

# "To Keep What Was Good and Pass it on": George Elliott's Small Town Memorial, The Kissing Man

Gerald Lynch

Volume 22, Number 1, Winter 1997

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/sc122\\_1art04](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/sc122_1art04)

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Publisher(s)

ISSN

0380-6995 (print)

1718-7850 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Lynch, G. (1997). "To Keep What Was Good and Pass it on": George Elliott's Small Town Memorial, The Kissing Man. *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 22(1), 69–95.

Article abstract

George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* anatomizes a small town, looking at the characters, institutions, and traditions that give a place coherence over time. This essay has a threefold purpose: to direct critical attention to this deserving work, to contextualize *The Kissing Man* in the continuums of the Canadian short story cycle and magic realism generally, and to offer a close reading of some key stories of the cycle, showing the ways they create symbols and rituals that enable the memories and create the meanings which Elliott envisioned as definitive of life in an unnamed southwestern Ontario small town at the middle of the twentieth century.

# "TO KEEP WHAT WAS GOOD AND PASS IT ON": GEORGE ELLIOTT'S SMALL TOWN MEMORIAL, *THE KISSING MAN*<sup>1</sup>

Gerald Lynch

George Elliott's *The Kissing Man* has remained, since Dennis Duffy first observed so in the only critical article devoted solely to the book (published in *Canadian Literature* over two decades ago), an "underground classic" (52). Elliott's virtual silence for more than three decades after *The Kissing Man*'s appearance in 1962 may partly explain the scarcity of published criticism,<sup>2</sup> as may the book's unconventional form, the story cycle. But Elliott has begun publishing books of fiction again and story cycles have become more fashionable, yet little is said now of *The Kissing Man*, and less written. To borrow from Sarah Binks, the underground classic is in danger of going down to the magma. Consequently the following essay has a threefold purpose: to direct critical attention to this deserving work, which W.H. New described in the second edition of the *Literary History of Canada* as "deceptively simple" ("Fiction" 259); to contextualize *The Kissing Man* in the continuums of the Canadian short story cycle and magic realism generally; and to offer a close reading of some key stories of the cycle, showing the ways they create symbols and rituals that enable the memories and create the meanings which Elliott envisioned as definitive of life in an unnamed southwestern Ontario small town at the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

Broadly speaking, there are two categories of short story cycles: those of place and those of character (Lynch, "One" 94-95). In cycles of character the two kinds often intersect, as for example they do in Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House* (1970) and Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978), doubtless because such cycles eventually come round to the relationship between a char-

acter's sense of identity and her place of origin. But generally in story cycles there is an obvious emphasis on either place or character. *Bird* and *Who* are primarily about Vanessa MacLeod and Rose respectively, and Manawaka and Hanratty are secondary to the fictional analysis of individual psychology in these cycles that constitute *Künstlerromane*. *The Kissing Man*, like Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896) and Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912), is distinctively a story cycle of place.<sup>4</sup> It anatomizes a small town, looking at the characters, institutions, traditions, mores and rituals that give a place coherence over time. In effect, it analyzes what makes a physical place a human community, for good and ill, and signals what threatens the continuance of small town life and communal values. As I have argued elsewhere, the story-cycle form, in its cross-sectional sampling technique, is ideally suited to such an anatomy of place as well as to the interrogation of identity and subjectivity in post-modern culture ("One" 95-96).

Such story cycles of place likely have their origins in the sub-genre of the Village Poem (which begins in Canada with Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* in 1825), and antecedents in such eighteenth-century village novels as the Anglo-Irish Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766); small town fictions gained popularity, if not critical sanction, from the nineteenth-century vogue for local colour fiction (see Magee). In Canada the tradition of small-town fictions continued through the twentieth century, finding a somewhat anxious voice in the self-reflexive musing on the subject that begins Robertson Davies's *Fifth Business* (whose portrayal of the small town saint-whore would seem, intertextually, to be the target of Munro's critique in *Who Do You Think You Are?* [26; see Mathews 181]). Elliott's *The Kissing Man* may, in fact, mark a terminal point, or at least signal the start of a long period of inactivity, in the continuum of Canadian story cycles whose subject is place as small town exclusive of character development.<sup>5</sup> Since about 1960, Canadian story cycles have focused instead on the great modern subject of psychological and philosophical explorations of character and subjectivity, if yet showing sometimes a definitive relationship between self-identity and place.<sup>6</sup> When place still figures as the locus of attention in a contemporary story cycle, as it does, say, in Jack Hodgins's *Spit Delaney's Island* (1976),

the theme is most likely to be dispersal and fragmentation rather than place as site of identity.

*The Kissing Man* differs most noticeably from its literary and generic predecessors in style: it is neither local colour, nor humour, nor social or psychological realism; nor, for that matter, is it seldom conventional representational fiction. *The Kissing Man* draws more obviously on the styles and techniques of myth, fable, and fairy tale, mixing the mundane and marvellous in an unapologetic manner which by 1962 had already long been termed "magical realism" (Flores 188).<sup>7</sup> Angel Flores could in fact have been predicting *The Kissing Man* when in 1955 he described South American fiction writers generally as evincing "the same preoccupation with style and also the same transformation of the common and the everyday into the awesome and unreal" (190), and characterized their prose style as one that "seeks precision and leanness" (191).

But if *The Kissing Man* anticipates Canadian magic realism and some of the dominant stratagems of postmodern fiction, it is also true that in terms of deep-structuring subtexts it relies respectfully, in high modern fashion, on older stories drawn from a variety of sources ranging from the biblical account of Jacob and Esau ("When Jacob Fletcher was a boy") to Irish folklore ("A leaf for everything good") to various North American folk tales. With the notable exceptions of Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939) and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959), it remains true that *The Kissing Man* was unique in the world of Canadian fiction for an elliptical prose style that can make Norman Levine's look florid, and for a mundanely marvellous presentation of fictional events. However, as in *The Double Hook* (which is deeply structured on the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus<sup>8</sup> and re-affirming of the values of family and community), the avant-garde techniques of *The Kissing Man*'s stories — temporal disruptions and compressions, narrative lacunae, a general making strange — serve a decidedly conservative and characteristically Canadian vision of the importance of family and community. Of course, both the form and subject of story cycles of place — the connecting of discrete sections, the absence of a protagonist — already express a conservative-communal, as opposed to a liberal-individualist, vision. Although it can appear every bit as strange, *The Kissing Man* is no *Beautiful Losers*; and if at times as fictionally adventurous, it is not ideologically postmod-

ern in its relation to such a central construct as authority, whether the centralizing communal or the implied authorial. In the context of the continuum of Canadian short story cycles of place, Mordecai Richler's *The Street* (1969) is chronologically the work that follows *The Kissing Man*, and it is conventional in form and style, being more of a regression to the sketch-book form of the nineteenth century than an advancement in the use of cyclical story form. And that comparison should serve to highlight again the extent to which *The Kissing Man* was both technically innovative and the fulfillment of one kind of Canadian story cycle.

