that was when I smelled the Alderwood smoke. The scent was coming from my left, so I turned in that direction... I was in the right place*" (pp. 143-144). This remarkable ability is considerably effective, and Emmeline's advanced nasal skills enabled her to locate for instance the presence of an item even when blindfolded. She describes: "Eyes still closed... the smell was clear as beacon... I lowered my hand, searching. There" (p. 28). In addition, she could track violets before everyone else knew they had bloomed. The story tells: "On the first day of spring, I thought. Colette had brought in a cake one evening after dinner. There had been candles... I hadn't had the heart to tell her that



Dodge and I had followed our noses to the edge of the woods and found violets two days before” (p.103). These experiences of sniffing and tracking scents are inspired from two experimental trials detailed in Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience Lucia Jacobs’s article “The Navigational Nose”. In one study, humans were able to pursue successfully an olfactory stimulus (2019, p. 4) and in another one they were equally able to accurately map a random location in a room by relying on odor gradients (p. 4). However, one challenging fact arises: despite the evidence that humans have notable olfactory abilities and can distinguish between a plethora of scents and even follow scent trails (McGann, 2017, p. 1), their physiological aptitude “to orient to odors is not as highly developed as that of olfactory specialists, such as the domestic dog” (Jacobs, 2019, p. 4). A confession on this note is voiced by the author, who through Emmeline, describes how her dog’s alertness to scents around them translated and forecast changes. She explains: “Over the following days, Dodge became my translator of the world outside the house. Through his nose, it became safer, and soon I found myself wanting to inhale the air around me as he did, as something pure and alive and full of messages” (p. 82). This situation does not devalue humans’ sense of smell, but on the contrary, it celebrates the animalistic ties between humans and animals and establishes the thought that the nose is a primitive sense that was vital for foraging, hunting, and mating which all denote survival and continuity.

The above statement made by Emmeline calls for a consideration of the role of smell in guaranteeing survival. The analysis will focus on survival through foraging and risk assessment. The author chose to divide the location of her plot onto three settings: The Island, the Cove and the City. In the first, Emmeline’s life and existence relied primarily on her nose. Throughout her life in the isolated island, her insular lifestyle was depicted as primitive and animalistic and dependent heavily on her sense of smell. The latter, from an evolutionary point of view, has been described as the oldest sense and the most primitive one (Massri et al., 2022, p. 2). Since the sense of smell is less considered because of these traits, many authors choose to avoid highlighting these ties. However, Bauermeister does not shy away from the animalistic olfactory instincts of humans and refers to primitive behaviours like foraging and risk assessment (Nielsen et al., 2015, p.1) to demonstrate how the sense smell is an essential element in human survival. The following quote is an excellent example of this statement: “We spent much of our days outside. We raised chickens for eggs and tended the fruit trees and the vegetable garden. Even so, the majority of our food was gathered from the untamed portions of our island. I cannot remember a time when I was not a part of this process, and by the age of eight, I considered myself an essential, if not quite equal, partner in our survival” (p. 12). It is worth noting that foraging for food and collection of wood has enabled Emmeline to survive after her escape with Fisher from the Cove.

A primary role played by smell in *The Scent Keeper* is embodied in the detection of

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risk and the avoidance of danger. In the story, Emmeline perceived Martin, Fisher's father, as a dangerous individual. She describes his smell as "sharp and yellow," (p.86) with a stench of gasoline (p.86). In addition, she notes how the smell of bitterness as in "burnt coffee" (p. 133) trailed in the air after him. Globally, the colour yellow denotes danger and therefore it calls for vigilance to avoid the risks entailed. In the story, Emmeline expresses the conditions and impact of her encounters with Martin in the following quote: "I smelled the gasoline odor before Martin arrived and sprinted to my bedroom, where I stood in my doorway, listening... I pulled my head back out of sight" (p. 122). On the relevance of smell in survival, it is commonly known that this sense is a key to survival. The nose is able to detect and signal threats or safety. Equally, smell triggers subconscious reactions that result in fight, flight or stay (Pálsdóttir et al., 2021, p. 2). The sensation of fear triggered by the scent of a 'predator' triggers a bevy of behavioral responses (increased heart rate, blood flow, release of adrenaline) which amplify energy flow necessary to escape (Kadohisa, 2013, p. 1). Thus, and following the above statements, it is apparent that the nose channeled input about the outside world to the human brain which affected humour and behaviour thus making olfaction a more diverse sensory experience that goes beyond ample expectations.

