

Recollection and Revision: Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*

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I

DESPITE BEING AWARDED THE TITLE Dame Penelope Lively in 2012 and having won prestigious literary awards during a long career, outside of Britain Lively's fiction is less well known than her resumé would seem to warrant. Furthermore, her novels, despite being well reviewed, have received relatively little critical attention.¹ A major exception is the Booker-Prize-winning *Moon Tiger*, which pursues many of Lively's favourite themes but

1 Perhaps Lively's work in general, with the exception of *Moon Tiger*, has been perceived as unfashionable or middlebrow because it generally concerns mostly commonplace people and circumstances while often attending to conventional male-female relationships and to family life. Her humanism, based on the importance of interpersonal recognition and commitment, might also strike some as unstylish. Yet her literary practice is anything but conservative. Milada Franková commends Lively, "usually labelled a conservative writer," by stressing "the experimental manner of Lively's prose"—its postmodern orientation most evident in *Moon Tiger* with its focus on "the elusiveness of language, deferral of meaning, multiplicity of voices, breaking down of the authoritative voice and other relativising concepts" (56). She is also an adroit prose stylist. A *New York Times* review credits Lively with "the gift of being able to render matters of great import with a breath, a barely audible sigh, a touch" (Bausch). In *Moon Tiger* it is perhaps harder to recognize Lively's language is generally subtle and understated because Claudia Hampton is anything but.

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is more ambitious than her other novels, not only by being centred on a larger-than-life personality but by dramatically entangling her in world history, especially through her experience as a World War II war correspondent. Evidencing Lively's life-long fascination with history—her area of study at Oxford, from which she graduated in 1954—*Moon Tiger*, like her other novels, not only features a protagonist compelled to investigate history, personal and collective, but represents how memory captures or distorts the past, how it permeates the present and projects the future, and how it helps fashion personal reality and self-identity. Lively acknowledges that we are all bound by chronological time and yet are capable—despite the power of forgetting—of reconstructing and changing its significance through memory in concert with other mental faculties. Over a forty-year career her publications have incorporated these themes. They appear in her first adult novel, *The Road to Lichfield*, a 1977 finalist for the Booker Prize, and in the most recent of her twenty-two adult novels and short story collections, as well as in some of her thirty-one children's books.

Lively contends that recollection, as mediated by language and particularly by narrative, lies at the core of human experience, including individuals' sense of themselves. Indeed, it is doubtful that anyone lacking short- and long-term memory, as in the case of advanced Alzheimer's, would have the resources to express much of a self or constitute one in the first place, no matter how many rudimentary habits or visceral responses survive. Lively's recent memoir, *Ammonites and Leaping Fish* (2013), articulates her ideas about memory, but they are enacted and coalesce most powerfully in *Moon Tiger*. This novel perhaps is particularly worth revisiting now because, as the most assertive and successful employment of its author's long-time concerns, it could provide an illustrative point of entry for retrospection of her overall accomplishment. Lively is eighty-seven, and her last novel, *How It All Began*, was published in 2011. There may not be another.

Facing her own death, the protagonist of *Moon Tiger*, elderly historian Claudia Hampton, recollects personal and world history with the desire, on the one hand, to assert her positive self-conception and, on the other, to understand those elements of the past that do not entirely fit her self-narrative. What results is a coming to terms with dissonant aspects of her life formerly suppressed and, in consequence, the ability to face death with equanimity.

Arriving at this condition, however, is not straightforward because Claudia often experiences as well as characterizes memory as "kaleidoscopic," a term Lively has used throughout her career to describe one aspect

of what researchers have labeled episodic or autobiographical memory.² Although one can reproduce past experiences in orderly sequences, they more often manifest in terms of non-linearity, complexity, unanticipated associations, and changeability. Broken into narrative chunks, sometimes inclusive of different points of view, and following no consistent chronology, *Moon Tiger* captures the disorderly aspects of a kaleidoscope but also recognizes that a kaleidoscope continually generates new patterns and expressions of order. Gradually, the postmodern structural aspects of the novel, through a combination of Claudia's intentions and the unpredictable emergence of memories, generate order as she circles around and finally discloses what is both central to her life story and most challenging to her self-understanding. Faced with death, Claudia and the novel ultimately gain coherence and control through her willingness to re-experience the implications of the novel's title.

