"Summoning Your Youth at Will"

Memory, Time, and Aging in the Work of Penelope Lively, Margaret Atwood, and Doris Lessing

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In a 2009 interview with Sarah Crown in the *Guardian* newspaper, the novelist Penelope Lively remarked that "in old age you can close your eyes and summon your youth at will. As a writer it puts one at a distinct advantage." She added: "the idea that memory is linear . . . is nonsense."[1] Aging is clearly a topic of increasing interest for a number of contemporary women writers, and new critical approaches to aging and gender in this field are beginning to burgeon. The focus in the majority of critical work has often been on how literary texts address the theme or subject of aging; however, as Lively's comments in the *Guardian* interview suggest, and as I will argue here, aging is capable of generating in fiction a new relationship among time, memory, family history, and form. Through a close study of Penelope Lively's *Family Album*, which was published in 2009, and with briefer allusion to Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and Doris Lessing's *Love, Again* (1996), this essay will argue that these writers' engagement with aging and gender allows them to create their own kind of "late style," to borrow from Edward Said. Lively in particular draws on fictional devices (such as the deliberate refusal of narrative tension or suspense) that make us consider how we rethink the pattern of a life as we age.

This essay begins with a brief survey of recent feminist writing about aging, arguing that this work tends to focus on how aging is represented, rather than how it might impact form. The critical work that does pay attention to the relationship between aging and form, or the idea of "late style," will then be considered, particularly the work of Edward Said in his *On Late Style*. However, the majority of work on "late style" does not consider the issue of gender.

The novelists we are concerned with here have all made comments in interviews and essays, which will then be discussed, about the importance of the gendered aging process in allowing them to rethink structure and form in fiction. However, I want to make a distinction between *The Blind Assassin* and

Love, Again, which both focus on the protagonist reflecting on her past life in relation to the present, and *Family Album*, which uses the family home as the central shaping consciousness. Lessing's and Atwood's novels emphasize the limitations of individual perception by focusing on vision, blindness, and the photograph or portrait as a "witness" to the past. In contrast Lively's text makes use of the idea of the collage or kaleidoscope as a metaphor for shifting perspectives, but also as a device to structure the novel itself. In doing so, it references both high and low art forms and acknowledges women's domestic work as part of their art. Thus, for Lively, I argue, aging generates a focus on the work involved in maintaining a home and parenting a child; she sees these as inseparable from the work of writing.

The essay will then explore how the focus on domestic and emotional labor, and its relation to writing, is connected in Lively's novel to the innovative formal device of refusal of suspense. The generation and final resolution of suspense around the secret of biological parentage is key to *Blind Assassin* and is intimately connected with the secret of authorship, but I argue that *Family Album* refuses that connection, perceiving it to be old and tired. This resistance to revelation can be instructively compared with what Said refers to as the unproductive productiveness of "late style" and its refusal of conventional narratives of maturation and development.

The centrality of suspense in popular fiction, especially in romance writing, suggests that all three novelists can be understood as self-consciously deploying the strategies of romantic fiction, even if this is often ironic. This ironic, self-conscious use of popular forms can also be seen as characteristic of middlebrow fiction: the final part of the essay will discuss how all three writers make use of the middlebrow as a creative space for writing.

In the past the second-wave feminist movement was accused of ageism and ignoring the older woman; however, feminist writing about aging and gender has more recently begun to proliferate into a substantial critical literature. In "Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature" Kathleen Woodward claims that "we have not before had a collective feminist historical consciousness of there being older women or of being older women. Historically we have not before had what I call generational consciousness of older women."[2] It is surely not insignificant that many key writers associated with the second wave of feminism, including Germaine Greer in the United Kingdom, Simone de Beauvoir in France, and Betty Friedan in the United States, produced work on women's experiences of aging. In 2001 Roberta Rubenstein argued in *Frontiers* that "now that the cohort of women whose pioneering work defined the second wave of the women's movement has reached the life-stage of the women they once regarded as invisible or irrelevant, they

have begun to address the challenges of aging from the perspective of their own experience as older women."[3] Similarly, Zoe Brennan remarks that "feminism is increasingly beginning to show signs of examining its own, and society's, attitudes towards older women due largely to the fact that the still vocal pioneers of the second wave have reached their sixties and incorporated issues of aging in their work."[4] The three women writers I am considering here have also reached a similar point: Lively was seventy-six when *Family Album* was published; *The Blind Assassin* came out when Margaret Atwood was sixty-one; and Lessing's *Love, Again* was published when she was seventy-seven.

It is also the case, however, that both feminism as a movement with its own "waves" and "generations" and the life story of individuals entering the "third stage" of life tend to draw on narratives of progress and degeneration. As Eagleton and Watkins remark: "terms such as first-, second- and third-wave feminism or 'feminism and postfeminism' structure our understanding by using metaphors either of decline and fall or development and maturation."[5] Woodward claims that feminism needs a model of what she calls "generational continuity" that incorporates "three generations linked to each other through a heritage of care for the next generation" rather than the "Freudian model of oedipal struggle between generations . . . that has been reproduced by feminists in the academy—and to our disadvantage."[6] Therefore it is important to discuss the kinds of narrative trajectories that Lively, Atwood, and Lessing use in order to establish whether they see aging in terms of decline or ripening, and as creating generational conflict or continuity.

The majority of work on gender and aging in literature concentrates less on narrative than on representations or images of aging women.[7] However, there have been some attempts to consider the relationship between aging and narrative structures. Gullette, for example, notes that most cultural scripts related to the aging process follow narratives that correspond to what she calls "decline ideology."[8] More positively, Barbara Frey Waxman coined the term *reifungsroman* to describe what she calls the "novel of ripening."[9] In a later critical work, *To Live in the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging*, Frey Waxman also attends to the "dialogic qualities" in life writing about aging and to the many perspectives provided on aging by the multiplicity of voices in this genre.[10] It remains the case, however, that the conventional age narrative (and one that is often used by male authors) is one of decline accompanied by nostalgia for past glories.[11] A good example of a male-authored contemporary novel that has some similarities to those being considered here is John Banville's *The Sea*; however, the nostalgic, elegiac note dominates, untempered by any other point of view.[12]

Atwood, Lessing, and Lively are part of a significant generation of ag-

ing contemporary women writers. However, in comparison with the work of Margaret Atwood and Doris Lessing, the novelist Penelope Lively's writing has been infrequently studied, and the work that exists mainly concerns *Moon Tiger*, her 1987 Booker Prize–winning novel.[13] *Moon Tiger* focuses on a feisty elderly historian, Claudia Hampton, who, while terminally ill in hospital, reflects on her life and her memories of her time as a war correspondent in Egypt during World War II. This novel has much in common with *Love, Again* and *The Blind Assassin*, which have been the focus of a substantial amount of the critical commentary on aging in Lessing's and Atwood's oeuvres.