After a dinner at Fisher's house, Martin's abusive nature was revealed to Emmeline. Consequently, she felt the need to save Fisher and thought of escaping back to her island. They agreed to a plan and took some amenities and left that night. However, both lads anticipated that they would be followed by Henry and Martin. Although Henry posed no threat, Emmeline knew that Martin is dangerous thus they must hide from him. She explains how their first night was filled with fear and anticipation: "we went and hid within earshot of the clearing, crouching in the underbrush. My nose scanned the air, searching for a scent of gasoline, while our ears strained for the sound of a motor" (p. 165). Another excellent statement is found in this quote that describes Emmeline's alertness and the fear she had felt when she sensed the approach of a boat: "It was the smell that pulled me back-diesel... I rose to my feet, feeling the shake in my muscles, scanning the water in front of me" (p. 176). According to the above statements, it becomes palpable that the human nose and the sense of smell act as risk detectors that send signals to the brain to either hide or escape. Emotions in general according to Gu et al. (2019) developed to modulate basic life tasks. Fear and anger for instance help in survival by prompting the organism to either escape to reach safety or fight to defend itself (p. 2). Bauermeister proposes the examination of the sense of smell from an angle that promotes its critical role for the recognition of threats as well as the location of food necessary for the preservation of life.

What is equally important is the notion of how specific smells influence mood and promote well-being. Fisher was the sole friend of Emmeline and her only partner. After his departure from the Cove to the city, Emmeline longed for the soothing effects of his

smell. Whenever she felt nostalgic, she sniffed his shirt to feel the familiarity and to alleviate her stress. She expresses how nostalgic she felt and how Fisher's scent calmed her: "At last I dried off and lay down on the bed, my body falling deep into the mattress. Still, I couldn't sleep, no matter how tired I was... I went over my backpack and pulled out Fisher's T-shirt... I wanted to feel his scent around me. I took the shirt back to bed with me. I wouldn't think about him, I promised myself. I would just breathe" (pp. 232-33). This eloquent description of the soothing impact that Fisher's odour has on Emmeline, is quite expressive of the potency of smell to decrease stress. On this note, numerous empirical psychological tests have demonstrated that nostalgic scents evoked pleasant emotions (Herz, 2016, p. 4). In this regard, Massri et al. (2022) contend that shared familiar smells promote a sense of identity and security, and psychologist Sarah Herz (2016) noted that nostalgic reminiscence boosted social connectedness (p. 4). On this subject, the scent of spruce emanating from the fabric of a sweatshirt she wore to stifle the smell on Fisher's T-shirt she wore on the island, evoked sentiments of security and familiarity. Emmeline describes its effects in the following statement: "Hovering in the air around me, was another scent. Spruce, I thought. I must have still had some on the sweatshirt I'd pulled from my pack that morning. I relaxed into the familiarity of it" (p.233). In their study of the influence of olfaction on relationships, Granqvist et al. (2018) concluded that the bodily scent of a romantic partner modulates stress and the sniffing of a partner's clothes or garments can be "a self-treatment against stress" (p. 1).

In addition, one of the most influential sensory interruptions in the narrative revolves around smells and how specific scents influence mood. As it has been debated above, odors possess the ability to impact mood and evoke significant experiences of pleasure or displeasure, and this is due to the interaction of smell with limbic system structures that are intimately concerned with emotion processing. Through her remarkable ability to discern and identify scents, Emmeline sorts people in terms of how they smell, and this chemosensory identity modulates her perception of the individuals and governs how her body reacts to encounters with these individuals. As expressed above, Emmeline's body becomes tense and she hides away from Martin. His gasoline smell became a marker and a signal for Emmeline to escape. However, with Henry and Colette, Emmeline rejoices in feelings of safety, comfort and coziness. Henry and Collette for instance are always adorned with the smell of cinnamon and cardamom which Emmeline perceived as "soft and comforting" (p. 71).