II

The first sentence of *Moon Tiger* consists of an abrupt announcement by its audacious and, it appears, supremely self-assured protagonist. The dying Claudia Hampton, who throughout the novel slips in and out of consciousness, tells a nurse, "I'm writing a history of the world." Convinced of her patient's senility, the condescending nurse responds, "Well, my goodness.... Upsy a bit, dear, that's a good girl!" (1). The ironic gap quickly becomes apparent because Claudia remains intellectually vibrant and lucid in her internal mental life. As she does with many other characters in her novels, Lively accesses Claudia's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and, uniting all three, her memories. She is a successful and controversial popular historian, but she will absorb the "history of the world" she contemplates into the history of her own largely egocentric life as she internally processes it in her final days while producing an often kaleidoscopic review of her own past that constitutes the bulk of the novel (2). She asks herself,

2 Following the lead of theorists and researchers, Lively breaks memory into several broad categories: procedural (how to do things), semantic (the language-driven capacity to identify things), and episodic or autobiographical (awareness of past experiences, their contexts, and their emotional content). This by now conventional simplification partially postdates Lively's earliest work, but it is implicit from the first, as is her understanding that autobiographical memory "is random, nonsequential, capricious, and without it we are undone" because it allows us to know ourselves as selves and the foundations of action and interaction, although all three types of memory are necessary for a person to function capably (*Dancing* 122, 123).

shall it or shall it not be linear history? I've always felt a kaleidoscopic view might be an interesting heresy. Shake the tube and see what comes out. There is no chronology inside my head. I am composed of a myriad Claudias who spin and mix and part like sparks of sunlight on water. The pack of cards I carry around is continually shuffled and reshuffled; there is no sequence, everything happens at once. (2)

Despite the disparate memories and past situational identities she comprehends, Claudia is well integrated enough to exercise some control over her narrative, which, although not strictly linear, provides exposition when needed and strategically defers the central drama of her life until the later stages of the novel. But it is also the case, in spite of leaving matters to apparent chance and because of fantasizing that she is composing a history of the whole world, that the circumstances surrounding her long-suppressed psychic war wounds are not likely to be the first things disclosed by the shaken tube of memory.

The “world” part of her project is not inappropriate, however, because her life is connected not only to the world history she writes about in her books on important historical figures but also to momentous history that influenced her personal life, especially World War II but also the postwar Soviet domination of Eastern Europe: “*Moon Tiger* is conscious of itself as a story of history, of personal relations in great historical events, and the unfeelingness of history to those relations and the characters involved” (Dukes 89). At the heart of the novel lies World War II, Cairo and the Egyptian desert at the time of the North African Campaign, and an insect repellent known as Moon Tiger with its intensely romantic name in such contrast to Claudia’s habitual matter-of-factness and its own mundane function. Her discontinuous and chronologically disjunctive internal narrative, briefly interspersed with and at times contradicted by the thoughts and recollections of other characters, loosely replicates, as it spirals around the memory and meaning of a wartime love affair, the spiraling form of the burning coil of insect repellent with its weight of emotional associations. Only a third of the way through her narrative does Claudia reveal what Moon Tiger is for those who do not know and, obliquely at first, begin to unfold what it means to her—a matter that she earlier had only briefly touched upon. Like *The Road to Lichfield* and many of the novels that followed, *Moon Tiger* relives and interrogates memory and its partially constitutive relation to a character’s self-meaning and consequent behaviour.³