The marvellous aspect of *The Kissing Man* — which involves the figuring of what amounts really to the repressed or denied spiritual and emotional dimension of small-town Canadian life — provides a way of representing such intangibles concretely in fiction and of showing the means by which communal value and truth can continue to be expressed across generations. Though unremarkable when labeled the spiritual and emotional life, in *The Kissing Man* this dimension of town life is presented startlingly as an other-worldly realm that pervades the daily lives of the residents, sometimes violating everyday reality in a materially and emotionally disruptive fashion. Such destabilizations are best exemplified by the compassionate "Kissing Man" of the title story, a magical figure who appears out of thin air in the middle story of the book both to commiserate with the dowdy women of a very ordinary dry-goods store and to figure the maturing of a young woman.

Generally the workings of magic realism are usefully described by Robert R. Wilson:

On the one hand, the hybrid constructions of magic realism arise, in some passages . . . when something different, even inconsistent, arrives. It comes from outside an already established world . . . and informs it temporarily. On the other hand, one world may lie hidden within another. Then the hybrid construction emerges from a secret already contained within, forming an occulted and latent aspect of the surface world.

(72; see also Hancock 36, and Patterson 29)

Whereas fictional magic was used to destabilize the colonial reality — the politically useful illusions conjured by officialdom — of various South American authoritarian states, Elliott uses it in *The*

*Kissing Man* as a means to concretize the ways in which Canadian communal continuities are effected and, in most cases, the ways in which small-town life is endured. Employed thus, Elliott's magic realism can be understood as partaking also of the surrealist reaction against nineteenth-century realism and naturalism, and is indebted as much to André Breton as to Alejo Carpentier. So it is not true, as Carpentier asserted, that "the marvellous is not universal, but exclusively Latin American" (in Hancock 36; see also Iftekharruddin 93). That is a rather limiting and unliterary view of what is, even in its South American origins and context, a literary technique. Such an exclusive view is also ignorant, if understandably so, of what many Canadian critics, from A.J.M. Smith to D.M.R. Bentley, have recognized as the definitive Canadian literary strategy, which devolves from the privileged position of writers who can choose eclectically from among innovations arising elsewhere and adapt those styles, techniques, and poetics to a Canadian environment. Elliott himself has explained his use of magic realism as not so much a political weapon as a "coping mechanism": "I contend that magic realism is a thing that happens between a writer and a reader in which the reader who cannot cope with reality with the tools he has, is given an extra invisible tool to cope with reality" ("Concluding Panel" 124). I think he means coping as in managing what one of his characters calls "the frailties of mankind" (92), not as in tossing a fictional Molotov cocktail.

Perhaps of equal interest to Elliott's adaptation of magic realist techniques is the recognition of how little has changed in the idea (as opposed to the representation) of small towns in Canadian story cycles. Elliott's vision of small-town community life is still essentially conservative, and no more radically Tory than was Leacock's (which was radical only in the sense that it criticized a crassly materialistic view of human affairs). That Tory vision is clearly signaled early in *The Kissing Man*, in its epigraph taken from arch-conservative T.S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*: "But when I speak of the family, I have in mind a bond which embraces . . . a piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote." (n.p.; see Eliot, *Notes* 42). In a number of ways, this epigraph can be seen to predict the shape and themes of *The Kissing Man*, whose first story, "An act of

piety," obviously echoes it, and whose last, "The way back," makes a fictional argument for "a solicitude for the unborn." All of the stories of this cycle can be seen to portray variously successful attempts to create personal and public symbols and rituals which enable such cultural continuities and bear witness to what Leacock himself called "all less tangible and provable forms of human merit, and less tangible aspirations of the human mind" (*Essays* 77).

I will have cause to return to some of this contextualizing background for *The Kissing Man*, but it is past time for turning to the stories themselves.

Readers of *The Kissing Man* must often feel about its enigmatic fictions as the boy Finn feels about the gnomish old man in the story "A leaf for everything good": puzzled, wary, toyed with, angry, and ultimately perhaps, satisfied, if inexplicably so. The narrator of *The Kissing Man*, like that story's old man sitting by the pond, talks cryptically as if in possession of a secret knowledge and wisdom that he wishes to impart to readers, information that cannot be conveyed by conventional means — such as in an algebraic equation or by the representational techniques of realistic fiction. As Geoff Hancock observes of magic realist fictions, "the narrator . . . is a reminder of the deep faith of an oral culture, presupposing a belief shared by hearers and tellers. . . . Magic realists affirm the art of making fiction at the same time that they connect their marvellous tales to the roots of society" (44). Readers, like the boy Finn, may find themselves attracted to these puzzling stories and their taciturn narrator; and readers require, as Finn requires, a great deal of patience if they are to hook and reel in meanings from Elliott's elusive collection. Much will remain of puzzle and enigma, and irresolution and mystery are apparently a large part of the meanings of *The Kissing Man*. Perhaps readers can learn, as Finn discovers, only that much of what initially appeared transparent, still and shallow is actually murky, dynamic, and unfathomable. Indeed, Elliott has said of *The Kissing Man* that "if themes and passions in various of the stories in the collection remain unresolved, it is because nothing in life is ever resolved" (quoted in Duffy 52).

The first sentence of "A leaf for everything good" observes that, since the incidents related in the story, the town pond has

been converted into a bowling green (75). Linear time is relentlessly threatening throughout *The Kissing Man*, and this *ubi sunt* trope contributes largely to making the unvarying tone of the cycle sombre and elegiac, and its dominant emotion nostalgia. Here, the loss of the pond gains a regrettable significance in light of its importance in the transference to Finn of what the old man knows of the submerged emotional life of the town. But change is an inevitable consequence of the passage of time, which is one of the lessons that Finn learns while fishing (84). Change as inevitably destructive of what *The Kissing Man* repeatedly calls "the good" is what the more favourably presented characters and the created symbols and rituals of *The Kissing Man* struggle to counter or accommodate.