Many studies demonstrated the impact of fragrances and essential oils on humans' moods and health. Interestingly, in traditional medicine, essential oils as well as fragrance mixtures were used as remedies for numerous physical and psychological including stress, anxiety and depression (Sowndhararajan & Songmun, 2016, p. 724). The scent of cardamom essential oil induces a sensation of vitality and completeness as well as increases self-esteem and enhances mental clarity (Rhind, 2012, p. 93). Its



psychotherapeutic benefits in aromatherapy relate to alleviating mental fatigue. Emmeline captures succinctly the moment of bliss experienced by residents at the cottage when they smelled rolls made of cinnamon and cardamom: “handing over warm rolls wrapped in paper napkins. I loved watching their faces relax as the aromas reached them” (p. 123). This instance of relaxation and coziness is induced by the smell of Colette’s pastries. On this note, Patil et al. (2011) maintain that the fragrance of cinnamon induces feelings of relaxation, cardamom on the other hand invigorates (p. 24). Equally for them, cardamom stimulates a sense of romance (p. 24). Another important smell that has a direct connection with stress reduction is vanilla. A perfect example on its effects is voiced in this quote by Emmeline: “It felt good, sitting around our kitchen table with Dodge at my feet, doing homework with Fisher while the smells of vanilla and butter made everything soft” (p. 117). The scent of vanilla is believed to have a pleasant effect on individuals as it prompts feelings of coziness and alleviates stress-induced anxiety (Sliburyte & Vaitieke, 2019, p. 104). In addition to cardamom and cinnamon, Emmeline reminisces about the soft and kind scent of lavender in Colette’s soap and confesses: “The love in her voice took me back. In a flash, I was there in her kitchen, surrounded by the smell of bread dough and Dodge and the faint hint of lavender from her soap. I opened my mouth, ready to confide in her” (p. 232). In this regard, it has been confirmed that lavender has a favourable effect on mood as it reduces depression, induces relaxation (Ogata et al., 2020, p.4 ) and relieves anxiety disorders (Koulivand et al., 2013, p. 3).

Many researchers called for the strong connection between smells and consumer’s behaviour. In fact, one can ascertain that the perfume industry relies on this connection to increase sales and profit. The implementation of pleasant fragrances has become a growing trend in servicescapes (Girard & al., 2019, p. 440). Retailers and businesses invested heavily in scent marketing with the expectation that unique and pleasant smells will increase purchasing rates, attract customers and build memorable brands (Bradford & Desrochers, 2009, p. 141). Scent marketing is a strategy that focuses on manipulating consumer’s affect by creating a positive memory and establishing bonds with clients. *The Scent Keeper* relies heavily on the influence of fragrances on emotions and the author allocates considerable attention to the impact of ambient scents on consumers’ behaviour and purchasing decisions. Victoria Wingate, Emmeline’s mother, is the Head of Inspire Inc.; a company that develops fragrances for companies, hotels and restaurants to create a unique olfactory atmosphere for their customers. Wingate’s approach is inspired from companies which focused on creating smellscape that would engulf the customers and tap into their emotions thus prompting them to purchase more. In this regard, Emmeline encapsulates Victoria’s mission in the following exchange: ““You may have noticed... that not everything smells good in a city. My job is to make things smell better- because when they do, people spend more money. They don’t think that’s why, of course. They think they are buying a shirt because it fits them, or a couch because it’s comfortable. But

we know better. We make them *want it*” (p. 235). As far as Victoria’s statement about the foul smells of cities is concerned, it is paramount to note that starting from the Victorian period and perpetuating long after, there appeared the tendency to consider smell as a social standard that signals class. Potent unpleasant smells like perspiration were associated with the lower class, whereas elaborate smells of soaps and light perfumes were associated with the aristocracy (Massri et al., 2022, p. 2). This new olfactory standard formed the impetus to deodorise spaces in the nineteenth century (Fjellestad, 2001, p. 639). Hence, this endeavour to smell clean perpetuated in the modern age and an excellent example is found in Emmeline’s description of Inspire Inc. ambiance through Victoria: “I watched the straight line of Victoria’s back ascend the escalator in front of me, and breathed in her scent of the day. It reminded me of the fragrance at the lobby at inspire, Inc., cool and clean, with just a touch of money” (p. 232).