³ Like *Moon Tiger* and other of Lively’s novels—*The Photograph* (2003) is a particularly strong example—*The Road to Lichfield* already follows a pattern of

Claudia's sense of self appears firm and purposeful, and in this she exemplifies the strong, independent woman Lively clearly admires: "I like women like that, upfront and aggressive," she says of Claudia (Interview). Claudia's life has been spent, with the exception of her wartime love affair, in confirming her story, with many memories to support it, about herself as someone exceptional. And indeed she is presented as intelligent, confident, energetic, forthright, courageous, dismissive of stupidity and dullness, and adept at getting her way. Throughout most of her life she was beautiful. Aware of her inherent gifts, she not only employs them but asserts them as a persona; she must live up to her conception of herself that, it turns out, is at some remove from aspects of herself that might compromise the person she publically asserts. But because she intends her history of the world as self to be accurate, in her silent thoughts and memories she reveals, as a sort of negative capability, a Claudia who might have been a somewhat or greatly different person from the self-certain, abrasive individual for whom strength interacts with a carelessness of others' feelings and an aversion to emotional closeness.

Claudia is more nature than nurture. In her novels Lively often attends to the relationship between these two determinants, and sometimes it is unclear which prevails, as with the character of Lazlo, Claudia's in-effect adoptive son, about whom she wonders "how much of Laszlo's instability can be attributed to history and how much to temperament" (178). In Claudia's case there is no clear explanation other than the unpredictable shuffling of genetic cards for why she as well as her slightly older brother Gordon are brilliant and full of self-assertion whereas their widowed mother is presented as a dull, conventional creature who does not know what to do with them. They grow up together in intense competition, perhaps more intense because they are so alike. The first personal recollection Claudia shares, part of her "kaleidoscopic view" of the past that dis-

deploying new circumstances or information and the memories they generate that in turn impel characters to interrogate history and challenge understandings of self. This pattern asserts itself in the experience of the novel's protagonist Anne Linton, who must disengage herself from restraints created by her past, especially those shaped by her relationships with her husband, father, and brother. By confronting personal history she discovers material for a revised self-narrative, a more capable identity, and prospects for a more satisfying life. As with most of Lively's novels, however, the ending does not achieve full closure. In this, *Moon Tiger* is an exception in that Claudia dies at the end after having revealed, to readers but not other characters, not only the general character of her life and personality but the negative capability revealed by a love affair imaginatively and emotionally encapsulated in the burning of Moon Tiger.

penses with “linear” history (*Moon Tiger 2*), is of her brother’s dangerously pushing her off a steep hillside, the outcome of competition in collecting fossils. But immediately we get a contrary story, one of Lively’s typical self-contained narrative chunks—in this novel preceded and followed by white space—giving Gordon’s different version of what happened. But is this to be understood as truly Gordon’s story, or might it be contrived by Claudia, exercising an interpersonal imagination that seems alien to much of what she leads us to believe about herself? Of her history of the world she thinks, “My story is tangled with the stories of others ... their voices must be heard also” (6). So early on, the novel confronts the vagaries of memory as well as the uncertainties of historical interpretation, and of literary interpretation as well. Our world consists of a set of generally agreed-upon facts surrounded by emotions, divergent interpretations, and uncertainty.

Also at play are the associative-emotional links that unpredictably lead to new ideas and memories. Lively’s approach demarcates voluntary and involuntary memories, a distinction posited by Bergson and maintained in Proust’s *À la recherche*: Claudia functions as both a purposeful historian and a complex emotional being who, as she lies in what will become her deathbed, is particularly susceptible to memory traces and the return of, if not the repressed, what she has chosen to semi-repress in an effort to control and stabilize her self-identity. Her control over her projected history of the world is limited because her mind sometimes spins out in unforeseen directions. The influence of modernists such as Woolf and Joyce is apparent when, as sometimes occurs in this and other Lively’s novels, free indirect discourse flows into stream of consciousness.