The natural consequences of linear time bring about the death of Mayhew and Tessie Salkald in the opening story, "An act of piety" — they grew old, they died — placing the pioneer and patriarchal Salkald farm in a kind of temporal suspension. Their passing forces Honey Salkald "to remember all he could about Mayhew and Tessie" (10) in order to effect the transition of the Salkald legacy to himself. Honey manages this transition through a ritualistic act of piety — tending Tessie's grave (9) — and a reluctant confrontation with the past in the person of the gossipy Mrs. Palson. Readers can only presume that Honey learns from Mrs. Palson about Tessie's intolerance with the infected Irish family some fifty years earlier (see Thomas 103). Tessie's intolerance put considerable strain on the bond of unspoken understanding that she believed existed between herself and Mayhew (3). Tessie's exclusionary attitude may also have had ill effects on her children, because, though none of the stories deals with the second generation of Salkalds (which says much unfavourably in itself), Johnson Mender in "What do the children mean?" observes that Honey's dad "never came around" (103-04). While tending Tessie's grave, Honey remembers what was fine and grand about Mayhew (11), not, note, the intolerant Tessie. It is from his subsequent talk with Mrs. Palson that he learns, presumably, what was amiss in so-called "Proud Tessie's" life. After his talk with Mrs. Palson, Honey "knew enough, now, about Tessie to make the old truth fresh and almost complete" (12). Although time destroys and causes the forgetting of much, Honey, at the conclusion of the first story, "wanted only to keep what was good and pass it on" (12).



Honey knows only "enough" because no character (or reader) can know all; apparently, action (and meaning) must also be taken on faith. The first story ignores the actual information Honey receives in favour of attending to the occasion and agency of its transference: the ritual of tending the grave and the unreported talk with the community gossip.<sup>9</sup> Honey's observance at graveside is the titular act of piety, an action which, as previously noted, illustrates the book's epigraph from T.S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* ("a piety towards the dead"). Further, the passage from Eliot defines family as "a bond which embraces" the dead, the living, and the unborn; and earlier in the *Notes* Eliot has described family as "the primary channel of transmission of culture" (41). A number of other characters in *The Kissing Man* attempt to create symbols, to establish or continue rituals and traditions that forge and fortify, in T.S. Eliot's understanding, such culturally embracing familial bonds. And not only "The way back" but also "What do the children mean?" illustrates from the epigraph Eliot's notions of "a solicitude for the unborn." Such stories, like Eliot's broad understanding of "family" within culture, focus on the two-way traffic along these invisible channels that reach across generations, from the dead to the living, to the newborn and even to the unborn. It could be said that *The Kissing Man* variously figures, in a manner that parallels the argument of Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," a kind of community and the individual life.

Other literary texts also figure in *The Kissing Man* as providing guidance and revelation. In "An act of piety," Honey's uncle, Dan Salkald, reads William Cullen Bryant's popular "Thanatopsis" at Mayhew Salkald's funeral, and the reading changes Honey Salkald's understanding of his grandfather's life and death (10). Typically, no lines from the poem are given, but Bryant's poem would have suggested to Honey that death is not an end — a terminal nothingness — but merely a "lying down to pleasant dreams" (l. 81). Also, the lines "Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim / Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again" (22-23), anticipate Doctor Fletcher's private ritualistic eulogies in "You'll get the rest of him soon": "Nourish him . . . be patient with him because you'll get the rest of him soon" (44). It is, presumably, death understood as in "Thanatopsis" that allows Mayhew Salkald to die defiantly (10) —

to Honey's initial perplexity — and later causes characters such as Doctor Fletcher fiercely to guard their privacy for the sake of personal ritual. Such an understanding of death also foregrounds the disparity between, and the necessary distinguishing of, the public man and the private in such as Mayhew and Fletcher.

Another text referred to in *The Kissing Man* is *Ecclesiastes*, a book which Doctor Fletcher knows “by heart” (13). *Ecclesiastes*'s insistence on man's works as a “vanity of vanities” (I:ii), especially if those works are intended in defiance of individual limitations as regards mortality (and the consequent necessity for community) under the mysterious ways of God, offers another means of understanding the humbling view of life and its mysterious dimension portrayed in *The Kissing Man*. But perhaps Elliott's vision of the reality of this audacious aspect of *The Kissing Man* — the lively spiritual and emotional dimension — can helpfully be glossed with a comment of Robertson Davies, that other chronicler of small Ontario towns and magical dimensions:

I feel now that I am a person of strongly religious temperament, but when I say “religious” I mean immensely conscious of powers of which I can have only the dimmest apprehension, which operate by means that I cannot fathom, in directions which I would be a fool to call either good or bad. Now that seems hideously funny, but it isn't really; it is, I think, a recognition of one's position in an inexplicable universe, in which it is not wholly impossible for you to ally yourself with, let us say, positive rather than negative forces, but in which anything that you do in that direction must be done with a strong recognition that you may be very, very gravely mistaken. (Cameron 41)

Throughout the eleven stories of *The Kissing Man*, characters are shown coming to an awareness of such a numinous realm (those “powers” of which Davies speaks) that interpenetrates the mundanely material. In “The kissing man,” the concretely realized, staid, and suffocating environment of Geddes's dry-goods store is disrupted by the spontaneous appearances of the compassionate Kissing Man. But the empathy experienced by the women who contact the Kissing Man is suggestively contingent on their awareness of the need for such communally necessary virtues as sympathy, empathy, and compassion.

Initially, "The kissing man" presents adolescent Froody as a cool spectator of the faceless customers, her neighbours, who pass through Geddes's (68). The arrival of the Kissing Man corresponds, then, to Froody's refusal to identify her life with the painful lot of the women she encounters daily. The subsequent movement within Froody from apathy to empathy is not explained. Presumably, she changes because she must, as Finn moves towards the old man because he must. In both there is trepidation and resistance as the encounter looms. Froody's awareness of the Kissing Man's presence in the store breaks slowly upon her. She does not witness his meeting with Mrs. Muncey, though she does notice Mrs. Muncey's pathetic reaction (69). When Froody sees the Kissing Man with Miss Corvill, she wants to scream out, wants to ask Miss Corvill what the Kissing Man had said. Although at this point Froody still believes that she doesn't care, she reacts by reaching "out for the faces in the crowded store because a change had come over everything" (71). Froody comes to understand that life, especially life as a woman, without the compassionate Kissing Man is a "barren orderliness," the patriarchal world of Muncey, Weaver, and Sobel (71), the looming and sterile world of her convenient relationship with Doug Framingham (72), a world further suggestive of the symbolically violent orderliness of the axe-handle factory and the bowling green that displaces the pond in "A leaf for everything good."