This essay argues that the three writers under consideration here take the aging process as a challenge to be addressed in new narrative structures and techniques. Critical discussion of these novels that focuses on form and narrative structure tends not to mention aging (or does so only tangentially); where the focus is on aging, there is less discussion of form, structure, and its implications. Lively's novel, in particular, encourages the reader via its formal process to rethink the relation among time, memory, family history, and form.

My focus on the relationship between aging and form is one that is also central to Edward Said's posthumously published collection of essays, *On Late Style*. Said is fascinated by Adorno's discussion of Beethoven's late style, for example. Adorno's comments reveal what Said perceives to be the "irresolution and unsynthesized fragmentariness"—the refusal of synthesis—in Beethoven's last work.[14] He uses adjectives such as "episodic," "distracted," "repetitive," and "careless" (*LS*, 10) to describe the unfinished, exilic quality of the work. In other essays Said discusses Richard Strauss, Mozart, Jen Genet, Luchino Visconti, Lampedusa, Glenn Gould, Constantine Cavafy, Thomas Mann, and Benjamin Britten. He focuses on music and cinema as much as literature and also on adaptations (both Visconti's *Leopard* and Britten's *Death in Venice*). However, at no point does he discuss a single woman writer, composer, or filmmaker. The closest we get is a reference to Myfanwy Piper, whose work as Britten's librettist involved a process of "cutting, paraphrasing, and condensing" (151) Mann's novel. This begs the question this essay will attempt to answer: how does gender inflect the relationship between aging and what Said calls "late style," or form?

Of course this is a big question to ask, suggesting several others; for example, is there, in fact, a relationship between aging and style, and if there is, how has that relationship been understood at different points in history and in different cultures? Discussions about the idea of "late style" have occurred for the most part over the last century, in tandem with the idea that the production of an artistic career (the oeuvre) can be equated with the life stages of human maturation and development.[15] Frank Kermode's "Going Against," a

review essay discussing Edward Said's *Late Style* alongside the essay collection *Late Thoughts: Reflections on Artists and Composers at Work*, questions how

> this habit of dividing the work of a lifetime into distinct periods took hold. Stylistic and biographical conjectures along these lines were common in the 19th century, and they persisted in various forms until fairly recently. Then they came to be regarded as the product of a false consonance between art and the history of the artist, and they went out of fashion. But now they seem to have become interesting again, and by recognising what was wrong with the old approach a new generation of commentators hopes to devise a more plausible and durable theory of lateness.[16]

Kermode's own interest in this topic is also clear in *The Sense of an Ending*, where his idea of apocalyptic lateness connects visions of the end times or apocalypse with the human desire to make sense of an individual lifespan in fiction.[17] While a substantial amount of work on "late style" has concerned music and the visual arts, in literary criticism there has been a significant discussion of Shakespeare's "late style" in what have become known, controversially, as the "late plays." According to Russ McDonald, for example, Shakespeare's late plays can be distinguished from his earlier work by their "audacious, irregular, ostentatious, playful and difficult" late style.[18] Gordon McMullan, however, in *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, rejects the very idea of a "late" Shakespearean style as inadequate "as a means of understanding a group of plays created in the conditions of early modern English professional theatre."[19] Instead he argues that "the idea of 'late Shakespeare' . . . contributed to the establishment of what I will call a *discourse of lateness*—that is a construct, ideological, rhetorical and heuristic, a function not of life or of art but of the practice of reading or appreciating certain texts within a set of predetermined parameters."[20] He traces the idea of Shakespeare's late style back to Edward Dowden's influential *Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art* (1875), which divided his career into four periods, concluding with "On the Heights," suggesting the achievement of a fully mature aesthetic that coincided with the last years of his life.[21]

More recently, critics including Theodor Adorno and (most important for my discussion here) Edward Said, who makes significant use of Adorno's essay "Late Style in Beethoven," have concerned themselves with this subject. The reexamination of the relationship between aging and art in an environment where there is a certain skepticism about the relevance of the author and biographical criticism to the interpretation of literary texts suggests that the time is right to move beyond questions about the way aging is *represented*

and toward questions of how aging might affect *form*, as the emphasis on *late style* would suggest. Of course there is no more reason why the age of an author should automatically affect the form of a book any more than the subject matter; however, as we shall see, the authors under discussion here have made allusions to the impact of aging on the way they choose to structure their fictional writing in interviews and essays.

And when the issue of gender is added to those of form and age, what might be different? McMullan's book on Shakespeare claims that "gender offers the most obvious immediate critical blind spot in studies of late style: there is no clearer indication of the limitations and fundamental context-boundedness of the discourse of lateness than its systematic exclusion of women."[22] He points out that the absence of discussion of late style in women's writing is connected to the reluctance to ascribe the quality of "genius" to women writers.[23] This would suggest the dominance of patriarchal ideas of late style as the preserve of male writers either in the fullness of or abjuring their powers.