Spangenberg et al. (1996) conducted a study that assessed the influence of olfactory ambiance in a retail environment. The research ascertained that subjects entertained positive evaluation and behaviours in scented environments as opposed to unscented ones (p. 77). This statement resonates in the following quote by Emmeline which expounds on the effect of mixed fragrances on positive brand memory and emotions of customers: “Inspire, Inc., used a machine that dispersed fragrances in a mist so fine it was effectively invisible. The smells spilled into the imaginations of customers, hitched rides on their clothes and the products nestled in their shopping bags. A perfect branding delivery service” (p. 257). Moreover, a potent commentary on smell’s ability to affect consumers’ mood and purchase decisions is reflected in the following quote:

The fragrance started off bright and happy, fresh-cut grass and sunshine, iced hibiscus tea, the best of a Sunday afternoon. Lavender and rose released their sweetness into the air so serenely you knew there was not a weed within ten yards of them. The scents filtered out through the store, and as Victoria and I watched, the customers began putting down their phones, looking about with greater interest, smiling at one another...another one sat down on a leather couch, her arms spread like a claim jumper. Mine. (pp. 258-259)

The complexity of the described fragrance demonstrates how businesses manipulate consumers by preparing and adjusting olfactory formulas that target consumers’ emotional reactions. The smellscapes developed by Victoria Wingate could induce feelings of comfort, safety or could make someone “feel at home, or *not* at home-make them feel younger, more confident, sexier. It depends on what the hotel wants” (p. 236). The exposure to positive smells in the market business, as Rimkute et al. (2016) note, improves brand memory and amplifies the chances of purchase (pp. 24-25). The author

raises awareness about the ethics of marketing and sheds light on business ethics and the dimensions of marketing manipulation. By depicting Victoria as an overly ambitious business woman, the reader can perceive the realities of how economic sectors manipulate consumers into purchasing and spending money on their products irrationally.

The above analyses challenge and put into question the belief that human olfaction is 'weak' because the sensory organ is "imprecise" (Aristotle, qtd. in Campeggiani, 2020, p. 240). Multiple views that originated from the 19th century considered humans as non-smellers and viewed their olfactory system as weak and inferior to other mammals. However, Brauermeister celebrates the nose and endows Emmeline with a highly sophisticated sense of smell that could detect the faintest fragrances able to shape her world.

## **5. Fragrant Memories: The Smell of the Past**

Nearly a century later, Bauermeister recreated the Proustian Phenomenon and responded to du Maurier's unnamed author's wish to recall and relive certain memories: "If only there could be an invention . . . that bottled up a memory, like scent. And it never faded, and it never got stale" (du Maurier, 1938, p. 36). Although *Nightingale* was designed to catch smells and preserve them in scented bottles, the fragrances lasted only momentarily. However, for Emmeline, the memories bottled up in the scent papers were evocative and powerful. The author relied not on the persistence of smells, but on their power to conjure childhood memories, inspire episodes of reminiscence, and (re)construct meaningful events in her story. Throughout each chapter, the author injects olfactory encounters that pull her character and her readers and cast them into an emotional whirl charged with happiness, nostalgia, grief and loss. The following analysis will draw upon empirical findings that address the effect of scents on memory to prove that olfactory cued autobiographical recollections are more potent compared to visual or verbal cued memories (Willander & Larsson, 2007, p. 1659) and notably are able to conjure vivid memories which are described as emotional and are often "associated with stronger feelings of being brought back in time" (Larsson & Willander, 2007, p. 1659).

In the narrative, the constellations of smells and their significance reconstruct key periods of Emmeline's life on the island, the Cove and the city. Since odours are powerful stimuli for episodic memories, (p. 1660) Emmeline's recollections are often immersive and their aftermath is charged with emotions and nostalgia. The nature of the evoked memories is dependent on the odour of the person or the context. Emmeline's life on the island moved through a series of lies, betrayal and loss. Starting from her early childhood, her father conditioned her to believe in fairy tales and tales of Jack the Scent Hunter. On this note, she expresses her frustration in this quote: "My name. My birthday. H'd taken me away from any chance at a normal life, brought me up in a way that suited him" (p. 316). Although scents helped her bond with her environment and her father, the