Though the Kissing Man thaws Froody's cool and contained sensuality, perhaps even her emotional frigidity, violating her detached complacency and challenging the illusion of exception and exemption she has enjoyed, she finally recognizes that she too needs the Kissing Man. She makes an overture to him, and his ominous reply — that she doesn't need him "yet" — causes Froody to shudder (73). The Kissing Man's prediction vanquishes Froody's self-satisfied vanity of vanities. She sees that she too will grow old, that she too may be left with loneliness after living and loving (to echo the rhetoric of the Kissing Man). This is the painful, mature knowledge that Froody acquires, that increase of knowledge involving an increase of sorrow. But this passage into maturity also ties Froody to her community, and to none more so than her communal sisters. Revealingly, such knowledge appears already to have been part of the older women's lives, for Miss

Corvill is not "shocked, angry or surprised" (71) by the Kissing Man's summation of her life as forlorn. Froody doesn't understand so at the time, but her growing awareness of what amounts to her lack of humanity, as it is presented to her incrementally by the compassionate Kissing Man, is compensation for her loss of a distinctiveness based on physical appearance, aloofness, and naiveté. Viewed in Blakean terms as a movement from Thel-like innocence to experience, Froody's hesitant emergence into the mature and female life of the community is "good." She will not live in a town without pity.

Froody's predisposition, really, to recognize the Kissing Man, which corresponds to her awakening to the need for connection, is analogous to Finn's surfacing faith in the presence of trout in the pond. Where the Kissing Man is the figure of Froody's passage to maturity, "A leaf for everything good" traces the complicated process by which a community's compassion, understanding, and faith become submerged, embodied symbolically in the trout, and retrieved by Finn. According to the old man who sits daily by the pond and has "the shape of the town clear in his heart" (75), the willow under which he sits draws from the earth and air the unspoken feelings and frustrated desires of all the townsfolk who come to grieve privately by the tree. The old man describes the process whereby the trout become an embodiment of the buried life:

Yes. A leaf of love, a leaf of loneliness, a leaf of regret, a leaf of remorse, a leaf of compassion, a leaf for everything good and forgotten, for everything bad and always here. They fall into the pond and the trout eat them. (78)

Belief in the existence of trout so nourished requires faith indeed; the skill to catch one requires patience and a willingness to acknowledge a shared community of joy and pain. The townsfolk deny the presence of trout in the pond, thereby repressing symbolically those feelings that the trout embody (78, 84). In contrast, Finn finds himself drawn to the old man, drawn finally by the lure of the possibility of trout in the pond (79). As was the case with the invasive Kissing Man, it would seem that there are instances when the "[other] dimension of existence," as Duffy describes it (55), calls to its potential acolytes, though few are chosen.

The use of trout to symbolize and embody mysterious com-

munal knowledge is not original to Elliott. The folklore of Ireland contains many instances of sacred trout (and other fish) inhabiting enchanted wells and ponds. One such story recounts a prophecy foretelling that “a man named Finn would be the first to eat of the salmon of knowledge, which swam in the pool of Linn-Fee” (Wood-Martin I:109). Here, the fish is a salmon, probably because in Irish folklore trout, considered sacred and not eaten, are confined to holy wells. Elliott seems to have fused the functions of trout and salmon, as can be seen from the following instance of the Irish legend:

The salmon watched the nuts on the hazel, and when they dropped into the water devoured them greedily. Their bellies became spotted with a ruddy mark for every nut they had eaten; on this account the salmon became an object of eager acquisition, for whoever ate one became, immediately, without the trouble of studying, a learned scholar, or an eloquent poet. (Wood-Martin I:108)

The trout in “A leaf for everything good” is not eaten, though the old man claims they would be the “best eating in the world” (80), and, in any case, catching one symbolizes a similar possession of its knowledge. Hancock has argued that “magic realists disrupt history . . . by placing Biblical myths, timeless myths and pagan allusions at the service of the narrative” (44). And certainly Elliott remains a magic realist in his destabilizing use of elements from myth and fable; but he is not intent on destructively disrupting a history (Canadian), which he represents neither in nightmarish terms (as in Joyce’s vision) nor in politically violent terms (as in the visions of South American magic realists). Rather, in *The Kissing Man* Elliott is bent on opening a space for the recovery of the repressed emotional and the forgotten spiritual dimensions of small-town life, without which vital attributes the human community verges on becoming, to borrow Earle Birney’s memorable phrase, a lifeless place haunted by its lack of ghosts. As was suggested earlier, Elliott’s strategy is more typically the Canadian way of adapting other cultures’ literary techniques to an environment where history and its records are, of necessity, evidence of instructive humanity to be cherished.

Although we know what Finn MacCool gains from the fish — the power to prognosticate — we do not learn clearly what Elliott’s

Finn comes to know. We are left finally with our questions dangling, as it were, into this deceptively simple story. There are nibbles of meaning, certainly, but nothing pendantly paraphrasable. It is possible that Finn, like Honey Salkald before him, learns something about the intolerant underside of small town life; but unlike Honey, who boldly takes possession of the family farm, Finn, without a caring family, leaves the town. And this action, taken after painstakingly landing the symbolically loaded fish, may constitute the book's most unfavourable prophecy for the small town.

In all the other stories of *The Kissing Man* devices similar to Froody's Kissing Man and Finn's trout are used to bring characters into contact with the invisibly spiritual or buried emotional life of the town, thereby strengthening communal bonds across time. The emphasis is usually on remembering, recovering, preserving, and passing on. Honey's ability in the first story, "An act of piety," "to keep what was good and pass it on," is only possible after a mining of the past with the aid of gossipy Mrs. Palson to uncover what in Tessie's life was not right, what was in fact anti-communal. Thus the good that Honey wishes to possess, safeguard, and pass on — figured in the Salkald farming tradition — is not simply the pleasant but also the painful: this is the "old truth fresh and almost complete" — *almost* because it is always being revised in the present for the future. Similarly, the old man by the pond does not instruct Finn to hook only the pleasurable: he wishes him particularly to grasp what is painfully lonely about the lives led by his neighbours. (And the epigraph to Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* comes inevitably to mind: "when you / fish for the glory / you catch the / darkness too.")