How have the writers under consideration here referred to aging in their nonfiction work? In a short piece in her *Time Bites* essay collection entitled, simply, "Old," Doris Lessing criticizes the dominant cultural script of old age, which she terms the "long descent after the golden age of youth," for ignoring the narrative of "ripening" (to borrow from Waxman), or the idea that "you have to grow slowly into a competence with your emotions."[24] She bewails the physical effects of aging, such as, in her case, the loss of four inches in height, and also makes referenc to what Woodward terms "the mirror stage of old age," remarking: "It is not a surprise to look in the mirrors and think: Who's that old woman."[25] However, on the next page she notes what she calls the "delightful surprises" of aging. She remarks that "time becomes fluid . . . and inside this fluidity is a permanence" and continues:

> Best of all . . . a fresh liveliness in experiencing. It is as if some gauze or screen has been dissolved away from life, that was dulling it. . . . You are taken, shaken, by moments when the improbability of our lives comes over you like a fever. Everything is remarkable. . . . You have been given new eyes. . . . Old age is a great reviver of memories, in more ways than one.[26]

Lessing's sense of aging as "shaking up" conventional apprehensions of time has some parallels with Said's attention to late style as deliberately anachronistic. For Said anachronism's "untimely" refusal of conventional narratives of maturation and development is characteristic of late style in its abrupt juxtaposition of the antiquated with the avant-garde. This combination of what Said terms "undiminished power and yet strangely recapitulatory and even

backward-looking and abstracted quality" (*LS*, 25) is also noted by Margaret Atwood, in an interview in the *Times*, where she connects the experience of aging with different or "untimely" ways of perceiving and writing about time, memory, and narrative: "If you are young you can imagine what it's like to be old but you haven't lived it. If you are older you have not only experienced what it's like to be older but you can remember every stage in between." She continues: "To stop yourself falling asleep you need to become more inventive. So *The Blind Assassin* covers pretty much the entire 20th century but it's also able to draw on a lot of levels of experience which the 25-year-old me did not have access to."[27]

In *Negotiating with the Dead* Atwood suggests that a central creative spur for her own and all writing is "a fear of and a fascination with mortality . . . a desire to make the risky trip to the Underworld, and to bring something or someone back from the dead."[28] She elaborates: "why should it be writing, over and beyond any other art or medium, that should be linked so closely with anxiety about one's own personal, final extinction?"[29] The connection Atwood establishes between mortality and intertextuality is elaborated later on: "All writers learn from the dead. As long as you continue to write, you continue to explore the work of writers who have preceded you; you also feel judged and held to account by them."[30] Recapitulation and looking backward are thus key to the process of producing "new" writing. Lessing's and Atwood's comments, like Lively's, with which I began this essay, focus on how aging and the drift toward death make even more apparent to the aging subject the importance of a perception of time as simultaneous rather than sequential and memory as antilinear. All three writers also draw on aging as a process that has allowed them to develop further their long-standing interest in what might be referred to as the "politics of form."

Penelope Lively's *Family Album* differs in a number of important ways from Lessing's and Atwood's texts and from her own earlier novel *Moon Tiger*. Whereas in Lessing's and Atwood's novels the focus and central shaping consciousness belongs to the aged woman protagonist looking back on her earlier life, *Family Album* has no such central consciousness. The narrative is composed of the different memories and perspectives of the members of a large middle-class family. The narration fluctuates among a number of different family members' first-person accounts, free indirect speech, and omniscient narration; it also moves between the past and the present. There is a substantial focus on the family home, there is a big family secret, and there are disturbing references to a game the children played in the cellar. Although Alison, the wife and mother, is the character who has the place of aging heroine in the novel, she shares narrative space and perspective fairly equally with her

six children; her husband, Charles; and Ingrid, the family's au pair. Different sections of the novel are told from the viewpoints of all the family members.

The understanding of aging as a process that confirms a plural and subjective sense of memory, time, and family history begins to be shared by all the children as they themselves become middle aged, particularly by Alison's daughter Gina, about to celebrate her fortieth birthday:

> It seems to Gina not so much that people are unfathomable or inscrutable but that other times, other circumstances, are unreachable, are no longer available. That was then, and you cannot go back there, just as you cannot revisit your own former self, recover the eleven-year-old Gina of that time when Ingrid went away. That person is herself, but also someone quite other, a distant stranger who occasionally signals, and there is a flash of recognition, but who is for the most part an alien being. . . .
>
> It seems to her that your family is at once utterly familiar and entirely unknown. She knows her parents intimately—their faces, their voices, the way they walk, smile, laugh, frown, hold a knife and fork, turn their head to speak. And she does not know them at all—why they did as they did, what they experienced, how they saw the world, and one another.[31]

The sense of alienation from the past and the absolute otherness of one's former and others' selves is here balanced by the possibility of epiphanic "flashes of recognition." However, rather than suggesting any profound revelation of authentic and unchanging subjective or familial identity, or an ability to access the past, such moments reveal only mundane, domestic, habitual details such as how someone eats. Gina's brother Roger, remembering a family holiday in Cornwall, remarks similarly on the subjective nature of memories of the past: "Your Cornwall was evidently not my Cornwall." He continues: "So who's right? . . . Who sees all of it?" (*FA*, 87).

The answer to this question in this novel, as many reviewers noted, is Allersmead, or the aging traditional English middle-class family home itself. Amanda Craig, writing in the *Independent*, comments: "Allersmead is the most interesting character of all."[32] Lorna Bradbury's review in the *Telegraph* also claims that "the house has as strong a presence as any of the characters. There are some terrific descriptions of the way it stows away events, preserving everything, good and bad, in one great archive."[33] Joanna Briscoe also remarks that the house "takes on the role of the only reliable witness."[34] Lively's use of "a house as an image of the mind" is, according to Nicholas Le Mesurier, "one of her most frequently used devices, especially in her work for children."[35]

The device of the house as witness and archive allows Lively to move beyond the focus on the protagonist's limitations and failures of perception central to Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* and Lessing's *Love Again*. *The Blind Assassin* is for the most part narrated by Iris Chase Griffin, a woman in her eighties who is writing an account of her life as a high-society daughter and wife and of her relationship with her sister, Laura, who killed herself just after the end of World War II. This autobiography/memoir is interspersed with newspaper clippings and chapters from the novel supposedly written by Laura, which contains the story of her romance with Alex, a young communist agitator and science fiction writer in the 1930s. Within this inner novel are embedded parts of a science fiction novel that he composed to entertain his lover and also used as a social commentary.

The Blind Assassin makes much play on notions of blindness and insight, visual acuity and perceptual shifts. The aptly named Iris frequently refers to her own presbyopia or aging vision. Visiting the family memorial for the first time after a bad winter, Iris notes that "there were the family names, only slightly more illegible, but that might be my eyesight. I ran my finger along these names, along the letters of them; despite their hardness, their tangibility, they appeared to soften under my touch, to fade, to waver. Time has been at them with its sharp invisible teeth."[36] The idea of time's teeth as "invisible" suggests the futility of Iris's attempt to preserve the truth by focusing on what she "saw." As readers realize (and she knows herself), what she did not "see" is equally important to the narrative.