For example, in a mix of intentionality and contingency, Claudia, imagining a “universal beginning” for her “history,” thinks about the beginning of life on earth and, building on her interest in geology and paleontology, she decides that an ammonite, “a spokesperson from the steaming Jurassic seas,” might make a good narrator for the early stages of her opus (3). “But here the kaleidoscope shakes,” and her thoughts logically but unpredictably stream from “the Paleolithic” into the experience of nineteenth-century fossil-hunting scientists. This subject in turn elicits recollection of the indeterminate event on the hillside, which Claudia says happened at an age prior to her and Gordon’s awareness of geological or socio-historical time: “our concept of time was personal and semantic” (3). Like Lively’s other novels but more so, *Moon Tiger* acts out the associative and often confounding dance of time and memory that dominates individual and

collective experience.⁴ The novel's challenge is to signify uncertainty and discontinuity and, in co-operation with Claudia's similar ambition for her world/personal history, form them into imaginative coherence. To accomplish this task Claudia must relive and contextualize self-defining events and circumstances, doing so in accordance with her end-of-life awareness "that reality and history are given meaning only by the operations of human consciousness" (Moran, *Penelope* 116).

Her first memory within her "history" is of her brother Gordon, and later, after establishing the shared intelligence, curiosity, competitiveness, and unconventionality that characterized their childhoods, she reveals that after puberty they began an incestuous relationship lasting several years; the catalyst was a discussion about the facts of life and a tango lesson Gordon gave his sister. Consensual sibling incest is little understood, in part because it no doubt is underreported. But the siblings' experience is somewhat explicable because of their similar natures, including their resistance to social constraints, and because their intense childhood relationship and their precociousness seemingly isolate them from others, including their widowed, limited mother who finds them impossible to understand or control. The absence of their father, killed in World War I, would also offer scope for the siblings to develop their own sexual dynamics, free of parental models. In any event, Claudia characterizes the incest as "narcissistic love" and Gordon as an extension of herself (187). Gordon manifests Claudia's self-referential world and an egotism that only the experience of disinterested love, something she little understands when she experiences it, can disrupt.

After ending their sexual relationship, although uneasy about it, neither sibling forgot or particularly regretted it. Indeed, Claudia's attitude toward her personal past is to regret nothing she has done or has happened in her life: what is, is; what was, was. She is a realist who forthrightly confronts death: "I'm dying, you know," she tells Laszlo, whom she had taken in as a teenage refugee displaced by the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary—one example of how big or collective history and personal history intertwine

4 "Memory studies," since 2008 represented by a journal of that name, through a broad range of disciplines and concerns examines the changing forces and factors that influence individual and group remembering and forgetting. It is an enormous field with insights applicable to Lively's fiction. In this essay I have attended to Lively's own understanding of her work and what I see as a strong correspondence between her ideas about fiction and memory on the one hand and her novelistic practice on the other. But as one would expect from a long-time student of history, she herself has made use of others' theories about history and memory—a distinction, incidentally, that memory studies finds problematic.

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in the novel and mutually help shape individuals. But because she is dying she will not only revisit her past but in some cases consciously and unconsciously challenge earlier understandings of it and of herself.

III

In putting her life in order Claudia must recollect/re-collect memories of four men, a miscarried fetus, and a daughter. The men are Gordon; Jasper, her off and on again long-time lover following World War II; Lazlo, a temperamental artist who virtually worships Claudia for her uncompromising strength of purpose and the help she gives him over the years; and Tom Southern, her wartime lover. The fetus, a shadowy emotional presence in Claudia's life, had been the posthumous consequence of her affair with Tom Southern. Her daughter Lisa, the product of her relationship with Jasper, Claudia characterizes as a dull child and then a conventional and boring adult unworthy, Claudia feels, of Claudia's own brilliance. Passages that share Lisa's thoughts and memories reveal, however, that Claudia's assessment of her daughter and the nature of her daughter's life are erroneous, that Lisa in fact is a pronounced individual who, it appears, has kept aspects of herself and her adult life hidden in an attempt to preserve self-integrity in the face of Claudia's overwhelming personality.