In "A room, a light for love," Alison Kennedy's chandelier is another exemplary symbol of an individual's and a community's need for continuing connection over time (see Thomas 102). The chandelier functions as container and cue for the communal good which should be passed on. It suggests that such memorial objects are not simply infused with symbolic significance: they are extensions in space and time of the spiritual and emotional life which partakes of the mysterious realm inhabited by such as the Kissing Man and Finn's trout. And Elliott's conception of the symbolic chandelier of "A room, a light for love" can be seen as ideally Coleridgean, where "a Symbol . . . is characterized by a translu-

cence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is representative" (*Statesman's* 30).

In the first few pages of "A room, a light for love," such words as "new" and "fresh" are repeated to suggest that there is always a need for change for one's own and others' sake (if not for the sake of change itself), a need to make new uses of established institutions and traditions. Comments and reflections imply that Alison was not fulfilled in her pre-war relationship with her husband, Gerry Kennedy, that she was perhaps on her way to becoming like one of the oppressed and disillusioned women of "The kissing man." But Alison takes decisive action. She remodels the Queen's Hotel into a place where her friends can meet; she buys a new chandelier and transforms it into a symbol of her heart and her community's submerged longings. The chandelier, recalling the willow tree in "A leaf for everything good," contains for a spell all the unspoken or seldom-mentioned feelings of those who frequent the Kennedy's parties; it is described as "shining down and drawing to its crystal beads all of what they felt" (63). By renovating the hotel, the matriarchal and proto-feminist Alison (it is after all the Queen's Hotel) "discovered the pride in herself, the confidence, and the idea of control was new and compelling" (53-54).

Alison and her hotel become the hub of a communal social circuit. Hotel and woman are effectively identified as extensions of each other: "She sort of flowed into the grey doors and they sort of flowed her on into the red wallpaper and the cream ceiling so that it was all of a piece" (56). The parties that she gives at the Queen's function as a communal catalyst, strengthening bonds: families "who never had anything to do with each other outside" are drawn together; affected behaviour and social status are forgotten for the moment (57).<sup>10</sup> Alison makes people such as Doug Framingham and Jeth Geddes feel simultaneously distinctive and bound one to the other through her, her hotel and its chandelier. Doug feels (innocently) that his love for Alison "seemed more right because it involved more than two people" (59).

In the time she has, Alison accomplishes her vaguely stated,

but inarguably communal, goal: "other things, not the private things necessarily, but what stops the loneliness" (57). She fabricates from the material at hand a private ritual that acknowledges the existence and importance of the emotional life of the individuals who make up her community. Each individual in Alison's wide circle of affection (to borrow the title of Duncan Campbell Scott's last book) is represented by a crystal bead in the chandelier, and she smashes the appropriate bead as each old acquaintance passes on (in this story and book the euphemism is apt). The entire chandelier is smashed when Alison dies, and the hotel is in decline, at the mercy of trendy antique dealers. But such material disintegration is inevitable. Through her accommodating spirit and its symbol, the chandelier, Alison achieves a distinctively human victory over time and entropy. Paradoxically, the destruction of the chandelier and hotel is necessary to the connections and continuities Alison forges: "The chandelier was destroyed, so the thread of memory had been established" (62); and as Gerry and Doug reminisce after Alison's death, "each memory began with the chandelier" (62, 62). Their remembering is important not only for their own peace of mind but for future generations, as Doug observes: "It matters to the new ones coming along to hear our noises" (62) — an observation which works again as both an illustration of the book's epigraph and a gloss on its conservative theme of the contract between the dead, the living, and the unborn.

Remembering is accorded priority indeed in *The Kissing Man*, as are the symbols and rituals that facilitate it. In the first story, "An act of piety," Honey Salkald had to remember all that he could about his grandparents in order "to make the old truth fresh and almost complete, . . . to keep what was good and pass it on" (12). Towards the end of that story, "the past was in [Honey], never to be forgotten or ignored" (12). And earlier in the story, when Honey "[crouches] over a deep well, waiting for the water to settle so he could see his reflection," the past and memory are seen to be constituent and constitutive of self-identity: "Memories flowed through him, memories of his grandmother . . ." (7). The functioning of memory is the subtext, perhaps even the subject, of the third story, "The listeners." This story employs the ritual of blowing the contents out of eggs, and then positions the symbol of the blown eggs to convey the emptiness of a marriage and the effects which the ritual, the



symbol, and the bad marriage have on the children — particularly on the workings of Young Audie's memory.

The mysterious process by which the feelings of disappointment and betrayal in his mother's, Mrs. Seaton's, heart find their way into Young Audie's memory parallels the movement in "A leaf for everything good" from repressed emotions to tree to leaf to trout to Finn. The hens that are privy to the progress of Mrs. Seaton's disillusionment (her "listeners") become, like the willow tree, mediums for the retention and transmission of those troubles. The meat in the eggs they eventually lay is, like the leaves of the willow, the substance of Mrs. Seaton's disappointment: this, then, is what is blown from the egg and into Young Audie's forming memory. The blown egg, like Finn's trout (and Alison's chandelier), becomes a symbol, an extension of, and means to, a shared experience. Appropriately, "The listeners" contains Elliott's most disturbing and haunting metaphor for the process of recollection: a marsh in which memories, "the bad ones, the unexplained ones, . . . pop up to the surface like marsh gas" (29). Young Audie's memory of blowing the egg is, for him, "a pure memory," recalling an experience he believes he "really remembered" (29). "He remembered crying, gasping for air and hiccuping in limp despair. . . . That was Young Audie's memory of it" (30). But that is not what happened. Young Audie's memory is not a "pure memory," but a bubble of marsh gas (versus Alison's bauble of light?) haunting him later with an emotional truth purer than any factual account of the incident or of his parents' bad marriage could convey. As this story shows, memory in *The Kissing Man* can also be a powerfully creative faculty, and a revisionist one; and even though here the memory is false, it nonetheless has given Young Audie insight to a deeper truth of his family life than his mother had intended. But as memorial ritual, the blowing of the egg fails to connect Young Audie or his mother to a greater good, whether an enhancing emotional life, familial life, or communal life; as symbol, the blown egg symbolises failure, even the retributive and revealing failure of mistaken memory itself.

