

Solace in Solitude:
The Relationship Between Isolation and Memory in *George Sprott*

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In an interview conducted by iGuzzini, cartoonist Seth remarks that in his narrative of George Sprott, “[m]emory is no solace against loneliness,” with loneliness often working against any comfort of isolation (Seth, “Capturing light through drawing”). Although memory may not provide a cure for loneliness, the implied connection between memory and isolation is something that Seth explores through the drawings of his characters. The picture novella, *George Sprott, 1894-1975*, recounts the life of the titular protagonist—all the way to the climax of Sprott’s heart attack—alongside flashbacks and interviews that debate the worthiness of his legacy, if he has one at all. Towards his end, George Sprott finds himself disconnected from the distractions of his early career and personal life, and in this solitude he becomes vulnerable to nostalgia and repressed memories. In fact, the cause for this disconnection to his past life reflects the topics he reminisces on, especially in regard to his unresolved traumas and regrets he pushed too late into his life to address. The journey of George Sprott in this novella offers the memories of his past in various manifestations of isolation and loneliness, whether they be the consequences of age, the introspections of dreams, or the explorations of mortality.

One reoccurring theme throughout *George Sprott* is how Sprott’s aging physique isolates himself from the evolving ecosystem within the town of Dominion, as well as the familiar environment where his early memories occur. Sprott’s age is continuously juxtaposed against the sepia-coloured panels of earlier moments in his

life, as well as interview sequences that flash forward and reveal the decay of those familiar settings. In the middle of all these chapters and panels, there are two interviews that offer the opinions George Sprott claims to hold on a wide variety of subjects. When asked his opinion on the subject of memory, Sprott muses on how he has tried to ignore his memories, but as he grows older age brings them back “with a potency that is completely unexpected” (Seth, “A Few Words from the Man Himself”). As Sprott becomes older, questions of legacy and loose threads haunt his growing distance from the world around him, specifically from those connected to his early life. For example, one of the first reflections seen from Sprott is upon seeing the obituary from someone he loved in his younger years. When thinking of her passing and the time it took place in his life, he realizes his age and feels like he recalled “an arranged date . . . and the one you were to meet had since died of old age” (Seth, “Merrily We Roll Along”). The people George Sprott used to know slowly die, and he continues to live disconnected from the society around him. Even his work environment evolved to a point where “George doesn’t even know the guys upstairs” in the studio, creating new shows while Sprott repeats the stories of his youth to a dwindling audience (Seth, “Prologue”). Alone in the unfamiliar setting, he is left with the memories of his younger self that shaped and defined his character, as well as those he continuously presents to the public. As a result, the loss of connections through changing times leaves Sprott isolated in an unfamiliar setting and without the people who accompanied him, dependant on memories to fill the gaps left by his aging.

Beyond George Sprott's physical state, he also finds isolating experiences in his dreams, formed from memories he tries to forget and some he wants to remember. A significant dream Sprott has in the novella is in the chapter "A Funny Dream," where the memory of his wife, Helen, and all the regrets he held in their marriage resurfaces. In this dream, Sprott is an unrecognized, passive spectator as Helen reprimands Sprott for his terrible treatment of her. Although he confesses that "[h]e pushed his troubles away—hoping they would vanish if he didn't look," this began to hurt their relationship as he ignored the effect his infidelities and disappointments had on his wife (Seth, "A Funny Dream"). Since the dream is taking place within Sprott's mind, the sequence explores the confrontation between how Sprott recollects these memories, and how isolation from his wife allows him to process his shortcomings. When asked in another interview segment about his relationship with regret, Sprott describes how the night often instigates these feelings, as one "[lies] there and [suffers] and [counts] those old wrongs again—far too late to fix them now" (Seth, "A Few Words from the Man Himself"). The final panel in the chapter "A Funny Dream" leaves Sprott lying alone in the dark, his face remorseful as he is confronted by these memories and the regrets he associates with them. The isolation Sprott feels within these dreams leaves him wrestling with the memories of his past, propelling him to finally address the regrets and loose ends in his life.

Throughout the novella, however, George Sprott is at his most isolated when confronting his own mortality and the memories he relives in his final moments. The moment of his heart attack takes place when he is both physically and emotionally

alone, and most vulnerable to the memories he repressed over his life. In the chapter “More from the Man Himself,” Sprott makes several claims in an interview concerning death-related topics juxtaposed by the seconds leading up to his death. One of the most poignant questions addresses loose ends at the end of one’s life, in response to which Sprott claims that there is “no point in dwelling on [loose ends]” and it is better to accept shortcomings (Seth, “More from the Man Himself”).

However, in Sprott’s final moments alone in his dressing room, his mind sees a vision of Olive Mott, his abandoned daughter, and Helen Sprott, the people he hurt in life when he ignored the impact of his actions. When thinking of these people, Sprott is overcome “by a great wave of regret” as his suppression of memory leaves him shameful of his shortcomings (Seth, “And So, Here We Are”). Although it is too late for him to absolve himself for his shortcomings, this moment opens the floodgate for Sprott to acknowledge all his memories sprawled on the unfoldable pages later in the novella. In that expansive sequence, Sprott is confronted with special memories of his childhood, adventures, and various objects, and although the meaning of this sequence is debatable, the impact lies in reliving his life and finding “some resolution to this struggle” of life (Seth, “More from the Man Himself”). The final confrontation with his own finite life allows George Sprott to relive all the memories he experienced and find, if not satisfaction, then some brief understanding of what his life meant on this planet.

In conclusion, the numerous manifestations of isolation and loneliness within *George Sprott, 1894-1975* by cartoonist Seth reveal how memories of the past are interconnected with those manifestations through the nature of aging, dreaming,

and mortality. Isolation for George Sprott involves the changing times and environments surrounding his social life and career, featured both within and outside of his dreams, and finally with his inevitable death, alone in a room, and alone with his thoughts. Through all of these events, George Sprott reconnects with the memories he suppressed; through isolation he finds that he indeed had shortcomings, but it is also in isolation that he gains some sense of what his life ultimately meant. Most of the story is left to the reader to interpret how impactful his life was, or even if there was any resolution to the question of his legacy. Beyond his own personal conclusions about them, George Sprott's memories are left to the solitary reader.

Works Cited

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