In order to make the point about the subjectivity of individual perception, both Atwood and Lively work with the idea of the old photograph as witness, or, as Robinson describes it, as "historical 'source[s].'"[37] Ruth Parkin Gounelas describes this emphasis on the visual in Atwood's novel as "both lure and deception."[38] In *The Blind Assassin* a torn photograph of Laura and Iris with Alex, the young communist agitator, is central to the plot. Laura also leaves evidence of her abusive treatment by Richard, the man Iris is married off to in a "gentleman's agreement" with their father. She gives her opinion of people in the narrative by coloring in black and white photographs of them with tinting materials that indicate in symbolic form her judgment of them and their behavior toward her. (She colors Iris blue because she is "asleep" [*BA*, 195] and gives Richard, her sexual abuser, red hands.)

Lessing's similar point about the limitations and failings of individual perception (especially when reflecting on the past) is also important in *Love, Again*. In this novel the protagonist, Sarah Durham, a sprightly sixty-five-year-old theater producer, writes and produces a play based on the journals and music of a nineteenth-century mixed-heritage Martiniquan musician and artist, Julie Vai-

ron, who was a "fallen woman" and social outcast. The romance of Julie's story seems to cast a spell over the production: Sarah unexpectedly finds herself falling in love with first an actor and then a director of the play; other characters in the novel also endure the torments of unrequited love: in most extreme fashion the patron of the British production of the play, Stephen Ellington-Smith, kills himself because of his hopeless love for the long-dead Julie.

Lessing's point about the limitations of individual perception is made not only through the plot but also through the use of what Virginia Tiger has termed the "external narrative voice." She terms this the "Eye/Voice," which, although initially "as distanced as a camera's long shot," then moves "from Eye to I, from omniscient narrator to limited consciousness."[39] The purposeful fluctuations in narrative mode dramatize issues of focus and perception and force the reader to engage with the question of how things are seen and told. Although photographs don't figure in this novel, the self-portraits of Julie Vairon function in a similar way to reference the conventional developmental narrative of a life. Julie refuses the conventional progress of a woman's life by ending her own; she represents this decision by drawing a black line between the portrait of herself in her early thirties and future selves, represented by imagined self-portraits in middle and old age.

Family Album removes the focus on a specific individual protagonist's engagement with the past and family history and the focus on the limitations of vision and the revelations provided by the photograph or portrait. The very title *Family Album* suggests instead a *sequence* of family photographs that may be of more than one person and have been chosen by several people. The idea of the photograph as witness is one that Lively has used before, in her novel *The Photograph*, which is about the discovery of an incriminating photograph that alters all the characters' perceptions of the person in it.[40] However, in *Family Album* the metaphor of the portrait and the old photograph opens out into an extended interest in narrative as collage, mosaic, or kaleidoscope. Lively uses the kaleidoscope image frequently to describe the shifts in perspective generated by the aging process and its tendency toward revision of long-held views; here she also uses it as a device to structure the novel itself. At a key moment of discovery in the novel one of the characters thinks that "for her it is a seminal moment not just because of the revelation, but because she sees it as a nice instance of a way in which such a revelation changes the entire perception of a scene. Allersmead was reshuffled and rearranged, as she sat there, like the fragments of a kaleidoscope" (114). The house is no longer the stable, reliable witness or the thing that "sees all of it," but, like its inhabitants, is the fluctuating and transient object of shifting perceptions. The kaleidoscope and the collage, both devices familiar to High Modernism,

are also both associated with children's toys and play, as well as childhood artwork, suggesting the use of a metaphor that consciously references both high and low art forms and acknowledges the domestic and familial as part of the "work" of art.

Gwen Raaberg argues that what she terms "femmage" (after Miriam Schapiro's 1989 essay of that name) constitutes "a women's tradition in the arts."[41] She continues:

> as an oppositional strategy, femmage provided an important basis for the practice of a new feminist art. It was a significant revisionist tactical move for feminist artists in the 1970s because it confronted male power in the arts, exposing the politics of aesthetics, which had devalued women's traditional art work and which continued to marginalize women's art. It was also important in focusing the work of a group of women artists, diverse racially and ethnically, on a strategy that connected them to a matrilineal artistic legacy and to each other. . . . Schapiro . . . views women's art activities and the femmage tradition as developing out of the experiences of women's lives, fragmented by domestic and nurturing duties and limited by patriarchal cultural privileges.[42]

Raaberg's understanding of collage as a metaphor that questions the distinction between "high" and "low" art forms and incorporates different kinds of women's work into a new aesthetic is suggestive for my reading of Lively's practice in *Family Album*. It also constitutes one way in which I argue that gender qualifies and complicates Said's vision of "late style" in this work.

Undoubtedly the "kaleidoscopic" quality of bricks and mortar and the text itself is intended to alter our way of seeing women's narratives of home, family, and domesticity. In revising a life story as one ages, what stands out in these three novels of aging are the dangers lying behind the facade of home and the work involved in maintaining one. Like Allersmead, in Atwood's novel the story centers around the Chase family home: Avilion. In *Love, Again* the traditional English country house in the novel, Queen's Gift, belongs to Stephen Ellington Smith and acts as the backdrop to a memorable production of the play of Julie's life story. The focus on domestic objects, as well as spaces, is apparent in the chapter headings of Atwood's and Lively's novels; the contents page of *Family Album* includes such apparently mundane objects as "Scissors" and "Black Marble," as well as the events of a family history such as "Gina's Birthday Party," "The Silver Wedding," and "The German Exchange." Similarly, *The Blind Assassin* includes chapter headings "most of which have titles to do with material objects," but also the domestic work of cleaning and cooking, such as "The hard-boiled egg," "The carpets," "The laundry," and "The ashtray."[43]

The vision of women's lives in these novels is focused on work in the home, whether it be the domestic drudgery of servants and au pairs or the middle-class wife and mother's role. As Gina notes:

> Around the world, Gina has seen and noted the subservient role of married women in many societies. Women cook and mind the children. Ring any bells, does that? She sees Alison in the kitchen at Allersmead, serving up meal upon meal upon meal . . . her life's work has been the provision of food. . . . Subservience implies inferior status, doing what you are told, or what is expected of you. But Mum did what she did because that is what she wanted to do. (*BA*, 179–80)