Illustrating her practice of asserting multiple and different subjectivities, especially in regard to competing memories and varied interpretations of the past, Lively juxtaposes two passages about a walk Claudia had once taken with her young daughter on a breezy day amidst trees and wildflowers. Claudia's sensuous and detailed recollection indicates at the end of her life an aroused interest in her daughter that challenges her normally dismissive stance. Without fully realizing it she is reassessing, not just revisiting, aspects of her life. But part of the memory apparently comes from a narrator rather than from Claudia's imaginings. It concerns attention Lisa paid to the pupils of her mother's eyes. Joycean in its presentation of a child's point of view, the second passage begins, "The trees are singing. They also make whooshing and hissing noises and eyes stare from their trunks, shapes of big cruel eyes." Also, "Claudia is really Mummy, but she does not like being Mummy so you have to say Claudia." Lisa's juvenile perceptions and conceptions end, "But Claudia is watching. Claudia's eyes have black holes just like the eye in the tree, and inside Claudia there are little fierce animals that might come peeping out of those eyes, little biting animals, little animals with sharp teeth" (45). Early on, Lisa has recognized her mother's power and antagonism. Perhaps part of Claudia's problem is that Lisa was not the daughter of Tom Southern.

Before she is ready to deal with World War II and Tom Southern, however, Claudia in kaleidoscopic fashion provides a lot of information about her life before and after her time in Cairo as a wartime correspondent, the only female one, as she proudly notes. Her job and her meeting Tom, a tank commander, result from several chance occurrences signified as such; this contingency involves unpredictably meeting certain people in certain places at certain times. For example, she encounters a soldier, a stranger to her, with the authority to get her to the front; she characterizes this meeting as “one of those vital hinges” that change everything (69). But such hinges incorporate both “choice and contingency” because of Claudia’s drive, bravado, and opportunism that includes willingness to take advantage of her physical attractiveness. Through these qualities she promotes herself into a journalistic trip to the ill-defined front out in a desert where British and Rommel’s tank corps are engaged in a terminal struggle for North Africa. This trip allows her to meet Tom and soon afterwards commence their affair, which takes place on his intermittent leaves in Cairo and lasts up until his death in battle. Claudia’s recollections of her wartime experiences take up the central third of the novel and contain some of Lively’s most precise, detailed narrative and descriptive prose as well as some of her most effectively impressionistic and deeply felt; as others have pointed out, the episode no doubt feeds on Lively’s highly impressionable early childhood spent in Cairo.⁵ For Claudia the affair became the secret centre of her life, the crux of her narrated history, the time she was blindsided by love. She refers to it as the “core” of her life story (12, 70).⁶

5 This period, presented as a near state of grace, is recollected in *Oleander, Jacaranda: A Childhood Perceived* (1994) with its subtitle suggesting that personal memory is always interwoven with subjective interpretation.

6 Hodda El Satta makes the case that this “core,” which Claudia experiences as “being outside time,” represents a “dialectic correlation between her own life and history [that] is a reflection of the general movement of time—public and private” (206). Furthermore, these “two aspects of time ... reach a moment of repose, of harmony as they coincide and become identical. This moment becomes possible and acceptable because it takes place against the background of Egypt, a land already credited with a mythical ability to unite past and present. Through contiguity, Egypt becomes a natural metaphor of the sought after intersection between history and private time” (206, 207). That *Moon Tiger* takes place in the context of Egypt, with its personal significance for Lively including the imaginative hold on her of its history both ancient and recent, is an important and often overlooked aspect of the novel. Claudia’s feeling of being outside of time, an effect produced by a union of public and private time, more specifically entails a joining of history and sexual love, an intensification of experience in the context of war and death that imaginatively and emotionally assimilates the timelessness that the West has traditionally associated with Egypt.