All of *The Kissing Man's* stories can rewardingly be read for the ways in which they show various memorial processes at work through ritual and symbol, individually and collectively, for good and ill, but I will look briefly only at one more, "You'll get the rest

of him soon," before turning to the final story of the book. Doctor Fletcher, like Alison, Finn, and Mrs. Seaton, demonstrates strange awareness of a realm beyond the material and practical. He needs to achieve and maintain connection with this dimension through a private and idiosyncratic ritual that simultaneously subsumes the private and personal in the communal and, indeed, connects these to larger traditions of Judeo-Christian civilization. Doctor Fletcher, like Honey and Froody a recurrent character in the story cycle, is portrayed as a conservatively proud man, possessing "pride of origin and unchange" (41), a man whose loyalties are to tradition and his sense of the connectedness of all life in an essentially organic vision. His attitude is at once personal and communal, as was Alison's, and he can also be viewed as a kind of medicine man in the practice of his private ritual, this doctor who is described twice as being like an "Anglican Minister" (44, 46). By means of his private ritual, Doctor Fletcher strives to connect the newborn male members of his community to the vaguely defined entity (a kind of Gaea entity) of his enigmatic addresses. Male members only, because Doctor Fletcher's ritual involves burying a foreskin, that synecdochic figure for "the rest of him."<sup>11</sup> But Fletcher is thwarted in his efforts to maintain this connection by the spitefulness of "the Lodge" officers, Muncey, Weaver, and Sobel, three men who later figure as oppressors of women in "The kissing man" and here harass and undermine Doctor Fletcher.

There is in "You'll get the rest of him soon" an opposition between Doctor Fletcher's personal ritual for communal-spiritual purposes and the social ritual of the Lodge brothers. Similar oppositions of view — which can most broadly be described as between the material and the spiritual — occur throughout *The Kissing Man*: between Tessie and Mayhew Salkald, between Finn and his father, between Alison and entropic time itself, between men and women in "The kissing man," to mention only those discussed. In "You'll get the rest of him soon," Muncey, Weaver, and Sobel want to initiate Doctor Fletcher into the Lodge, which would be to bring him more fully into the ersatz ritualistic life of the small town, but Fletcher desires only to be left alone to practice his private ritual, initiating newborn boys into his *tempus fugit* vision of the life cycle. He views Mrs. Scorrel's baby as "another chance, another novice, another initiate" and smiles to himself at the correspondence of

terminology between his ritual and the Lodge's initiation rite (48). When the doctor adamantly refuses the Lodge brothers, they have him fired from the hospital. Unable to deliver and circumcise, removed from his source of foreskins, Doctor Fletcher is himself cut off from his ritualistic function and connection with the numinous dimension. He dies and enters into that other realm, we may suppose.

"You'll get the rest of him soon" concludes with Froody bursting into clichéd "terrible tears" upon hearing news of Doctor Fletcher's death (48). Just why Froody cries remains a mystery, but crying is the common reaction in *The Kissing Man* when characters experience at an (apparently) non-verbal level a spiritual dimension that they had not known about or had intuited vaguely, or when they confront an emotional dimension that they had denied or suppressed. There is scarcely a story that does not contain at least one instance of bewildered tears. In "When Jacob Fletcher was a boy," wild Esau cries at the realization that he is losing civilized Jacob to the town from which he is excluded (18; as in the first story, "An act of piety," and the penultimate story, "The commonplace," exclusivity is shown to be the underside to solidarity). Young Audie Seaton believes that he cried when confronted with his mother's tribulations, though, in fact, he'd not. Alison cries because of the burden of her awareness of the transitory nature of what she loves most (52). Froody cries after witnessing the Kissing Man with Miss Corvill and realizing, presumably, her own lack of compassion. Finn cries when frustrated in his efforts to comprehend what the old man is trying to show him (81). Spinster Janey, in "The man who lived out loud," cries because she thinks that her private ritual with "John something," a drifter who wants into town life, has been manipulated by her brother (98). And Honey Salkald, in "The commonplace," cries in isolated impotence when confronted by all that Bertram Sunbird represents in his role as figurative cuckold (122). In *The Kissing Man*, not-so-idle tears are the initial and sometimes only response of circumscribed human intelligence and sensibility when frustrated in its exposure to, and/or overwhelmed failure to comprehend, the repressed emotional life, the spiritual, the mysterious — all that felt creation that hyper-rationalists label "metaphysical signifiers" and which George Steiner names "real presences."

But, needless to say, this spiritual reality in *The Kissing Man* does more than evoke tears, reveal inadequacy and loneliness, permit exclusion and false memory, and expose ignorance. On the individual level, connection with this mysterious dimension allows Doctor Fletcher to know, in "When Jacob Fletcher was a boy," that the twins he's delivering will be males, and the old man in "A leaf for everything good" to know that trout still swim in a supposedly fished-out pond; it also allows Alison in "A room, a light for love" to anticipate when an old acquaintance is about to pass on. Collectively experienced, this other dimension makes possible the changing cohesiveness of the small town over time: it makes of a place a human community. In attempting to fictionalize such a concept, Elliott has set himself a huge task in *The Kissing Man* indeed. Such a grand ambition helps explain and excuse the fiction's determinedly minimal, annoyingly gestural, unrelievedly enigmatic, maddeningly lacunal, strange style. The stories do show clearly, however, the *modus operandi* between the mundane and the numinous dimension: ritual, symbol, memory, and imagination, working through the senses to the heart. These means are seen operating with patiently fishing and observing Finn; and again when Johnson Mender, in "What do the children mean?," envisions his son's emotional awakening through the agency of a child "tugging at his ear and lifting up his eyelids and kicking him where his heart is to make it go" (106). For that matter, the other dimension's anti-rationalist nature bestows real presence on a Kissing Man in a dry-goods store and on an apparitional Johnson Mender strolling into town to requisition newborns at the baby agent's. And in the final story of the cycle, "The way back," this mysterious, numinous realm makes possible the seemingly ageless "grinder man," who was "a gnarled, brown old man" (126) when Dan was born and is still vigorously plying his trade at the weaning of Dan's third child (134).