The debate about the subservience of women and the attempt to make visible the invisibility of women's work extends not just to the work of housekeeping but also to the work of sexual reproduction and the raising of children. The issue of paternity and, indeed, maternity is important in all three novels, and the equation between writing and mothering is one that is of metaphorical significance for these writers' late style. In *The Blind Assassin*, for example, questions remain about parentage and paternity: Alan Robinson claims that "ambiguities surround the parentage of Iris's and Laura's babies" and that "we never learn, however, whether it was indeed Richard rather than Alex who was the father of Laura's baby."[44] In *Love, Again* Julie is the product of a liaison between a dual heritage woman and a white plantation owner's son, and her illegitimacy as well as her skin color set her up to become the suicidal "fallen woman" of conventional nineteenth-century narrative. There is also a rumor that she is pregnant when she dies. The centrality of mothering to women's lives is acknowledged, but these texts make apparent that the work of mothering may be done by women—servants or aunts—who are not the birth mother: aging generates a narrative that focuses on the *work* of mothering and its relation to writing; this is not merely thematic but is also linked to a number of formal and stylistic innovations.

The discovery of the "secret" of biological parentage is one element that I argue constitutes *Family Album*'s innovative narrative device of refusal of suspense. In the novel Clare, who is raised as Charles and Alison's youngest daughter, turns out to be the daughter of the au pair, Ingrid, the result of her affair with Charles. Reviewers of *Family Album* remarked on this aspect of the novel: in the *New York Times* Dominique Browning commented: "the event no one faces for years [that Ingrid, not Alison, is Claire's birth mother] isn't meant to be a mystery that's dramatically revealed. . . . It doesn't ignite a cataclysm, and that gives it its terrible power. . . . I don't think Lively intends for the secret to provide narrative tension. Rather, it's the slow, inexorable way

everyone comes to acknowledge the event that makes it quietly devastating."[45] Another similar refusal of tension occurs in the idea of the children's "cellar game." This "game" is alluded to frequently in a way that is intended to quicken the reader's curiosity and encourage speculation. Will the novel reveal sexual abuse in the way that Atwood's does? In *Blind Assassin* the reader discovers toward the very end that Alex was Iris's lover, rather than Laura's, and that he was also Iris's daughter Aimee's father; the reader also discovers that the author of the inner "Blind Assassin" novel is Iris, not Laura. These revelations, though central to its suspense, are anticipated throughout the novel.

Family Album is characterized by a deliberate refusal of this kind of suspense: a refusal that can be compared with what Said refers to as the "unproductive productiveness" (*LS*, 7) of late style. The power of silence and speech within the family unit and the triangular relation between two women and a man constitute significant revelations in *The Blind Assassin* and in *Love, Again*. However, *Family Album* deliberately excites and then refuses the readerly experience of narrative tension. This refusal of tension is connected to a reluctance to make the central question of the novel one of biological parentage. Instead different questions are asked about the *work* of mothering/caring and its connection with the creative writing process. Lively's deliberate disappointment of the reader's need for revelation is a key element in the novel's negotiation of a relationship among aging, narrative form, and the work of writing and mothering. The fact that the revelations that should resolve the narrative tension or suspense are either refused or in fact revealed slowly and gradually is designed to rewrite our understanding of the relative cultural significance of certain traditional or "aged" cultural scripts, which often focus on paternity and father-son relationships. The discovery of who is one's "real" father is key to countless narratives. This discovery is obviously important also in Atwood's novel, given the revelation about Aimee's paternity.

However, Lively seems to be suggesting that such revelations about paternity constitute an aged, tired plot device, which generates equally tired narrative structures such as an overreliance on suspense. According to Tony E. Jackson, writing on Lively's 1993 novel *Cleopatra's Sister*, she "understands a primary problem in constructing a chaotic or contingent-necessitarian model of history: namely the problem of showing the presence of the ending all the way."[46] In Atwood's *Blind Assassin* readers can see, for example, the presence of the ending (the truth about Aimee's parentage and the true authorship of the novel supposedly written by Laura) all the way. In *Family Album* such overdetermination is absent. The cellar game, with its teasing foreshadowings of a sexual abuse that never materializes, ought, as one review in the *Telegraph* suggested, to have revealed "at the very least an Austrian set-up complete with

a spare family or two down there."[47] Instead the novel rejects such suspenseful devices and replaces them with a more modest but important revelation about two women, Alison (the wife) and Ingrid (the au pair and mistress), who collude in revising a maternal and family script and eventually redistribute the power in their relationship with each other and with Charles, the father.

The fact that revelations about sex and parentage (Iris's daughter Aimee's paternity) accompany revelations about authorship is a key point in Atwood's novel; this makes a metaphorical parallel (one that has functioned throughout women's writing) between the birth of a child and the birth or authorship of a novel. As Robinson suggests, "confusion over the authorship of the 1947 novel [the inner "Blind Assassin"] leads Iris's daughter Aimee to believe that she is a changeling and her true parents are Laura and Alex, a claim which frightens Iris."[48] Atwood's vision of women's authorship as "deeply involved in day-to-day living" also suggests her refusal to see women's writing as separate from other kinds of production.[49] *The Blind Assassin* concludes with a vision of authorship as collaborative: "Laura was my left hand and I was hers; we wrote the book together" (513). This particular act of atonement can only ever be incomplete and utopian; it only partially absolves Iris from her guilty blindness in relation to Laura.

In comparison *Family Album* concludes with a more positive rewriting of the aged script of blame surrounding the division of women by men. The novel concludes with Charles's death; the sale of Allersmead, the family home; and Alison and Ingrid moving to live together in a cottage where they establish a business running cookery courses and growing food for farmers' markets. Clare, Ingrid's biological daughter (though raised as Alison's), emails her siblings at the end of the novel:

> Listen, all of you—isn't this a weird situation? Here's your mum and mine fetching up together on their own. OK, I know this is what we never say, your mum and mine, what we never talk about. So I'm saying it, because maybe it's time. Your mum and mine. Apparently settling down together in a cottage with an Aga and a new asparagus bed. Minus our dad. (*FA*, 258)

The ambiguity of "together on their own" awkwardly revises traditional family structures and patriarchal power dynamics and brings into the open a relationship that has been hidden and yet central throughout the text: the one between Alison, the wife, and Ingrid, the mistress. This acknowledgment of a relationship between two women previously separated by their connection to the same man is awkwardly expressed in new narrative dynamics that refuse the clichés of suspense and revelation associated with patriarchal relation-

ships. In this way Lively's novel can be understood as deploying deliberately what Said refers to as the "irresolution" and "refusal of synthesis" of late style, but in a characteristically feminocentric way.