Claudia's self-control, her repression of inner emotional existence, suggests actual vulnerability, a quality that Christina Kotte argues lies behind Claudia's history of the world as an effort to offset "her faltering sense of sovereignty. ... a final, desperate attempt at reasserting mastery and control in light of impending death" (139). Whether or not "desperate," her attempt reflects her effort to make sense of her life by placing the most meaningful experience of her history at the centre of world history in order to capture its profound emotional importance that the pain of loss had hitherto caused her to repress. What she disinters as the core of her story is a time when her self-control had evaporated, doing so in the face of war and that of an articulate, capable, humorous, and sensitive young man attracted to her own intelligence, verve, and beauty. For what seems one of the few times in her life, apart from that life's final retelling, she lets down her guard; she feels and wonders. That is the way she describes her all-too-brief affair with Tom, and there is no reason to doubt her since, in looking back, she is still amazed at responses so different from her seeming nature when in Egypt she found what she came to recognize as love. The objective correlative of the Moon Tiger encapsulates all this. The slow burn as it releases its mosquito repellent spirals around and around its coil, its life growing shorter and shorter until extinguished but leaving behind a ghostly trail of ash. It is like one of her few nights with Tom: its awareness of diminishing time, of approaching dawn, of a parting that war might make their last, and of the traces of memory that will last as long as she does. Later in life, having watched part of a television drama about the North African Campaign, the two dimensions of the screen take on a third that "smells of Moon Tiger, kerosene, dung and dust. Its feelings are so sharp that Claudia gets up, slams the television into silence" (50). It is only upon confronting death that she confronts the memories the television show had threatened to elicit, for the painful encroachment of time now suffuses its recalled transcendence in the hotel room where she and Tom made love: "She lies awake in the small hours. On the bedside table is a Moon Tiger ... a green coil that slowly burns all night, its glowing red eye a companion of the hot insect-rasping darkness. She lies there thinking of nothing, simply being, her whole body content. Another inch of the Moon Tiger feathers down into the saucer" (50, 75-76). Later, "The Moon Tiger is almost entirely burned away ... its green spiral is mirrored by a grey ash spiral in the saucer. The shutters are striped with light; the world has turned again" (79). Despite the novel's title, the Moon Tiger shows up only briefly, but here understatement and context are all. The moon, its waxing and waning, a tiger stalking prey, energy extinguished,

the meaning of war that nothing can long repel, and a trace of ashes: love, danger, time, death, memory.

But love, channeled by these other elements, changes Claudia in a transformation registered in the perceptions and words—language at times so different from her usual self-certainty and dismissiveness—to convey it in her final days. According to Kotte, Claudia’s experiences “a break-up of her confident trust in her own terms of reference ... [that] derives from a fundamental ethical moment, i.e., the encounter with alterity” (139).⁷ That Tom causes her to respond to something strange and disruptive, at odds with the ego-determination she had previously exercised, is certainly true, and it is ethical in that it causes her imaginatively and emotionally to experience and transcend otherness. This internal change is evident, even though following the war she self-protectively doubles-down on a contentious and unsentimental personality that, in a full and successful life not overtly controlled by its hidden core of romance, gets crustier with age as she papers over the pain of loss. She sees what she wants to see and, until about to die, perceives the world according to entrenched preconceptions.

But one result of her love-shaken wartime experience had been that the younger Claudia begins to see aspects of everyday life more clearly, a heightened perception partially catalyzed by encountering the chaos of the ill-defined battlefield, as disorienting as the sandstorm she and her companions drive through getting there. Love in a time of war elicits a kind of clarity in the midst of confusion. Thus, for instance, she begins to actually see Egypt and Egyptians. Hitherto she had been part and parcel of Cairo’s British sphere, an island of privilege and physical and epistemic exclusiveness. Love, however, had caused her to perceive not only beauty in her surroundings, but also “sores round the mouth of children, the flies crawling on the sightless eye of a baby” (75).