The theme of the necessity of ritual, symbol, and memory for maintaining contact with the spiritual and emotional dimension receives cumulative treatment in this last story of the cycle. Elsewhere, I have called similar concluding stories of cycles "return stories" ("One" 98), adapting the term from that other sub-genre, the Romantic return poem. As in poems such as Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" and Roberts's "The Tantramar Revisited,"

return stories (such as Leacock's "L'Envoi: The Train to Mariposa" and Munro's "Who Do You Think You Are?") subtextually ponder how the passage of time effects the returned and reminiscing subject's attachment to place and sense of identity, conceived both individually and collectively. Typically, "The way back" includes the preceding stories' symbols, rituals, and characters in the refrain-like manner of return stories of story cycles: Doctor Fletcher delivers Dan; a blown ostrich egg helps illustrate Dan's alienation as a result of his father's dismissal of the grinder man ritual (127); Dan's father recalls Finn's hard father in the former's belief that "work's what matters nowadays. Nothing else" (128); Dan avoids the old man who sits by the pond because the old man knows too much; Dan marries Mayhew Salkald's granddaughter, and it is Mayhew, the good patriarch, who insists that "there is always hope of return" (132). By recalling the preceding stories, the return stories of cycles suggest that "the way back" is accomplished not only by an individual's decision and efforts but by the cooperation of the entire community. Closing its version of the hermeneutic circle, a cycle's return story, such as "The way back," positions us to read its images, symbols, and rituals for their cumulative value in the context of the whole story cycle, to read (or re-read) each story in the context of the completed cycle, and to consider the whole cycle in terms of each reconsidered preceding story.

Specifically, "The way back" recounts Dan's struggle to find a way to reconnect with the small town community of *The Kissing Man*. His father had severed the connection by ignoring the local tradition of having the grinder man, a blade sharpener, present outside the house where a birth is taking place. Dan's father did so because he was an overly practical man, decisively cutting his family off from the community. He dismissed his wife's warning that this ritualistic practice is for the benefit of the father (presumably, the mother's connection is primarily biological — birthing, nursing, weaning — a suggestion which helps explain Doctor Fletcher's focus on boys in "You'll get the rest of him soon"), knowing she is right, yet holding to his rationalist belief that "it was a story, mystery, something concealed, a feeling. That was bad" (128). Of course, these are precisely the intangible — and here tantalizingly self-reflexive<sup>12</sup> — markers of *The Kissing Man's*

exploration of, and hopes for, a meaningful personal and communal life: that is, the way to the good.

The result of the father's willful denial was that his son, Dan, grew up a strange and alienated boy, one who selfishly hoarded the potentially rich gift of a blown egg, dangled a spider over his bed (thereby constructing an exclusionary parodic echo of Alison's chandelier) and screamed when his father attempted to take down the spider (127). Regardless of damage done, grown Dan somehow wins through to the realization that his father's break with tradition was not, as his father had insisted, "a question of fashion or times changing" (130). Dan understands, as his father would not, the gestural momentousness of the grinder man's presence and the reasons for his own alienation: "Thing like that," he reflects, "if you don't have a feeling for it, it'll separate you from the kids in school" (129). Here again, "feeling," as opposed to rationalizing, is prioritized. Dan realizes, too, that his father's attitude is "the difference between the life of [his] father and the life of the heart," the heart which is the chief sensing organ in *The Kissing Man*. Dan resolves: "I want the life of the heart and Mr. Salkald says there is hope, there is a way back. This is the connection" (134).

Dan re-establishes connection with the spiritual and emotional dimension of his town's life by choosing to participate in communal life as it is ritualized in the inexplicable grinder man tradition. By so choosing he contributes to the strength of his family and the whole community, town and farming districts alike. He has the grinder man sharpen some tools, a few of which once belonged to region patriarch Mayhew Salkald. Dan's wife then places Mayhew's scythe under the bed of the baby she is weaning, suggesting through this temporal symbol the continuity of birth, life, and death, and connection across the generations. As T.S. Eliot states in the book from which *The Kissing Man's* epigraph is taken, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, "Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community" (42). In a sense, it is the baby who accomplishes the reconciliation between Dan and his community, and between Dan and the timeless, mysterious realm. Interestingly, this baby also verifies Johnson Mender's belief, in the third-to-last story, "What do the children

mean?", that children are another means to the way back — perhaps because they are the only way ahead in this book where "time future [is] contained in time past" (Eliot, *Complete* 117).<sup>13</sup> The grinder man ritual — like all ritual — connects, here enabling necessary rites of passage and communal coherence.

For all its strangeness, the grinder-man tradition also constitutes a simple ritual, as simple as tending a grave, blowing an egg, catching a fish, or, for that matter, as mundane as eating and drinking. In "The way back" it is the implications of the quite conscious decision to participate that gesture towards a complex communal unconsciousness (and towards unabashed metaphysical signification). The result of Dan's reverential participation in the domestic grinder-man ritual is the re-establishment of familial harmony, the ascription of primary importance to the emotional and the intuitive, and the recognition of a nurturing interdependence of the individual and the community. By recalling various key elements of preceding stories, this return story, "The way back," argues fictionally that the individual's fuller life is only possible within the cohesive community, albeit a community whose cohesiveness is at times double-hooked by an unattractive exclusivity and repressiveness. This fictional argument for a Coleridgean and essentially Tory-humanist vision of independent interdependence is made, too, by those earlier Canadian story cycles of place, Scott's *In the Village of Viger* (1896) and Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (1912). Despite its modernist and proleptically postmodernist panache, *The Kissing Man*, a story cycle of place as small town, continues into the contemporary period, or at least its beginnings in 1962, the conservative Canadian vision that prioritizes the community over the individual, though not at the expense of the individual. I will leave it to readers to ponder the implications of its being perhaps the last highly accomplished story cycle of place to do so.