Lively's refusal of suspense is important when we consider its centrality in popular genre fictions such as the thriller, the crime novel, and science fiction. Atwood, Lessing, and Lively all position their narratives in slightly different ways in relation to genre and the distinction between popular and "literary" fiction. Lessing's and Atwood's pleasure in popular genres and their interest in the "politics" of genre and other kinds of classification have been noted by both Sharon Wilson and Susan Watkins.[50] *The Blind Assassin* contains within the inner "Blind Assassin" novel the science fiction novel, also of that name, which Alex and Iris create together. Pilar Cuder Dominguez argues that this is a collaborative narrative, where the woman often criticizes the way the story is turning out, suggests alternatives, and thus generates a further layer of textual self-consciousness.[51] In one of their shared moments of composition Alex argues that "I like my stories to be true to life, which means there have to be wolves in them" and concludes that "no other decent stories exist." The woman argues back, suggesting that "the story about telling me the story about wolves isn't about wolves" (*BA*, 344). The incorporation but also frustration of popular conventions such as narrative threat and suspense, signified here by the metaphorical "wolves," generates a metafictional awareness in the reader of the status and categorization of the text she is reading.

Despite the attention in *The Blind Assassin* to the science fiction genre, this metafictional awareness works most obviously in all three novels in relation to the genre of romance. Admittedly the romances at the center of all three books can seem hackneyed, despite the fact that they become the focus of intense ironic reflection. In *Love, Again* Sarah tells Stephen that "these days we cannot have a play about a woman ditched by two lovers who then commits suicide. We can't have a romantic heroine"; the company is concerned when the English production of the play "had to balance on that edge" (of "bathos").[52] Many critics have noted the attractions of romance, with both small and large *R*s, for these writers: Marta Dvorak argues that the indeterminacy of *The Blind Assassin* does not "signal epistemological failure. For the text is also inherently Romantic, aporetically suffused with the tension between the Multiple and the One."[53] Critics discussing Lively's earlier novel, *Moon Tiger*, have also noted the tension between romantic love and postmodernist fragmentation. The novel has been castigated for offering "an individualized vision of gender struggles that ultimately permits the reinstatement of . . . heterosexual romance" but also admired precisely because it offers "no third solution . . . no epiphany to stabilize the previous chaos and uncertainty."[54]

As with the use of the device of the kaleidoscope, the pleasures of romance and romantic fiction as popular forms are retained, if questioned, in these texts as part of a more sustained attempt to challenge old distinctions between the popular and the literary. The connection between late style and popular genres is one that Said examines in "A Lingering Old Order" in *On Late Style*, where he deliberately moves away from a "high culture enclave" to consider, instead, late style in the world of Hollywood films and "mass-market novels" (93). He argues that in working in the genre of the novel and the Hollywood movie, Lampedusa and Visconti were using "mass-society" (95) forms that sat uneasily with the themes they wished to address, such as the death of the Italian aristocracy and its replacement by nouveau-riche middle-class arrivistes. According to Said this nostalgia is "conveyed in a thoroughly readable form" (104). In the works we are considering here, similar allusions to popular literature suggest a desire to ask questions about the assumed importance or centrality of romance and desire in women's lives and writing. The self-conscious use of romance is characteristic of what critics have referred to as "middlebrow" fiction, as Nicola Humble suggests:

> The middlebrow novel is one that straddles the divide between the trashy romance or thriller on the one hand, and the philosophically or formally challenging novel on the other: offering narrative excitement without guilt, and intellectual stimulation without undue effort. It is an essentially parasitical form, dependent on the existence of both a high and a low brow for its identity, reworking their structures and aping their insights, while at the same time fastidiously holding its skirts away from lowbrow contamination, and gleefully mocking highbrow intellectual pretensions.[55]

Although it has been associated with the first half of the twentieth century rather than the contemporary moment, the idea of the middlebrow as a feminine writing strategy that refuses or questions the distinction between the "high" and "low" brow is of continued relevance in understanding Lessing's, Atwood's, and Lively's "late style." Atwood, for example, has been castigated in Graham Huggan's book *The Postcolonial Exotic* for her "celebrity status," her "unusually wide-ranging appeal," and her ability to bridge the gap between "academic and popular perceptions of her personality, as well as her work."[56] Huggan also mentions her appeal to a "middle-class readership" and discusses the Atwood Society as an example of "tension" between "research oriented ('academic') and publicity-driven ('popular') perceptions of Atwood and her work."[57] Huggan's points about Atwood's status as international celebrity and her ambivalent role as spokeswoman for Canadian culture demand

serious consideration; however, there does seem to be a kind of snobbery in his comments about popularity and middle-class readerships: he complains that Atwood's "embattled heroines elicit sympathy not so much because they are outsiders as because they register readily identifiable forms of middle-class alienation. . . . The ideological minefields she has uncovered, have mostly been negotiated from the safety of the middle-class family, the middle-class educational system, the middle-class home."[58] I would suggest that it is precisely Atwood's challenge to the idea of the middle-class home as "safe" and her renegotiation of the middlebrow genre that make new interventions in traditional cultural scripts about the family and the home.

In some responses to Lessing's novel there seems to be a similar refusal to acknowledge its generic and formal innovation and instead a tendency to focus, negatively, on the "trashy romantic" (to borrow from Humble) subject of love. Lessing herself remarked that "the immediate subject of *Love, Again*, love in old age, was surprising and shocking, and the fact that the novel has a rather complicated structure was hardly noticed."[59] A comparison with the response (including Said's own in *Late Style*) to a text like *Death in Venice*, where desire in an older man for a much younger man is seen as an entirely appropriate high-cultural topic, is instructive here. There has, in fact, often been a kind of intellectual snobbery in remarks about Doris Lessing's writing style, which, particularly recently, have tended to assume her naive, anti-intellectual lack of interest in what Humble refers to as "the philosophically or formally challenging."[60] Gayle Greene summarizes other critics' comments about Lessing's style as follows: "*turgid, prolix, polemical, preachy*, and *flat-footed*."[61]

Lively's position in the literary field as a middlebrow writer is even clearer. Beginning as a writer of children's fiction, Lively began to write for adults when she "realized that my preoccupations were . . . beginning to demand the sort of stylistic and structural experiment that you can't really inflict on children."[62] However, Hurley Moran argues that she is "not a literary stylist in the sense the term sometimes implies—that is, of being interested only in form and aesthetics," but actually has a "very moral view of literature."[63] She positions Lively as crossing the boundaries between experimentalism and verisimilitude, which includes a concern with character and moral issues and social satire.[64] She also remarks on her nod to stock English genre fiction types such as vicars, spinsters, and housewives.[65] Lively's place as a middlebrow novelist is implied, I think, by the marketing of *Family Album*: on the front of the UK edition is a photograph of a hallway with several pairs of wellington boots, hats and coats on pegs, and a child's toy. On the back are some cups and some butter in a dish on a table under a window.