Claudia makes no protest against economic or political oppression, neither in this instance nor anywhere else; she sees and reports in accor-

⁷ Drawing especially on the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, Kotte impressively and at length situates the novel in the genre of historiographic metafiction and argues that Claudia’s “subversion of History ... functions above all as a negative foil for the gradual emergence of the protagonists ‘ethical self’—a self no longer impervious, but highly susceptible to the demands of the vulnerable Other” (140). One quibble: on the two occasions when this ethical self manifests, during the war and on the threshold of death, it is not very gradual, for radically changed circumstances force on her awareness of the other—or in the case of Claudia’s deathbed experience, reawakened awareness—that is sudden and, in light of her habitual egotism, difficult for her to comprehend and know how to respond to.

dance with her character. The novel and Lively herself can be taken to task for disengagement from issues of social justice; Kathleen Williams Renk, for instance, views *Moon Tiger* as an exercise in “imperial nostalgia” that “continue[s] the legacy of imperialism ... [and] continue[s] to represent and codify colonial relationships” (218). For Huw Marsh, however, the novel represents “a postmodernist critique ... [that presents] a history bound up with, but critical of, empire; a history which describes the rise and fall of empires and is aware of their ongoing presence” (160). Disapproval of the novel’s treatment of imperialism is much like its susceptibility to disapproval for not protesting male dominance. Claudia says of the feminist movement that it could have used her help but that she “never felt its absence” (14) since what matters to her is unrelated to women in general. Because of the prominence of Claudia and Tom’s affair, Margaretta Jolly argues that in the novel “History, and the particular question of masculinity, dissolve into romance” (72). Mary Hurley Moran, however, believes the novel uses Claudia to challenge “patriarchal assumptions and to show that female liberation means something other than simply adopting the ways of men” (“Penelope Lively’s” 90).

Not only does Claudia’s quirky and complex character, immersed as it is complex personal and social history, but also the novel’s inclusion of alternate points of view encourage such divergent critiques. The point here is that Claudia gets to tell her story in her own way, stressing what she wishes, and romance in a time of war is the core of that story despite her rejection of sentimentality and various ideological or theoretical trends. And her political incorrectness is not limited to feminism or imperialism; it stretches to admiration of historical figures like Cortez, Napoleon, and Tito who, although she acknowledges their viciousness, fascinate her because of their combination of will and intelligence, qualities she of course perceives in herself. Criticizing author or novel because of Claudia’s overt and hidden agendas is as misguided as labeling *Heart of Darkness* or its author racist solely on the basis of Marlow’s limitations.

No doubt some readers find Claudia unattractive on a number of scores, perhaps even enough to stop reading. Lively takes a risk in making her so. But the war-time changes wrought in Claudia, although mostly suppressed later on, should make her, if not more sympathetic, at least more interesting. She takes on more depth when, despite being a confirmed agnostic if not an atheist, during the war she is forced to consider the existence of God. With the *Moon Tiger* insect repellent, Lively, whose other writings display familiarity with Blake, might have been thinking of “Tyger, tyger, burning bright, / In the forests of the night” and the poem’s

questioning of the nature of God. With Tom at the front, Claudia one day finds herself in a church fervently and confusedly praying to God for her lover's safety; in telling of this episode she expresses amazement at herself for resorting to such behaviour. But in her final days, this time facing her own death, she even talks to her normally devalued daughter about God—and sharing with Lisa is as uncharacteristic as Claudia's attention to God—in a conversation that leads into her memory of her wartime prayer. Claudia cannot get away from the idea that God, although evidently “an unprincipled bastard” because of the historical misery he has caused or allowed, might possibly exist because of the way the idea of divinity has permeated human consciousness and history (54, 55). War, love, and loss had once sensitized her to human misery, and their influence resurfaces, if only in guarded and necessarily temporary form, at the end of her life. Had contingency expressed itself differently the influence of Tom and of love might have produced a woman different from the one we experience. This is a kind of shadow self, an alternative Claudia that might have been, although for all we know that person might not have shared Claudia's success and brilliance.