realisation that the failure of scent papers to preserve memories drove a wedge between them and was followed by Emmeline's gesture to destroy the bottle through the bluff. The story proceeds by depicting scenes that detail John's succumbing to depression, the emergence of the female bear who followed Emmeline's trail from the bluff and who destroyed their food supply and killed Cleo, Emmeline's goat. All of these events were brought about as an outcome of olfactory experiences. Hence, smell is presented as a tool that alters events and engenders emotional content significant for the characters. An example is provided by the author who depicts Emmeline's loss and her attempt to relive a moment with her father. Emmeline burns a scent paper and lets herself be drawn by the scent. She describes: "I was in the middle of a warm and sunny afternoon, the fragrance of late summer draped around me. I could smell a basket of ripe apples on the table. I remembered the knife, the smooth spiral of peel as my father separated it from the fruit... I dropped to my knees. I could feel his arms, smell his animal warmth" (pp. 63-64). This moment of significance introduced the reader to the potency of odours and their power to evoke strong sensations of longing and grief. Another scene depicts how another scent paper impregnated by the smell of the lost pet made Emmeline cry. She recounts: "So I opened the bottles and lit the papers, I even found Cleo in one of them, and strangely, it was the one that made me sob" (p. 264). This scene draws the reader to contemplate about the potency of fragrances to birth memories charged with emotions that resurrect the past and influence the protagonist's affect.

As noted by Larsson & Willander (2007), autobiographical memories are powerful reminders about past emotional experiences and the exposure to olfactory stimuli brings people to the original time and place of their memories (p. 1659). A crucial moment of significance in the text revolves around Emmeline's return to the island with Fisher. Upon their approach to the shores, she experiences a moment of time travel to her childhood. This quotation nicely describes the latter statement: "*Mermaid party*, I thought, and memories collided inside me. I breathed in the fragrance of seaweed and cedar and mussels and salt that was my island, smelled the diesel exhaust mixing in, and suddenly I was twelve years old again, hiding in the woods, watching a white boat come into the lagoon and break my childhood in two" (p. 159). Following this statement, Emmeline relives the moment when she discovered about her father's lies and she depicts how she felt restless and nervous as she "pulled away" (p. 159) from Fisher's embrace. Despite the fact that Emmeline's experienced a negative moment of retrieval, the feelings that accompanied this scene are the result of trauma. Equally, this moment denotes her inability to assimilate the intrusion of Fisher's smell into her island. She notes: "For almost thirteen years, I'd lived on this island alone with my father. Now here I was again, without him...my arms around a boy whose smells had never been here before...each thing I did was changing everything I'd had" (pp. 159-160). Unsurprisingly, Emmeline was afraid to jeopardise the purity of the smells on the island and considered Fisher's

smell as a disruption of the olfactory smellscape on the island. However, not long after their arrival, Fisher's smell began to be coloured by the scents dwelling in the island and "the smell of salt and sea stayed in his hair like a mark of approval. One scent at a time, the island was taking him in" (p. 161). Henceforth, Fisher's scent was altered by his diet on the island and his olfactory identity became familiar and recognizable to Emmeline's nose and later in the narrative, the author explores how Fisher's scent became an emblem of familiarity and belonging for Emmeline.

Scents can trigger memories which are experienced like time travel and these memories helped the reader piece out missing information and link events, but more importantly they engaged the protagonist's emotional responses. The constellation of scents like 'cedar, spruce and fir... Applewood smoke. Salt water... Salmonberries, huckleberries... and morels' reminded Emmeline of the island whereas the fragrance of clams transported her "back to the lagoon" (p. 224). Wood smoke and bread yeast reminded Emmeline of her cabin, hence, woody smells as she contends: "sent me to the island so fast I couldn't stop the tears from filling my eyes" (p. 244). Through this emotive description, the author compels her readers to navigate through Emmeline's life and establishes a sentimental bond between the protagonist and her readers.

Equally, the author crafts her smellscapes around the potency of scents to unlock the most traumatic and significant memories that would influence her character and allow her readers to experience the power of smells. On the traumatic features of certain recollections, in the text, the author explores how specific animalistic smells, specifically the scent of indole, reminded Emmeline of her struggles in school. Due to her peculiar abilities, Emmeline was shunned by her classmates and was often called a pig. The latter sent Emmeline back to her tumultuous years at school and the hardships she experienced as "Miss Piggy" (p. 249). An encounter with this rosy scent evoked in Emmeline feelings of contempt and hatred as she expressed: "I looked over at Claudia. I hated her right then, in a way I had never hated anyone, even the kids at my school. This cold sleek girl wanted to break me, just like they had" (p. 249). Other scents like petrichor reminded Emmeline of her father's stories and as she confessed the scent "unlocked me like a key...I wiped my eyes with my thumb, trying to hide my reaction." (p. 274). Considering these instances of nostalgia and trauma, the reader is immersed into the olfactory world of Emmeline who suffered the loss of her father and home and depended on her nose to retrieve long lost moments of significance of her life.