Thus the eleven stories of *The Kissing Man* present a vision of Canadian small-town life at mid-century that is stroboscopic and fragmentary in its perception of what is passing and lost, a vision that is uncompromising in its perception of life's pain and tragedy. But the book as a whole, employing to masterful advantage the recursive dynamics of the story cycle (Ingram 20, Luscher 149), insists fictionally on the reality of a spiritual dimension, a numin-

ous realm that, when acknowledged and experienced, bestows a sense of continuity and a shared community of pain and evanescent joy. And despite its focus on the pain of frustration and denial, despite its elegiac tone, *The Kissing Man* holds against its *tempus fugit* perceptions a steady vision of continuity, of time past and time future as ever-present in the rituals and bloodlines of a community. There are characters in these stories (Muncey, Weaver, Sobel, Finn's father, Dan's father) whose attitude is exemplified in Dan's father's view of the grinder man's significance as "a story, mystery, something concealed, a feeling. That was bad." But there are also characters in these stories who recognize and honour, as do the stories and the cycle itself, an implied contract between the dead, the living, and the unborn. Mayhew Salkald, his grandson Honey, Doctor Fletcher, Alison, Dan, and others, affirm the magic in the mundane, the importance of ritual and symbol, and the primacy of informed memory for keeping and passing on the good.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Stan Dragland for his advice on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from a couple of poems in the literary magazine *New Quarterly* and one short story, "Side Trip," in *Canadian Forum*, Elliott's only book-length publication to 1994 was the text for the coffee-table book *God's Big Acre: Life in 401 Country* (1986). This book, whose subject is the farming communities along the southern Ontario highway, covers territory familiar to readers of *The Kissing Man*, and Elliott's text provides an interesting companion to his fiction. I should note, too, that Clara Thomas's article comparing *The Kissing Man* with Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches* makes some intriguing observations, and that John Moss's entry on *The Kissing Man* in his *A Reader's Guide to the Canadian Novel*, 2nd ed. (98-100), is appreciative and insightful, though understandably limited by format.

<sup>3</sup> Duffy (54-55) observes that "Southwestern Ontario has produced some fair literature of this sort. . . . George Elliott has speculated in conversation that perhaps because Western Ontario 'peaked' in the [18]90s and has gone nowhere since, . . . its liveliest spirits migrating West or to the cities, the place provides that sense of a golden age gone bust . . . that good writing thrives on." Needless to say, the anonymity of *The Kissing Man's* small town, with its geographically generic roads and



lake, lends it a more general relevance than would otherwise be the case; that anonymity is worth considering in light of Robert Kroetsch's observations on the advantages of unnamed characters in Canadian fiction, in "No Name Is My Name." See Thomas (102) for Elliott's reported testimony that the town is based closely on Strathroy, Ontario.

<sup>4</sup> See Thomas (101): "After *Sunshine Sketches*, *The Kissing Man* is the next landmark in our small-town literature." And more evocatively (104): "*The Kissing Man* is like an overlay, a palimpsest on *Sunshine Sketches*."

<sup>5</sup> I do not want to be accused of cuteness, so will mention here that I have published a story cycle of place, *Troutstream* (London: Fourth Estate; Toronto: Random House Canada, 1995), whose setting is an Ottawa suburb.

<sup>6</sup> Michelle Gadpaille argues that the exploration of character began with Duncan Campbell Scott: "In presenting character as dynamic rather than static, as something shaped by social, temporal, and geographical realities, Scott moved towards what has been called the 'great modern subject', the disintegration of the human personality and consciousness" (15).

<sup>7</sup> See Peter Hinchcliffe and Ed Jewinski, who describe the term "magic realism" as an "oxymoronic phrase," a "complex and unstable critical concept" (5-6).

<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to D.M.R. Bentley for pointing this out.

<sup>9</sup> It is worthwhile observing a parallel here between *The Kissing Man* and the first Canadian story cycle of place, Duncan Campbell Scott's *In the Village of Viger*; Viger's resident gossip, Madam Laroque, is also subtly presented, somewhat against type, as insightfully serving a communal function. (See Lynch, "'In the Meantime.'")

<sup>10</sup> Here again, the communal purpose of Alison's parties is reminiscent of an earlier Canadian short story cycle of place, Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, where the hilariously ineffectual whirlwind campaign in Mariposa is ironically justified as follows: "I don't say it didn't do good. No doubt a lot of men got to know one another better than ever they had before" (72).

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas (104), who argues that "Doc Fletcher buries a tiny bit of pink (obviously a piece of the umbilical cord)." The point may be arguable, but I think not the cord. Consider: Froody's newborn baby brother was delivered by Fletcher eight days before the day on which she overhears the doctor at his secret rite (42); and at story's end, Doctor Fletcher is returning to the hospital "to fix up Mrs. Scurrell's baby boy" (47), an "eight-day-old baby boy" (48). A cord would not be pink eight days after delivery, but black, and the doctor performs his fixing-up only on boys.

<sup>12</sup> Again the trope is reminiscent of, if less surprising than, Leacock's self-reflexive reference in the *Sketches*' concluding "L'Envoi: The Train to Mariposa" to "such a book as the present one" (141).

<sup>13</sup> See Flores on the manipulation of time in magic realism generally: "the reader is thrown into a timeless flux and/or the inconceivable, freighted with dramatic suspense" (190); "time exists in a kind of timeless fluidity and the unreal happens as part of reality" (191). See also Thomas (101): "George Elliott wrote *The Kissing*

*Man*, not to stop time, but to join past, present, and future in an ongoing, nurturing process, supportive of the growth and development of individuals."

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# STAGING *THAT SUMMER IN PARIS*: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES AND THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES IN THE LIFE WRITING OF MORLEY CALLAGHAN

Marianne Perz

The people in the principal cafés . . . might just sit and drink  
and talk and love to be seen by others

(Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* 100)

In "Mimesis: The Dramatic Lineage of Auto/Biography," Evelyn Hinz proposes a new poetics of life writing, one that recognizes life writing's "dramatic affinities" (196). She argues that "drama [i]s the 'sister-art' of auto/biography" (196) and writes: "the internal dynamics of life writing are much closer to dramatic art, and the language of the stage affords us a much better vocabulary for describing the impact of this kind of literature than does the critical terminology of prose fiction" (208). There are three pivotal steps in Hinz's argument. First, she traces the "genetic" or historical roots of drama, citing various life writers who have acknowledged the connection between the two genres. Second, she refers to the large volume of modern criticism in which the similarities between the two are illuminated. And third, Hinz points out several features in auto/biography, which, she explains, are ones which Aristotle has identified as being essential to drama.

I suggest that there is yet another parallel between the two genres: the authors' use of similar strategic techniques. Just as a stage director employs stagecraft for the production of a drama, a life writer uses it to shape the way that he or she recreates life experience. Canadian writer Morley Callaghan, I argue, dabbled in techniques of the stage when writing his memoir *That Summer in Paris*. In this text, Callaghan creates a narrative persona for his