The middlebrow romance of *Family Album* finally generates the novel's most important point about the work of writing and the relationship among

aging, gender, family history, and narrative. Charles, the paterfamilias at the center of the narrative's secrets, is a writer of coffee-table books for the general reader, which are variously described as "potboilers" and "commercial" rather than academic. Throughout the novel he struggles to find time and space to work in the family home without interruption by domestic and personal issues, feeling that he would be a better writer without such encumbrances. This is what many would see as a typically feminine dilemma:

> Alone, Charles glares at the sheet in the typewriter. He glares, scowls, types furiously for about twenty seconds and then stops. He is finding that he is no longer deaf; he can hear kitchen noises, a child yelling to another child, the slam of a door. The house seethes around him, the world is too much with him, what is a man to do? (*FA*, 46)

The "seething," "yelling," "slamming" noises of the house force their way through his self-imposed deafness, or isolation, imposing a sensory realignment that admits his c: ınection with the house and its other inhabitants and breaks his creative flov

Later in the novel, till feeling that he has failed to write his magnum opus, Charles desperat y gropes toward an understanding of the importance of what he calls "conc rrence" (*FA*, 94). Unfortunately, this is only a failed epiphany, yet another ı velation that is refused, to him at least. However, what he fails to understand is revealed to the reader: rather than perceiving his family as entirely sepai te and fending it off as a distraction from his "proper" work of writing, he m: ;ht have recognized (as women writers often have to) the creative spur of co tinual negotiation between public and private, family and work, and the rat: ınal and the emotional. Perhaps then he would have *welcomed* the existenc : of "concurrence, juxtaposition, the absence of any sequence" (94). He ha: a belated vision of his children, "whom he sees suddenly as multiple creat .res, each of them still present in many incarnations—smaller, larger, babies, lumpen teenagers, any of them to be summoned up at will" (94) (note the ı .se of the phrase "summoned up at will," which Lively also uses in the *Guard an* interview quoted at the beginning of this article). His vision of his child en as multiple, appearing simultaneously at different ages and stages of thei: lives, refuses conventional life narratives of development and maturation t ɔward an end point (old age or death); it also refuses conventional narrative ;tructures that move toward a final release of suspense. Charles's near-revelatic n is about form as well as representation: as he then wistfully concludes: "a novelist would make more of this sequence problem . . . rather than a serious analytical worker like himself" (94).

Lively's and the rea ler's acknowledgment that the novel we are reading

does the work and has the insight that he is not capable of achieving is revelatory, but only ironically so. Charles's failure to understand concurrence and his sudden death at the point where he is once again groping toward an epiphany (ironically referred to as a "mild attack of concurrence" [*FA*, 244]) are balanced against the fact that we are, of course, reading the novel that *has* "made more of this sequence problem" (94). This could be described as having your cake and eating it: Charles's failure is romantically tragic itself (but also humdrum and pitiful). The novel allows *the reader* the revelation about concurrence that Charles fails to achieve: we also recognize that "concurrence" can be understood in several ways. It is partly about accepting the closeness of the domestic and personal to the work of writing and thinking and partly about being made aware of the fictional and narrative devices available to the author for dealing formally with that closeness. Suspense and revelation are here deliberately refused in order to suggest, rather, that knowledge emerges slowly, gradually, and through repetition.

The tension between romance and irony created by the deliberate refusal of revelation and suspense seems to make sense in *Family Album* if seen as a middlebrow renegotiation characteristic of Lively's particular late style. As a self-conscious attempt to redraw the relationship between, as Humble has it, the "trashy romance or thriller on the one hand, and the philosophically or formally challenging novel on the other," Lively's novel, particularly, acknowledges but also challenges the importance of romance and biological parentage in women's lives and writing.[66] Instead *Family Album* stresses the importance of the domestic work involved in maintaining a home and caring for children and the productive connections that can be made between this work and the work of writing. In its kaleidoscopic, collagelike structure and the refusal of suspense and revelation, the novel suggests the unproductive productiveness of Lively's late style and questions conventional patriarchal narratives of maturation and development. Charles is unable to connect his emotional and domestic life with his writing life; moreover, he also fails to develop an appropriate form—a way of sequencing his work—that acknowledges that connection. The reader of the novel, however, is able to do so. Lively asks readers to rewrite old narratives and scripts about time, memory, family history, and form. She is enabled in this by her serious engagement with the gendered aging process.

NOTES

1. Sarah Crown, "A Life in Books: Penelope Lively," *Guardian*, July 25, 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jul/25/life-books-penelope-lively-interview.

2. Kathleen Woodward, "Inventing Generational Models: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Literature," in *Figuring Age: Women, Bodies, Generations*, ed. Kathleen Woodward. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 149–70, quotation at 163.

3. Roberta Rubenstein, "Feminism, Eros, and the Coming of Age," *Frontiers* 22, no. 2 (2001): 1–19, quotation at 2.

4. Zoe Brennan, *The Older Woman in Recent Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2005), 4.

5. Mary Eagleton and Susan Watkins, "Introduction: The Future of Fiction/The Future of Feminism," *Journal of Gender Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 115–17, quotation at 115.

6. Woodward, "Inventing Generational Models," 152.

7. See, for example, Kathleen Woodward, "Introduction," in Woodward, *Figuring Age*, ix–xxix; Kathleen Woodward, *Aging and Its Discontents: Freud and Other Fictions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); and Mike Hepworth, "The Mask of Aging and the Postmodern Life Course," in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, ed. Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage, 1991), 371–89.