Smells in *The Scent Keeper* created and recreated worlds and uncovered crucial instances of identification and belonging. The variety of smells that Emmeline has developed for her mother were gifts that were presented to Victoria to gain her approval. She crafted scents that targeted customers who were strangers to Emmeline and at a given time, the new smells birthed a new version that the protagonist herself did not recognize. She confessed: "I'd spent so many months wishing to be her. And now-when I was no



longer sure I wanted to be-I was". The loss of her identity coincided with the loss of her ability to invent fragrances and listen to the scent's stories. She recounts: "I was afraid of what she might think of me, what they all might think of me, if they knew my talent had disappeared" (282). The loss of Emmeline's ability was brought about by the discovery of her mother's lies and that recognition that she abandoned her and was the cause of her father's demise.

The closing lines of the narrative throw the readers into Emmeline's past which was unlocked by vials from Victoria's collection of scents. The latter encapsulated Emmeline's life and was crafted by Victoria who used Emmeline's memory to recreate her life on the island. As Emmeline opened the vials which were arranged in a specific order, a variety of smells emanated from each one in order: passion, promises, money, "the olfactory urge to procreate" (p. 327). Hence, Emmeline realised that she is navigating through her parent's history which was "told through scent-orchestrated, controlled, one perfume after another" (p. 328). What was revealed next is Emmeline's scent which she describes as: "soft, floral-sweet orange and sunshine, with just a touch of violet leaf-and it hit me in a wash of pain" (p. 328). The bottle depicted Emmeline's birth and the olfactory story told by the bottle divulged Victoria's indifference and lack of maternal love and this realisation devastated Emmeline. She avows: "she has used me, too, I thought just like she used my father. Spun her scents to get what she wanted" (p. 329). Tying these lines of thought together, the author attempted to emphasise the potency of smell to generate meaning and truths in her story. Through Victoria's collection, the reader travels across the lives of the protagonists and ponders about the dimensions of scents and the worlds they create. Readers are pulled and their emotions are engaged by the smellscape that promote longing, belonging, betrayal, and lost and found childhood.

The potency of fragrances and their emotive nature are encapsulated in the closing scene wherein Emmeline burns the last of her father's scent paper in Victoria's kitchen. The story tells:

In a white bowl, the paper caught fire... I inhaled and Victoria's kitchen disappeared around me. It was early morning in the cabin winter...I remembered that morning. It was the first time I ever saw the machine. I must have been three, maybe four years old ... You'd think I remember but I didn't. What I remembered was how it felt to be held in his arms. To be loved that way, before everything else happened. At that moment I felt whole. (pp. 334-335)

The above-mentioned scene holds significant evidence about the nature of olfactory

recall. Emmeline's memories engendered a powerful sensation of self-realisation and awakening. The author described how Emmeline was engulfed in nostalgic memories of her father, and this sensory experience conveyed how smells induced strong feelings of longing and reminiscence. This literary instance is inspired from a study conducted by Chu and Downes which proved that label cued memories brought about a bump or a larger number of memories between the ages 10-30 as opposed to odour cued memories which were clustered in the first decade (Chu & Downes, 2000, p. 114) "indicating that odor representations are older than verbal and visual ones" (p. 114). The olfactory recall drew Emmeline to her early years as a child and allowed the reader to experience a time travel which cannot be granted by any other sensory ability than smell.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The aim of this investigation is to explore the power of olfaction in the light of emotion and autobiographical recall. It has been demonstrated that the sense of smell played a pivotal role in modulating human experiences and has emphasised that the nose is a significant sensory organ able to guarantee survival. Equally, the present research shed light on the influence of ambient scents on human mood and emotions. Throughout the study, the power of pleasant fragrances has been addressed to conclude that familiar scents evoke positive emotions of familiarity and connectedness. On a similar note, it has been proven that olfaction plays a major role in servicescapes as businesses diffuse particular scents to enhance customers' moods in order to amplify purchasing rates. More importantly, the article demonstrated the ability of olfaction to induce autobiographical instances which would evoke emotional and behavioural responses in the protagonist. The present research endeavour has demonstrated that the author was able to emphasise the aesthetics of olfaction and its significance in the light of human experience.

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