Reliving the war and accessing another part of herself also appears part of the reason for her altered behaviour toward her daughter. Wanting to get things right with her, much as she wants to get her story right, Claudia, after having from time to time recollected instances of earlier interactions with Lisa, apologizes to her. She says she is “Sorry I was such an inadequate mother,” and after Lisa's stumbling, tongue-tied response at such an uncharacteristic admission, Claudia matter-of-factly concludes the subject with a small qualification: “By conventional standards I made a bad job of being a mother. So I apologize. Not that that's much use now. I just wanted to put it on record” (182). Lisa is nonplused by this, her understanding of mother and daughter now disordered by a troubling new memory, and she regrets hearing what she heard: “now it will always be there, complicating things,” she thinks (182). New information and interpretation continually revise history.

IV

Claudia's last piece of business involves having Lazlo, her worshipful one-time ward who is devastated by the idea that she might actually be mortal, bring her Tom's journal. It had come to her following his death. Claudia had asked Tom what war is like, and the novel takes up ten pages in which he sensitively describes events and impressions conveying how war had seemed to him. He imagines it might someday be made into a coherent

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shadow self.

story, perhaps by Claudia (204), and this is the novel's final testament to Lively's commitment to narrative as a supreme form of human expression. Tom's journal now has become an intrinsic part of the story that Claudia and the novel, despite their apparent digressions and non-linearity, in fact effectively unfold. Even though she feels she cannot make narrative sense out of the journal—"your voice is louder now than the narrative I know" (206)—love intensified by war, life by death, becomes the thematic hub of the novel's artistic wholeness, intimating the ideal of wholeness Claudia approaches through a self-narrative in which private and public converge. At the same time, because the journal appears at the end of the novel, Claudia and the novel give primacy to the character of Tom, to his intelligence and humaneness along with other qualities that attracted Claudia and spoke to obscured parts of her makeup, as well as to the war that changed Claudia's life through not only her love affair but by setting her on the road to becoming a sharp-eyed historian. War, love, the Moon Tiger: these constitute the hidden heart, long suppressed, of Claudia's life story.

Moon Tiger concludes with Claudia's death and a void consisting of the patent absence of what we are to understand had been a remarkable person, and all the more so because of her courage in recollecting, and partially revising, aspects of her past and identity inconsistent with her long-cultivated sense of self. Upon her death her hospital room has "the stillness of a place in which there are only inanimate objects ... No life. Something creaks ... Beyond the window a car starts up, an aeroplane passes overhead. The world moves on. And beside the bed the radio gives the time signal and a voice starts to read the six o'clock news" (208).⁸ Time moves on, news reports what is new and already old, and the present slips into the equivocal domain of memory and meaning.

⁸ Deborah Raschke stresses that at the end of the novel meaning is vacated as "binaries collapse, [with] no epiphany to stabilize the previous chaos and uncertainty" (131). But meaning inheres in a life courageously lived within a meaningless, chaotic universe and in the face of history's depredations. Raschke is correct in saying that *Moon Tiger* presents "refreshing conceptions about history, philosophy, women, and the plotting of women's desire" (131), but Lively's goal is not to make sense out of the messy business of life. As one who has "never come to terms with life, and ... wouldn't want anybody else to do so," she believes "We read to find out more about what it is like to be a human being, not to be told how to be one" ("Bones" 15). The concluding scene of *Moon Tiger* speaks, as does the rest of the novel, to the human condition of uncertainty and the struggle for meaning waged within the entanglements of time. That should be enough to make readers thoughtful about their own lives.

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