8. Margaret Morganroth Gullette, *Aged by Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 11.

9. Barbara Frey Waxman, *From the Hearth to the Open Road: A Feminist Study of Aging in Contemporary Literature* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 1–22.

10. Barbara Frey Waxman, *To Live in the Center of the Moment: Literary Autobiographies of Aging* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 13.

11. Brennan's *Older Woman in Recent Fiction* discusses this association between male-authored narratives of aging and models of decline in the first chapter (see esp. p. 41). In contrast Brennan suggests that the range of women's writing about aging performs more varied functions, including making the older woman the subject of the narrative and expanding the possibilities for older female characters.

12. John Banville, *The Sea* (London, Picador, 2005).

13. Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987).

14. Edward W. Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 12 (hereafter cited in the text as *LS*).

15. Said claims that "the writer's life, his career and his text form a system of relationships whose configuration in *real human time* becomes progressively stronger. . . . In fact these relationships gradually become the writer's all-encompassing subject. On a pragmatic level, then, his text is his statement of the temporal course of his career, inscribed in language." See Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intentions and Methods* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 227.

16. Frank Kermode, "Going Against," *London Review of Books* 28, no. 19 (Oct. 5, 2006): 7.

17. Kermode argues, for example, that "literary fictions changed in the same way—perpetually recurring crises of the person, and the death of that person, took over from myths which purport to relate one's experience to grand beginnings and ends." See Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 35.

18. Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare's Late Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.

19. Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

20. McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 5.

21. McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 22.

22. McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 17.

23. McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, 20.

24. Doris Lessing, "Old," in *Time Bites: Views and Reviews* (London: Fourth Estate, 2004), 215–16, quotation at 215.

25. Lessing, "Old," 215.

26. Lessing, "Old," 216.

27. Ben Hoyle, "You'll Need Even More Luck Than I Did, Margaret Atwood Tells Aspiring Authors," *Times Online*, Oct. 13, 2007, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article2648608.ece.

28. Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 156.

29. Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead*, 158.

30. Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead*, 178.

31. Penelope Lively, *Family Album* (London: Penguin, 2009), 116–17 (hereafter cited in the text as *FA*). References to the novel are to this edition.

32. Amanda Craig, "When the Foundations Crumble in an Ideal Home," *Independent*, Aug. 14, 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/family-album-by-penelope-lively-1771567.html.

33. Lorna Bradbury, "*Family Album* by Penelope Lively," *Telegraph*, Aug. 1, 2009, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/5949326/Family-Album-by-Penelope-Lively-review.html.

34. Joanna Briscoe, "Penelope Lively Skewers Middle-Class Family Life," *Guardian*, Aug. 8, 2009, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/08/family-album-penelope-lively-review.

35. Nicholas Le Mesurier, "A Lesson in History: The Presence of the Past in the Novels of Penelope Lively," *New Welsh Review* 2, no. 4 (Spring 1990): 36–38, quotation at 37.

36. Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 418 (hereafter cited in the text as *BA*).

37. Alan Robinson, "*Alias Laura*: Representations of the Past in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*," *Modern Language Review* 101 (2006): 347–59, quotation at 351.

38. Ruth Parkin Gounelas, "'What Isn't There' in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*: The Psychoanalysis of Duplicity," *Modern Fiction Studies* 50, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 681–700, quotation at 688.

39. Virginia Tiger, "*love, again* and *The Sweetest Dream*: Fiction and Interleaved Fictions," in *Doris Lessing: Interrogating the Times*, ed. Phyllis Perrakis, Debrah Raschke and Sandra Singer (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2010), 133–48, quotations at 138, 139.

40. Penelope Lively, *The Photograph* (London: Viking, 2003).

41. Gwen Raaberg, "Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts," *Mosaic* 31, no. 1 (1998): 154–71, quotation at 159.

42. Raaberg, "Beyond Fragmentation," 159–60.

43. See Gounelas, "'What Isn't There,'" 685.

44. Robinson, "*Alias Laura*," 356.

45. Dominique Browning, "Domestic Dysfunction," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/29/books/review/Browning-t.html.

46. Tony E. Jackson, "The Consequences of Chaos: *Cleopatra's Sister* and Postmodern Historiography," *Modern Fiction Studies* 42, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 397–417, quotation at 413.

47. Bradbury, "*Family Album* by Penelope Lively."

48. Robinson, "*Alias Laura*," 357.

49. Ellen McWilliams, "Keeping Secrets, Telling Lies: Fictions of the Artist and Author in the Novels of Margaret Atwood," *Atlantis* 32, no. 1 (2007): 25–33, quotation at 26.

50. See Sharon Wilson, "Margaret Atwood and Popular Culture: *The Blind Assassin* and other Novels," *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures* 25, nos. 3–4 (2002): 270–75; and Susan Watkins, *Doris Lessing*, Contemporary World Writers (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2010).

51. Pilar Cuder Dominguez, "Margaret Atwood's Metafictional Acts: Collaborative Storytelling in *The Blind Assassin* and *Oryx and Crake*," *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* 56 (2008): 57–68.

52. Doris Lessing, *Love, Again* (London: Flamingo, 1996), 41, 241.

53. Marta Dvorak, "The Right Hand Writing and the Left Hand Erasing in Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin*," *Commonwealth Essays and Studies* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 2002): 59–68, quotation at 67.

54. Margaretta Jolly, "After Feminism: Pat Barker, Penelope Lively and the Contemporary Novel," in *British Culture of the Postwar: An Introduction to Literature and Society, 1945–1999*, ed. Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (London: Routledge, 2000), 58–82,

quotation at 60–61; Debrah Raschke, "Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*: Re-envisioning a 'History of the World,'" *Ariel* 26, no. 4 (1995): 115–32, quotation at 131.

55. Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 11–12.

56. Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 215.

57. Huggan, *Postcolonial Exotic*, 224.

58. Huggan, *Postcolonial Exotic*, 217.

59. Doris Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume Two of my Autobiography, 1949–1962* (London: Flamingo, 1998), 309.

60. Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 11.

61. Gayle Greene, *Doris Lessing: The Poetics of Change* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 31.

62. Mary Hurley Moran, *Penelope Lively* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 5.

63. Hurley Moran, *Penelope Lively*, 5.

64. Hurley Moran, *Penelope Lively*, 7.

65. Hurley Moran, *Penelope Lively*, 7.

66. Humble, *Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, 11.